

Ordinary People, Extraordinary Things

How God Brings Revival

Dr. Bruce Ballast

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DEDICATION

To my wife, Patrice. Your commitment to live out the good news in our life together is a constant source of renewal for me.

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I have been privileged to serve three congregations as pastor. In Calvary, Plainwell I learned that the Spirit blows where and how he wills. In CrossPoint I learned that God can change any life. And in Covenant Life I learned the true nature of grace. The people of these churches have nurtured a desire for revival.

INTRODUCTION

The following conversation is a composite of those taking place in hundreds of churches in this country. A group of leaders in this particular congregation was called to a meeting to discuss the future of the church. Their pastor of 9 years had recently gone to another congregation to serve, and this team of people was charged with defining what qualities the church should seek in the next leader. Then they were to conduct a search to find the person who met the profile.

As part of their conversation one member came with a graph that demonstrated a continuous decline in membership for the past twenty years (experts estimate that 80% or more of the churches in our country are on a membership plateau or declining). A sanctuary that once was full has many empty pews. An educational building that once resounded with the noise of children and young people has only a few rooms used. Gray heads predominate on Sunday mornings. The decline happened so gradually, however, that people didn't really notice it.

There were a few moments of stunned silence after the graph and the accompanying table were explained. One elder finally broke the silence: "We've got to turn this church around somehow, or there won't be a church much longer, at this rate."

The chairman of the search committee responded, "I guess this says something about the kind of person we need as our next pastor.

Someone who can help us grow the congregation."

"What does that mean?" asked the leader of the women's ministry. "I mean, are we looking for someone like Bill Hybels, an effective CEO type leader?"

"I'm not sure what I meant," the chairman answered. "What kinds of people help churches like ours get growing?"

"I think we just look for someone who preaches the Word faithfully," a charter member chimed in. "If the Word is preached faithfully, then if God wants us to grow, we'll grow."

"That's a nice sentiment," a businessman who had joined the church two years earlier added, "But if I saw my business beginning to decline, I'd be crazy not to try to do something about it. I'd be looking for the best people around to help me get things turned around. I think God would want us to use some good business sense when we see something like this. We need to try to fix the problem."

"In the Old Testament there were several times when only a remnant of believers was left," responded the charter member. "Maybe that's what God is calling us to be—a faithful remnant that preaches the Word."

"That might be true," the chairman said. "But we also have to keep in mind that our city is growing. Many of the people who have moved into our area don't go to church and likely aren't

saved. I think God would want us to do something about that, don't you? And if we're going to do something about it, we're going to need a pastor to lead us in the effort."

"It might be helpful if we defined what we'd like the pastor to lead us to do," a younger deacon said. "What do those churches in our community that are growing do different from what we do?"

The chairman of the evangelism committee quickly said, "The Pentecostal churches have tent services every year. Maybe we should plan a series of tent meetings out in the parking lot in the summer."

The chairman got up and wrote this suggestion on the board. "Okay, we could look for a pastor who is good at planning big events like a tent meeting."

"The Mormons are at my door a couple of times a year," added another member. "They continue to grow because of their door-to-door calling. We used to do that sort of thing, but really haven't done a thorough canvass of the neighborhood in several years."

"In that case, we'll need someone who can lead us and train us in door-to-door calling," the chairman said as he added this thought to the board.

"What we need is a dynamic youth program," said another member who had three teenagers. "Just look at the New Life Community Church and what they've done with an effective youth pastor."

"So we may want to consider getting a younger pastor, one who can relate to the youth of the church and community," the chairman summarized as he was writing this suggestion on the board as well.

"I think we've really got to get an effective advertising campaign going," the businessman said. "I think we should look for a pastor who has had some experience in the day-to-day world of business, maybe someone who went into the pastorate later."

This suggestion was added to the list: expert in marketing.

"Maybe we should get a new sign out front," a member of the building committee suggested. "We can do that without a new pastor, can't we?"

The discussion went on for some time until the board was filled with suggestions that ranged from a person who was a great evangelist to someone who could lead the church to relocate to one of the growing suburbs. During a lull in the conversation one older woman in the group asked a question that would change the course of the meeting as well as the course of the church. "I wonder why the church grew in the past? My grandfather used to tell me about the tremendous revival that happened when he was a child. Why did that revival happen? What kind of people did God use to turn things around in the past? Maybe we ought to find out how God worked in the past before we make plans for our future," she suggested.

The committee agreed that it was a good suggestion: How did God work in the past? What kinds of people were used to bring about the revival that they wanted for their church? They decided to spend the next month reading on the subject. One member agreed to do an internet search of relevant articles and email them to the members. They would then meet again to discuss what they had found.

One month later they were back in the same room. "What did you find?" the chairman of the committee inquired.

The charter member spoke first. "It was just like I said it was. All they did during revival times was to preach the Word, and things happened. If God wants us to grow, we'll grow, as long as we continue to preach the Word faithfully."

"That's not what I found in the material we read," responded the businessman. "In every revival in this country there seemed to be a leader who did a great deal of organizing, and the organization seemed to contribute to the Holy Spirit making the church grow."

The chairman interjected, “Well, one thing we can agree on after reading this material: there have been some extraordinary times in our history when God caused revivals, and some extraordinary men who were part of it. Churches grew, and the world was affected. Wouldn’t it be wonderful to have that kind of excitement in the church again?”

The older woman who had started this conversation by referring to earlier revivals said, “I noticed that the leaders came after revivals were already started for the most part. I think what we need to find out is what the church did prior to the revival. Maybe there’s something that church members were doing that made the Holy Spirit come. If we can find out what that is, maybe we’ll get some direction for our own church, and then God will send us the right pastor to lead us to further growth.”

When Revivals Come

The history of the United States, in one sense, is a history of periods of a revival, when spiritual interest intensified and the churches in our country grew. “If only God would do that again!” many of us say. “If only the churches in our country could have the vitality that they had during those periods!” But will God do it again?

Some think it’s happening now. I think of a church that I attended in the Northeastern part of the United States. After the service, I had a delightful time interacting with people and asking about the ministry of this lively congregation. With joy one man I talked to reported the growth of their membership, the increasing involvement of the members, and the new programs that were being developed to reach into the community. As we reflected on this, he continued to say that New England has been in the spiritual doldrums for a long time, but now “a revival is happening.” He was convinced that a new “Great Awakening” was dawning, and part of the reason was the arrival of a new pastor a few years prior.

Evangelical Christians have been praying for revival now for years. A quick search of an internet site listing sermons on 2 Chronicles 7:14 indicate that this is a very popular subject: 54 different sermons from a variety of well-known to unknown preachers in America. It’s a good subject for preaching. The spiritual and moral decline in our country is alarming. Charles Colson, a modern-day prophet, reflects in his books on the decline of the influence of the church. Legal action, in the name of separation of church and state, has severely limited Christian influence in the schools and in public life. (1) Our politicians openly claim that they can be good members of Christian churches, yet support legislation that opposes the values of the church. That is why, some observers say, we can have the phenomenon of the 1980s and early 1990s: church membership going up while the morality of the nation as evaluated by crime rates and moral issues, or declined.

So revival is a good topic for preaching, and many have said that revival is near. Some years ago David McKenna even said, in the introduction to his book, *The Coming Great Awakening* (2), “There are stirrings of the Spirit in all sectors of the globe, which are converging with earth-shaking force.”

My focus in this book is going to be on two things: 1) How does revival happen? What does the local church have to do to be the channel of God’s power to bring about revival? And 2) What kind of people does God use in the church to provide leadership to revival? of our history. God was at work. This will be a study of the means and the people that God uses to work to bring about revival. A second thing about myself that you should be aware of is this: I am a pastor. I work in a local church that has sought, since its beginning in 1969, to bring salvation to its community and world, and to have a positive impact on the world around it.

The people of Calvary Church have taught me much during the past 20 years that I have been

their pastor. Their love for the lost has inspired me to investigate more fully how that love can be expressed in a world where so many seem to be wandering in darkness.

This book will be divided into six sections. Each of the first five will deal with one of the historical periods of revival. We will look at the events leading up to the renewal of the church, the prominent men that God used as channels of His power, and at the effects that the revival of religion had on the society at large. Section six will look ahead rather than back. I will be seeking, in this last section, to draw some conclusions from this study— lessons that the church of Jesus Christ can apply to its ministry today to be a more effective channel of the reviving power of God and where to look for leadership in the process. We will see that God, over and over again, uses ordinary people to do extraordinary things when it comes to the revival of the church.

It was in an effort to satisfy my own curiosity about these questions, and my desire to see the church that I pastor experience the power of the Holy Spirit, that I decided to study how God has worked in the past to bring about revival. It is my conviction that when we understand how God has worked in the past, we will be better able to provide the leadership that the church needs today and in the future.

Since the place one begins such a study will have a huge impact on the conclusions, there are some things you, the reader, should know about me, the writer. First of all, I write as a person who is theologically conservative, which means I believe in the inspiration of Scripture, in the Divinity of Jesus Christ, and in the presence of God through His Holy Spirit. This is important to know about me, because in defining what a revival is, I have found that it is possible to discuss them in a strictly sociological sense. For example, it is possible to say that the enthusiasm for religion during one period of revival was simply the response of people going through the industrial revolution with its accompanying uncertainties. That is not how I approach this study. I have found that I prefer the definition given by J. Edwin Orr. He writes in the introduction to his volumes on revival that,

An Evangelical Awakening is a movement of the Holy Spirit bringing about a revival of New Testament Christianity in the church of Christ and its related community. (3)

In other words, something supernatural was going on in the revivals hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.

Notes:

1. Charles Colson and Ellen Vaughn, *Against the Night* (Servant Publications, 1999).
2. David McKenna, *The Coming Great Awakening* (Intervarsity Press, 1991), p. 14.
3. J. Edwin Orr, *The Eager Feet* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1975), p. vii.
4. If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves and pray and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.

Part I: The Great Awakening

CHAPTER 1: THE DREAM

The Great Awakening, the first revival to occur in the United States, is rooted in the very beginning of our country. In the year 1630 a ship named the Arbella sailed from England on March 29 for the New World. On board were the future leaders of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, setting out on a grand experiment. It had been 10 years since the Mayflower had deposited the Pilgrims at Plymouth, and many of the leaders of this new colony felt that the beginning of a city in Massachusetts Bay was the continuation of the dream that they had: to live in a place where they could live and worship the way they wanted. This group became known as the Puritans, and an understanding of the Great Awakening requires an understanding of these “Separatists.”

Ever since the Reformation period in the middle of the 16th century, the church of England had been the official church of the nation. The head of that church was the king of England, James I, at the time of the migration to the New World. In other words, the church was subject to the state. This fact, as we shall see in a few moments, made many people in the church uncomfortable, for they felt it was not a biblical order of responsibility.

Another issue that caused dissatisfaction was the organization of the church of England. It was an Episcopal church. In other words, there were bishops and archbishops who made decisions about what the church was to believe and what it was going to do. These leaders of the church were appointed by the king.

Another aspect of this denomination that resulted in disillusionment was the fact that the membership in this church was inclusive--everyone in the entire nation of England, regardless of his or her beliefs or moral life, was a member.

Because of these three things (the state controlling the church, a structure for the church that was not found in the Bible, and the inclusive church membership), there arose a group that came to be known as Puritans because of their desire to purify, or reform the Church of England.

The reforms that this group pressed for directly related to the areas where they felt the church had drifted from the directives of Scripture. First, they felt that the Bible required a ministry of equals, not the hierarchical structure presently in place. Secondly, they wanted to change the rituals and liturgy of the church, moving away from the vestiges of Catholicism that they saw in the vestments of the priests, the kneeling for communion administered by the priest, and the Book of Common Prayer. The relationship between the church and state was a third bone of contention for these early travelers to America. They desired equality between church and state, or at least a separation. The history of the Church of England demonstrated many times that the control of the church by the state led to corruption by politically motivated bishops.

The greatest area of dissatisfaction, however, was with the practice of inclusive membership.

The Puritans wanted to raise the standards for church membership. They wanted members to be only those who could give a clear testimony about their salvation.

With this agenda, the Puritans had several strategies to bring about the change. They appealed to the Sovereign (Elizabeth I and Charles I) to mandate the changes. Each time they tried this route they were denied. The next strategy was to attempt to work through the Parliament. During the late 16th century several bills were introduced to bring about the changes, but each time they died in the House of Commons. The most successful strategy was to work for reform at the local level. Since the local gentry (rulers of an area) appointed the priests, those who were sympathetic to the Puritan ideas appointed priests who were graduates of Emmanuel College, a training ground for clergymen in the Puritan mold.

A final means used to deal with their dissatisfaction was to become what was known as a “Separatist.” Separatists did just what their name implies: because, in their opinion, the church of England had become so corrupt that it was beyond any hope of purifying it, they abandoned it and formed new, unconnected churches. This was a dangerous course of action, since rejection of the church of England was also a rejection of the authority of the King or Queen. Therefore, some of these groups left England and moved to the Netherlands or other more religiously tolerant countries. Among those who left were the Pilgrims who came to America in 1620 aboard the “Mayflower.” They came with the dream of being the purified church in a new land.

Other Separatists did not follow the trail to America in great numbers until the 1630s. That decade became known as “The Great Migration,” as Puritans began to move in large numbers to the Massachusetts Bay Colony. What caused the change in strategy from working locally to giving up and moving to America? The primary cause was the appointment of a man named William Laud as Archbishop of Canterbury. Laud began a campaign to do away with the local reforms that had kept Puritans happy enough to stay in the fold of the church of England. With their limited freedoms threatened, thousands decided to go to America to establish a new kind of church, and a new kind of church-state relationship. John Winthrop, future governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, stated their perceived mission clearly. In a sermon on board the Arbella, he said,

“Wee shall be as a city upon a Hill, the eies of all people are upon us; soe that if wee shall deal falsely with our god in this worke wee have undertaken and soe cause him to withdrawe his present help from us, wee shall be made a story and a by-word through the world.” (1)

This was the mission: to demonstrate to the world the beauty and wisdom of a place where people lived pure, godly, pious, spiritual lives. The people who came to America in the 1630s came with a sense of destiny and purpose. They, in their special relationship to God, His Church, and to one another, would be the means by which salvation would extend to the world.

What Happened?

The dream of a pure community of believers was lived out in the beginning years of the Massachusetts Bay and surrounding colonies. To join the church in what was becoming known as New England, you had to: 1) be able to give clear testimony about how God had worked His miracle of grace in your heart; 2) be willing to enter into a covenant with your fellow church members to look out for one another’s spiritual life; 3) commit to living a “good” life, one that is based upon the law of God; and 4) demonstrate that you have knowledge of theology. As you can see, the desire to keep the church pure was paramount for people who were attempting to reinstate what they believed to be the Biblical church.

By the early part of the 18th century, however, there was a need for and an experience of

what was called “revival” in this pure church. The word revival means to reanimate, to awaken new life. What happened that a church that began with a mission to remain vital, to become the Kingdom of God on earth, could become so dead as to need reanimation? There were several things that contributed to the decline of the Puritan vision for America.

Internal Stressors

The Antinomian Controversy

It was not long after the arrival in Massachusetts Bay in June of 1630 before the concept of the “pure” Church was tested. In the middle of that decade there arose a controversy over some of the foundational teachings of the Calvinistic Church of New England. The first major challenge was a movement that became known as “The Antinomian Controversy.” The leader of this movement was a woman named Anne Hutchinson. This pious daughter of a Puritan minister began a Bible study in her home which was attended by over sixty women of the colony. As they searched the Scriptures together, these mothers and daughters came to the conclusion that some of what they were being taught by their church was not true to the Bible. They accused the clergy of teaching a legalism that was a throwback to the Old Testament emphasis on law over against that of grace. Such an emphasis, they said, was nothing less than a covenant of works. This group, then, which soon included men among its adherents, received the title of “The Antinomians,” or “anti-law” group. Instead of the law, the Antinomians emphasized the work of the Holy Spirit in bringing assurance of salvation.

How would the leaders of the purified community handle someone who was going against the grain, challenging the leadership of the clergymen who had learning and tradition on their side? They dealt with it by having a series of meetings in Cambridge in 1637. The magistrates and clergymen examined the beliefs of Anne Hutchinson and other Antinomians. They concluded that they had made 82 errors in their interpretation of the Bible. Twenty-nine of these errors were attributed to Anne. She was ordered to recant her error or be banished from the colony. She chose banishment. Mary Dyer, a Quaker who had become connected with the movement, was also banished. Unlike Anne, however, she returned to Boston to test the leaders’ threat of death to her and Anne, should they return. The threat was carried out when she was hung from a tree on Boston Common. Today there are statues of both of these women on the grounds of the Massachusetts State House, with plaques that glorify the commitment of these women to religious freedom. It was all too clear at the time, however, that religious freedom was not going to be tolerated in the Massachusetts Bay Colony.

The reaction of those who disagreed with the established church was predictable: the dissent went underground. Most of the people who had been part of the Antinomian controversy stayed in Boston, but now kept their beliefs about the Holy Spirit and legalism to themselves. Thus, the first experience of a totally united colony began to disintegrate very early. The decline had begun.

The Witchcraft Trials

It was not long before other controversial actions by the leaders in the area began to cause a decline in the Puritan influence. In the later part of the 17th century (the 1670s and 1680s) the witch trials in Salem were the focus of attention. A total of 20 people were put to death during this period for practicing witchcraft. Nineteen of these were hanged as confessed witches, and one died while going through “pressing”--having increasing weight put on him in an effort to get him to confess. When one reads the accounts of the trials of the accused witches from a modern

perspective, it seems obvious that petty desires for revenge was the motivation behind many of the accusations, and much of the evidence is suspect. (2) However, for a time, the accusations and trials raptly held the attention of the purified church.

After this period of irrationality there was a time of confession of error on the part of the leaders in the community, and prayers were offered, asking forgiveness. Rational people began to think that the Purified community had gone a little crazy, and the authority of the church had become suspect.

The Half-Way Covenant

There was another force that contributed to the decline of the dream of a purified church. Church membership was decreasing. This was especially seen in the declining numbers of people who were taking communion. Apparently the expectation was so high for church members, and the emphasis on guilt so all-pervasive, that few felt pure enough to partake. They had been taught to take the warning of Paul very seriously: "Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many of you are weak and a number of you have fallen asleep" (1 Corinthians 11:27-30). These verses were emphasized every time communion was celebrated. People feared sickness in that day and age when medical knowledge was limited, and any illness was seen as a visitation of the Lord. Therefore, it was considered wiser to keep away from the Supper than to risk illness. It has been estimated that only 20% of the people in the colonies were taking communion. (3)

In addition to the decreasing numbers of people taking communion, it was noticed that the other sacrament, baptism, was being ignored by a growing number of people. Parents were not having their children baptized. The second and third generation, the children and grandchildren of the original settlers, did not have the same spiritual commitment to the church and its teachings that their parents had. Therefore, they were less willing to fulfill the requirement for church membership of being able to give a testimony of how God had worked grace in their lives. Since they were not officially members of the church, they could not have their children baptized. The numbers of unbaptized children, then, was becoming large, and this was of great concern to grandparents in particular.

How would the church respond to this difficulty? A synod of ministers met in 1662 to address the problem. They produced a compromise that became known as "The Half-Way Covenant." In essence, this statement said that baptized, but unconverted adults were still connected to the church. Since they could not give a testimony of their own experience with God, it was decided, they could still have their children baptized if they would "own the covenant." This meant that they had to demonstrate an understanding of Christian doctrine, give assent to the creed of the church (the Westminster Confession), and acknowledge that there was an obligation on them because of their own baptism. If they owned this covenant, they could proceed with baptism of their children.

There were, of course, many opponents to this plan, those who still had the dream of a church that was made up of committed and converted people. There were fears that allowing members who were only 'half-way' committed would dilute the character of the church. Nevertheless, this plan became practice in most of the Congregational Churches in New England.

Once the Half-Way covenant became accepted and established, the next logical step was to allow the half-way committed to partake of the Lord's Supper. Solomon Stoddard, pastor in

Northampton, Connecticut, was among the first to encourage his congregation to see the Lord's Supper as a means to conversion, not as a celebration for the converted. Therefore, sometime in the 1670s, he began the practice of admitting to the communion table those who had "hopes" of salvation alongside of those who were able to testify of saving grace.

External Pressures

Up to this point, we have looked at pressures within the church that contributed to the decline of spirituality in the New World. There were also external pressures. Toward the end of the 17th century there were repeated crop failures. Smallpox and other epidemics took lives. Disastrous fires had destroyed cities. Even Boston, the most advanced city in the colonies at that time, was swept by flames several times. The destruction of many towns, properties and homes in a great earthquake in 1727 left many people thinking that the end of the world was near and that they were experiencing the judgment of the covenant God.

In addition to all these natural disasters, there were the Indian Wars, most disastrous of which was what has become known as King Phillip's War. The picture that was used by the Massachusetts Bay Trading Company as its seal was of a half-naked Indian with a bow in one hand and an arrow in the other, with this announcement coming from his mouth: "Come over and help us." The goal of many who were recruited with this picture was to convert the Indians. Instead of conversion, though, one disagreement led to another between Indian and Colonist. Diseases brought by the whites decimated many tribes, leaving them mistrustful. The result was war. Several different tribes rallied around King Phillip and attempted to force the whites out of the area. All through 1675 to 1676 Indians raided local towns and villages. The colonists were poorly prepared for these attacks, since the original plan and hope had been to convert the Indians, not fight them.

By the end of the war, which concluded with King Phillip's being shot and beheaded by a man from Plymouth, one-tenth of the adult males of Massachusetts had been killed or captured, and two-thirds of the villages had suffered raids. (4)

All of these disasters led the Christians to ask why God was afflicting His people. Another Synod was convened in 1679 in Boston that came to be known as "The Reforming Synod." The delegates to this synod came up with a list of 13 evils that they claimed had provoked the Lord to bring judgment on New England. They were:

1. A decreasing godliness among Christians
2. Extravagant dress, exhibiting pride
3. The neglect of baptism and the fellowship of the church, along with a failure to testify against heretics like the Quakers and the Baptists
4. Profanity and irreverent behavior in the sanctuary
5. A lack of observance of the Sabbath
6. A decline in family worship
7. Legal litigations between church members, along with backbiting and censures of each other
8. Tavern haunting, giving liquor to the Indians, adultery, mixed dancing, suggestive dress and behavior
9. Dishonesty
10. A love of the things of the world
11. An opposition to do something about the sins
12. A lack of what was called the "public spirit," with a resulting languishing of the schools
13. A lack of a will to repent and an "unfruitfulness under the means of grace."

Whether or not you agree that these were grievous transgressions or minor sins, whether you picture God as bringing judgment upon a people for such sins or not, it was obvious that the influence of the church was diminished.

The leaders of the churches sought to address these perceived evils by preaching what have become known as “jeremiads.” A jeremiad is a sermon or speech that gets its name from the weeping prophet, Jeremiah. Doom, gloom and judgment were the themes preached in the churches of the area.

However, people did not turn back to the Lord in ever increasing numbers as the clergy had hoped. In fact, the decline continued, until it reached a point described by Jonathan Edwards, a person we will get to know more personally in a few pages. In a letter to a Dr. Benjamin Colmon, pastor of the Brattle Street Church in Boston, he described life in Northampton, Connecticut prior to the Great Awakening. He wrote that his grandfather, Rev. Solomon Stoddard, had seen five periods of renewal in the congregation and surrounding area over his near sixty years of ministry. After the last one, eighteen years before the Great Awakening, nothing much seemed to stop the declension or decline of religion. As Edwards put it:

After the last of these came a far more degenerate time (at least among the young people) than ever before. The greater part seemed to be at that time very insensible of the things of religion. Just after my grandfather’s death, it seemed to be a time of extraordinary dullness in religion; licentiousness for some years greatly prevailed among the youth of the town. They were addicted to night-walking, and frequenting the tavern, and lewd practices, without any regard to order in the families they belonged to. Family government did too much fail in the town.(5)

Men had tried and done their best to revitalize the church and renew the dream, and they had failed miserably. Now God began to work to bring new life to His Church in the New World. He did so primarily through two men: Jonathan Edwards and the English itinerant evangelist, George Whitefield. We’ll meet them in the next chapter.

Notes:

1. Quoted in Daniel J. Boorstein, *The Americans: The Colonial Experience* (New York: Random House, 1958), p. 1.
2. See David D. Hall ed., *Witchhunting in New England*
3. Cedrick B. Cowing, *The Great Awakening and the American Revolution* (Chicago: Rand McNally & Co., 1971), p. 42.
4. For a further description of these wars by those participating in them, see Charles H. Lincoln, *Narratives of the Indian Wars* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1913), pp. 21-106.
5. Jonathan Edwards, “A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God,” in a collection edited by Carl Wolf, *Jonathan Edwards on Evangelism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958), p. 18.

CHAPTER 2: EDWARDS, WHITEFIELD AND THE GREAT AWAKENING

It is not possible to consider the revivals that God has brought about in our country without looking at people who were equipped with a special power of the Spirit and deployed to bring about the revival of religion. The first of these, the man to whom history has attributed the beginning of the Great Awakening, was Jonathan Edwards.

It was about 1640 that Edwards' ancestors came from England to the New World. They settled in Connecticut, where Timothy Edwards, Jonathan's father, became the pastor of a church in East Windsor, Connecticut. Jonathan's mother, Esther, was the daughter of a man mentioned in the last chapter, the Rev. Solomon Stoddard. Jonathan was born into this family on October 5, 1703. He was the fifth child out of eleven born to Timothy and Esther, and the only son.

As the only son in the family, there were expectations that he would follow in the father's footsteps and become a pastor. To that end Timothy began to train his son in the necessary skills at an early age, and Jonathan proved to be an able, if not precocious child. At the age of 6 he was studying Latin. When he was 10 years old he wrote and published an essay that contributed to a theological discussion that was prevalent at that time: where is the soul in the body--is it material, part of the physical? Edwards argued that the soul was not material or physical, but spiritual in nature.

It was also at the age of 10 that he had a spiritual experience during one of his father's annual revival campaigns at the church. He describes going down to the "booth in the swamp," a wooden shed that had become a favorite play place for children. There he poured out his soul to God, and first felt the assurance of salvation. At the age of 13 he entered Yale college. His course of study there included subjects like Greek, Latin, Hebrew, rhetoric, logic, physics, theology and philosophy. It was the last of these that became his love, and his abilities in this area earned him the reputation of being the finest mind produced by the Colonies. His theology, too, reflected a deep devotion to philosophy, and his stated desire was to unite the two.

Edwards graduated from Yale with highest honors before his seventeenth birthday. He continued his education, however, choosing to spend the next two years doing graduate studies in theology rather than immediately entering the ministry. During those two years of study he had another spiritual experience, the one that he more closely associated with conversion. Edwards never fully explained what happened or how this experience changed his outlook toward life, but

we know that sometime in 1721 he read I Timothy 1:17, “Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honor and glory forever and ever.” In some way the Holy Spirit used these words to give Jonathan a new appreciation for the sovereignty of God. He said that he had a “new sense of things,” and wanted to be “swallowed up by God.” In his diary he wrote: “Resolved: That every man should live to the glory of God. Resolved second: That whether others do this or not, I will.”(1)

In August, 1722, Edwards accepted the call to be the pastor of a small group of people that had broken off from the First Presbyterian Church in New York City. He was there only a short time before he moved to Bolton, Connecticut in, April, 1723, to take up the pastorate of a church in that town. Again, his stay was very brief. After just over a year he left this church to become a tutor in Yale College, a post he assumed on May 21, 1724. He held this position somewhat unhappily, since he didn’t enjoy his responsibilities, until September, 1725, when he became ill with an undiagnosed fever. This, of course, was in the days before antibiotics, and the battle with the illness left him with a tendency toward sickness the rest of his life. In the fall of 1726 he was called to a new position. His grandfather, Solomon Stoddard, was growing old and beginning to look to retirement. He planned to get someone to assist him for a while, and then take over for him as pastor of the church. Who was better suited than his own grandson? Jonathan was asked to come and take the new position, and accepted.

Five months later he married Sarah Pierrepont, who became an extremely valuable helpmate to him. In fact, it was the peaceful home life of the Edwards that caused George Whitefield to begin to think about taking a wife.

Solomon Stoddard died on February 11, 1729, and Jonathan was appointed the pastor. It was in this church, in this town of Northampton, that the revival began.

Revival took some time, however. Edwards preached in Northampton on themes like the sovereignty of God, justification by faith alone, and the coming judgment for a full four years, without any noticeable change in the character of the town or society. Toward the end of **1733**, however, a change in spiritual climate was felt. Edwards wrote,

There appeared a very unusual flexibleness and yielding to advice in our young people. It had been too long their manner to make the evening after the Sabbath, and after our public lecture, to be especially the time of their company-keeping.... A sermon was now preached on the Sabbath, before the lecture, to show the evil tendency of this practice. (2)

The Great Awakening Begins

The willingness on the part of young people to listen and heed such advice was new, and Edwards took this as the beginning of an awakening to spiritual things. This awakening was deepened in 1734, when the community reacted to two deaths. The first was of a young man who died two days after coming down with an unexplained illness. Edwards preached at the funeral and used the occasion to remind his hearers that one must always be ready to meet the Judge. The second death, of a young woman, came a short time later. This death resulted in many feeling a call to salvation. Edwards described the events that led up to her conversion and translation to glory:

This was followed with another death of a young married woman who had been considerably exercised in mind about the salvation of her soul before she was ill; but she seemed to have satisfying evidences of God’s saving mercy to her before her death. She died, warning and counseling others. There began evidently to appear more of a religious concern on people’s minds.

In the ensuing months Edwards preached about justification by faith alone, and that apparently prepared the ground for the Spirit. People began to seek peace with their creator. What happened next is well described by Edwards. In his letter to Dr. Colmon he gave this account of the beginning of revival:

Then, in the latter part of December, the Spirit of God began to set in, and wonderfully to work amongst us. There were, very suddenly, five or six persons who were, to all appearance, savingly converted. Particularly I was surprised with a young woman who had been one of the greatest company-keepers in town. It appeared to me that God had given her a new heart, truly broken and sanctified. (4)

From that point on, people in the town of Northampton and the surrounding towns increasingly became interested in the way of salvation. After six months Edwards estimated that three hundred people had been converted in that town and area, and they joined the church in droves. Church records show that more than one hundred people were received into the church before the Lord's Supper on one Sunday. A short time later eighty more were accepted, and sixty more joined prior to the next celebration of the Lord's Supper. The growth was so great that a new church was built in Northampton in 1737 to accommodate the increasing crowds who came to take part in the presence and power of God.

The events in Northampton were not limited to that area, however. From that village the movement spread throughout the countryside, as well as to such far-away places as New York, New Jersey, and the rest of New England. It spread primarily by word of mouth, as many came to Northampton to see the work that God was doing and went away with something of the Spirit in their story. But much credit also goes to faithful preachers who saw what God was doing and participated in it by calling people to salvation.

George Whitefield and the Countrywide Revival

Unfortunately, the heightened excitement did not last very long. Within a few years, the number of converts began to decline, and the sense of excitement began to wane. In other words, the revival had not yet become what we call "The Great Awakening." That was to wait until 1740 and the arrival of George Whitefield in the United States.

Whitefield was a priest in the Anglican Church who had committed to ministry as an itinerant evangelist. He is the second major character that was especially used by God in this first renewal of religion in the United States.

George Whitefield was born in an inn that was owned by his parents in Gloucester, England, on December 16, 1714. His father died when he was 2 years old, leaving the future of the family in financial jeopardy. His mother, however, was determined that he should receive an education, and so she scrimped to provide him with the best. At the age of 18 he entered Oxford College, where he joined what was known then as the "Holy Club," the first name given to the Methodists in England. It was their commitment to a serious study of the Scripture and discipline in spiritual things that Whitefield adopted and which consequently led to his conversion.

He was ordained on June 20, 1736. Immediately he became known as a preacher of extraordinary ability, able to move audiences through his use of words and imagery. In fact, a complaint was brought to his bishop that his first sermon had driven fifteen people mad.

While still a student at Oxford he had heard of the mission of John and Charles Wesley to the infant colony of Georgia, and since he felt called to missions, he decided to go to work in America. This decision was made in spite of several lucrative positions that he was offered in England. Therefore, 1738 found him traveling to Georgia. Disappointment was the result of his

stay there, however-there just weren't enough people to convert. So Whitefield used his abundant energy to begin an orphanage, a cause that he would gather funds for throughout his ministry in both England and America. Three months later he was back in England.

In an attempt to solicit funds for his orphanage, he traveled from place to place preaching. Many Church of England priests were uncomfortable with Whitefield's preaching, however, because he constantly pressed people to make a commitment to Jesus Christ. When not allowed in the village or city churches, Whitefield adopted the Methodist practice of preaching in the open field.

In October, 1739, he returned to America to raise funds for his orphanage and to preach in places other than Georgia. The spiritual fervor that had begun through the ministry of Jonathan Edwards was still glowing, and people were therefore interested in hearing the gifted preacher from England. Crowds gathered wherever he went, and increased as his reputation grew. At times the number of people was so large no building would hold them, so preaching was often done from a hill, in the town commons, or from the balcony of a large building.

On this trip to America, Whitefield traveled throughout the colonies, even preaching in Jonathan Edwards' church four times during the weekend of October 17-20, 1740. He stayed at the parsonage, and, as mentioned earlier, was so impressed with the peaceful life of the Edwards family that he determined he needed a wife.

The significance of Whitefield in the Great Awakening cannot be overestimated. Though the revival began with Jonathan Edwards in Northampton, it was Whitefield who reignited the flickering flame of the renewal, and spread it throughout the colonies. Benjamin Franklin summarized the effect that Whitefield had on Philadelphia in this way:

The multitudes of all sects and denominations that attended his sermons were enormous, and it was a matter of speculation with me to observe the influence of his oratory on his hearers and how much they respected him, notwithstanding his common abuse of them, assuring them that they were naturally half beasts and half devils. It was wonderful to see the change soon made in the manners of our inhabitants. From being thoughtless and indifferent about religion, it seemed as if all the world was growing religious; so that one could not walk through the town in an evening without hearing psalms sung in different families in every street. (5)

Philadelphia was not the only city that had such a response. Throughout the colonies there was talk of spiritual things, and the awakening that occurred became truly Great! George Whitefield made a total of seven trips to America. Each time he came, he was an instrument of revival, though the number of people making commitments once again began to decline already by 1742. Whitefield died in 1770 while in America on a preaching tour.

The End of the Great Awakening

Church historians believe that the peak of the revival occurred in the summer of 1741. On July 8 of that year Edwards preached probably the best remembered sermon of the time. At Enfield, Connecticut he preached a sermon with the title, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." Literature classes still study this sermon as an example of the kind of preaching that was fairly typical of the time. Below, you will find a part of it. However, most preachers who today quote it and teachers who read it do so with dramatic descriptions and angry tones. This was not Edwards' style of preaching. He typically read his sermons, word for word from a manuscript. He used no gestures and provided no dramatics. There was no eye-contact with his audience. This was in contrast to Whitefield, who spoke extemporaneously and with great drama. God saw fit to

use both men and both styles. Consider these words, read from behind a plain pulpit, and know that they caused, under the power of the Holy Spirit, people to fall down and cry for mercy.

There are black clouds of God's wrath now hanging directly over your heads, full of the dreadful storm. The sovereign pleasure of God for the present stays the rough wind, otherwise your destruction would come like a whirlwind. The wrath of God is like great waters that are dammed up for the present. The bow of God's wrath is bent; and justice bends the arrow at your heart, and strains the bow; and it is nothing but the mere pleasure of God that keeps the arrow. Thus are all you that never passed under a great change of heart by the mighty power of the Spirit of God upon your souls, all that were never born again and made new creatures (however you may have reformed your life in many things, and may have religious affections, and may keep a form of religion, and may be strict in it). The God that holds you over the pit of hell, much as one holds a spider over the fire, is dreadfully provoked; his wrath toward you burns like fire. It is nothing but his hand that keeps you from falling into the fire every moment. O sinner! Consider the fearful danger you are in: you hang by a slender thread with the flames of divine wrath flashing about it, ready every moment to singe it, and burn it asunder; and you have nothing you have ever done to induce God to spare you one moment. (6)

This inducement to fear by calling people to consider God's judgment upon them was characteristic of the time. Edwards, Whitefield, and other preachers sought to help people see the danger of hell, and consistently pointed to the way of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

The tide of revival, however, was not to last. By the end of 1742, the signs of the ebbing were already there, and controversy began to capture the attention of the church as opponents of the revival and critics of the excesses of some revival practitioners began to drain the energies of the church away from evangelism.

As energies turned to squabbling, the attitude of the church toward many of the leaders of the revival changed. Especially tragic is the end of the career of Jonathan Edwards. From 1744 to 1748 not one candidate applied for membership in his church. By 1750 opponents in his own congregation had gained a majority. These opponents were unhappy with Edwards' insistence on a conversion experience to participate in communion. You will remember that Solomon Stoddard had opened communion to the unsaved as the extension of the Half-way covenant. Edwards had sought to change that practice, seeing it as one of the signs of decline in the church. However, even during the days of revival, the strong Stoddard faction in the church remained.

When the revival waned, so did Edwards' strong position in the congregation. He was ousted from the pastorate on June 22, 1750. After his dismissal, Edwards devoted himself to writing and study. In the fall of 1757, however, he received a call to become the president of the College of New Jersey, which would become Princeton University. He arrived in New Jersey to take up his responsibilities on February 16, 1758. He hardly had time to order his office, however, for on February 23 he was inoculated for smallpox, and complications of that inoculation resulted in his death on March 22 of that year.

Effects of the Great Awakening

The effects of the Awakening were significant. First of all, the churches were renewed and built up. The New England churches were the most organized, and therefore our best statistics come from that area of the country. These estimates, however, will demonstrate how powerful this work of God was, and what a great impact it had on the churches and the society around them. Conservative estimates put the number of new church members in New England at

between 25,000 and 50,000. (7) The smaller number represents seven percent of the population of the country at that time. If a revival of the same magnitude occurred nationwide in the United States today, if seven percent of the population were to enter the churches that exist, the influx would number more than 17,500,000 people, assuming a rounded off U.S. population of 250,000,000. Can you imagine the impact that would have on the country?

The number of ministers and churches multiplied as another result of the Great Awakening. The Presbyterian Church reported an increase in ministers in the American Colonies from 45 to over 100 in the years from 1740 to 1760. The Baptist churches in New England increased from 21 to 79.

Another aspect of the impact on the churches was the fact that “revivalism” became a dividing issue among many church leaders. Schisms and divisions occurred in many denominations as the proponents of revivalism argued that the benefits of people experiencing conversion was worth any of the problems that arose. Detractors of the revivals pointed to excesses like the writhing on the floor, weeping and groaning, etc. that some taught were the evidence of true conversion. Eventually these disagreements led to divisions among Congregationalists and Presbyterians.

This division among churches had an impact on the education of America. Princeton College began as a direct result of these schisms, as theologically conservative, revival supporting Christians decided they needed a school of their own. Other colleges were begun for the same reason in other denominations.

An emphasis on education in general was another result of the Great Awakening. People who had been converted wanted to read the Scriptures for themselves, and so sought the learning that would allow them to continue growth in their faith.

There were also social effects on the towns and villages of the country because of the revival. People who were converted changed their behavior. Edwards gives this report of the effect the renewal of religion had on Northampton:

This work of God, and the number of true saints multiplied, soon made a glorious alteration in the town; so that in the spring and summer following, A.D. 1735, the town seemed to be full of the presence of God. There were remarkable tokens of God’s presence in almost every house. Our public assemblies were beautiful; the congregation was alive in God’s service, very earnestly intent on the public worship. In all companies, on whatever occasions persons met together, Christ was to be heard of and seen in the midst of them. (8)

Other towns reported the closing of taverns and a sharp decline in crime as the numbers of people in worship increased.

Finally, there was a political impact of the Awakening. It has been argued by several historians that the resulting political activism of the evangelical Christians in all the colonies was a factor in the push for political freedom that occurred a couple of decades later. The joy and vitality of the religious experience, some have argued, led people to get involved in the fight for justice. Thus it was that Christians were among the first to argue that the English Acts of Parliament should be resisted. (9)

In short, the entire society of the American Colonies was impacted by the fact that great numbers of people were coming to the point of confessing their sin and claiming the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross as the solution for those sins.

Notes:

1. Jonathan Edwards, “On Revival,” Carl Wolf, ed., *Jonathan Edwards On Evangelism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958) p. ix.
2. Jonathan Edwards, “Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God,” Carl Wolf, ed.,

- Jonathan Edwards On Evangelism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958), p. 19.
3. Ibid.
 4. Ibid, p. 20.
 5. Quoted in A.S. Billingsley's classic work, *Life of George Whitefield* (1889) p. 152.
 6. Jonathan Edwards, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," in Sister Ann Carol, *The Beginnings of American Literature* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1965), p. 37.
 7. Frank G. Beardsley, *History of American Revivals* (New York: American Tract Society, 1912), p. 64.
 8. Jonathan Edwards, "Faithful Narrative," p. 21.
 9. For a further discussion of this important link between the Great Awakening and the American Revolution, see Cedrick B. Cowing, *The Great Awakening and the American Revolution: Colonial Thought in the 18th Century* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1971).

PART II: THE SECOND GREAT AWAKENING

CHAPTER 3: THE REVOLUTION AND BEYOND

So the flood of emotion deep and strong
Troubled the land as it swept along.
But left a result of holier lives,
Tenderer mothers and worthier wives,
The husband and father whose children fled
And sad wife wept as his drunken tread
Frightened peace from his roof-tree's shade,
And a rock of offence his hearthstone made,
In a strength that was not his own began
To rise from the brute's to the plane of man.
Old friends embraced, long held apart,
By evil counsel and pride of heart,
And penitence saw through misty tears,
On the bow of hope on its cloud of fears,
The promise of Heaven's eternal years,
The peace of God for the world's annoy,
Beauty for ashes, and oil of joy.(1) (John Greenleaf Whittier)

After that whole generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation grew up who knew neither the Lord nor what he had done for Israel. (Judges 2:10)

The first quote above is from a poem describing the ministry of George Whitefield. The Great Awakening, as this Quaker poet notes, had far-reaching effects in the lives of the ordinary people in this country. When you see, as we did in the last chapter, all the positive effects of this movement, you would think, wouldn't you, that it would go on and on, a constantly growing wave of revival spirit that would eventually engulf and change the nation? That was not the case, and that is why I've included the second quote above, from the book of Judges. We will see this pattern repeated again and again in the history of revivals in this country, for this statement pretty accurately describes the phenomenon of Christianity in America after the Great Awakening. During the period of the Great Awakening there was a new fervency, a deeper spirituality, a heightened awareness of the work of God in the affairs of men. That spiritual climate, however, did not continue to grow until it became the norm for all of America. Instead, as we saw in the previous chapter, the tide began to diminish already in the 1740s and 1750s. Quickly, it seemed, apathy toward religion returned. The reasons for this change in the religious commitment of the United States are many, complex and varied. However, when we look at this period we will see that there were two primary forces that caused people to go back to sleep spiritually after the Great Awakening. These forces came from the world of ideas and the world of finance. In this chapter we will examine how the Enlightenment and the economy after the Revolutionary War had an effect on the spiritual character of the nation.

After the Revolutionary War, America was invaded, not by an army coming from Europe, but by many of the ideas that resulted from scientific advances. The period was known as “The Enlightenment,” a name that implies that people were walking in some kind of darkness until science began to turn on the light. In a sense that was true. Science began to make many discoveries that broadened the view of the world. However, the same discoveries had the negative effect of narrowing the concept of God. Let’s look at a few of the most important contributors to this process.

Copernicus is known as the founder of modern astronomy. He earned this reputation by virtue of being the first to suggest that the sun, not the earth, is the center of the solar system. His primary ideas were published in 1543 in a work entitled, “The Revolution of the Heavenly Spheres,” in which he challenged the traditional view of the universe. Orthodox scientists and theologians up to this point had taught that the earth was the center of the universe. Above and around the earth were “the heavens,” the world of the sun and stars and planets. These were in constant movement around the earth, which did not move.

Obviously, this new teaching was radical for the 16th century, not only for the scientists of that day and age, but also for the church. It was a revolutionary departure from the teaching that was supported by the Roman Catholic Church. For that reason, Copernicus expected persecution by the church, and therefore published his theories anonymously. It was only on his deathbed that he allowed his name to be associated with the ideas presented in “The Revolution.”

Galileo was an Italian astronomer who did his work many years after Copernicus. He became interested in the work of Copernicus, however, when he began to study “the heavens.” In order to better observe this aspect of the creation, Galileo invented his own telescope. The best telescopes prior to Galileo’s were of Dutch design and were 6 power, or brought things six times closer. Galileo was able to design a telescope that was 30 power, and therefore gave to him a better view of the planets and stars than that afforded any preceding human being. With this telescope he was the first to see the moons of Jupiter, the rings of Saturn, and the first to study the phenomenon of sunspots. It was his work on sunspots that began his conflict with priests and professors. In 1613 he published “Letters on Sunspots,” which posited that the sun is the center of the universe, as Copernicus had said in Poland many years before. Immediately the church reacted against this theory, because, they said, it was not what the Bible taught. Galileo then suggested that the Bible should not be accepted as an authority over science when the subject was science. The Bible speaks of theology, Galileo claimed, not science.

In order to understand the tremendous upheaval that this caused, you have to recall that at this point in history, the Roman Catholic Church was all-powerful, holding authority even over the government. Galileo’s claims were seen as an attack on the authority of the church, and therefore, the church reacted negatively. In 1615 the Pope established a committee to study the phenomenon of the earth’s movement. The committee’s conclusion was that the Copernican view of the universe was opposed to the Bible, and therefore was wrong. In 1616, therefore, the Pope forbade Galileo to teach this theory.

For several years this ended the controversy, since Galileo obeyed the Pope’s ruling. However, with a rising tide of popular, scientific support for his views, Galileo published another book in 1632. In it he did not openly propagate the new ideas, but compared the traditional view of the universe with what Copernicus had taught many years before. This was the period of the Inquisition, you will remember, when any challenge to the church was met with a trial. Galileo was once again accused of heresy and of defying the church by disobeying the Pope’s ruling to not propagate his views. He was called before the Inquisition, tried for heresy, and convicted. He was sentenced to life imprisonment. This sentence was changed to a house arrest shortly thereafter.

What does all of this have to do with the ebbing of spirituality in America? Simply this: by the

time of the Revolutionary war, Galileo's interpretation of the universe was widely accepted. As a result of his discoveries, the narrow interpretation of the creation by the church was challenged, with the result that the church was seen as increasingly out of touch with reality. Also, scientists and mathematicians were encouraged to use exploration and experimentation as the means to discover truth. The church was no longer considered the authority in this area. We will see the results of that change in a short while. First, let's look at the other major generators of the Enlightenment.

Isaac Newton is the next person considered to be a father of the Enlightenment. Every school child knows the story that tradition has immortalized--that Newton discovered the law of gravity while seated in his orchard when he saw an apple fall to the ground. It is not true, by the way, that the apple fell on his head, as some versions of the story suggest. Seeing the apple fall, however, got the thought process going for Newton. He gave credit to this event as a catalyst in his studies of the gravitational pull of the earth on the moon, and the ideas that were born in that orchard came to fruition in his widely known "Principia Mathematica," published in 1686. In this landmark work he developed the three laws of motion.

The contribution of Newton to the continuing development of science was a demonstration that the universe worked according to established laws of motion, and that these laws could be demonstrated mathematically.

These scientific discoveries were hailed at the time, and are still taught in our schools as the foundation of what has become known as Modern Science and the scientific method. However, what is not taught is the effect that discoveries such as these had upon mankind's attitude toward religion. Prior to the work of such men as these, it was assumed the world continued and operated because of the direct intervention of God. If there was a storm that destroyed your home, it was God trying to tell you something, applying discipline for some wrong attitude or action in your life. If there was an eclipse, it was a warning of some act of judgment or of the end of time. Sunrise and sunset were God's gracious controlling of His universe. Now Christians were confronted with a vision of the universe that had been discovered to be in motion, with the sun at the center of this solar system, and this solar system being only one of many. Rather than God causing things like sunrises and sunsets and the movement of stars in the sky, it was now obvious that these things were the product of mathematically predictable forces. Gravity, not God, was at work. The faith of many was challenged. Newton himself, toward the end of his life, refused to take the Lord's Supper. He felt that he remained a Christian, but considered many of the doctrines of the church as irrational and superstitious. Others, reflecting on his work, came to the same conclusion and began to reject the traditional faith of Christianity. Reason and science were thought to be the means to answer the major questions of life. The natural world and the rules that governed it, were easily probed by the application of the human intellect. What could not be rationally demonstrated and experienced was to be questioned.

The Christian Church was threatened. There were even some who questioned whether Christianity would survive. Voltaire, a French philosopher who lived during this period (1789-1815) predicted that Christianity would die away within the next thirty years.(2) Francis Scott Latourette, eminent Christian historian, said of this time: "...it looked as though Christianity were a waning influence, about to be ushered out of the affairs of man."(3) Reason or Rationalism, as it came to be known, reigned supreme. It would be the exercise of the human reason that would solve the problems of mankind, not the intervention of a Divine being.

John Locke, an English philosopher who lived from 1632 to 1704, is another major figure in the Enlightenment that we should learn about. He is known for taking the scientific methods of rationalization and experimentation and applying them to the social problems of the day. Sydney Ahlstrom describes the significance of his thought this way:

He more nearly personifies the reigning spirit of the eighteenth century than any other thinker. His thought is guided by three great optimistic principles: that the chief end of man is felicity in this world and probably in the next; that man's rational powers, if rightly disciplined and employed, provide a means for solving the problems of life and attaining this felicity; and that the essential truths of such a view are so self-evident, and man himself so responsive to such evidence, that progress in human felicity is inevitable.(4)

In other words, reason should be applied to every area of life, and if it is, happiness will be the result.

Locke is important in our consideration of the decline of the Great Awakening because he wrote political works that became the germinal ideas of the founders of America. He also wrote on religion, turning the light of reason on the spiritual experience. And Christianity began to wither in response, even though Locke himself defended Christianity. In his 1695 work, "The Reasonableness of Christianity," he said that Christianity was good if defined by a belief in Jesus and living a moral life.

How Did It Come to America?

How did this questioning of faith become part of the American Church scene? How could views that seemed so contradictory to Christianity find a hearing in a nation that began as a "city set on a hill?"

Actually, this emphasis on human reason was very much part of the life of the United States, and played an intimate role during the period of the Revolution. Both Thomas Jefferson and John Adams (possibly the founding fathers with the greatest influence on the writing of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution) spent many years in Europe during and after the Revolutionary War. In their travels through France and other European countries in an effort to obtain treaties and loans, they were exposed thoroughly to the thought that lay behind the Enlightenment and were "converted." Jefferson, in particular, became a Deist--that is, he believed that there was a supreme being, but that Christianity probably did not represent the revelation of the Deity. He was convinced that the only legitimate learning comes through experience. Therefore, there probably is not any "divine" revelation. Nature is the revelation. Jefferson saw the universe as a clock: the Creator made it, set it in motion, and then backed away and watched it tick.

Because there was not, in Jefferson's mind, any divine revelation and no supernatural happenings, many of the traditional Christian doctrines were cast aside as illogical and irrational. The Trinity just could not be a reality. Jesus could not be divine, but was a great moral, human teacher.

Jefferson, because of his inquisitive mind and commitment to the way of rationalism, set upon a quest to discover the original, pure religion, the religion that was not corrupted by priests and ministers. Over a period of twenty years he redefined the text of the Bible, taking out references to God's intervention in the world, the divinity of Jesus, etc. He did this by taking a Bible, snipping out the passages that he felt were genuine, gluing them on another sheet, and throwing the rest away.

So these ideas were here in America, affecting the political and scientific world, and as the European scientists and philosophers were studied in the colleges of the land, these teachings became the norm.

The Reaction of the Church

How did the churches respond to this “invasion” of ideas? There were at least three varying reactions. One was to ignore the controversy and stick with the simple truths of Scripture. During this period we find that the Methodists continued to grow in the frontier areas of our country, where there wasn't much concern with thoughts that were considered to be above them. Rather, men like Francis Asbury and some conservative Calvinists continued business as usual, calling people to conversion.

A second response was to try to find a compromise, to recognize the discoveries of science, but maintain a commitment to the Bible with the view that it was a book on theology, not science. Such was the response of some Presbyterian and Anglican churches. This was the middle ground.

Thirdly, there was the reaction of accommodation. Some churches decided to buy everything the philosophers and scientists were saying, thereby limiting God to being the “first cause.” Those who adhered to this view called for “enlightened” Christianity, and became Unitarian. The following characteristics apply to these churches.

1. There was an emphasis on mankind's freedom to choose for the good and his natural inclination toward goodness.
2. The Christian faith was proclaimed as simple, and the complex theologies of the Reformation and even medieval church were ridiculed. John Locke boiled genuine “enlightened” Christianity down to two rules: Believe in Jesus; and lead a life of virtue.
3. Living a moral life was considered the ultimate goal of Christianity.
4. Because of #3, belief in the effectiveness of anything like the sacraments was considered to be superstition.
5. The idea of progress is prominent. In other words, mankind would gradually improve and bring about a Kingdom of God here on earth, as we learned more about the natural world.
6. God was seen as a Power, or as a First Principle, or as Creator. He was often called “Deity.” This, as you can see, is a very impersonal view of God. The enlightened rational man would have a hard time seeing God in a close relationship with man, and would probably have trouble saying anything like David's “The Lord Is My Shepherd.” These kinds of beliefs radically altered the belief system so that it was barely recognizable as Christianity.

The Post-Revolutionary War Phenomenon

In addition to the invasion of the ideas of the Enlightenment, there was another force that played a role in the decline of vital spirituality in the new United States. It was the despair and depression of the post-war country. Soldiers had returned from the war to fields that had not been kept up for many years. Poverty gripped the nation, and in the confusion of this period, morality declined. J. Edwin Orr, a historian who specializes in the history of revivals, characterized the moral life of the fledgling country in these words:

Of a population of five million the United States suffered three hundred thousand drunkards, and buried about 15,000 of them annually. Christian chroniclers complained that, for the first time in the history of the country, there was a surfeit of lawlessness, a profusion of gamblers, of gangs of robbers and slave-stealers. Drunkenness was common and profanity prevalent, they said. Immorality had increased as standards of honesty and morality declined.(5)

The Resulting Effect on Christianity

What effect did this have on the church, and on the church's influence in the country? Church membership declined. The typical college student was an atheist and living an immoral life. Lyman Beecher described it this way:

College was in a most ungodly state. The college church was almost extinct. Most of the students were skeptical and rowdies were plenty. Wine and liquors were kept in many rooms; intemperance, profanity, gambling and licentiousness were common.(6)

There were those who felt that Christianity was coming to the end, and that new religions would naturally evolve, but Christianity would not be the religion of the future. Chief Justice John Marshall wrote that the church was too far gone ever to be revived.(7) Bishop Samuel Provost of New York felt that the situation was hopeless, and he simply stopped functioning as bishop.(8) In 1793 the Kentucky legislature voted to do away with the position of chaplain, because such a person was no longer necessary.(9) Colleges and universities, the training ground for leaders of the future, were in the hands of atheists. It looked like a dark time for the church and the nation. How would God and the church respond? That is the subject of the next chapter.

Notes:

1. John Greenleaf Whittier, "The Preacher," *Complete Poetical Works* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1882), p. 254.
2. Voltaire
3. Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of the Expansion of Christianity* (Vol. III), p. 454.
4. Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), p. 353.
5. Edwin J. Orr, *The Eager Feet* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1975), p. 8.
6. Lyman Beecher, *Autobiography*, Vol. I, p. 43.
7. Orr, p. 10.
8. Ibid.
9. Frank Beardsley, *A History of Revivals* (New York: American Tract Society, 1912), p. 81.

CHAPTER 4: THE SECOND GREAT AWAKENING

The power and influence of the church had ebbed. Only 5% to 10% of the country was affiliated with the Christian church. Predictions were being made that Christianity would die out within a generation in America. How would God respond? What tactic would the church employ to regain lost ground? J. Edwin Orr puts well the human action taken, that opened up the way for supernatural intervention by God.

The problem was too big for human ingenuity or human energy. Neither denominational organization nor inter-denomination cooperation could cope with the emergency. Demonic forces with carnal collaboration had forced the churches into a corner. How did they retaliate and turn the defeat into victory? The only weapon left was prayer, and pray they did...Intercessors simply supplicated the God of the Universe to intervene on their behalf, in a revival of religion and an extension of the kingdom of Christ on earth.(1)

The extraordinary prayer began to reap results as early as 1791 in the First Baptist church in Boston. Following the example of churches in England, this church began a weekly prayer meeting for revival, held in the vestry of the church. When that area became too crowded, the group moved to the sanctuary. Over that year, even through the winter months, a goodly number of people came, and the church began to grow, adding 138 members.

Similar prayer meetings were begun elsewhere in the Boston area, with similar results. However, the first united tactic of prayer began in 1794. This was when the “Concert of Prayer” idea began to take hold.

As people saw the results of prayer in a few New England churches, a group of ministers sent a circular letter around the country inviting other pastors and churches to engage in a concert of prayer. A concert, of course, is where all the instruments in the orchestra play different parts, but also play together, following the same score. This concert in prayer was to be a joining together of Christians around the country at the same time, imploring God for the same thing: a renewal of religious fervor in the land. The first Tuesday in January 1795 it was to begin, and thereafter it was to continue every quarter.

The response was encouraging. Presbyterian synods recommended the plan to their churches, the Methodist Episcopal Church agreed to fast and pray at the agreed-upon time, Baptist churches, Congregational churches, Reformed denominations, and Moravian churches all agreed to this unique request.

In many areas they prayed more often than the requested quarterly meeting. Some groups of Christians covenanted to pray for the salvation of people a half hour at sunset on Saturday, and a half hour before sunrise on Sunday.

It wasn't long before God answered these prayers. Local awakenings began in such places as West Simsbury and New Hartford, Connecticut in 1798, in Farmington, Canton and Norfolk,

Connecticut in 1799, and continued to spread to Massachusetts and Vermont. Churches that had no new members for 16 years, as in Lenox, Massachusetts, began to grow again. In New London, New Hampshire, a small church of 18 members welcomed 100 converts in a short time. In New York City, from 1807 to 1812, the Rutgers St. Dutch Reformed Church increased from 80 to more than 700 members.

This revival was different from the Great Awakening of some forty years before in a couple of distinct ways. First of all, there were no prominent names at the beginning, no figures like Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield who were the instruments of

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initiation. It was not fired by itinerant evangelists the way the Great Awakening had been, with first Whitefield and then others traveling the colonies and uniting them. Rather, it was the local pastor in the local church that became the catalyst for the release of the power of God. A second way this awakening differed from the first was the fact that demonstrations accompanying conversion that had become so controversial in the Great Awakening were absent at the beginning of the Second Great Awakening such as falling down and rolling on the floor, screaming, and some of the other physical manifestations of grief for sin. The meetings were orderly but conversion still occurred.

Early Events

Though there were no well-known itinerant evangelists at the beginning of this period of awakening, there were some people and places that are worth mentioning as an example of the variety of ways that God worked. The rest of this chapter will be devoted to a consideration of the revival at Yale college under the leadership of Dr. Timothy Dwight, the Cane Ridge revival, and the revival at William and Mary college. These were the highlights early on in the Second Great Awakening. Then we'll close the chapter by seeing how God called and equipped Charles Finney to extend the revival for the next several decades.

Yale College

Even though there was no primary evangelist in the early years of this second spiritual awakening, there were some people who made an impact that was memorable. One of those people was Timothy Dwight, grandson of Jonathan Edwards. Dwight's work revolved around higher education. He was educated at Yale College, from which he graduated in 1769. From 1771-1777 he served the college as a tutor. At that point he was disappointed at not being named college president, and responded to the appointment of someone else by joining the Union Army as a chaplain. After the Revolutionary War, he was ordained in 1783 in the Presbyterian Church, and accepted a call to serve as the head of an academy in Greenfield, Connecticut. From there he accepted a call to become what he had desired earlier: President of Yale College. His term of service at that institution began in 1795 and lasted until his death in 1817.

When Dwight arrived on the Yale campus he found a largely unbelieving student body, skeptical of the Christian faith and even hostile to it. Dwight, however, was a fervent believer in the truth of Christian doctrine and was determined to use his post to fight the beliefs of the Enlightenment, which had come to be known among committed Christians as the "French infidelity." Therefore, upon assuming his post, he met with a variety of student groups and listened to their arguments against Christianity and their doubts about its truth. He then proceeded to preach Jesus Christ in chapel exercises. In these chapels he answered the doubts and arguments he had heard from his students. Not much happened at first. However, in 1802 a powerful revival swept the campus that resulted in seventy-five of the approximately two-

hundredand-thirty students being converted. Many of these made a commitment to become involved in mission work.

In this instance of revival we see how the practice of preaching and the perseverance of one man were used by God to make a powerful impact not only on that one college campus, but through its graduates on the world.

The Cane Ridge Revival

The Yale revival was one example of how God caused revival during this period. An entirely different modus operandi was used on the frontier. Most notable among the many revivals that swept the outer edges of civilization was what has become known as the “Cane Ridge Revival.” The meetings in Cane Ridge, Kentucky, began in the heart and mind of a Presbyterian minister by the name of Barton Stone. He had been impressed by other large gatherings on the frontier areas of the country, and therefore determined to organize such a meeting himself for the purpose of preaching the gospel. A circular was produced and news began to spread through word-of-mouth. The announcement was made that a great religious meeting was going to take place at Cane Ridge, Kentucky, on August 6, 1801.

In order to understand the phenomenon of the Cane Ridge Revival, you must remember what life was like on the frontier at that time. The movement of people had usually outstripped the development of new churches, so there had been little religious influence on many of these people for some years. The rugged frontiersman was usually a hardened, profane, tough-minded, rough-speaking, and hard-drinking individualist. Such people did predominate, but by this time some families were living out in the wilderness too, causing society to grow. Whether family or rugged individual, though, an announcement of a gathering with others was joyfully anticipated, since people usually lived at great distances and had few social opportunities. Still, when one announced a meeting, there was no way to predict how many people would show up—especially if that meeting was supposed to be religious in character.

When August 6 arrived, Barton Stone was astounded to see somewhere between ten and twenty-five thousand people gathered in the fields of Cane Ridge. Many Methodist and Baptist ministers also came in response to the announcement of the meeting, and it was a good thing: they were needed to help conduct the variety of meetings that became the Cane Ridge Revival. The astonishing number of people that showed up is even more phenomenal when you consider that Lexington, the largest city in Kentucky at that time, had only two thousand inhabitants. Over ten thousand people, many of them traveling huge distances, came in order to hear the Word preached.

The meetings were quickly organized. Preachers preached at the same time in various parts of the camp from a log, or a crude platform, or in a tent. People would wander from place to place to hear the various sermons. All preachers called upon people to confess their sins and enter the kingdom. In the evenings, around a myriad of campfires, the people would discuss the messages of the day.

The official part of this experience lasted for six or seven days; history does not record the exact length of time. We do have recorded, though, the accounts of many “miracles” of conversion, as people would fall down in tears over their sins and beg for forgiveness from a benevolent God. It is difficult to tabulate the number of converts that were won during this meeting. However, it is considered by many to be the greatest outpouring of the Holy Spirit since Pentecost, as people from various theological persuasions gathered together with a common purpose and a common theme: conversion to faith in Jesus Christ. We don’t know how many people were converted, but we do know of some of the results of this and other such camp

meetings. Shortly after this time a Rev. George A. Baxter traveled through Kentucky. He reported in a letter what he found:

On my way I was informed by settlers on the road that the character of Kentucky travelers was entirely changed, and that they were as remarkable for sobriety as they had formerly been for dissoluteness and immorality. And indeed I found Kentucky to appearances the most moral place I had ever seen. A profane expression was hardly ever heard. A religious awe seemed to pervade the country.(2)

Over the next years the “camp meeting,” as it came to be called, became the standard technique used on the frontier to aid the awakening that God was sending.

The Haystack Meeting

Another example of how God worked during these years is what has become known as the Haystack Revival. During a summer afternoon in 1806 five students from William and Mary college were forced to find cover in a thunderstorm. They had been meeting in a grove of maple trees for prayer, afraid to let it be known to their skeptical and cynical fellow scholars that they were praying. While waiting out the rainstorm burrowed in the haystack they discussed the need to reach the heathen for Christ. They prayed, and committed themselves to expending themselves in sharing the gospel, and formed a society right then and there to further their plans.

At this time William and Mary College was largely committed to the principles of the Enlightenment. In fact, the five young men met in secret in order to avoid the ridicule that they expected should it be known that they were Christians. Minutes of their meetings were recorded in a code to keep the suspicious from making an issue of their meetings. Things were so bad on campus that these five students, when they subtly talked to others on campus to learn about their religious convictions, found less than 20 others who shared a burden for the lost.

The Haystack Revival is considered a significant event in the beginning years of the Second Great Awakening for two primary reasons. First, it was a lay movement without strong ministerial leadership. The five young men were independent of any particular church or organization or clergy associated with any denomination. Secondly, this was the beginning of Americans becoming involved in foreign missions. These five lived out their commitment to become involved in missions. The best known of the five was Adoniram Judson, who went to Burma as a missionary. Another was Samuel J. Mills, who did not end up in foreign missions, but was instrumental in the beginning of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions.

Charles G. Finney

At the beginning of the Second Great Awakening, as mentioned earlier, no main figure appeared that became the focus of the energies of the revival. However, this great movement of the Holy Spirit that we call the Second Great Awakening had a second wave that picked up the power of the first wave, organized it, and spread it with power throughout the nation. The second wave produced the person with whom this revival is often associated: Charles Gradison Finney.

Finney began his career as an evangelist in 1821, but the years prior to his emergence as a spiritual leader are worth noting in order to see how God worked in the life of an ordinary person whom He was preparing to do the extraordinary. Finney was born in Litchfield County, Connecticut, on August 29, 1792. You will notice that a city is not identified as the place of his birth. That is because most of his early life was spent on what was then the frontier of our country. His life began on the western end of Connecticut, in an area that is not very heavily populated even today. When he was two years old, the family moved to Oneida County, New York. This area would become important some years later, when it became the center of an

important migration after the completion of the Erie Canal. However, at the time Finney was first there, it was, as he termed it, “a wilderness.” By the time he was 16, the area was settled enough to have a church, but religion apparently played a very small role in the life of the Finney family. During his sixteenth year Finney’s father again uprooted the family and moved to Henderson, New York, on the shores of Lake Ontario, effectively taking them once again away from the benefits of the encroaching civilization. Finney describes this area in his memoirs this way: “No religious privileges were enjoyed by the people. Very few religious books were to be had...they had among them very little intelligent preaching of the gospel.”(3)

Thus the beginning of Finney’s life was without any religious influence whatsoever. His parents professed no faith. He heard little preaching and had no Christian fellowship to serve as an example to him.

The direction of Finney’s life began to change because of his desire for an education. Early in his life any formal education was received sporadically in scattered log schools that would eventually find their way into the wilderness. Since he wanted to learn, he decided to return, with his parents’ permission and encouragement, to Connecticut to attend high school. He graduated, and still wanted to go to college. His desire was to enter Yale. His school counselor, however, discouraged him from following that course because it would take him four years to get his degree, and if he continued to study with the counselor, he could earn the equivalent of a college degree in two. He thus studied with this “preceptor” for a time, but also began to earn his living as a teacher; he continued in that profession until he was 25. In that time teaching was not something that was seen as a career for a man. Therefore, at the urging of his parents, he decided to pursue the profession of attorney-at-law. He became apprenticed to Judge Benjamin Wright of Adams, in Jefferson County, New York. Two years of study later he took the bar exam and passed it, and then settled down to practice law in partnership with Judge Wright.

By this time in his life, Finney reports, he was still largely ignorant of religious things. Although he had attended religious services occasionally, his evaluation of them was not very positive. The ministers, according to the time-honored practice, read their sermons. The sermons, he felt, were irrelevant, and his conclusion was that they were “probably written years before.”(4) No gestures were used by the preachers lest they detract from the message. The result was that sermons were not easy to listen to. Therefore, he felt no attraction to church or to the message of salvation, assuming that the practice of religion was a quaint custom, but hardly necessary for life. He described his spiritual condition upon the beginning of studying law this way:

Thus when I went to Adams to study law, I was almost as ignorant of religion as a heathen. I had been brought up mostly in the woods. I had very little regard to the Sabbath, and had no definite knowledge of religious truth.”(5)

All of this began to change when he began to study law with Judge Wright. As he studied the history of jurisprudence, he found that authors often referred to the Scriptures, especially the Mosaic law found early in the Bible. In order to be well-informed, he purchased a Bible and began to read and study it. It was during this period, too, that he began to attend church regularly in Adams, where George Gale was pastor. Finney was not in church because he was convinced of the truth of the Christian message, it should be noted. Quite the opposite was true. In fact, he would have discussions with Gale that criticized perceived faults in the logic of Gale’s preaching, as well as flaws in the Calvinistic system that Gale presented in his sermons. In addition to the inconsistencies that he noted in the preaching and doctrine of the church, Finney felt that the prayers of the church people bordered on the ridiculous. They prayed at the weekday prayer meeting, but never saw answers to their prayers. The cynical Finney was asked once if he wanted the prayer group to pray for him. His response was typically caustic. As he reports it,

On one occasion, when I was in one of the prayer-meetings, I was asked if I did not desire

that they should pray for me. I told them, no; because I did not see that God answered their prayers. I said, "I suppose I need to be prayed for, for I am conscious that I am a sinner; but I do not see that it will do any good for you to pray for me; for you are continually asking, but you do not receive. You have been praying for a revival of religion ever since I have been in Adams, and yet you have it not. You have been praying for the Holy Spirit to descend upon yourselves, and yet complaining of your leanness." I recollect having used this expression at that time: "You have prayed enough since I have attended these meetings to have prayed the devil out of Adams, if there is any virtue in your prayers. But here you are praying on, and complaining still."(6)

Imagine such a response from a neighbor or friend! What would be your reaction? A couple of people in Adams reacted by secretly covenanting to pray for the conversion of Charles Finney. The Holy Spirit began to work on the young lawyer. As he read the Bible, he began to be more and more troubled. After two years of intense study of the Scriptures, he came to the conclusion that the Bible was the Word of God. This caused a bit of a crisis in his life. Once he accepted that there was a God who spoke, and that there was a heaven that God was going to bring people to, Finney had to question whether he was going to go there? At this point he knew that the answer to this question was a decided "no," and would remain that way unless there was a major change in his life. Some time was spent in anxiety about these things until one bright day in October of 1821. It was a Tuesday, and after a particularly restless Sunday and Monday, Finney was on the way to the office when he felt he had to find an answer to his questions about his eternal salvation. The question seemed to crowd his mind, "Will you accept it now, today?" His reply was, "Yes; I will accept it today, or I will die in the attempt."(7)

Instead of going to the office, he went to a woods near his home where he knelt to pray between two large trees that had fallen. After agonizing for hours over his pride and inability to pray, he finally found peace as God brought promises to his mind about his gracious acceptance of sinners through the blood of Jesus. Although he still did not feel sure of his salvation, he felt that there was hope that he would find it. As he reports it, it was that evening he was in the law office, determined to pray again, when he had a vision.

There was no fire, and no light, in the room; nevertheless it appeared to me as if it were perfectly light. As I went in and shut the door after me, it seemed as if I met the Lord Jesus Christ face to face. It did not occur to me then, nor did it for some time afterward, that it was wholly a mental state. On the contrary it seemed to me that I saw him as I would see any other man. He said nothing, but looked at me in such a manner as to break me right down at his feet...I wept aloud like a child, and made such confessions as I could with my choked utterance. It seemed to me that I bathed his feet with my tears."(8)

While kneeling there before Jesus, Finney had what he called a "mighty baptism of the Holy Ghost." It was an experience of the love of God that, he said, "seemed to come in waves and waves of liquid love..."(9)

Thus was Finney converted, and felt the call to become a preacher of the good news that he had experienced. The next day a deacon from the church came to the office to remind Finney that he was to plead his case in court at 10 o'clock that morning. Finney's reply was, "Deacon, I have a retainer from the Lord Jesus Christ to plead his cause, and I cannot plead yours."(10)

He immediately began to share Jesus Christ with anyone who would listen, and even made a few forays as an evangelist, one to nearby Evans Mills and one to Antwerp. However, in order to gain the credentials for ministry, he placed himself under the tutelage of George Gale in preparation for the ministry of the Presbyterian Church. In 1823 the Presbytery passed him after examination, even though they didn't entirely agree with his developing theology. However, his obvious success as an evangelist in several revival meetings convinced them of his call to the

ministry, and they proceeded to ordain him to ministry in the Presbyterian Church. He accepted an appointment as an itinerant evangelist in March of 1824, by the Female Missionary Society of the Western District of New York, and was given a salary of six hundred dollars per year and a challenge to reach many with the good news of salvation. During the next few years he traveled freely throughout the region, honing skills in preaching and attracting growing attention. Whitney Cross, historian of the Burned-Over District, described his success in preaching this way:

Graceful in motion, skilled in vocal music, with a voice of extraordinary clarity, tone, and ranges of power and pitch, he spoke without mannerism in concise, familiar figures. Having been not only a lawyer, but also an accomplished horseman, marksman, and sailor, he could utilize parables meaningful to common folk.(11)

Finney emphasized preaching without a manuscript and without notes in order to better relate to the congregation. This style was a welcome change from ministers who read their sermons. The content was also a refreshing respite from the sermons of the day, which were usually explanations of doctrine. Utilizing natural abilities along with skills gained in his teaching and law careers, Finney became an effective preacher and channel of the power of the Holy Spirit.

Over the next nine years Finney became well-known in the area of Western New York that became known as “The Burned-Over District” because of its recurring revivals. Successes in the cities of Rome, Utica and Troy caused a demand for his services in larger cities. One revival that he remembers as the greatest of this phase of his life occurred in 1830-1831 in Rochester, New York. Of this revival Finney said,

The greatness of the work in Rochester, at that time, attracted so much of the attention of ministers and Christians throughout the State of New York, throughout New England, and in many parts of the United States, that the very fame of it was an efficient instrument in the hands of the Spirit of God in promoting the greatest revival of religion throughout the land, that this country had then ever witnessed.(12)

The revival at Rochester also rocketed Mr. Charles Finney to national fame and prominence.

Here are some highlights of the rest of his career. In 1832 the Eastern Seaboard began to open its doors to the backwoods preacher. In that year he became pastor of a Presbyterian church in New York City. The number of people that thronged to hear him was so great that a larger building (The Broadway Tabernacle) was built to handle them in 1834. In 1836 Finney left the Presbyterian Church because of a dispute over several theological issues, but the instigating controversy was over church discipline. After some wrangling over the Calvinist doctrine of the church, Finney decided to become a Congregationalist. In 1835 he accepted the position of professor of Theology at Oberlin College in Ohio. During this period of his life he taught in the summer, but went back to his church in New York for revival meetings and continued preaching during the winter months. In 1837 he became the interim pastor of the college church in Oberlin, and later, after resigning his position in New York, became the pastor in Oberlin. He was now teacher, pastor, and traveling evangelist, with trips throughout the growing United States and England. The Presidency of Oberlin College was added to his list of responsibilities in 1851, a post he retained until 1865, when he resigned due to the health problems that accompanied his advancing age. He remained pastor of the college, however, until 1872, when, in failing health, he resigned that position to devote himself to writing down his experiences, his theology, and his thoughts.

Notes:

1. J. Edwin Orr, *The Eager Feet* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1975), p. 12.
2. Quoted in Frank Beardsley, *A History of Revivals* (New York: American Tract Society, 1912), pp. 95-96.

3. Charles Finney, *An Autobiography* (Old Tappan, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1886), p. 4.
4. Ibid, p. 7.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid, p. 10.
7. Ibid, p. 14.
8. Ibid, p. 19-20.
9. Ibid, p. 20.
10. Ibid, p. 24.
11. Whitney Cross, *The Burned-Over District* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1950), p. 152.
12. Finney, p. 300

CHAPTER 5: THE RESULTS OF THE SECOND GREAT AWAKENING

The results of the Second Great Awakening were many, varied, and widespread. Almost all of the various elements of American society life were changed in some way.

Impact on the church

This second major awakening in America took place in waves over many years. After the excitement of 1800 there was a period when the revival's intensity waned. Another peak was reached in 1807 to 1808. During the period of the War of 1812 the excitement ebbed again, only to pick up again thereafter and reach new peaks through the ministry of traveling evangelists such as Charles Finney. Because this revival came as it did, in different chapters over a long period of time, it is difficult to count the numbers of people that became members of churches as a result of spiritual awakening. However, we do have estimates from some of the denominations that figured prominently in the movement. The Baptist Church in Kentucky estimated a growth of ten thousand people.(1) Between 1800 and 1803 the Methodist Episcopal Church took in about forty thousand members.(2) Later, in 1818, the Methodists reported a 16% increase in one year.(3) These two denominations serve as examples of a harvest that was experienced by any church that was proclaiming a gospel of being reconciled to God during this time when the Holy Spirit caused people to be receptive. New members swelled the churches and new congregations were begun. A renewed excitement and vitality on the part of the older members was experienced. It had been, in this sense at least, a Great Awakening.

A second result of the Second Great Awakening was a series of schisms in the church. Ever since the days of the Half-Way Covenant among the Congregationalist, there had been two strains in the church: the one conservative and opposed to having unconverted people as members in the church; the other accepting of the Covenant and more open to the new ideas of science. The relationship between those who held the two views was strained during the Second Great Awakening. In the Presbyterian Church there was a split between what became known as the "New Lights," or the supporters of the revival spirit, and the "Old Lights," or those who were critical of the emphasis on conversion and preferred a more open and liberal stance in the church. In the Congregational Church the split was between the conservatives, who remained orthodox and supportive of an emphasis on conversion, and the liberals, who eventually became the Unitarian Church in New England.

The New Measures

A third impact on the church was the organizing and standardizing of the techniques of revival. Jonathan Edwards had made observations about the process that the converted in the Great Awakening seemed to go through. It began with an awakening to the fact that they were sinners, in danger of going to hell. Sometimes this would happen suddenly in a meeting and people would be crying out for mercy, and for others it was a gradual process. But whatever the experience, there was a concern for salvation on the part of the sinner. The second stage in the process would be an attempt to find peace, which they would seek by forsaking previous sinful practices and by reading the Bible and going to church services. This, Edwards called, their “time of being under trouble.”⁽⁴⁾ Finally, they would yield to the prompting of the Holy Spirit, give themselves to God, and would then be converted.

Charles Finney is remembered for the role he played in institutionalizing this process of conversion. It was his conviction that revival was not to be something that just happened whenever the Holy Spirit fell. Rather, it should be the natural course of events for the church. It was possible, he felt, to manipulate events around a revival so that converts would be an assured result. Therefore, he, along with the many other revivalists of his time, began using what were called “new measures” in planning for revival meetings. One “new measure” was a change in the preaching style and practice. Prior to this time the emphasis in preaching had been on a finely crafted speech. In contrast, Finney used short and simple sentences, common examples, and repeated himself frequently. It was his conviction that a common exhorter, one who spoke to peoples’ hearts, would be able to move a congregation toward that feeling of anxiety that was a prelude to conversion. Thus, preaching was extemporaneous, rather than read and focused on what could be understood by the common man or woman.

A second new measure was the institutionalizing of prayer that preceded revival. People were encouraged to pray at sunrise, in the morning, during the day, in the evening, and after sundown for the conversion of people as a prelude to a revival meeting. In addition to the informal gathering of small groups at various times, a formal prayer meeting was held, usually in the evening. At these meetings people would pray in circles for the Holy Spirit to bring about revival.

A third “new measure” had to do with the quality of prayer rather than the quantity. Some historians believe that Finney taught people to pray specifically because he was reacting to his experience with prayer meetings in Adams. There, you remember, he saw people praying much, but with few answers. Whatever the reason, Finney taught that it was offensive to make a request of God that was so obscure that it was not possible to know when it was answered. Requests should be precise; a clear object should be in mind. Also, prayer must be based upon the promises of God as revealed in Scripture. It must be for an unselfish purpose. And faith should expect an answer. This technique for prayer became known as the “prayer of faith.” Many such prayers were prayed for specific people to come to conversion at specific meetings.

Fourthly, the role of women was expanded as one of the “new measures.” Prior to this period there had been a few instances of women being directly involved in the ministry of the churches. Women were encouraged to fulfill their domestic role as helpmeet, and to obey the counsel of Scripture to remain silent in the church. Statistics have shown, though, that women were in the majority in the membership of most of the churches during that time. Finney and the other revivalists of this period capitalized on the presence and involvement of women by allowing them and then encouraging them to pray in mixed groups, to speak up at meetings, and in other ways to take leadership. Using the gifts of women in this way at this time in the flow of revival bore fruit. Many husbands joined the church in direct response to women’s prayers and invitation.

Fifthly, the house-to-house canvass was developed. In preparation for a revival, “holy bands”

of people were encouraged to spend their day between the morning period of devotions and the evening prayer meeting in calling on their friends and neighbors. Similarly, groups of Christians were encouraged to warn sinners on the streets about their lack of salvation. In an attempt to get the necessary man and woman power to accomplish the confrontation of the entire city where the revival was going to be held, Finney would even visit the shopkeepers and encourage them to close their stores during the time of the revival, and many agreed.

A sixth, and more controversial technique that was developed to encourage revival was the Inquiry Meeting. Changes occurred in the use of this technique over the course of the Second Great Awakening. Early on in the ministry of Finney, he encouraged those who were interested in knowing more and exploring their need of salvation to gather at the end of the service to inquire further and to receive counsel from the evangelist and others. Later this was developed into a separate meeting in the morning. The purpose of these meetings was, of course, to confront sinners with their sin and to produce anxiety in them about their soul. Over a period of time this separate meeting was put back into the evening service and developed into the most controversial of all of the “new measures”: the anxious bench. During the meeting, while the preaching and singing were going on, people were encouraged to come up and occupy a bench in front of the congregation if they were experiencing anxiety about their relationship with God. This was the beginning of the practice that continues today of inviting people to come forward in answer to an “invitation” at crusades. The point was to break down the pride of the person so that they would be more receptive to the prompting of the Holy Spirit. Finney had struggled with this very issue of pride prior to his own conversion; he was not able to pray when he was in the woods because he kept wondering if anyone was near who might hear. Therefore, he told people at the meetings that they had to ignore their pride and be humble before the Lord. They could demonstrate their humility by coming forward and taking a place on the anxious bench. While there the “anxious” person would be the subject of prayers and entreaty on the part of the preacher and the people until they came to the point of being penitent enough for the Holy Spirit to work in their life. In some preaching of that time the anxious bench was pictured as a place where the sinner was suspended figuratively between heaven and hell--awakened to their spiritual condition, but not really part of the kingdom yet. This was a controversial technique, opposed by many theologians and pastors as a manipulation of a person’s emotions. Finney and the other evangelists who used it, and those who have developed the idea further since then, said that it was merely paving the way for the coming of the Holy Spirit.

The “protracted meeting” was another “new measure.” This was a reference to the practice of the revivalists to plan many meetings, and keeping them going for several hours. When a town planned a revival, meetings were planned for every morning, afternoon and evening. Prayer meetings would go through the night on occasion. The purpose, according to proponents of the practice, was to gradually break down the impediments to the working of the Holy Spirit. Opponents said that the protracted meeting was manipulative. Toward the end of the Second Great Awakening evangelists were becoming more and more sensational in an attempt to see revival. The use of these techniques seemed to border on what was later called “brainwashing.” This was a common accusation against the many cults that arose in the 1960s in the United States.

These “new measures,” then, were developed to facilitate the experience of revival. They have survived and are still used today by itinerant evangelists and some tele-evangelists. When you become aware that these methods are being used, know that their roots are here in the Second Great Awakening.

Sects and Cults

A fourth result of the Second Great Awakening was the beginning of some of the better known sects and cults in America. The religious excitement that was generated during this period sometimes found expression in religions that were offshoots of traditional Christianity. The church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Mormons) was begun in these years. Joseph Smith saw his supposed vision of the Father and the Son in 1823, and the first Mormon Church was established on April 6, 1829. The Jehovah's Witnesses began in the 1870s, at the end of the Awakening. William Miller began the movement that became the Seventh-Day Adventist Church when he proclaimed, upon the basis of his study of the Bible, that Jesus was going to return sometime between March 21, 1843 and March 23, 1844. The "Transcendentalists" also became well-known during this period. Ralph Waldo Emerson left the pastorate of a Unitarian Church to focus on the essence of religion. Emerson, Horace Bushnell, and Henry David Thoreau were writers and thinkers who espoused a unity with nature as the way to experiencing peace. Perfectionists also abounded during this time. These people taught that there was a second stage of faith. Once you reached this second stage, sinless perfection was the norm. Believers in this state of grace, they taught, were totally free from the law. One perfectionist, a man named John Humphrey Noyes, began what became the Oneida Community in the 1840s with this idea as its foundation. The best-remembered characteristic of this community was the fact that they were sexually communistic, believing that the sharing of the act of intercourse between adults was the obvious extension of community of goods.

The Second Great Awakening was the soil that produced this crop of religious variety. People became spiritually desirous of finding the perfect church, the perfect group of people, the one truth among the many. Thousands were led into these various sects and cults in a desire to fulfill the spiritual hunger that was awakened during these years.

Reform Movements

When the spiritual fervor of this time began to wane, the fascinating phenomenon of various reform movements was born. People came to see that if their faith was to be significant, the church must make an impact on the society around it, and so movements began that sought to reform society. The first Temperance Movement was begun in Massachusetts in 1813 and became a nation-wide society in 1826. The American Anti-Slavery Society was formed in 1833, and this developed into the first abolitionist group in the United States. The Female Moral Reform Society began in New York in 1834 with an agenda of ending sins against the 7th commandment. This group preached morality and marital faithfulness, and it ministered to the prostitute population in New York and elsewhere. Eventually members of this Society went on to become activists for Women's Rights. The American Sunday School Union was formed in 1830 for the purpose of supplying religious instruction to children in the country. These are just a few of the many societies that were formed with an agenda to bring about positive change in the world. Among the ones that have lasted through the years are the American Bible Society and the American Tract Society.

Social action, therefore, was high on the agenda of the converted during this period. Christians were on a mission to bring about a change in the world, and thereby to usher in the kingdom of God.

Foreign Missions

As mentioned earlier, this Awakening in America also was the beginning of foreign missions. Prior to this time there had been many calls going out in England for workers to come to America to aid in the mission enterprise. In other words, America was the mission field. With the fervor that the Second Great Awakening brought about, America became a sending nation. I have mentioned that the beginning of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions in 1812 was one expression of this newborn interest in foreign missions. In 1819 the Methodist Episcopal Church of the United States of America began a society for outreach to other nations. The year 1821 saw the formation of the Protestant Episcopal Church's first overseas mission project. The Presbyterians, troubled by the division that had occurred between new and old lights, did not form their Board of Foreign Missions until 1837.

This was a time for refocusing of energies outward to the world, and the world responded. This revival spread throughout many countries as the breath of the Spirit blew from the United States to England, Australia, Burma, and elsewhere.

Perhaps the best conclusion that we can draw from this time is that America became a Christian nation. Count Alexis de Tocqueville, a French historian, visited our country in 1831. He was seeking to determine how the experiment in Democracy had worked here in contrast to how it had gone in France. He wrote of his visit in a classic work, *Democracy in America*. His conclusion is worth noting as an end to this chapter. He wrote: In the United States the sovereign authority is religious, and consequently hypocrisy must be common; but there is no country in the world where the Christian religion retains a greater influence over the souls of men than in America; and there can be no greater proof of its utility and of its conformity to human nature than that its influence is powerfully felt over the most enlightened and free nation of the earth.(5)

Notes:

1. Frank Beardsley, *A History of American Revivals* (New York: American Tract Society, 1912), p. 101.
2. Ibid.
3. Whitney Cross, *The Burned Over District* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1950), p. 11.
4. Wolf on Edwards, p. 25
5. Alexis De Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Trans. by Henry Reeve, vol. 1 (New York: Vintage Books, 1945), p. 314.

Part III: THE GREAT REVIVAL

CHAPTER 6: THE ROOTS OF THE GREAT REVIVAL

With the kind of spiritual fervor that characterized America in the 1820s and 1830s, it is hard to imagine that we would need another revival by 1857. But the pattern of spiritual excitement followed by spiritual depression continued so that the nation with “the soul of a church,” in the words of De Tocqueville, became a nation that still had a soul, but it was well hidden. In this chapter we are going to look at some of the forces that contributed to the sapping of the spiritual strength of this country.

Immigration and Urbanization

One of the primary forces that changed the character of America in many ways, including the spiritual, was the vast immigration of people that occurred during the early part of the 19th century. This period has been called the greatest wandering of peoples in history. The United States was described throughout Europe as the land of opportunity, and therefore many people there decided to emigrate in the hope of a better life. The number of people who became United States citizens during this period is truly astounding. In the 1820s the Immigration Service counted 128,452 people coming in. In the 1830s that number rose to 538,381. In the 1850s there was a flood of people immigrating: 2,811,554 new Americans in that ten-year period alone.

This flood of new people changed the character of the northern part of our nation. Most of those coming in were of the poor labor classes of Europe, and they took advantage of the rapid industrialization of America and found jobs here that they could not find in their home lands. Most of them were either Roman Catholic or Lutheran.

Both of these characteristics, religious affiliation and labor class, had an effect on the nation. A mistrust of those who were not “native” Americans, that is, born in the United States, found public expression. During these years the “Know-Nothing” party was formed. This party got its name from the pact that members made to let no one outside of the party know of its meetings, decisions, or plans for action. Thus, when asked anything about what had been said, where they stood, and what they were going to do, members said they “didn’t know.” We do know that in spite of the veil of secrecy they attempted to maintain, the primary tenet of the party was a commitment to native-born rule in America. Candidates supported by the party pledged to appoint only those who were born in America to important government posts if elected. In the midst of the growing tension between native-born Americans and naturalized Americans, the attention of the nation was turned from the spiritual to the political.

The fact that many of the people who came in were poor also had an impact. They naturally flocked to the cities in an attempt to find jobs in the diversity of an industrializing economy. The result was the creation of a burgeoning city. Large cities, with many sub-societies or ghettos, were a new phenomenon for the United States, and, it should be noted, were not a desirable development. The fathers of the United States had hoped that such cities as they had known in Europe would never become the norm here. Thomas Jefferson, in his “Notes on the State of Virginia,” even calculated how many people could live in Virginia by living as farmers. This quote shows his commitment to this kind of lifestyle for the new world:

Those who labor in the earth are the chosen people of God, if ever he had a chosen people, whose breasts he has made his peculiar deposit for substantial and genuine virtue...While we have land to labour then, let us never wish to see our citizens occupied at a work-bench, or twirling a distaff. Carpenters, masons, smiths, are wanting in husbandry: but, for the general operations of manufacture, let our work-shops remain in Europe...The mobs of great cities add just so much to the support of pure government, as sores do to the strength of the human body. It is the manners and spirit of a people which preserve a republic in vigour. A degeneracy in these is a canker which soon eats to the heart of its laws and constitution.(1)

Jefferson figured that the maximum population of Virginia, if everyone received his living from the land, would be four and a half million people.(2) Such a distribution of people would avoid the problems of crime and raucous living that were the norm in the ghettos of Europe.

In the mid-19th century, though, America had growing cities, and with the growth of the cities came the accompanying problems that Jefferson had foreseen: crime statistics were rising rapidly; drunkenness was again becoming common, in spite of the work of the Temperance Society a few years before; and unemployment and poverty were becoming issues that the government and churches were having to face.

This dynamic of growing problems related to the cities also contributed to the draining of religious fervor that had so recently been the norm in the country.

Prosperity

A look at the years prior to 1857 shows that this was a tremendously prosperous time for the United States. A glance at history demonstrates that the spiritual vitality of the church had withstood persecution and grown through it. Prosperity, however, appears to have had an adverse effect on spirituality at times as people lost the vision of an eternal kingdom of God because they enjoyed the present one so much. God warned about this danger as far back as Deuteronomy 8, when Moses said to the Israelites who were about to enter the promised land where they would finally own houses, land, vineyards and fields.

When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the Lord your God for the good land he has given you...Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery...You may say to yourself, “My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.” But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your forefathers, as it is today” (Deuteronomy 8:10, 12-14, 17-18).

This was one of those times when preoccupation with possessions caused many to forget the Lord. Those outside of the growing slums of the city had prospered due to several conditions in the country. The conclusion of the Mexican War that began on April 25, 1846, added the areas of

California and parts of New Mexico to the growing realm of United States. This addition of land opened up new areas for settlement throughout the western section of our continent.

Immigration, though it had a negative impact on the buildup in the cities, also had a positive financial impact on the country. Those who came were willing to work. The result was a rapid expansion of agricultural and industrial production, as well as an increase in trade.

In addition to these forces, there were other forces that added to the general prosperity of this period: gold was discovered in

California, adding millions of dollars to the economy; and the railroad provided jobs for thousands as usable track quadrupled in just a few years. The availability of the railroad to ship goods and people caused a rapid increase in the Gross National Product. Prosperity in these forms resulted in people becoming “choked by life’s worries, riches and pleasures” (Luke 8:14).

Church Problems

In addition to the political and social problems mentioned above, there were internal problems in the church. The Millerites are cited as being the cause.⁽³⁾ The Second Awakening had heightened peoples’ desire for the perfect church, and, as mentioned in the previous chapter, there were various attempts to restore the church of the apostles. One such attempt that came later and caused a great deal of excitement was the movement that became known as the Millerites. In the early 1840s a man named William Miller, a farmer, began to proclaim that Jesus was going to return in 1843. At first his predictions were very general, based on a figurative interpretation of prophecies in Daniel and the symbolism in the book of Revelation. However, as more people responded to his speculations, Miller became more specific, announcing that Jesus would return on April 23, 1843, and the judgment of all mankind would follow. The calculations were so convincing, and the interpretation of Scripture so compelling that many believed that they had to get their lives in order. Thousands of people neglected their work, figuring that they would not need to work much longer anyway. People gave generously of their goods to the poor. Communities were formed to prepare for the great day, and many of them produced “ascension robes” for their members to wear. Of course, April 23 came and went, and Jesus did not return. Normally, that would be the end of any such movement, but not so with the Millerites. Calculations were redone and an error discovered: the real day was March 22, 1844. When that day came and went with no change in the world, October 10 was prophesied. The net result of this movement was that the faith of many people wavered. Churches were made the object of ridicule, and confidence in religion and religious figures was dealt a grievous blow.

Political

There were also political forces at work making a revival necessary. Over these years the slavery issue had assumed national prominence. The work of the Abolition Society, publication of abolitionist newspapers, and decisions made by the Supreme Court all had ramifications for the country. Most famous of the decisions of the Court during this period was the Dred Scott decision. Dred Scott was a Negro slave, owned by a citizen of Missouri, Mr. Sanford. Mr. Sanford took his slave to Illinois to do business there. Slavery had been discontinued and made illegal in that state by an Ordinance of 1787. Then master and slave traveled to the Wisconsin Territory. Slavery was also not legal in this area because of the Missouri Compromise of 1850, in which all of the northern territories were to be kept slave free. For the better part of four years, from 1834 to 1838, Scott and his owner lived and traveled in free territories. Dred Scott used this as the basis for a suit against his master, saying that he was free because of his sojourn in free territory. This

suit was considered by the Missouri court, and eventually made its way to the Supreme Court. This highest legislative body in our land had to decide: 1) if Scott was indeed a citizen of Missouri, and therefore holding a legal right to sue; 2) if #1 was true, did his time in free territory make him free; and 3) was the Missouri Compromise of 1850 constitutional in its limiting of the institution of slavery. In a shocking decision, written by Chief Justice Taney, it was decided, “upon a full and careful consideration of the subject, the Court is of opinion that, upon the facts stated in the plea in abatement, Dred Scott was not a citizen of Missouri within the meaning of the Constitution of the United States and not entitled as such to sue in its courts.”(4)

This meant, first of all, that slaves were not to be considered citizens of the country. The decision further declared that wherever he traveled with his master, Scott was under the laws of Missouri, not Illinois nor the Wisconsin territories. And finally, it was declared by the Supreme Court that the Compromise of 1850, one that had been the source of a measure of political peace on the issue, was unconstitutional.

There was an immediate and vehement reaction to this decision, a reaction that focused the energies of people in the United States on the issue of slavery, and not on their spiritual condition.

Publication in 1852 of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel about slavery, was another occurrence that caused the nation to think about slavery. This simple story about a poor Christian slave called Uncle Tom, trying to survive and remain faithful within the degrading institution of slavery inflamed peoples' passions on the subject of slavery. In Stowe's book, slavery was portrayed as the great moral failure of the nation, a failure that cried out for redress. The readers of the book responded, contributing to the forces that would result in the Civil War. Abraham Lincoln, upon meeting Harriet Beecher Stowe, is said to have commented, “So this is the little lady who made this big war.”(5)

The Prelude to Revival

There had been a growing spiritual apathy due to the various social, political and religious forces that were at work from 1840 to 1857. What, then, prepared the nation for revival? There was one particular event that many believe led to an outbreak of spiritual concern and opened the way for a blowing of the Holy Spirit. That event was the financial crash of 1857. Various things contributed to a financial panic in the autumn of that year. The primary contributor was the status of the nation's banking. At that time there was no centralized banking system in the United States, which meant that each state regulated its banks according to its own laws. Some banks, therefore, were very stable and contributed to the financial expansion of the country; many others were in sad shape. The nation was flooded with bank notes that did not have a uniform value, and some of them proved to be worthless.

Land speculation had also become a booming business. People mortgaged in order to purchase more. Excessive railroad building had increased the land speculation and the investment speculations in the country. There was, therefore, a great deal of debt and an inflated value on land.

The result of all these financial forces was a precipitous crash; banks failed; merchants went out of business; interest on first-class securities skyrocketed to 3% per month, and then rapidly rose to 4% and then 5%; factories closed, throwing thousands out of work (thirty thousand in New York City alone).

Financial adversity has not always resulted in revival. It didn't happen in the crash of 1929, as we will see later. However, as a generalized statement we do note that people who are in crisis are more willing to consider the claims of God and His promises. Thus hearts were prepared for a return to the Lord.

Notes:

1. Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1954), pp. 164-165.
2. Ibid, p. 84.
3. Frank Beardsley, *A History of American Revivals* (New York: American Tract Society, 1912), p. 214.
4. Morimer J. Adler, ed, *The Negro in American History* (New York: Encyclopedia Britannica Educational Corp., 1966), vol. II, p. 422.
5. Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (Penguin Books, 1981), quote from the jacket.

CHAPTER 7: THE GREAT REVIVAL

“The Great Revival!” That is what it is called in some history books. Others call it “The Prayer Meeting Revival” because prayer was the primary means and evidence that a revival was happening. This revival was unique, to say the least. As we will see, it began quietly, inauspiciously, but soon gripped the nation with a sense of the power and presence of the Holy Spirit.

The Beginnings

It began in New York City. That fact alone made this revival different. As mentioned in the last chapter, urbanization had become a phenomenon that was largely negative in its effects. Huge areas of New York City that once had been homes were now devoted to businesses and crowded tenements full of immigrants, and that was especially true anywhere near the waterfront. When their members moved outward from the city center, most of the churches did too. Many congregations that had become famous in the Second Great Awakening, such as the Broadway Tabernacle where Charles Finney pastored, and the Brick Presbyterian Church, left the city environs to move where their people were. Doesn't that sound familiar? As I write these words the denomination of which I am a member is studying how we can effectively reach the city. We were first an agriculturally based church of immigrants; then we moved to the cities, and gradually we became a suburban church. Now we want to get back into the cities, but don't know how to do ministry there anymore. That is the case for many churches that fled to the suburbs during rapid urbanization.

However, in New York there was one church that decided to try to learn how to minister in the city setting. The North Dutch Church, at the corner of Fulton and William streets, was facing the same pressure as others in the area. As the neighborhoods changed, the number of people in worship declined, and it began to look as if a move to the growing area around the city would become necessary to ensure survival of the congregation, because that's where the former members now lived. As sometimes happens in churches, though, the decision to move was put off until it was no longer financially feasible. Most members had joined other congregations. Therefore, the leadership decided to put energy and prayer into reaching the area around the church. This was, in some senses, a last-ditch effort at survival, but this church should go down in history as willing to change in order to minister to its community.

To accomplish this outreach, the remaining congregation decided to hire a lay missionary who would have the task of reaching out to the masses of people that lived in the various tenements and family-owned businesses in the area. Mr. Jeremiah Lanphier was hired.

Jeremiah Lanphier was born in Coxsackie, New York, in 1809. We know little about his life until 1842, when he attended the Broadway Tabernacle, the large church built for the ministry of Charles Finney. There he was converted in 1842. He was described by a journalist at the time as “tall, with a pleasant face, an affectionate manner, and indomitable energy and perseverance; a good singer, gifted in prayer and exhortation, a welcome guest to any house, shrewd and endowed with much tact and common sense.”(1)

We also know that he was a businessman, having worked for many years in the mercantile business of New York. It was probably thought that since he was himself a businessman, he would be able to relate to the business people around the church.

This quiet man began his work with zeal on July 1, 1857. With the mind of a businessman, he began by getting organized. The area around the church was divided into districts, and methodically Lanphier began to call on every family within each district. He brought with him a folder explaining the history of the church and the various programs that would be of help to the people. Tracts were left with families and Bibles given to the homes that had none. In addition, boarding houses and hotels were visited, and the proprietors were informed that visitors from these places would be welcome at worship services. He convinced managers of hotels to have the chambermaids distribute a small card telling the times of the services when they made their rounds on Sunday mornings. Down at the church, pews were set aside in anticipation of visitors who would come as a result of these efforts. But hardly anyone came. Several months went by as Lanphier exhausted his ideas about outreach with little fruit to show. As fall approached, with a growing sense of discouragement, Lanphier decided, with no ideas left, to commit to praying about the spiritual condition of the area. He also decided to invite others to pray with him. A handbill was printed and distributed that invited businessmen to join him for prayer. This is what it said:

How Often Shall I Pray?

As often as the language of prayer is in my heart; as often as I see my need of help; as often as I feel the power of temptation; as often as I am made sensible to any spiritual declension or feel the aggression of a worldly spirit. In prayer we leave the business of time for that of eternity, and intercourse with men for intercourse with God.(2)

This bill he placed in places that he hoped would attract attention, primarily in office buildings and warehouses and other prominent places of work. He invited businessmen, merchants, clerks, mechanics, and anyone else to come on Wednesday, September 23, at noon to the consistory room in the rear of the North Dutch Church, and those invited were informed that the meeting was planned for an hour, but if it was necessary to leave after as little as five or ten minutes, you were free to go. September 23 came. Imagine the apprehension and anticipation that Jeremiah Lanphier must have felt as he prepared the room. He had no idea how many people would show up, or if anyone would come. If you've ever been in a similar position, you probably can picture him getting to the consistory room early, sitting down and praying for people to come. A little before noon he probably went and opened the door, glancing out to see if anyone was waiting to come in. No one was early, waiting to get in. At 12:00 he most likely sat down and began to pray, but probably with an ear cocked toward the door, listening for those who would join him. He heard nothing. He was the only one there at 12:00. Ten minutes went by, and he was still the only one there. I suspect that he got up at about that point to see if the door had stuck, or if someone was outside not knowing where to go or with a fear of being the only one coming in. But no one was there. By 12:20 he probably gave up on anyone coming and began to spend his own time in prayer. At 12:30 he finally heard the sound of someone on the stairs, and he welcomed his first partner in prayer. In a few minutes, another joined them. Then another drifted in, and another,

until a total of six people gathered in prayer for each other and for their community.

After a meaningful time of prayer, the six decided to make personal invitations to friends and fellow workers to join them. The next Wednesday, September 30, there were twenty gathered for prayer. By October 7 the number gathering to pray had grown to forty. Sometime during that meeting in the first week of October, the decision was made to hold meetings more frequently. A suggestion was made to meet daily for prayer; it was agreed upon. They didn't know it, but a revival had begun. In the subsequent weeks the attendance gradually increased with men from all classes and professions attending the noon prayer meetings, so that by January of 1858 the church was using three large lecture halls, with a meeting going on in each simultaneously.

The format was simple: a hymn or two would be sung, and attenders would pray or be led in prayer. People were encouraged to come and go at their convenience, and there were some draymen who took that literally. There are reports of some who drove up to the curb, tied their horses, and entered one of the rooms for the singing of a hymn, and then came back out, untied their teams, and were on their way.

At first only men attended this meeting. Gradually, however, women became included as well, and the revival spread even more quickly.

As other churches heard about what was happening at the Dutch Reformed Church, they also began to have noon-time prayer meetings. To make a long story short, by March of 1858 there were over ten thousand people gathering for prayer each day in New York. Twenty different prayer meetings were going on, with churches overflowing with the prayers. Police and fire departments had services in their buildings. Rooms were made available in stores for clerks to go and pray at noon when they couldn't attend one of the meetings.

As the number of meetings expanded, they also gained variety. Different times of the day and night were offered. Sometimes the preaching of well-known ministers like Henry Ward Beecher was featured.

The result of all this prayer activity in New York was two-fold: religion became the major topic of the day; and even though the prayer meetings were not at first designed to be evangelistic, the addition of "Religious Inquiry Meetings" with their instruction and call to repentance began to bear conversion fruit. In the two years that this revival spread across the country, it is estimated that over two million people were added to the churches.(3)

One of the fascinating aspects of this revival was the fact that it received extensive coverage by the newspapers. Already in January of 1858, reports of the daily prayer meetings appeared in daily editions of the news. In February, updates on the revival appeared daily. This account appeared in one editorial in *The Daily Tribune*:

We understand that arrangements are being made for the establishment of one or two additional meetings in the upper portion of the city; soon the striking of the five bells at 12 o'clock will generally be known as the signal for the "Hour of Prayer."(4)

Other cities began to hear about what was happening in New York and reported the noon prayer meeting phenomenon. There are reports in a newspaper from Washington that "religious interest has been growing in the midst of the rowdiness everywhere so long prevalent...religious revivals were never more numerous or effective."(5)

In Manhattan, the count of 6,110 people attending noon prayer meetings was made by reporters going from place to place in horse cabs and roughly counting people before moving on.

It was not long before the news of what was happening in New York sparked interest in having something similar in other cities. Philadelphia, Albany, Boston, Cincinnati and Chicago soon had "daily union prayer meetings," as they came to be known, and the revival spirit spread. The revival in Philadelphia began in earnest through the suggestion of a young member of the Young Men's Christian Association in that city. He attended some of the early meetings at the

North Dutch Reformed Church in New York, and upon returning home suggested to his fellow YMCA members that they begin the same kind of meeting in Philadelphia. On November 23, 1857, the first meeting was held. The response was discouraging: over the first few months no more than thirty-six people showed up. By February, it was decided that attendance might improve if a more centrally located room was found, and so the anteroom of Jayne's Hall was rented. Slowly the attendance increased until it was necessary to move out of the anteroom into the main hall. Attendance then soared until the entire hall was filled with people, an estimated three thousand, for the time of prayer. Other places were rented, preaching services begun, and approximately 10,000 people were converted and added to the church rolls during 1858.

In Boston the prayer meetings were begun in the historic Old South Church. However, the crowd for the first meeting was too large for the building, so additional places were rented and the people divided among them.

Two thousand people gathered in The Metropolitan Theatre in Chicago, forming the largest prayer meeting in "the Windy City." Other churches also held noon-time prayer meetings in this city.

The Spirit seemed to spread from place to place until the entire country was pervaded by a sense of holiness and righteousness. In one of the meetings in Boston, led by an aging Charles Finney, a man got up to give testimony. He said, "I am from Omaha, in Nebraska. On my journey East I have found a continuous prayer meeting all the way. We call it two thousand miles from Omaha to Boston; and here was a prayer meeting about two thousand miles in extent."⁽⁷⁾

Other Roots to Revival

The daily prayer meetings were the primary means of bringing about revival in the country. It should be noted, however, that God was moving concurrently in another way to prepare the nation for the blowing of the Holy Spirit. This parallel movement had its beginning in a convention that was held in Pittsburgh in the fall of 1857. The purpose was to discuss the need for revival in the land. Topics ranging from the various obstacles to revival in the country, to the means that should be used to promote revival were presented and discussed. The conventioners left their series of meetings with a covenant to set aside the first Sunday in January of 1858 to preach revival in their churches and to pray and fast the following Sunday, asking God for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit. By this time, of course, the Daily Union Prayer Meetings in New York were going and growing, but the fact that the call for revival came in two different cities, in two different ways, at the same time, is an indication that this movement was of God and not simply the result of man's planning.

Results of the Great Revival

This revival had three phases to it. Phase one was the spontaneous attendance at prayer meetings throughout the country. This was a lay movement of unprecedented proportions, as men and women held meetings wherever they could find room, and God moved the hearts of others to attend. This, as I mentioned, resulted in an estimated two million or more being added to the membership rolls of the churches within a two-year period prior to the Civil War. This was the first result of the revival. Every area of the country was touched, except for the southern states; some have suggested that this area was so caught up in the issue of slavery, and so mistrustful of anything that came from the north, that the Spirit was quenched there.

Internationally, however, it was a different story. Ireland reported an awakening in 1859 after a visit to the Fulton Street meeting in New York by a delegation from that country. After Ireland,

the British Isles as a whole were touched. It spread from England to Europe, and from Europe to India. Over the next several years the Daily Union Prayer Meeting was instituted in many places, but almost always with the same results--an outpouring of the Holy Spirit. This was phase I of this revival.

Phase II came with the ministry of Dwight L. Moody. This shoe salesman turned evangelist picked up the strands of the revival spirit that were left after the Civil War and changed the direction from having prayer meeting to producing evangelistic crusades. Moody was a product of the great Young Men's Christian Association. The YMCA began as an evangelistic organization and became the launching pad for the international ministry of its best-known member.

The third phase of the Great Revival was a missionary movement. Hundreds of young men and women who were part of the Student Volunteers, the YMCA, the Salvation Army and the Christian Endeavor movement volunteered for mission duty. This was a time of deep concern for the lost, as evidenced by the fact that there were more than 849 missionary societies in the country raising funds and sending people out to the mission field. Their growth was a direct result of challenge to missions given to young people in the universities and colleges. In India, Japan, Korea, the Philippines, Turkey, Malaysia, North Africa, Egypt, West Africa, Uganda, all through the world, this army of inspired workers reached out in the name of Jesus and with a message of His love. Often the ministry of Moody and other evangelists was described as the reason that more than five thousand young people dedicated themselves to spreading the good news throughout the world.

Social Results

It is difficult to determine the social results of this revival. They were not as clearly visible as the various reform movements that sprouted out of the Second Great Awakening. However, it is possible to document a renewed concern for some areas of society. Timothy Smith, student of revivals and social reform, says of this revival. "The rapid growth of concern with purely social issues such as poverty, working men's rights, the liquor traffic, slum housing, and racial bitterness is the chief feature distinguishing American religion after 1865 from that of the first half of the nineteenth century."⁽⁸⁾

In addition to social action in these areas, there was a spiritually energized concern for those who suffered during the Civil War. The YMCA in particular sent packages and people, including Dwight Moody, to the various camps to encourage the soldiers.

Lay Ministry

Prior to this point in time, the work of the church was seen primarily as belonging to the ordained clergy. This revival took place almost without regard to the official representatives of the church. Laymen began to realize that they could make a significant contribution to the work of the kingdom, and did not relinquish this involvement to the clergy after the revival was finished.

Preparation for the Civil War

In many ways, this revival gave soldiers and others the strength to endure the bloodiest war in our history. As you read histories of the war, the religious aspects of the struggle are often left out, but religious histories point out that the Union army camps often were places of religious services. Churches who sent their sons to the war were places of prayer. The fact that the nation had been spiritually strengthened prior to the conflict helped people endure the pain of loss, both personal and national.

This revival, then, was a fascinating one. The Spirit seemed to break out in new ways over the land, as lay men and women spontaneously came to confession of faith. Large cities and small hamlets benefited from the renewal, and the stage was set for phase II of the revival: the ministry of Dwight L. Moody. His ministry is the topic of the next chapter.

Notes:

1. Unattributed quote in Frank Beardsley, *A History of Revivals* (New York: American Tract Society, 1912), p. 219.
2. T.W. Chambers, *The Noon Prayer Meeting*, p. 42 (Quoted by J. Edwin Orr in *The Fervent Prayer* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1974,
3. p. 4).
4. J. Edwin Orr, *The Fervent Prayer* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1974),
5. p. 5.
6. *The Daily Tribune*, February 10, 1858.
7. *National Intelligencer*, Washington, March 2 and 11, 1858.
8. *New York Herald*, March 26, 1858.
9. Quoted by Beardsley, p. 227.
10. Timothy Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform* (Baltimore: John
11. Hopkins University Press, 1980), p. 148.

PART IV: REVIVALISM IN POST-CIVIL WAR AMERICA

CHAPTER 8: DWIGHT LYMAN MOODY

He has been referred to as “God’s Gospel Salesman.”⁽¹⁾ He was a shoe salesman turned evangelist. If you were going to search for an evangelist who would have a nationwide and international impact, you probably wouldn’t be interviewing shoe salesmen at that time. Even if you did, you probably would have taken Moody off your list of possibilities because of his inability to speak well and his lack of education. Yet God used Dwight L. Moody mightily, and we add him to our list of American revivalists.

Of all of the well-known evangelists that we have studied up to this point, the one that you would choose as least likely to succeed would be Dwight Moody. It is conceivable to the logical and rational person that God would use the brilliant Jonathan Edwards. After all, he was trained theologically and involved in the life of the church. George Whitefield is someone we would say had a future in evangelism. From early on in his studies he was recognized as an eloquent spokesman for the Gospel. Even Charles Finney, though he did not go to seminary, had been educated as a lawyer and was trained to do logical analysis and presentation. But Dwight Moody was an uneducated shoe salesman. The way God used him should remind us that anyone can be a channel of His power. Moody was rough, raw material, and yet the power of the Holy Spirit flowed through him for the conversion of thousands.

Youth

There is nothing in the childhood or youth of Dwight Moody that would make anyone think that God was preparing him for the work that he was going to do later in his life. He was born in the agricultural area of Northfield, Massachusetts, on February 5, 1837. He was the sixth child in the family, and the fifth son. His family was not part of the wealthy set of Northfield. In fact, just the opposite is true. The Edwin Moody family lived on the edge of bankruptcy in spite of the father’s work as a brick maker and mason.

When Dwight was four years old, his father died, leaving Betsy, the mother of the family, with seven children. One week after Edwin’s death, twins were born. So here was a family with no father and nine children in the day when women were not regularly part of the work force. Needless to say, the family was devastated emotionally, and their finances were in disarray. With the lack of pity that often characterized financial institutions in that day and age, creditors added to their misery by coming to the home and taking everything of value, even the kindling out of the woodshed. Friends and family suggested that Betsy give the children up for placing in other homes, a common practice at that time. She was determined, however, to hold her family together, despite the fact that her children now ranged in age from newborn to only 13 years old.

During this period of readjustment and recovery of the family after Edwin's death, Rev. Oliver Everett, the minister in the local Unitarian Church, befriended the family. Subsequently, Betsy joined this church and had all of her children baptized in it when Dwight was 5 years old. Thus the Unitarian Church was the primary means of spiritual nurture in Moody's youth. This denomination has its roots, as we have seen, in the rationalistic emphasis of the Enlightenment. When conservative churches were calling people to repentance and confession of Jesus as Lord, the Unitarian Church embraced every scientific discovery and the scientific method as the means to advancement for the human race. A brief history of this denomination, which is still quite active in the Eastern United States, will help us understand something of the theological wasteland that was Moody's early church experience.

One of the early leaders was Robert Breck. Breck was a graduate of Harvard, a university that had become very liberal. Upon becoming a candidate for a church in Connecticut, he preached a sermon in which he suggested that the heathen, particularly the Native Americans, could be saved by attention to natural religion. This claim so upset the established ministers, including Jonathan Edwards, that they refused to participate in his ordination service.

The next major figure in the development of Unitarian thought was Charles Chauncy. His work, "Seasonable Thoughts on the State of Religion in New England," condemned the Great Awakening as overly emotional and not based on good rational thought. His later sermon at an ordination service in Baltimore, entitled "Unitarian Christianity" laid the groundwork for a new religion. It retained the name Christian, but denied the divinity of Jesus Christ, denied the need for faith in order to be saved, and elevated reason to the pinnacle of the church's belief system. The Bible was not considered to be authoritative, and no creed was accepted as normative for the church. In other words, "anything goes" became the practice; you could believe anything and still be part of this church.

As a sidelight, it should be noted that most of the great American literary figures of that period were part of the Unitarian movement. Hawthorne's short stories are consistently anti-Calvinistic and speak against the belief in a sovereign God. Longfellow and Thoreau were members of the Unitarian Church as well. Ralph Waldo Emerson was a minister in the Unitarian Church, but left that denomination to form a new system of belief, which he called Transcendentalism.

The emphasis of Unitarianism, then, was not on a system of belief, but on building a good character through the application of education and reason.

It was in this kind of church that Dwight L. Moody was baptized. Will Moody, Dwight's son, wrote a biography of his father in 1900, and asserted there that there were three books in Betsy Moody's home: "a large family Bible...a catechism, and a book of devotions, comprising contemplations and written prayers." (2) Apparently, even though the Bible was in the house, growing up in a Unitarian Church did not make Dwight familiar with the contents of the book. Some years later, when Moody was interviewed for membership in the Mount Vernon Congregational Church of Boston, he displayed complete ignorance of the basics of the biblical story. But that's getting ahead of the story.

As a youth, Moody is remembered as having an abundance of energy and a willingness to work hard at anything--anything, that is, except his education. He himself felt that he never got more than a fifth-grade education, and that lack was to plague him during his public life. What he lacked in education, however, he made up for in energy. He worked at a variety of jobs, but quickly became bored when things became routine. It was this boredom that led him to move to Boston when he was 17. He was in search of new opportunities, and Boston was one of the leading cities of the country at that time. An uncle, Samuel Holton, owned a retail book and shoe store in the city, and he invited young Dwight to work for him until he could find another job. All

attempts to locate work outside his uncle's establishment came to nothing, however, and so the next two years of Moody's life were spent as a salesman in his uncle's shoe store.

It was while he was in Boston, living in a room near the Boston Common, that Moody had the first real religious experiences of his life. One condition of employment that his uncle had made when Dwight came to the city was that he attend a church regularly. The Mount Vernon Church became the place for this involvement. However, early in his stay there, he seemed little touched by or interested in spiritual things. His letters home refer to watching the girls and engaging in the stimulating life of the city. He did join the YMCA, but the motivation for that seemed to be more an interest in the recreation they offered and the library and lectures provided for the fee of one dollar per year than for the spiritual program of the organization.

It was in Boston, though, that Moody experienced conversion. His Sunday School teacher, a man named Edward Kimball, was teaching the Gospel of John to a class of young men, including Dwight. This man was able to hold young Dwight's attention and earn his respect. Kimball also had a great desire that his students become Christians. Therefore, he made it a point to visit each one and share the gospel message. The story goes that Kimball came to Samuel Holton's shoe store burdened with the need to share the gospel with his student. Uncertain about interrupting a place of business, he paced outside of the store until finally he got up courage to go in. He asked for Dwight, and was directed to a back storage room. There he found Moody wrapping shoes in paper. Standing among the boxes, papers, string, and other paraphernalia that had collected in this back room, he shared the simple gospel story. Moody said this about that meeting:

When I was in Boston I used to attend a Sunday School class, and one day I recollect my teacher came around behind the counter of the shop I was at work in, and put his hand on my shoulder, and talked to me about Christ and my soul. I had not felt that I had a soul till then. I said to myself: "This is a very strange thing. Here is a man who never saw me till lately, and he is weeping over my sins, and I never shed a tear about them." But I understand about it now, and know what it is to have a passion for men's souls and weep over their sins. I don't remember what he said, but I can feel the power of that man's hand on my shoulder tonight. It was not long after that I was brought into the Kingdom of God.(3)

That was April 21, 1855. On May 16 he came to a meeting of the deacons of the Mount Vernon Congregational Church applying for membership. They examined him and found him lacking. The principle question of this examination was, "What has Christ done for you, and for us all, that especially entitles him to our lives and obedience?" Moody couldn't give a good answer. His application for membership was rejected. Two men were assigned to work with him over the next months, and almost a year later Moody was again before them. Though he did only marginally better in this examination, the committee took note of his sincerity and the life he had led, and admitted him to membership. Officially he became part of the church on May 3, 1856.

The Chicago Connection

A short time after becoming a member, Moody headed for Chicago. It was September, 1856. This city of about 80,000 at the time was the new burgeoning capital of the West. It was the land of opportunity, and Dwight's energy and commitment to getting ahead led him to stake his future on this area. He had a goal in mind: the goal of making his fortune in the boot and shoe industry there. His personal goal was to save \$100,000, a fortune in the mid 1850s. He was well on his way by 1860, with \$7,000 in the bank. Even with his concern for riches, though, he did not neglect the spiritual side of life. He became a member of the Plymouth Congregational Church on May 3, 1857. He was involved in the prayer meetings of the Great Revival, referring in letters home to the events that were taking place in that city. And sometime in late 1858 or early in 1859 he became

involved in the YMCA in Chicago. It was involvement with this organization that paved the way for Moody's fame, but his work with evangelism didn't begin there. Already in the Plymouth Congregational Church he showed a capacity for reaching out as a salesman for God. He hired four pews, according to the practice of the day to rent particular seats, and then proceeded to fill them each week with people that he had invited--mostly young businessmen like himself.

He also volunteered to teach in a Mission School. Mission Schools were part of the outreach strategy in that day and age. On Sunday, schools would open up around the poorer areas of town to teach the young children, often of immigrants, the basic truths of Scripture. The target audience was children whose parents were not Christian. Moody was told by the superintendent of the school in which he volunteered that there were only 16 pupils in the school, and that they already had 12 teachers. However, if he got his own class, he could teach. The next Sunday Moody appeared with 18 raggedy students, and began to direct his attention during his spare time toward getting others to come. Soon his class was filled to overflowing.

The north side of Chicago was especially poor. Moody began his own Mission School there in the early part of 1859. This school prospered under Moody's guidance to the point that eventually a church was formed to continue to minister to the children as they grew. And eventually Moody turned over control of the school to the YMCA. It was in this school that Moody gained experience in public speaking. He would speak to the group of children gathered there, often using a chalkboard for illustrative purposes. Soon adults were attending the lectures until the room became too crowded and other accommodations had to be rented.

By 1860 Moody was faced with a decision that had national and international ramifications. He was incredibly successful in his work, and was now traveling throughout the West as a debt collector. He was also fabulously effective in his work with the school. But even with his abundant energy, he was not able to do both. He therefore gave up his previous goal of becoming wealthy, and made a decision to go into full-time Christian work. The fact that this decision was made after his engagement to Emma C. Revell indicates the depth of the commitment that he had made to be the Lord's man. Marriage was postponed until August 28, 1862, due to the financial limitations of the budding evangelist.

Moody threw himself with all of his energy into the work of his school. Stories are told of him confronting children on the street, exhorting them to come to the mission school, reciting the fun they had singing, playing games, etc. When rebuffed, he would follow the child, sometimes even going into the home. (4)

He also became a familiar figure in public, even getting up on the steps of the courthouse and preaching to the passersby. He became known as "Crazy Moody." And yet, he was loved by the students who filled his school, and began to fill his church.

Further experience and exposure were gained during the Civil War, when he was sent by the YMCA of Chicago to Camp Douglas to minister to the soldiers. Several times he traveled to camps during the war and even was the first person representing a Christian group to enter Richmond after its fall.

In 1866 he was elected president of the Chicago YMCA and quickly used his new position and his business sense to expand the ministry of that organization. Noon prayer meetings were augmented. New ministries were begun. Building programs were undertaken after the Chicago fire. New mission schools were started and financed by the large sums of money that Moody was able to raise from his business contacts.

It was during these years, too, that he began to formulate the pattern for the crusades that would lead to his fame. The revival meetings had their genesis in 1870, when Moody met Ira David Sankey at a meeting in Indianapolis. When the singing dragged at a prayer meeting, Sankey got up and sang, "There Is a Fountain Filled with Blood." Moody was so impressed with the

young man, that he immediately invited him to come and join the work of the YMCA. Two months later, Sankey joined Moody in the work of the North Side Tabernacle, the church that had been formed out of his mission school.

A trip to England in 1873 that lasted two years confirmed the gifts of these men, and in 1875 they returned to the United States with international reputations. A series of evangelistic revivals was planned beginning in Chicago, then over to Brooklyn, on to Philadelphia, and culminating in New York. Meetings were well attended, and the response was overwhelming as people came forward in increasing numbers at the time of invitation. Moody had become a force for good in the spiritual battleground of the United States.

Ideas and Contributions to Revivalism

Moody is remembered today for three significant contributions to the ongoing legacy of revival in this country. First of all, he proclaimed God's love. Prior revivalists had focused peoples' attention on the coming judgment in an effort to get them to turn to Christ. Jonathan Edwards, in particular, believed that the means to revival was to "scare the hell out" of people. So, prior to Moody, hellfire and damnation was the normal message heard during revival meetings. Moody, on the other hand, was impressed with the love of God, and that is what he proclaimed. This is probably due to Moody's own experience. In 1871 he was holding services in Brooklyn during the evening, and during the day he was asking for funds to rebuild buildings destroyed in the Chicago fire. While seeking donations on Wall Street, he received a filling of the Spirit that caused him to want to share a message about a God who could love sinners. He described his experience this way:

Oh, what a day! I cannot describe it; I seldom refer to it; it is almost too sacred an experience to name. Paul had an experience of which he never spoke for fourteen years. I can only say that God revealed Himself to me, and I had such an experience of His love that I had to ask Him to stay His hand.(5)

After this vaguely described experience, Moody began to listen to other preachers, notably Harry Moorhouse, who preached a God of love more often than a God of judgment. Gradually, his method of preaching began to change. In his words,

I used to preach that God hates the sinner... I never knew that God loved us so much. This heart of mine began to thaw out; I could not hold back the tears...I took up that word "love" and I do not know how many weeks I spent in studying passages in which it occurs, till at last I could not help loving people.(6)

This emphasis of love drew people to Moody and his meetings, and brought a refreshing renewal to the practice of revival crusades.

Moody is also remembered for bringing a thorough organization to the crusade meeting. Ever the efficient businessman, he saw to every detail in a campaign, from organizing churches, to promotion, to making sure the lighting was right, to the quality of the program. Sermon illustration books abound with examples of Moody's businesslike approach. Just one example of this salesman keeping his customers satisfied will give the flavor of Moody's approach to his meetings. When one local clergyman was praying too long at a revival service, and Moody sensed that the crowd was getting restless, the evangelist got up to the platform and said, "While our brother finishes his prayer, let's sing number...." Crowds loved that kind of showmanship and they loved him.

A third development in revivalism that we attribute to Moody was the delivery of the message. He possessed little education, and often mangled the English language. One observer in England wrote:

Oh, the way that man does mangle the English tongue! The daily slaughter of syntax at the Tabernacle is dreadful. His enunciation may be pious, but his pronunciations are decidedly off color. It is enough to make Noah Webster turn over in his grave and weep to think that he lived in vain. (7)

And yet he was so personable and humble in his delivery, so obviously sincere in his message, so empowered by the Holy Spirit, that people responded to the messages enthusiastically.

This uneducated man is also remembered for the development of Moody Bible Institute, and for making Christian education materials available through inexpensive paperback books, published usually by his brother-in-law, Fleming Revell.

It is difficult to sum up the influence of a man like Dwight L. Moody. What I have given you here is just a sketch of the way God touched and used someone. His desire to be totally committed to God made him usable by God. His experience in the business world changed the way that revivals were conducted. His message of love touched a world.

Moody died on December 22, 1899 after falling ill during a series of revival services held in Kansas City. He peacefully passed away, saying, as he felt the end nearing, "It is my coronation day... Earth is receding and heaven is opening. God is calling me. Is this dying? There is no valley here!"(8) Four days later he was buried in Northfield. In one sermon he said,

Some day, you will read in the papers that D.L. Moody of East Northfield is dead. Don't you believe a word of it! At that moment I shall be more alive than I am now. I shall have gone up higher, that is all--out of his old clay tenement into a house that is immortal; a body that sin cannot touch, that sin cannot taint, a body fashioned like unto his glorious body. I was born of the flesh in 1837. I was born of the Spirit in 1856. That which is born of the flesh may die. That which is born of the Spirit will live forever. (9)

Dwight Moody--one other example of the kind of person God has used to bring about revival in this country.

Notes:

1. Glyn W. Evans, *Profiles of Revival Leaders* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1976), p. 55.
2. W.R. Moody, *Moody*, p. 26. [Quoted in James F. Findlay Jr., *Dwight L. Moody American Evangelist*(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), p. 38.]
3. Frank W. Beardsley, *A History of American Revivals* (New York: American Tract Society, 1912), p. 257.
4. Evans, p. 59.
5. Ibid, p. 58.
6. Gamaliel Bradford, *D.L. Moody—A Worker in Souls* (New York: Doran, 1927), p. 108.
7. Bradford, p. 104
8. Beardsley, p. 286.
9. Ibid.

CHAPTER 9: DECLINE AGAIN

Even while Dwight L. Moody was having his greatest success as a revivalist in the United States, the process of spiritual decline had also begun once again. Historian Arthur M. Schlesinger has called the period from 1875 to 1900 “The critical period in American religion,”(1) because it was during this time that the church faced internal and external challenges that left it splintered.. A spiritual lethargy invaded many areas of the church, even while “revivals,” or what I have been referring to as revival meetings, continued in various cities around the country. In this chapter we will look at the forces that contributed to the decline of spiritual piety, and in the next we will consider how God continued, even in the midst of the spiritual challenges of the time, to lay the foundation for the next period of revival.

The Draining Forces

Darwinism

Perhaps the greatest challenge to faith and belief in this critical period was brought by Charles Darwin. Darwin was born in Shrewsbury, England, to the family of a wealthy physician. His father, a well-educated man himself, had a deep concern for his son’s education. This love for learning, however, did not carry through to the son. Charles showed little interest in education, and was even removed from the school in Shrewsbury in 1818 because he was interested only in hunting. In an effort to redeem the young man, the father sent Charles, in 1825, to Edinburgh to study medicine, with the hope that he would follow in his father’s footsteps. Unfortunately for Charles, and maybe even less fortunate for the concerned parent, he disliked medicine intensely. It was a deep disappointment to the physician father that Charles couldn’t watch an operation without getting ill himself (this was, of course, in the days prior to anesthetic).

If the children of wealthy people didn’t go into medicine or law in England at that time, there was always a last resort: they would study for a career in the church. Charles Darwin, therefore, was sent to Christ’s College in Cambridge in 1827, to study for holy orders in the church of England. However, even there he didn’t apply himself, and was thought to have very poor prospects for a future ministry. Though the study for holy orders didn’t go as planned, Charles did begin to get a picture of his future while at Christ’s College. During his four years of study there he met several well-known scientists, and by the time he received his Bachelor of Arts degree in 1831, he was greatly interested in botany and geology. He especially admired “naturalists,” people who studied the natural world. It was this interest that won his first real job, as naturalist aboard the HMS Beagle on a “round the world” trip. John Henslow, a tutor of Darwin, recommended

him for this trip. The ship was to study several phenomena on its voyage, and the government wanted a naturalist aboard to write observations about the flora and fauna in various parts of the world. Darwin took the job, even though it did not pay, and the scene was set for him to make a place in history.

The ship sailed on December 27, 1831, on a voyage that was to last for five years. During that time Darwin observed variations in nature that led him to question the traditional understanding of biology. Up to that point, it was thought that plants and animals were unchanging, the result of a divine creative act. However, Darwin noticed that there were differences in rodents between South and North America that caused him to reflect on the reason for such differences. As he observed the same kinds of variations in other groups of plants and animals, the question seemed to grow in importance. He began to formulate his best-known theory in the Galapagos Islands. There he noticed ground finches that displayed a great variety from island to island. On one island they would have powerful beaks and would eat large seeds. On another island there would be smaller beaks, and the birds would eat small seeds. On yet another, the finches would have fine beaks and eat insects. Darwin's hypothesis was that the species adapted itself to its environment through a process that he called "natural selection."

On October 2, 1836, the ship was back in England, and Darwin spent the next several years compiling his samples and writing about his observations. It wasn't until November 24, 1859, however, that he published, "On the Origin of Species." In this book he suggested that there was a process of evolution that was going on in the world, and it was this process that explained the differences he had seen. He also supposed that through the process of natural selection, one species could evolve into another. Thus it was that divine creation was replaced, in the minds of many, with a very long process of evolution. This was, as you can imagine, a direct attack on the relationship of the Creator to the creation in the opinion of the church. People believed, up to that point, that creation had been brought into being to declare the glory of God (Psalm 19), to proclaim His eternal power and divine character (Romans 1:20). Every tree, every flower, every blade of grass was somehow controlled by God, working out His beautiful designs. At least this is what the average person believed and what the church had taught. Darwin's scientific observations began a revolution in thought that would prove to be more devastating to the church than the effects of the Enlightenment. Instead of the world being the special place where God was working out His designs and interfering, when necessary, on behalf of His people, the world was now seen as a constant struggle that was being played out over billions of years--a struggle where only the fittest survive. Instead of God creating the creatures of the world, including the crown of creation--man, the way was open to see every creature as the product of an evolutionary sequence that began with a chance collision of atoms. Man, rather than being the image-bearer of God, was seen as nothing but the dominant of many creatures, and his dominant position may not last because evolution continues.

Such a theory was an attack on the very basics of Christian belief at that time. The response of some church leaders was to go on the offensive. Others, however, as we will see in a moment, found ways to apply this new theory to Christianity, and even talked about the evolution of Christianity. Still others incorporated this theory into their own system of belief, and rejected the Christian faith.

Historical Criticism

"Historical Criticism" was another factor in the decline of piety toward the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century. Historical criticism was a technique of research that applied vigorous rules of interpretation to the Bible. Scholars using this method viewed the Bible as just

one history book among many. Thus, divine providence was discounted as an explanation for events like the Old Testament history of the Jews, the life and times of Jesus, and the events that caused the Christian church to rise to prominence in the Roman Empire.

Perhaps the best known of the historical-critical thinkers of this time was Julius Wellhausen. In 1878 he applied principles of historical research to the books of Moses and published his findings. He questioned whether Moses wrote most of the Pentateuch; and he proposed that a scribe took some writings and put them together at a much later date than could be possible for Moses to be involved.

People in the world of scholarship began to doubt the verbal inspiration of the Bible as a result of these attacks on commonly accepted doctrines. As historical theology became a discipline, the very basic doctrines of Christianity were questioned. Some liberal scholars, like Adolf Van Harnack (1900) suggested that there were only a few simple tenets of Christianity that were accepted by all people at all times, and faith, he said, should be reduced to these few simple statements of Jesus.

Immigration

Immigration continued to have an effect on the life of the Protestant and Catholic churches in America. The movement of people coming here from Europe changed the face of the country, and the expectations for the church. Chicago is an example of the vast number of changes that occurred in society as a result. In 1833, the period when the Second Great Awakening was reaching its peak, the city on the shores of Lake Michigan was a frontier outpost of 17 houses. By 1900 it was the fifth largest city in the world, with 1,698,575 inhabitants. Chicago is just one sample of what was happening all over the country during this period of time. The pre-Civil War high of immigrants was 427,833 in 1854. In 1882 almost twice that number moved into the country. In 1907 there were 1,285,349 people who came here, primarily from Europe. The summary figures are impressive: from 1860 to 1900 14 million immigrants came to the U.S. Another 14 million came in the twenty-year period from 1900 to 1920.

The nightmare that Thomas Jefferson wanted to avoid had become a reality with this influx of newcomers. Less than one-third of the immigrants settled on the farms. The rest settled into the teeming cities that were becoming metropolises: places like New York, Philadelphia, Chicago and Boston were home to thousands.

The church didn't respond well to the newcomers. There was little attempt to reach them, as we saw in a previous chapter. Instead, the churches began to flee the cities. Between 1868 and 1888, seventeen Protestant churches moved out of the district below Fourteenth Street in New York.⁽²⁾ During that same twenty-year period, about 200,000 people moved into that area. In the ten-year period between 1878 to 1888, the 13th ward of Boston, with 22,000 people, did not have a single Protestant church to minister to them.⁽³⁾ In the heart of Chicago, it was estimated that there were 60,000 people who had no church ⁽⁴⁾.

Among all of the Protestant churches, only the Salvation Army sought to reach out to the poor and needy of the cities. This ministry came to the United States from England in 1869 and targeted the lower socio-economic classes that made up most of the populations of the cities of the country. They provided social help, job help, food pantries, and the like. But they were the only ones. The Roman Catholic Church tried to minister among those who came here hopeful of starting a new life, but even they responded slowly to the massive movement of people that characterized these years.

Wealth

The poor were not ministered to by the churches. The common working man was also disenfranchised during this time. During this period when the working class folks were forming, with great struggle, the first unions, the Protestant churches were blessing the capitalism of its wealthy suburban members as the way of God. Thus, the prosperity of a few kept the church from identifying with the masses that were fertile ground for the gospel. Wealth caused church members to be satisfied with the status quo, and many ministers refused to preach on the needs of the poor or minister to the poor around them.

Infidels

During this period, too, the phenomenon of the “infidel” also challenged the teachings of the church. The most famous of these challengers of the Christian faith was Robert Ingersoll. This son of a conservative Protestant minister served in the Civil War as a colonel in the Union Army, was a successful lawyer, and also had been involved in politics. At some point, which he never clarified, he abandoned the faith of his father and became an agnostic, which means he didn’t know if there was a God. If there was a God, Ingersoll proclaimed in his very effective speeches, he probably wasn’t at all like the God of Christians. In an era of great scientific advance, he said, the church had become an anachronism, and had really made a mess of things in the process.

Ingersoll and others like him had an extremely negative impact on the church, especially in challenging those of marginal or fragile commitment to Christianity. Such people contributed to the sapping of the spiritual vitality that had been developed during the prior revival.

Effect on the Church

Sydney Ahlstrom eloquently gives testimony to the devastating effects of the above mentioned forces in his book on the history of religion in America.

From every sector the problems converged: the Enlightenment’s triumphant confidence in science and in nature’s law, the multiform romantic heresy that religion was essentially feeling or poetic exaltation, that nature was a cathedral and communing in it a sacrament; the disruption of the Creation story and the biblical time scale; the evolutionary transformation of the old notion that the world’s orderliness bespoke God’s benevolent design; the historical criticism of the Bible, the relativization of the church and its teachings, the denial of human freedom and moral responsibility, and even the abolition of those eternal standards by which right and wrong, the false and the true were to be judged. All this had to be faced, moreover, in the new urban jungles of the Gilded Age, where Americans seemed to be chiefly bent on getting and spending and laying waste their powers. Never in the history of Christianity, it would seem, was a weak and disunited Christian regiment drawn into battle against so formidable an alliance, under such unfavorable conditions of climate and weather, and with so little information on the position and intent of the opposition.(5)

How did the church respond to the variety of challenges posed? One response has become known as liberal theology, or modernism. That is, there were those theologians and ministers, and therefore their churches, who decided to incorporate the new teachings into their systems. They became liberal, that is, they stood for a “liberty” in what a person believed and wanted to “liberate” Christianity from what they viewed as slavery to obscure creeds. Seminaries like Harvard, Yale, Union Theological Seminary in New York, Boston University (Methodist), Lane Seminary (Presbyterian) and the Divinity School connected with the University of Chicago all

became centers of liberalism. People trained in these seminaries became pastors who, in turn, affected the churches that they pastored over a twenty-year period. There were many different branches of the liberalism movement, but there are some common denominators.

1. There is an emphasis on man's free will and what is believed to be a natural tendency to do good. Mankind has the moral and rational ability to do the right. Original sin does not exist or, the liberals say, it is so innocuous as to be inapplicable to the world today.
2. What mankind needs, then, is education in morals. The Sermon on the Mount was considered to be the heart and core of the Christian faith by the liberals. Christianity thus was reduced to moral imperatives.
3. The world is seen by liberal theology in evolutionary terms. When liberals look at history, they see a progression--man improving as knowledge improves. We are gradually evolving into a better species, they say, so that the kingdom of God is not something to look for in a future life, but to create here and now.
4. The divinity of Jesus was also debated. It is felt by most liberals that the creeds and doctrines about Jesus had been developed by men as a response to their times. A historical review of those times would allow scholars to get at the essence of who Jesus was. Such books as "Quest of the Historical Jesus," written by Albert Schweitzer in 1906, were attempts to remove the "human constructions" or myths that had grown up to surround Jesus. He became a Moral teacher under this kind of scrutiny, and if He was divine, it was because of His spectacular teaching, not because of some inherent quality of His being.
5. Religious education is the purpose of the church, to allow people to learn the moral truths of the most evolved religion.

The Social Gospel

Another similar response to the social and scientific upheavals of the age was the development of the social gospel. This movement was, in many respects, a natural outgrowth of liberalism. It proclaimed "good news," but the news was not that Jesus Christ came to save sinners. Rather, the good news was that we are progressing as mankind, and the real business of the church is to become involved in the great social needs of the world and solve them. One proponent of this view was Charles Sheldon, the Topeka pastor who wrote "In His Steps" as a working out of the philosophy of this application of Christianity. The major prophet of this theology was a man named Walter Rauschenbusch, who wrote, "Christianity and the Social Crisis" in 1907. On the last page of that work he wrote of the expectations that he had for Christianity:

Last May a miracle happened. At the beginning of the week the fruit trees bore brown and greenish buds. At the end of the week they were robed in bridal garments of blossom. But for weeks and months the sap had been rising and distending the cells and maturing the tissues which were half ready in the fall before. The swift unfolding was the culmination of a long process. Perhaps these nineteen centuries of Christian influence have been a long preliminary stage of growth, and now the flower and fruit are almost here. If at this juncture we can rally sufficient religious faith and moral strength to snap the bonds of evil and turn the present unparalleled economic and intellectual resources of humanity to the harmonious development of a true social life, the generations yet unborn will mark this as that great day of the Lord for which the ages waited, and count us blessed for sharing in the apostolate that proclaimed it.(6)

Note that the themes of progress and the evolution of mankind are there. Notice also that no cross is necessary in this system. Christ is a moral teacher, and if people but follow His lead, they

will be able to solve the many problems of labor and management, poverty, crime, and, indeed every social problem, with the result of creating heaven on earth.

This optimistic view of history and life could not withstand the blows of World War I and the Great Depression, but for some time they were persuasive and directed the church's attention and energy away from the cross of Christ and conversion of people as the answer mankind's real and deepest need.

Progressive Orthodoxy

That is what Billy Sunday, the next major evangelist in the country called his belief, and we will examine it and learn of him in the next chapter. However, here we point out, in connection with the church's response, that there were many Christians who learned to accept evolution as a scientific fact, but their view of God was so awesome that they saw it as only confirming His greatness. The Hebrew word for "day" in Genesis could refer to a period of time, several scholars said. So why couldn't God have finished the great work of creation over a period of millions, or even billions of years? Those who were progressively orthodox proclaimed the essential doctrines of salvation by grace through faith in the sacrifice of Jesus, the inspiration of Scripture, the virgin birth and the like. But they refused to allow progression in knowledge to shatter faith.

Fundamentalism

Another response to the draining of spirituality that occurred around the turn of the century was the development of fundamentalism. There were those who felt that Christianity was drifting from its traditional moorings, and so, the need of the day was to get back to the fundamentals of the faith, and cling to those no matter what was happening in the world. Among those with that opinion were two men, Lyman and Milton Steward, lay businessmen from Los Angeles. They created a \$250,000 fund with the purpose of using the money to inform every "pastor, evangelist, minister, theological professor, theological student, Sunday School Superintendent, YMCA and YWCA secretary in the English speaking world"(7) about true religion. Twelve booklets were commissioned, written by several distinguished theologians from England and America. The title of the series, as you might guess, was "The Fundamentals." From 1910 to 1913 these booklets were written and printed, and over three million of them were distributed before the outbreak of World War I. What were the Fundamentals? At the Niagara Bible Conference in 1895 a group of orthodox theologians set down the five "essentials" of Christian dogma. They were: the literal infallibility of the Bible, the virgin birth, the substitutionary atonement, the resurrection, and the imminent, bodily, premillennial second coming of Christ.(8) This movement garnered support from a variety of churches and theologians, and became very much influenced by the dispensationalism of Scofield. It served to form a bulwark against encroaching modernism, though it was seen by many to be a withdrawal from the exciting scientific and historical discoveries that were being made in this period.

So the nation was again heading away from being a "city set on a hill." What would be God's response? That is the topic of the next chapter.

Notes:

- 1 Arthur M. Schlesinger, "The Critical Period In American Religion," *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, 64 (1932-33), pp. 523-547.
- 2 Ibid, p. 531.
- 3 Ibid, p. 532.

- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Sydney Ahlstrom, *History of Religion in America*, p. 774.
- 6 Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1907), p. 422.
- 7 Ahlstrom, p. 815.
- 8 William McLoughlin, *Modern Revivalism* (New York: Ronald Press Co., 1959), p. 349-350.

CHAPTER 10: GOD'S RESPONSE

How did God respond to the decline of the church? Unfortunately, we cannot say this time that there was a nationwide revival that uplifted the country again and prepared it for a new mission endeavor after World War I. There were two movements, however, that showed that God was continuing to build His church even during a time when the overall spirit of the country was less than Christian. First of all, there was the development of a patterned crusade. The person who is best remembered for developing the methods of crusading, or producing local revival meetings, was Billy Sunday. And secondly, there was the beginning of the Pentecostal movement during these years.

Continued Revivals

It is at this point that we have to make a distinction between “revival” and “holding a revival.” “Revival” meant “coming to life again” in the days of Edwards and Whitefield and during the Second Great Awakening, as well as during the Great Revival. After Charles Finney’s popularizing of the new measures, and Moody’s refining of them, “revival” began to refer to a city-wide meeting that hopefully would result in coming to life again. People would plan a revival, or “hold a revival,” meaning they would plan meetings that they prayerfully hoped would result in the quickening of the spiritual nature of the city. In this chapter such a practice is going to be referred to as “revivalism” rather than “revival”; what is referred to is the planned meetings.

Revivalism and revivalists had gone through considerable development during the history of the United States up to this point. With Jonathan Edwards, revival was seen as the supernatural movement of the Holy Spirit. As he preached, with few gestures and in a monotone voice, the Holy Spirit would fall on the people. This was the understanding of revival in the Great Awakening: it was something no one could manipulate or plan for; it just happened by the gracious working of the Holy Spirit. Charles Finney, as we have seen, felt that revival did not have to wait for an arbitrary falling of the Holy Spirit. Rather, he taught that revival should be the expected experience when certain measures are applied. Therefore, he developed the new measures that we considered back in chapter 5. When these measures were applied, revival was almost certain to come, he taught. Moody took the new measures one step further and made several improvements: sending advance teams to prepare the way by making contact with churches and arranging publicity, and using music and professional musicians effectively. The inquiry rooms and response cards also were modern updates, as the practice of “programming” revivals gained greater sophistication.

By the turn of the century, just after Moody’s death, there were critics of revivalism and revivalists that filled the presses of the various Christian publications. The criticisms came from

three areas of the church. Those who were emphasizing the Social Gospel felt that the practice of revivals was limited in its scope. The conversions that were reported failed to make an impact on the serious social questions of the day and, in fact, failed to address them at all, preferring instead to emphasize individual conversion as the means to build God's kingdom. Another barrage against revivalism came from conservatives in the churches. Men like Rev. George F. Pentecost abandoned the profession of itinerant evangelist in 1900, because he felt that the days of mass evangelism were nearing an end. He wrote that the future evangelism of the country would not be done through city-wide campaigns, but through the patient working of individual churches, pastors and people who would reach out in their places of life and work.(1) Pentecost was especially critical of the "shallow decisions" made by those who felt pressured in an "after meeting." Another conservative figure that became prominent in criticizing revivalism was a man named Rev. George E. Horr, the editor of the national Baptist newspaper, "The Watchman." Horr did some statistical studies of Moody's revivals and concluded,

The statistics appear to show that in eastern Massachusetts, for example, the addition to the evangelical churches for five-year periods after the Great Tabernacle meetings in Boston were not so large as for five-year periods before. And most pastors have observed that the quality of the material brought into the churches under these influences is not so high as that gained by the devoted work of the local church by its own methods among its own clientage.(2)

So conservatives were critical not only of the shallow character of the revival meetings, but also of their apparent ineffectiveness in building up the church. Revival meetings had turned into a good show, with the emphasis on numbers of converts rather than changed lives.

A third group of critics of revivalism were the moderates and "liberals." These people felt that the anti-intellectual bias of the revivalists failed to allow for a blending of the modern discoveries with the age-old Christian message. William McLoughlin put their desire this way:

What they wanted was a revivalism which would be both intellectually respectable and emotionally fervent, which would show some awareness of the need for social reform and yet not substitute socialism for regenerating individuals. They felt that a more practical application of the Christian message was needed, but did not want the churches to take any stand on the controversial issues of capital and labor. In short, they wanted to have their cake and eat it too.(3)

In spite of being attacked on all sides in this way, revivalism, or the practice of holding revival meetings in a city-wide crusade, flourished in the period leading up to World War I. In 1911 there were 650 full-time evangelists active in America, along with 1,200 part-timers. It is estimated that between 1912 and 1918 at least 35,000 revivals were held in cities and towns across America. It was estimated, as well, that between 1914 to 1917 the evangelical churches of our country spent twenty million dollars per year on "professional tabernacle evangelism."(4)

The best known of the revivalists of this period, as mentioned earlier, was Billy Sunday. As in the case of Dwight L. Moody, if predictions were being made about who would become effective in reaching people for the Lord, William Ashley Sunday would not have figured in the list. Billy Sunday was born on November 19, 1862 in Ames, Iowa. His father, William Sunday, never saw his son. At the time of the birth he was serving in the Union army as a private, and died of pneumonia on December 23, 1862. His death left his wife with three children: Albert (4), Edward (2), and the sickly little boy who was at first called "Willie." Little Willie's health was poor, and it was reported that,

During the first three years of his life Billy was anything but a healthy child, and his mother and her relatives often despaired of his life. He was small at birth, lacking in strength, and for some reason did not gain rapidly, as his brothers had done. Then an old French doctor, living in the neighborhood, prescribed some herb remedies that seemed to be just the thing, for they soon had the boy going toward robust health.(5)

The mother struggled along on her own for six years, with limited help from her father, Squire Martin Corey. Then she married a man named Heizer. Two more children were born from this union over the next six years. During this period, however, Willie and his stepfather didn't get along very well. The child, therefore, spent a good deal of this time living with his grandparents, the Coreys. This arrangement ended during the economic depression of 1874. Apparently, under pressure because of the economic straits of the area, Heizer abandoned his family, never to be heard from again.

Mrs. Sunday packed up the children and moved to her parents' house. However, five children apparently were too much for her father to support. Willie and his brother Edward were sent to the Soldier's Orphan Home in Davenport, Iowa. The years spent at the orphan home made a lasting impact on young Sunday. Any untidiness or tardiness resulted in demerits. Demerits meant loss of privileges, a threat that struck fear into the children there. They especially hated to lose the Saturday trip into town. Under this strict and rigorous system Willie developed a passion for cleanliness and neatness. He also received an education that would be roughly the equivalent of grammar school at the orphanage.

The religious training of the orphanage, however, made little impact on the youngster. The method of training was to have the orphans memorize Bible passages. Billy didn't do too well in this area, but excelled at physical activities such as running and fighting.

In 1876 Edward was made to leave the orphanage because he had reached the age limit of 16. Rather than stay by himself, Willie insisted on going with his brother. They returned to Ames, Iowa, to their grandfather's farm. This "homecoming" was not to last long, however. Both grandfather and grandson were quick-tempered, and when Squire Corey cursed the teenager over some mistake, Willie borrowed a horse and went to Nevada, a small town eight miles from Ames. He got a job there as an errand boy in a hotel, and never lived with his mother again.

Within a few months he lost the job at the hotel because he went home to visit his mother and didn't return in twenty-four hours. He quickly found work again, however, as a stableboy and errand runner for a man named Colonel John Scott. He was paid \$8 per month, plus room and board, and while living with the Scotts, he attended high school. Sunday became well-known, during these years, as a speedy runner. He regularly won the local 4th-of-July races, and even obtained a job in nearby Marshalltown due to the need of the local fire brigade for a fast person to race in a firemen's competition. Running in that race caused him to miss his high school graduation, but he had a job that paid more than any previously, and that was considered more important to him. Since the fire brigade was not a full-time job, Billy supplemented his income by working for an undertaker as his assistant. He also had time to play baseball on Marshalltown's team.

In 1883 his team won the state tournament. Billy's speed and playing ability in this tournament caught the attention of "Pop" Anson, the manager of the Chicago Whitestockings. Anson convinced Billy to sign on as a professional baseball player for a salary that seems ludicrous today: \$60 per month. Billy Sunday's time in baseball was short--eight years, from 1883 to 1891. However, during that time he established two records: he ran around the bases from a standing start in 14 seconds; and he stole 95 bases in one season. The second record stood until 1915, when Ty Cobb stole 96.

The favorite story from his playing career was told many times in sermons. During a game with Detroit, in the ninth inning, Chicago had a one run lead. Two men were on base, and two were out. The batter had a full count, and the next pitch was hit high in the air out toward Sunday in right field. He told the story this way:

As I saw the ball rise in the air I knew it was going clear over my head into the crowd that

overflowed the field. I turned my back to the ball and ran. The field was crowded with people and as I ran I yelled, "Get out of the way!" and that crowd opened like the Red Sea for the rod of Moses. I ran on, and as I ran I made a prayer; it wasn't theological, either, I tell you that. I said "God, if you ever helped a mortal man, help me to get that ball!" I ran and jumped over the bench when I thought I was under it, and stopped. I looked back and saw it going over my head, and I jumped and shoved out my left hand, and the ball hit it and stuck! At the rate I was going the momentum carried me on and I fell under the feet of a team of horses. But I held on to it and jumped up with the ball in my hand.(6)

He was considered one of the fastest, gutsiest players on any team.

Billy's conversion came about in 1886. One Sunday afternoon he and a group of fellow ballplayers were leaving a tavern after having "tanked up." They stopped to listen to a group from the Pacific Garden Mission singing hymns that Billy recognized from his childhood. Something about the words and the vaguely remembered music struck a responsive chord in the baseball player. The leader of the group asked the ballplayers to come to the Mission. Sunday did, and eventually, through the ministry of Mrs. Clark, the wife of the founder of the mission, went forward and committed his life to the Lord.

Part of the attraction to Christianity for Sunday had to do also with his relationship with a young woman named Helen A. Thompson, nicknamed "Nell." Nell was the sister of the batboy for the Whitestockings, and through him Billy was introduced to the woman who would become his wife. However, the Thompson family was not enamored with the idea of Nell being courted by a professional baseball player, mostly due to the reputation that ballplayers had of living a wild life. However, after his conversion, Billy gave up drinking and joined the Jefferson Park Presbyterian Church, where the Thompsons were members.

His life changed in other ways, too. He gave up gambling and going to the theaters. He stopped playing baseball on Sunday. He began to go to the YMCA in whatever city he was playing and talking to boys there about "Earnestness in Christian Life." He also began studying the Bible at the Chicago Y, and undoubtedly heard Dwight L. Moody lecture there. Even with all of these improvements in his lifestyle, however, it took three years to convince Mr. Thompson that he was a worthy suitor for Nell.

The crisis that set Billy Sunday on the road to becoming an evangelist came in the off-season for baseball, winter, 1890-91. He had been spending more and more time in the work of the YMCA, and they wanted him to become a full-time Christian worker. However, there was the matter of his baseball contract. He had signed a three-year contract with the baseball team in Philadelphia that still had two years to run. With prayer for direction, he asked for a release from his contract, using March 25 as a fleece; if he was granted a release before March 25, he would consider it God's will that he go to work full time for the YMCA; if he did not receive a release, he would continue playing baseball. The release came on March 17. The decision became more complex, however, when Cincinnati's baseball team, hearing that he had been released, immediately offered him a contract for \$500 per month--a huge salary back then, and one that would support his wife and one-year old daughter. He and his wife consulted with Christian friends and prayed about what to do. It was Nell who finally settled the matter when she concluded, "There is nothing to consider; you promised God to quit."(7) So instead of \$500 per month he received \$83.33 per month working at the Chicago YMCA. His position was called the assistant secretary of the religious department. His work week filled six days, with hours often extending from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m.

This relationship continued with the YMCA until 1893. That year a depression caused a cutback in donations to the Y, and they were looking to cut some staff in order to save money.

Billy Sunday was, therefore, open to an offer that came from J. Wilbur Chapman to join his evangelistic team. Chapman was well-known at that time, and so, it seemed logical to accept the invitation to become his “advance” man, the one who would go ahead of the revivalist to make sure all details were taken care of in preparation for crusade meetings. From 1893 to 1895 this was Sunday’s job: He saw to it that sufficient money was raised to offset the initial expenses of the revival (renting a hall and paying for advertising); and he organized and directed the work of the local committees who were involved in the planning of the choir, the ushers, the prayer meetings, the finances, publicity and the personal workers who would counsel the converted. During the revival he would work wherever necessary, as a counselor, usher, leading prayer meetings, taking care of overflow crowds, etc. All of this, as you can imagine, gave Sunday great training for the next stage in his life.

In December of 1895 Chapman, without warning, decided to give up revivalism and become the pastor of a church in Philadelphia. While Sunday agonized for the next few days about what to do, even considering going back to professional baseball, God was preparing a new stage in his career. An invitation came from a small town in Iowa, asking him to come and conduct a revival campaign. Chapman had originally been invited, but now he suggested that they ask Billy. Sunday quickly called Wilbur Chapman, who gave him a few sermons to use. Sunday’s first revival was held in Garner, Iowa. From Garner it was on to Sigourney, Iowa for a week long series of meetings. Over the next five years Sunday went from small town to small town, leading sixty revival campaigns.

At first he was extremely reserved in his gestures and voice modulation. As he became more comfortable in front of people and began to develop his own material, however, he opened up and began to develop the flamboyant style that became his trademark.

Over the next several years, Billy Sunday expanded his services from two days to two weeks, and upgraded the music by hiring professional music leaders. He also moved, in these years, from renting the largest meeting hall in town, to renting huge circus tents that were pitched just outside of town, to requiring a “plywood tabernacle” for his meetings. These latter structures were roughly made buildings that would be dismantled and sold after the meetings were completed.

After 1900 a noticeable change occurred in Sunday’s ministry, as he moved from a simple gospel message toward a message that called for a reform in society. His most famous crusade took place in Burlington, Iowa, in 1905. This town of 25,000 had a conflict over the selling of liquor in the town. A state law had been passed in 1894 outlawing the sale of alcohol unless it was regulated by the local authorities. And even if a license was issued to a proprietor, no alcohol was supposed to be sold after 10:00 p.m., and the sale of liquor was forbidden on Sunday. The police chief in Burlington had been ignoring the breaking of these provisions for some time, and so the religious leaders in the town felt it was time for a showdown. They therefore invited Sunday, who by that time was preaching temperance, to lead a revival in Burlington. His most famous sermon, preached many times thereafter was called “Booze, or Get on the Water Wagon.” On December 17, 1905, he preached this sermon to a group of 4,000 cheering men. He concluded the sermon by asking, “How many of you men would stand by Mayor Caster if he would put the lid on and close up the saloons tight on Sunday and put the gamblers out of business?”(8) The entire audience jumped to its feet and shouted its support.

This revival campaign caused Sunday to be noticed by larger cities, with headlines proclaiming, “Bill Sunday Has Made Graveyard Out of Once Fast Town.”(9) The resulting publicity of his success in closing things down in Burlington led to invitations to these larger cities. In 1913 the average population of the cities in which he held crusades was 76,000. In 1914 it was 171,000. In 1915 the average population was 528,000, and in 1916 that average rose to 584,000. In 1917 he reached the zenith of his ministry. The average population of towns visited in that year

was 1,750,000, most important of which was New York City.

As a result of his work, Sunday became a household name in America. In 1914 the American Magazine asked its readers, "Who is the greatest man in the United States?" Billy Sunday was tied with Andrew Carnegie in 8th place.

The high point of his ministry was the series of revival meetings that were held in New York City in 1917. By this time Sunday's athletic presentation (he would climb on chairs, wave a flag, sometimes stand with one foot on the pulpit and another on a chair, sometimes take off coat and tie, dance down aisles) had become so well-known that there was a great anticipation of the event. He arrived in town on April 7, the day after war had been declared on Germany. He was met at Pennsylvania Station by 3,000 shouting supporters. A wooden tabernacle had been built that would seat 16,000, with room for 4,000 more standing. For ten weeks he packed the tabernacle, verbally assaulting Germany and encouraging men to sign up for the army, attacking drink, and giving the invitation (beginning on the 12th day of the campaign). Sunday did not use the inquiry room of Moody, or the anxious bench of Finney. His was an invitation that was very general, and was colored by the patriotic fervor that had begun to make its presence felt as we went to war. He would say, as he climbed onto a chair, "Do you want God's blessing on you, your home, your church, your nation, on New York? If you do, raise your hands." When hands were raised, he would say, "How many of you men and women will jump to your feet and come down and say, 'Bill, here's my hand for God, for home, for my native land, to live and conquer for Christ?'" He would dramatically pause, and then say, "Come on!" The music would start, and he would meet people down front, shaking every hand proffered.

Sunday's influence began to wane when the war was over and his patriotic appeal was blunted. Then in 1919, when Prohibition was enacted, he lost the reforming audience. He continued to preach throughout the 20s and 30s, but never again had the influence that he had in New York, in 1917, when the governor of the state and the mayor of the city made a point to thank him for the effect he had had on the moral and religious climate of the Big Apple.

Sunday's influence on revivalism is debated still today. There are those who say that he watered down the gospel message so greatly that he had little effect. Others were offended by his rather crass statement that he could deliver converts for an investment of "Two Dollars A Soul." However, in his defense, it should be noted that he was a natural heir to Moody, and also spoke the word of God in the context of his times. Revivalism had become big business in his day, and he played the role of its chief businessman.

Sunday never received a formal theological education, and in that characteristic he is much like Finney and Moody. However, he did become an ordained minister in the Presbyterian Church. He met with a board of ministers from the Presbytery in Chicago in 1903. Elijah Brown, a friend of Sunday's who wrote a biography of the revivalist, described the meeting to determine his qualifications this way:

In his examination before the Presbytery, the former ball player was plied with questions for an hour or more by the professors of theology and the learned members of the body. He answered their questions to their entire satisfaction, and his orthodoxy was pronounced sound in every particular...Occasionally some erudite professor would ask him a question that was a poser, to which he would immediately reply: "That's too deep for me," or "I will have to pass that up."⁽¹⁰⁾

The questioning was ended when a friend of Sunday's moved that he be accepted and that the examination be waived due to the fact that Sunday had converted more people than all of the ministers there put together. The motion passed.

As mentioned above, the changes that occurred after the First World War led to a decline in revivalism. Billy Sunday's influence also declined during this period. His theology became more

and more focused on the Second Coming of Christ as he became increasingly pessimistic about the world. He came to the conclusion that 1935 would be the end of the world as predicted in Revelation, and began to preach eschatology exclusively. Religious leaders began to repudiate Sunday and his views, and attacked him and his methods of raising money. The criticisms revolved around the negative statements that were often made about the local clergy, the superficial altar call of “shaking a hand,” the high pressure methods to get a “free-will” offering, and the gifts given to revivalists. The decline of Sunday and revivalism in general was also hastened by a group of unscrupulous imitators who made mass evangelism a laughingstock in the church and in the country.

The Beginning of Pentecostalism

Another reaction to the spiritual lethargy that gripped the nation around the turn of the century was what is called today Pentecostalism. As the church in America became more wealthy, and identified with the wealthier people in a thriving society, many at the lower end of the socio-economic scale were attracted to Holiness groups, those that emphasized personal holiness and literal interpretation of the Scriptures. These people condemned the prosperous and largely complacent church in America, and many felt that there had to be a new infusion of spiritual strength, a new revival in the country, if the church was going to become effective again. One such movement was to have a lasting and international impact on the church of Jesus Christ.

The story of modern American Pentecostalism began with a man named Charles Parham. Parham was born in Iowa on June 4, 1873. When he was 15 years old, he became a lay preacher in the Congregational Church. Later, he joined the Methodists, and through that denomination became involved with the Holiness movement. Through his study of Scripture he became convinced that the story of Acts 2 could and should be repeated in the modern world.

In order to better train young people in holiness thought, he opened a school in Topeka, Kansas, in October of 1900, and called it the Bethel Bible College. He charged no tuition, trusting God to bring in the needed funds. On New Year's Eve a group from the school was holding a traditional “Watch Night” service of prayer and praise. During this service, a Miss Agnes Ozman asked that Parham lay hands on her and pray that she might receive the Holy Spirit. After initial reluctance, for Parham himself had not yet been “baptized” with the Holy Spirit, he placed his hands on her head and began to pray. As he reports it, “I had scarcely repeated three dozen sentences when a glory fell upon her, a halo seemed to surround her head and face, and she began speaking in the Chinese language, and was unable to speak English for three days.” (11)

After this shocking event, classes were suspended at the school. The whole student body began to earnestly pray during January, 1901, for the same kind of outpouring, and soon, the majority of the students could testify to the same kind of filling, evidenced by speaking in tongues.

Parham and the students believed that this would be the beginning of a new revival that would spread worldwide. However, their initial attempts to spread the word were met with doubt and persecution. “Revivals” held in Kansas City and Lawrence were deep disappointments, and the school closed within two years because of lack of support.

In spite of those first setbacks, however, the teaching about tongues began to spread quietly. It is estimated that by the winter of 1905, Texas had 25,000 Pentecostals and about 60 preachers.(12) From Texas the missionaries of the new movement spread out, one of them going to Los Angeles.

William Seymour attended a new school that Parham began in Houston. In addition to his teaching duties in that town, Parham also preached in a growing Pentecostal congregation, and used students such as Seymour to help him in the work. One visitor to that gathering, a woman

named Neeley Terry, received what was now being referred to as “Holy Spirit baptism.” When she returned home to Los Angeles, she suggested to her church that they call William Seymour as associate pastor. A call was extended and Seymour accepted. Seymour’s first sermon was on Acts 2:4. He suggested that anyone who was truly baptized by the Holy Spirit would speak in tongues. Some members were so offended that when Williams returned to the church for the afternoon service, he found the door locked. He was being put out of the church. That might have been the end of a work for Seymour in Los Angeles if it had not been for Richard and Ruth Asberry, relatives of Neeley Terry. They invited Seymour to hold services in their home. It was there, on April 9, 1906, that seven people received the Holy Spirit baptism and began to speak in tongues. It is said that this group spent the next three days and nights shouting and praising God.(13) The news quickly spread that there was something new and vital going on, and the number of visitors began to increase. In order to accommodate the growing numbers, Seymour and his followers rented an old building on Azusa Street, then an industrial area of Los Angeles. Planks were placed on empty nail kegs to provide seating for the crowd of people that came to learn more about this new movement. Thus the famed Azusa Street revival began in what came to be known as the Apostolic Faith Gospel Mission.

People fanned out from Azusa Street across the country, and eventually across the world spreading the news about the Holy Spirit baptism. They were usually received with persecution and revulsion in the middle-class and wealthy churches of the country, but found a ready hearing among the poor. Today the Assemblies of God church, which eventually grew out of the Pentecostal movement, is the largest and fastest growing church in the world. But it began here, during a time when the mainline churches were facing the challenges of Darwinism and losing the battle for the hearts, and maybe souls, of people in America

Notes:

1. William McLoughlin, *Modern Revivalism* (New York: Ronald Press Co., 1959), p. 348.
2. George E. Horr, “The Watchman,” January 20, 1898, p. 8.
3. McLoughlin, p. 350.
4. Sydney Ahlstrom, p. 748.
5. Elijah P. Brown, *The Real Billy Sunday* (Chattanooga, Tn: Global Publishers), p. 16.
6. William McLoughlin, *Billy Sunday Was His Real Name* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), p. 5.
7. Ibid, p. 8.
8. Ibid, p. 31.
9. Ibid, p. 33.
10. Brown, p. 200.
11. John Thomas Nichol, *Pentecostalism* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), p. 28.
12. Ibid, p. 31.
13. “How Pentecost Came to Los Angeles” *Pentecost Evangel* XLIV (April 8, 1956), p. 4.

PART V: THE MOST RECENT AWAKENING

CHAPTER 11: EVENTS LEADING TO THE FOURTH AWAKENING

It would be wonderful to report that with the beginning of Pentecostalism and the ministry of Billy Sunday, we became the Christian nation we have always professed to be. Unfortunately, that is not the case. Once again, there was decline in spirituality, and once again God responded with what is sometimes referred to as “The Fourth Great Awakening.” After World War II there was an increased sensitivity to and interest in spiritual things. Many people in the country turned to God, and the growth rate of the churches increased. Billy Graham is the figure that was produced by this awakening to continue the tradition of revivalism leadership. In this chapter we will briefly look at the history between the end of the third period of awakening, figured by historians as the end of World War I, and the opening up of the fourth, which roughly coincided with the last stages of World War II.

The Twenties

The period from the signing of the Armistice in Europe to the Stock Market crash of 1929 made this decade one of the most clearly defined in our history. During this time there were several events that affected the spiritual health of the nation.

1. We became an urban nation. For the first time a majority of Americans lived in cities with a population of over 2,500. According to the census of 1920, 51.4% lived in urban rather than agricultural areas. As we’ve noted in previous chapters, the church did not adjust to this movement to the cities on the whole, preferring instead to maintain an agriculturally based strategy in planning for ministry, and gradually moving out of the cities.
2. The standard of living rapidly rose during this period. As many labor laws were enacted limiting the number of hours people could work, and agreements were made with labor and management, leisure time was created. Play time became the right of all, rather than the privilege of just a few. Many aspects of our society were created during this time in order to fill the needs of people to be involved in play: movies began to be popular; the radio provided connection to areas other than the immediate neighborhood; and national figures were created in the entertainment industry--people like Babe Ruth, Lowell Thomas, Rudolph Valentino, Charlie Chaplin, and Charles Lindberg became national heroes. The automobile became a commonplace possession, with people doing more travel. Vacations became a way of life. In short, this period became known as the “Roaring Twenties” with

the emphasis on fun, finance, and progress.

- 3 There was controversy in the church. Another aspect of the church's problems during this decade was the fact that many of the theological disagreements mentioned earlier between science and theology became exacerbated. Perhaps the culmination of the controversy between fundamentalists and the scientific community came in July of 1925. The event that became known as "The Scopes' Trial" took place in Dayton, Tennessee. John Scopes, a teacher, was under indictment for teaching evolution to his students. The State of Tennessee had passed a law, sponsored by George Washington Butler of the State legislature, that became known as "An Act prohibiting the teaching of the Evolution Theory in all the Universities, Normals, and all other public schools of Tennessee." John Scopes, recent college graduate in his first year of teaching, transgressed the law and was brought to trial. The famous trial lawyer Clarence Darrow agreed to defend him. William Jennings Bryant, another nationally famous figure, was engaged on behalf of the conservative religious faction that had supported the law. During six days over two million words were given to reporting this trial in the nation's newspapers. But in reality, it became something of a national joke.

The unwillingness of the fundamentalists to include the scientific advances in their system of belief alienated other religious leaders. Liberals, led by Harry Emerson Fosdick, preacher in Riverside Church in New York, began to criticize the fundamentalists. Fosdick, at that time, was the most influential minister in the country due to his publishing and radio ministry. He used those forums to write and speak against anything that smacked of fundamentalism.

Thus this decade was a time of thriving economy, rampant disregard for many of the traditional values and themes of Christianity, and one of controversy within the church. Sydney Ahlstrom, in summarizing the effect that these things had on religion, referred to "The American Religious Depression" of 1925-1935.⁽¹⁾ Church attendance declined throughout the country; far fewer people volunteered for mission work; and income for missions fell off sharply in spite of the booming prosperity of the country. It was a time when prosperity once again seemed to have a negative effect on the spiritual life and health of the country.

The Thirties

Anyone who lived through these years will share stories of deprivation during "The Depression." The Stock Market Crash of 1929 shocked a nation that believed that there would be a continued progress in life. Many people refused to believe that the depression would last, thinking that it was like previous "adjustments" in the economy, lasting a year or so. But this time the economy continued to slide. The national income plummeted. In 1929 income nationwide was 83 billion dollars. In 1932 it was 40 billion dollars. Unemployment soared to 15 million in early 1933. Bread and soup lines became a normative experience in the cities, and people selling apples on corners or needles door-to-door to get a little extra money were common. A sense of desperation filled the country. The dustbowls of the Midwest farm areas added to the despair that left the entire country questioning the future.

Unlike the experience of 1857, when an economic decline precipitated an openness to prayer, this experience of economic depression did not contribute to a nationwide revival. This is not to say that faith was everywhere on the decline, however. While researching this period I spoke to some people with vivid memories of this time. They told of the fear and dread that enveloped families at the time that house payments could no longer be made, and the repossessioner came. They spoke of the father in the family having to move out of state to work, because that was the

only work available. There was the story of one girl who worked as maid, laundress, cook and cared for children--all for fifty cents per week. Yet, many churches continued to grow, and the faith of many remained strong in spite of the pressures being exerted against a belief in a loving, caring, providing God. However, those who did not enter the decade with a firm faith did not, as a general rule, come to the churches in huge numbers during this decade. To quote Sydney Ahlstrom again,

Adding greatly to the uneasiness of churchgoing Americans of all classes was the continued advance of those changes in manners and mores that had made the 1920s a nightmare for rural America. Despite the Depression, urban civilization continued to make its conquests. Jazz, dancing, feminism, and the Hollywood star system mocked the older moral standards, both Catholic and Protestant. Hard times notwithstanding, the automobile continued to transform traditional modes of living and loving. Sabbath-keeping was losing ground.(2)

During this decade there was also theological controversy with the beginning of what became known as Neo-Orthodoxy. This theological system began in Germany with the goal of combining traditional Christian doctrine with the social gospel and the liberal wing of the church. However, as an apparent cross between the fundamentalist belief in a need to respect Scripture and a liberal tendency to cut itself off from an inerrant Scripture, this system of Karl Barth and Richard and Reinholdt Niebuhr was attacked by both. Those committed to religious conservatism were especially vehement in their condemnation of what they interpreted as a carefully disguised form of modernism.

The War Years

On December 7, 1941, there came the “day that will live in infamy.” The United States had prided itself as a nation of peace-loving people, and President Roosevelt had pledged to keep us out of war. However, when Japan attacked Pearl Harbor, all of that changed. The nation went to war. These years, too, had an effect on the spiritual lethargy that the nation had fallen into during the twenties and thirties, for several reasons. First of all, it became clear, as the country developed war fever, that the moral influence of the churches had declined considerably since 1916 and the beginning of our involvement in World War I. During that First World War, the church had been instrumental in supporting the war. Billy Sunday had been a major instrument of recruitment for men to sign up for the army, and ministers in the pulpit were the primary mass media. Now, however, with radio and a growing television market, with newspapers available in every city, and with the division in the church world, the church was not looked to as the guiding moral light that it had been during the earlier conflict. Secondly, despite the facts mentioned earlier, there was a return to spiritual thinking.

People were looking for meaning in events that were beyond understanding, and this search intensified as the price of war increased. It is said that “there are no atheists in foxholes.” This was largely true for the soldiers in Europe, but it was also true on the home front as thousands of homes had blue and gold stars hanging in their windows, testifying to the sacrifices that they were making for the sake of the war. Thirdly, and closely related to the events mentioned above, the end of the war saw forces unleashed that called peoples’ attention to things eternal. The atomic bomb had brought Japan to its knees, but the rest of the world took notice as well. Such awesome and overwhelming power put a fear into the heart, especially as the Cold War developed and bomb shelters were built out of fear of attack by the Russians. These kinds of forces at work made people stop and think about the eternal values, and began to turn to the Lord. Fourthly, there was an economic change in the country that somehow made people turn in thanksgiving to God. After ten plus years of depression and four years of war, there was a renewed affluence. Work was

available in a post-war, expanding economy. Paychecks could now purchase those goods that were not obtainable before. This time, affluence after struggle caused people to thank God for

1910	
1920	43%
1930	47%
1940	49%
1950	55%
1956	62%
1960	69%
1970	62.4%

deliverance and provision. Fifthly, there was a vast people-movement that occurred during the post-war years. In the census of 1950 we find that two-thirds of the population of the United States lived in the cities. Previously, those thronging into the metropolitan areas of the country were largely immigrants. Back in the twenties there had been the development of immigration quotas as a means to control the influx of foreigners, so after World War II it was not the Europeans who were filling the tenements.

The people moving into the cities during this period were coming from the country. Farm workers who were unneeded due to the increasing mechanization of agriculture made their way to the industrial centers of the country to find work.

Modern Church Growth research has found that people are more open to the message of the gospel during times when such people movements occur. This period was no exception as church organizations began to see the vast potential of mission enterprise at home. Sixthly, there was the Cold War. Newsweek magazine of May 1, 1950, is devoted to a report on the Cold War and Joseph McCarthy's search for communists in government, in the arts, and in education. It reports a fear that was sweeping the country and leading many to reaffirm being an American. One way to affirm the American way of life was to be a church member. Church membership was a denial of the atheistic stance of communism.

Declining morals in the country caused a deep concern. Women had taken jobs in the war industry during the war years, and this had opened up new opportunities for unfaithfulness. It also caused a dislocation of families, with the beginning of the breakdown of the traditional view of father at work, mother at home with children.

Juvenile delinquency also increased during the decades of depression and war, as children felt the dislocation of families and experienced poverty.

Resulting Revival

This is the background for an upsurge in religious interest. Newspapers, popular magazines and books of that time analyzed the resurgence of piety. People were going back to church and back to the synagogue. In fact, in 1957, when the Census Bureau asked people the question, "What is your religion?" ninety-six percent of Americans responded by listing a particular church or synagogue. The table below shows the percentage of people who affiliated with the church in the twentieth century.

The church was once again alive and well, and having an impact on the society of America. It was during the decade of the fifties that "In God We Trust" was officially adopted by Congress as the theme on our coinage (1956). This had been an unofficial motto since 1865, but now it was to become the country's first official statement of faith. It was also during this decade that the phrase, "One nation, under God," was added to our national Pledge of Allegiance (1954).

Major Figure

This period of revival produced a renewed interest in revivalism. In the *Newsweek* issue mentioned earlier, there is also a report on the main character of the revivalism that flourished anew: Billy Graham. *Newsweek* reported: “Billy Graham is sure that a great revival is sweeping the United States. He believes that he is only part of it. ‘My feeling as a worker in the vineyard is that there is a great upsurge of faith in the country which seeks a way back to Christ.’”(3)

Revivalism was something new for many churches. After 1930 it had almost died out as a means of reaching people for Christ, replaced by “Home Visitation” as the preferred technique. Now, however, with the sense that there was a renewal going on, revivalists returned to the forefront, and none was more notable than Billy Graham. In our next chapter we consider the life and ministry of this latest tool in God’s hands.

Notes:

1. Sydney Ahlstrom, p. 899.
2. Ibid, p. 924.
3. 3. *Newsweek* (May 1, 1960), p. 67.

CHAPTER 12: BILLY GRAHAM

Convinced that prayer was the way to begin a revival, businessmen in Charlotte, North Carolina came to Frank Graham with a request to use his pasture for a prayer meeting. The time was May, 1934, in the midst of an economic depression that was accompanied by a spiritual apathy. About thirty men gathered for a day of prayer, and their leader, a man named Vernon Patterson, prayed that “out of Charlotte the Lord would raise up someone to preach the Gospel to the ends of the earth.”⁽¹⁾ Later that year, the businessmen raised the needed funds to build a pine tabernacle for an 11-week revival campaign, to be led by an evangelist by the name of Mordecai Ham. It was during the meetings that took place during that crusade that God began the answer to Patterson’s prayer, for Billy Frank Graham, a young man of 16 years old at the time, came forward and dedicated his life to the Lord. His name would become synonymous with crusade evangelism, and he himself would become a world-wide ambassador for the Lord.

Early Life

William Franklin Graham, Jr. was born November 7, 1918. Weekdays were spent on the family dairy farm early in his life. Sundays were spent attending the Associate Reformed Church. This denomination was characterized by an extremely conservative worship service where only the Psalms were sung. Biographies about Graham indicate that early in life he was far more interested in baseball than school. He even harbored, as do many young boys, hopes of becoming a professional baseball player. He reported that one of the highlights of his youth came when he was ten years old and got to shake Babe Ruth’s hand.

When Bill was about fifteen, there was a series of incidents that would change the direction of his life. First of all, in 1933 his mother joined a Bible class, invited by her sister. The sister, Lil Barker, had discovered “that the Lord has come in and lives in our hearts. I had never known that truth before.”⁽²⁾ So Billy’s mother became interested in spiritual things. His father, however, was focusing his energies more on rebuilding the family’s economic situation after the local bank failure had wiped out all monetary reserve.

Three weeks after Mrs. Graham began attending the Bible class, however, another event occurred that shook the family. Frank Graham was working with a mechanical saw when a piece of wood flew off it and struck him in the head. The doctor was called, and the verdict given that he would probably die. Billy’s mother called people, asking them to pray. She herself went upstairs to intercede for her husband and to petition for his life. She stayed there until she felt a confidence that her husband would indeed recover. This event led to a mild spiritual awakening for the family, as both parents felt that God had spoken to them about their need to spend more

time in spiritual pursuits. Morrow Graham began to read devotional writings to her children, though Billy thought them ridiculous. He preferred racing around the country with other young men in the family car, which he would “borrow.”

The third event, of course, was the visit of Mordecai Ham. This revival was to last eleven weeks. By all reports, it made quite an impact on the city of Charlotte. None of the Grahams attended the first week. Billy was especially antagonistic to the idea of a hellfire-and-brimstone preacher. However, Billy was encouraged to come by the sons of a local sharecropper when they knew that Ham had accused the local high school students of fornication. The students at Central High School were furious, and marched on the tabernacle in protest. The local newspapers carried accounts of the event, and Billy’s interest was piqued. Once at the meeting, he said, “All my father’s mules and horses could not have kept me away from the meeting.” His attendance began to produce an anxiety in young Graham, however. He “came under conviction.” For several days he felt uncomfortable, knowing that Christ died on the cross for his sins, knowing that Jesus was alive and wanted a relationship with Billy Graham. Yet, Billy was uncomfortable knowing that if he made a commitment to God, it would have to be a total commitment, one where he gave up control of his life. The struggle continued throughout the one evening of the revival until the choir sang, “Almost Persuaded, Christ to Believe.” This song put the danger of Billy’s hesitation in perspective and gave him the courage to go forward. Down the aisle he went and prayed with a local tailor who was volunteering as one of the counselors that evening.

Bible School

At this point, however, Billy still did not feel called to become a preacher. He admired friends like Grady Wilson. Grady had gone forward at the same time as Billy and in a short time was preaching at the local mission. Billy thought himself too nervous and shy to do anything like that, and was incredibly nervous when he would “testify.” He had no idea what the future held for him as far as a profession was concerned, and probably was thinking that he would yet be a dairy farmer in Charlotte.

After graduation from high school in 1936, Billy went to work selling Fuller brushes. He was an effective salesman, and the supervisor of his area said that he was the best salesman he had. That fall he entered, at the urging of his mother, Bob Jones College in Cleveland, Tennessee. After only one semester, he transferred to the Florida Bible Institute in Tampa. It was while he was a student in this institution that he made a decision for the ministry. The decision was the culmination, once again, of a series of events in his life. First of all, he heard of the moral failings of two Christians whom he had admired and learned from. This shook him with the knowledge that such things could happen, and could happen to him if he wasn’t totally committed to the Lord. The second event was a broken engagement. He had fallen in love with a student who was one year ahead of him in the school, Emily Regina Cavanaugh. In the summer of 1937 he wrote to her at her home in Toronto, asking her to marry him. She was not able to give him a definite answer until February of 1938. While out for ice cream cones, Emily agreed to his proposal, and Billy began to look forward to a future that included marriage and family. As he thought about the future, the possibility of being a preacher began to look more and more attractive to him. His fear was that he wouldn’t be any good at it. The authorized biography of Graham put his struggle this way:

In the night walks alone he tussled with excuses. His indifferent background would indeed keep him a mediocre preacher “somewhere out in the sticks.” Yet any sacrifice appeared trivial beside Christ’s sufferings or the world’s needs. As for eloquence, the Lord had told Moses, “Go, and I will be with thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt say.” Billy hesitated because for him

the call was absolute. If he accepted, he must henceforth have no other ambition, no other occupation but the proclaiming of God's message, everywhere, to everybody, always...Once the call was accepted, half measures would be impossible. One night in March 1938 Billy Graham returned from his walk and reached the eighteenth green (the college was on the grounds of a former golf course) immediately before the school's front door. "The trees were loaded with Spanish moss, and in the moonlight it was like a fairyland." He sat down on the edge of the green, looking up at the moon and stars, aware of a warm breeze from the south. The tension snapped. "I remember getting on my knees and saying, 'O God, if you want me to preach, I will do it.' Tears streamed down my cheeks as I made this great surrender to become an ambassador for Jesus Christ."(3)

From that point on, Billy began to plan for a preaching career. Unfortunately, things did not work out so well with Emily. In May she told him that she was having second thoughts. She felt that she loved another man, a senior about to graduate, more than she loved Billy. At a party she told him that she had decided to marry Charles Massey. Billy and Emily remained friends, and later Billy even attended the wedding.

In his disappointment about the failure of this relationship, he dedicated himself to his new passion, preaching. He preached wherever there was an opening, and if there was none, he would preach in the street. He also gained some first-hand experience in giving an altar call, a skill for which he was to become famous. Later in his life he said that he experienced the power of God in a special way when he was inviting people to come forward and commit their lives to the Lord.

Graduation from Florida Bible Institute came in 1940 for young Graham. At the commencement ceremony the valedictorian of the class, Vera Rescue, spoke of the need for a revival in the nation. She reviewed, in her speech, the way God has acted in the history of the church in America noting that God regularly used, a chosen human instrument to shine forth His light in the darkness. Men like Luther, John and Charles Wesley, Moody and others who were ordinary men, but men who heard the voice of God...It has been said that Luther revolutionized the world. It was not he but Christ working through him. The time is ripe for another Luther, Wesley, Moody. There is room for another name in this list.(4)

Even though the man referred to was sitting among the graduates that day, he still had no inkling of what his future was going to be.

Knowing now that he intended to enter the ministry, Graham felt that he needed more education. Accordingly, he enrolled in Wheaton college. Because Bob Jones College and the Florida Bible Institute were not accredited institutions, he entered as a sophomore in September of 1940.

Wheaton College Years

There were a couple of incidents during his years at this institution that were to shape his future. First of all, he met the woman who would be his wife, Ruth Bell. Ruth was the daughter of missionaries and intended to serve as a missionary in China. This appeared to be a conflict of vocation, since Billy intended to become a minister at home. However, after their engagement in the summer of 1941, Ruth agreed that she would follow Billy wherever he felt God led him. Another incident that shaped Billy Graham was his appointment as the preaching pastor for the United Gospel Tabernacle in Wheaton. This experience gave him a taste for ministry and especially for preaching, though it sometimes made him so exhausted that he would fall asleep during Monday morning classes.

After Wheaton, Billy decided to enter the army as a chaplain. The army, however, told him that he would need a year in a pastorate or a year in seminary before they would consider him for

a chaplaincy. Therefore, he accepted a position as pastor of Village Church, Western Springs, Illinois. He was paid \$45 per week. Once he had begun his work there, Billy felt free to marry. A trip to Montreat, North Carolina, home of Ruth's parents, was arranged, and they were married on August 13, 1943.

To Chicago

During that first year of marriage and pastoring there was another turning point in Billy's career. In October he received a telephone call from Torrey Johnson. Johnson experienced stress as he tried to fulfill three roles: pastor of a thriving church, professor of New Testament Greek at Northern Baptist Seminary, and serving as host of a weekly radio program called, "Songs in the Night." The radio program consisted of forty-five minutes of singing and preaching from 10:15 p.m. to 11:00 on Sunday nights. Johnson suggested that the Village Church take over sponsoring the program, with Billy Graham as host and preacher. The cost would be \$100 per week, a significant investment for a church that had a total weekly pledge of \$86.50 per week at the time. But the congregation raised the money needed for an initial five broadcasts. Billy enlisted the vocal abilities of George Beverly Shea for the beginning programs. After those five, the program became self-supporting as Chicago listeners were enthusiastic about the young man from North Carolina and sent in their financial support.

Another turning point came in the spring of 1944, and this one also came through Torrey Johnson. Johnson had a burden for the many servicemen who were coming through Chicago, and wanted to offer an alternative to the bars and brothels of the city. Therefore, he decided to organize a Saturday evening, "Youth For Christ" rally. He booked Orchestra Hall, with three thousand seats. Most people thought this ridiculous since many evangelists had had dismal results in the city of Chicago, and there had not been that kind of crowd for a religious event since the days of Billy Sunday. Billy Graham was chosen as speaker for the meeting. An estimated 2800 people showed up, and 42 came forward at the invitation. Thus began the practice, from city to city, of the Youth for Christ rallies that became the primary vehicle for expanding the reputation of Billy Graham.

Youth For Christ

In October of 1944 Billy accepted a commission into the army as a second lieutenant, with orders to report to Harvard Divinity School for training as a chaplain. While preparing to report, Billy came down with mumps. He was sick in bed for six weeks, and afterwards needed convalescence. A radio listener sent \$100 for him to go to Florida. While in Florida recuperating, Torrey Johnson visited Billy and described a vision for Saturday night rallies throughout the country and Canada. Since convalescing officers were confined to desk jobs, Torrey argued, Billy should resign his commission and become the first organizer and evangelist for Youth for Christ. Billy agreed, and his career as a full-time evangelist was begun.

With a motto of "Geared to the Times, Anchored to the Rock," Youth for Christ came at a crucial time in the history of our country. Denominational leaders in conservative churches were concerned that the great doctrines of the church were no longer held in honor. And yet, there was concern, too, that there had to be a contemporary explanation of those doctrines that would capture the hearts and minds of America's youth. This is what the organization set out to do, not only in the United States, but also in Europe. Supported by the National Association of Evangelicals, the ministry rapidly grew, and Billy Graham's life was filled with the details of running an expanding organization and preaching regularly.

The revival service that catapulted Billy Graham into national fame came in 1949. There had been many successful crusades prior to this time, but news was still little focused on religious matters, and so, few had heard of the evangelist of Youth For Christ. That was about to change.

Crisis Over the Bible

Prior to the crusade in Los Angeles, however, there was a crisis that deeply affected the ministry of Billy Graham. Billy was struggling with the issue of the inspiration of Scripture. A good friend had begun studying with liberal theologians, and encouraged Billy to become more modern in his presentation and beliefs. Charles Templeton, the friend, was reported to have said, "Poor Billy. If he goes on the way he's going he'll never do anything for God. He'll be circumscribed to a small little narrow interpretation of the Bible, and his ministry will be curtailed. As for me, I'm taking a different road." (5)

Templeton claimed that this was an erroneous report of his words, but they were what Billy heard. The result was a crisis of faith for the young evangelist. Would he believe God had spoken in the Bible and preach it that way, or would he look for the newer way? That evening, after talking with Templeton, Billy Graham spent time by himself reading the Bible. He noticed especially how often the prophets said, "Thus saith the Lord,." He reviewed how Jesus treated the Old Testament as the Word of God. He read again the Bible passages that affirmed the Bible's own claim to inspiration. After reading these many passages, he went out into the woods around Forest Home retreat center in Southern California, and prayed for wisdom. He described the resolution of this dilemma this way:

So I went back and I got my Bible, and I went out in the moonlight. And I got to a stump and put the Bible on the stump, and I knelt down, and I said, "Oh, God, I cannot prove certain things. I cannot answer some of the questions Chuck is raising and some of the other people are raising, but I accept this Book by faith as the Word of God." (6)

Today a stone tablet marks the spot where he prayed this prayer. It was with this renewed conviction and confidence in the Word that Billy planned his future preaching.

The Los Angeles Campaign

The first revival campaign that was planned after the Forest Home decision was in Los Angeles. This campaign was to catapult Billy Graham into national prominence. The campaign started, as do all of Billy Graham's crusades, with prayer. The advance team, led by Grady Wilson, organized prayer groups in churches, ministers' prayer times, prayer chains, and prayer vigils. A three-week crusade was planned in a tent on the outskirts of downtown Los Angeles. At the end of three weeks, organizers encouraged an extension of the campaign. Graham, up to that time, had never extended a campaign, but was in prayer about it when the conversion of Stuart Hamblin changed the course of events. Hamblin, a former Texas cowboy, was a legend in Los Angeles. He had a daily radio program in which he sang his own songs and talked. At the urging of his wife, Hamblin attended one of Graham's meetings, with the result that he invited Graham to be interviewed on his radio program. A live interview was held, at the end of which Hamblin encouraged his listeners to go to the tent. In a statement that was a surprise even to him, Hamblin ended by interview by saying, "I'll be there too." He went faithfully, but became angry at Graham, thinking that he was speaking directly to him about the need for a change in his life. In anger, toward the end of the three weeks, he decided to go out and get drunk. He went from bar to bar, consuming the drinks that had formerly given him some relief from the stress and strain of his life. This time, however, he found no peace in the alcohol. Finally, he went home troubled, woke

his wife, and together they prayed. About 2 a.m. they called Billy Graham, who immediately went to the Hamblin home to meet with them. Some three hours later, Stuart Hamblin quit fighting the call of the Holy Spirit and became a believer.

When Hamblin announced his decision to his radio audience, reporters were at the next Billy Graham meeting, along with hundreds of other new people. When a local well-known gangster, Jim Vaus, was converted, people began to take even more notice. Hundreds began to stream forward at the end of meetings in which the new converts shared their testimonies. *Time* and *Newsweek* carried stories about the new evangelist. And the crusade was extended for eight weeks.

After Los Angeles there was Boston. Again the response was tremendous. Colombia, South Carolina, followed, and the rest of the story is well-known. Billy Graham has become an ambassador for God to the world, a confidant of presidents and kings, and a preacher who still feels the power of God come upon him when he gives an invitation.

Contributions

Billy Graham will be remembered for many things related to revivalism, but probably most of all he will be remembered for:

1. The extraordinary response to his invitations;
2. Bringing revival services to radio and television;
3. His integrity in a day and age when other television religious figures have experienced a moral falling;
4. Extending the revivalism of Finney, Moody and Sunday into the 20th century.

Part of the success of Graham in these areas is attributed to a failed campaign in Modesto, California. After leading meetings that bore little fruit, the evangelism team of Beverly Shea, Billy Graham, Cliff Barrows and Grady Wilson met to discuss why revivalism had such a bad reputation since Billy Sunday's time. They came up with a list of items that needed correcting:

- sensationalism
- emotionalism
- too great an emphasis on prophecy
- anti-intellectualism
- no follow-up
- an anti-church and anti-clergy bias in the preaching
- too much pay for the evangelist

The team decided to correct as many of these as possible by designing follow-up with the Navigator's material, by putting Billy Graham on a salary rather than depending on a freewill offering to pay his way, by supporting the local church and clergy, and by refining the preaching at the revivals.

These corrections made it possible for revival crusades to flourish in our country during his ministry.

Notes:

1. John Pollock, *Billy Graham* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), p. 5.
2. Ibid, p. 4.
3. Ibid, p. 17.
4. bid, p. 24.
5. Ibid, p. 53.
6. Ibid.

**PART VI WILL THERE BE A
REVIVAL NOW?**

CHAPTER 13: A TIME OF DECLENSION

In the previous chapters we have considered the history of revivals in our country. There have been four periods of revival: the Great Awakening that lasted approximately from 1735 to 1741; the Second Great Awakening began in 1799 and extended to the early 1840s; the Great Revival of 1857-1858, the effects of which continued after the Civil War; and the renewed interest in religion that came after World War II. One of the goals of working on this book was to find out what the common denominators are in these periods of revival. In other words, what do these times of renewed interest have in common with each other? Is there a means that God uses in His sovereignty to bring about a revival in this country that is quantifiable? In the next few chapters I want to focus on a few commonalities from which we can learn. There are at least four factors that recur in these periods of history:

1. They are preceded by a time of religious decline, sometimes referred to as declension, in the country.
2. God's people then feel called to pray;
3. Prayer leads the church to confession and work that allows the Holy Spirit to break out in power;
4. The revival then produces leaders who continue the revival spirit and create new methods of evangelism or refine old ones.

Declension in History

Each of the previous periods of renewal and revival were preceded by forces that limited the influence of Christianity in our country. Prior to the Great Awakening, we've seen, there were doctrinal controversies that left many dissatisfied with the church, such as the "Half-way Covenant" that allowed the uncommitted membership status in the churches. There were Indian wars that sapped the life-blood of the colonies. And the preaching turned to jeremiads, or condemning preaching, as preachers harangued people to return to faithfulness. Renewal was needed, and God sent His Spirit to effect an awakening.

The Second Great Awakening was preceded by a series of events that once again caused a period of spiritual decline. The Enlightenment influence caused a questioning of long-held beliefs about the centrality of the earth in the universe and the intervention of God in controlling the universe. This caused some to question their faith and others to develop liberal Christianity. The financial struggles of the post-Revolutionary War era also led many to turn to drink and crime in

an effort to deal with the uncertainty of the times. At a time when only about five to ten percent of the country was Christian, God convulsed the nation with the Second Great Awakening.

The Great Revival of 1857 occurred in the context of a changing nation. Industrialization, urbanization and immigration were all factors that had changed the character of the nation and had altered the way the church was viewed as well as limiting its influence. Prosperity had people feeling that this world was home rather than a place of sojourn. In addition, the political and social problem of slavery and the unsettling preaching of groups like William Miller's Adventists raised doubts among many churches. Things looked bad for the church when Jeremiah Lanphier and five other men gathered to pray in that small room in New York. But God opened the windows of heaven and showered down an awakening.

Evolutionary teaching, historical criticism, wealth and immigration again led to decline in Christianity and its influence as the 19th century came to an end. We have seen that God responded by preserving Bible teaching through the fundamentalists and by preparing the soil for future renewal through the beginning of Pentecostalism.

During and after World War II there was a renewal, but it was not national in the same way that previous revivals had effected the entire country.

Where Are We Today?

What has happened in the intervening years? Are we poised for a revival today? Let's take a brief look at the years since World War II.

The period from World War II to the present has been mixed in regard to revival and renewal. It began with twenty years of uninterrupted growth for the church of Jesus Christ. The years from 1945 to 1965 show yearly gains in the numbers of people in the churches, as well as rising expenditures on social issues. The peak came in 1957 when a Gallup poll showed that 96% of Americans identified with some religious tradition. However, in the 60s, we see once again the decline in influence and extent of Christianity. Beginning in 1965 denominations began to report a decline in membership. The Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches reveals that between 1965 and 1988 the United Methodists declined from 11 million to 9.2 million; the PCUSA went from 4 million to 3 million. The Disciples of Christ declined from 2.1 million to 1.1 million and the Episcopal Church experienced a loss from 3.4 million members to 2.5 million, or a loss of 16.7%. The Lutheran Church in America declined by 5% and the Presbyterian, U.S. Church lost 7.6%. In 1968 the Methodist Church merged with the Evangelical United Brethren to form the United Methodist Church, but the merged denomination continued to lose members and influence. The number of missionaries in the United Methodist Church numbered 1,453 in 1958, but in 1971 there were only 1,175 reported overseas.

The loss of influence has been so great that in the early 2000s we are told by observers of society that we are facing a post-modern and post-Christian society in the United States. The statistics from the 2000 census combined with those from the Emmanuel Gospel Center are especially challenging and troubling. They indicate that while the United States population increased by 11% (almost 25 million new people in the decade), communicant membership in the Protestant churches has decreased almost 10%. (1) In fact, North America is the only continent in the world today where Christianity is not growing.

What caused this great decline in the Protestant Churches of our country? Though the history of this period is rather recent and therefore difficult to analyze, there were events and movements that we can see in retrospect as contributing to this decline.

Forces of Decline

First of all, in the latter part of the 60s the social fabric of our country was stretched to the breaking point. The peaceful 50s were replaced by a time when leaders were assassinated, beginning in 1963 with President Kennedy's death. The murders of Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King followed in 1968. Violence against such nationally prominent figures convulsed the nation.

In addition to the violence of assassination there was the violence that accompanied the civil rights movement. Although the movement led by Dr. Martin Luther King was peaceful, by 1965 many blacks were dissatisfied with the speed at which progress was being made. Therefore, more radical leaders began to get a hearing. The result was the urban violence of the Watts riot in 1965, followed by rioting in Detroit, Newark, Chicago and many other smaller cities. The American dream, it seemed to many, was coming apart. As people questioned the American dream, it appears that they also began questioning the role of the church, because they left it in droves.

Another powerful influence on the decade of the 60s was the Vietnam War. In the early years of our involvement most preachers seemed to support the decisions of the government. However, as more and more lives were lost in battles to attain objectives that seemed less and less clear, many became disillusioned. This war was also called "The Living Room War," because nightly the violence in Southeast Asia was transported into our living rooms via the television. The government's claim that we were there to stop the spread of communism began to wear thin, and protests multiplied. It didn't seem to be worth the price being paid, and questioning of our purpose as a nation followed.

Theological developments also led to a decline in church influence and membership. During the 60s the "Death of God" theology was developed, leaving many to wonder what happened to the traditional values with which they had grown up. The major proponents of a theology that became known as Christian Atheism were men like Thomas Altizer, who said that modern man had lost his sense of anything sacred, and that God no longer had any relevance for mankind today. Harvey Cox, professor at Harvard University, made this new theology popular with his 1965 book, *The Secular City*, in which he proposed that God did not give meaning to life. Rather, men and women create their own meaning as they piece together all of the parts of their world. So we should not look beyond ourselves, but within for meaning and happiness.

These theories caused a reaction among faithful Christians at that time, of course. Bumper stickers came out with sayings like, "If your God is dead, try mine," and "God is not dead, I talked to Him this morning." But popularly there was a decline as many questioned the basics of religion. The news media encouraged the questioning by giving exposure to this theology. *Time* magazine mentioned the controversy in its October 22, 1965, religion section. The April 8, 1966, issue of *Time* was devoted to the topic as the cover emblazoned the question for its readers, "Is God Dead?"

Another theological development of this period that contributed to the decline came to be known as Liberation Theology. This theological position taught that the only significant Christian action was to seek justice for oppressed peoples. Thus those who espoused this belief stood up for the poor in Third World countries, particularly Latin America. The emphasis of its proponents was on social work rather than evangelism. This change in priorities, from evangelistic outreach to social action, had an impact on the influence of the church in the United States as well. In a 1972 study entitled, "Why Conservative Churches Are Growing," sociologist Dean Kelley, an official of the National Council of Churches, shared his findings about the loss of church membership in most denominations. He found that during the decline of mainline denominations, theologically conservative churches (like the Southern Baptists, the Seventh Day Adventists, the Assemblies of

God, etc.) continued to grow. Why was this true when mainline denominations were undergoing massive decline? His conclusion was that people turn to religion in order to answer the big questions of life: Why we are here? What will happen when we die? What is the meaning of life? etc. Theologically conservative churches offered time-tested, dependable answers to these questions, as well as affirming values that were distinctive from the world. This was attractive to those who were feeling the world crumble around them and who believed their church was waffling on the important issues.

In addition to the social and theological developments of this period, there were also political decisions that contributed to the decline of religion. Several Supreme Court cases put limits on the authority and influence of the church. Modern historians point to 1962 as the turning point in a process that continues today. In that year the Court considered the case of *Engle v. Vitale*. The suit was in regard to a practice in New York of having public school children recite a prayer at the beginning of the day. The prayer was written by the Regents of the State, and its recitation was required. The court decided that this was in violation of the First Amendment, which said, "Congress shall make no law respecting the establishment of religion..." Justice Hugo Black, writing for the majority opinion, said that the practice of this prayer was "Wholly inconsistent" with the First Amendment because the State was promoting a religious viewpoint. Reactions to this decision were negative on the part of the religious establishment, and even several major newspapers voiced their disapproval. But the process of removing a Christian understanding of God from public life had begun.

The following year saw another case, *Abington v. Shempp*, which raised even more concern on the part of Christians. The conclusion of this litigation was that Bible reading and recitation of the Lord's prayer in a school setting also were unconstitutional. The justices that year said that the Bible could be studied, religion could be studied, but "the exercises here do not fall into those categories. They are religious exercises, required by the states (Maryland and Pennsylvania) in violation of the command of the First Amendment." (1) About 150 proposals for amendments to the Constitution to allow these activities were suggested in Congress after this ruling, but none garnered the necessary votes to become law. As late as 1984 this subject was still on the agenda for Congress as they considered the Reagan Amendment, which said that "Nothing in this Constitution shall be construed to prohibit individual or group prayers in public schools or other public institutions." Even though the vote was 56 for and 44 against, the amendment did not become law since a two-thirds majority is required for constitutional amendments.

Schools were also the venue for controversy about the content of education material. In 1961 a U.S. district judge in Arkansas declared a law unconstitutional entitled, "Balanced Treatment for Creation-Science and Evolution-Science Act". Creationists, the judge said, "take the literal wording of the Book of Genesis and attempt to find scientific support for it." Since that practice advances a particular religion, it is unconstitutional.

In 1968 the matter came to the Supreme Court, as another Arkansas law was challenged. The rule that prohibited teachers in public schools and public universities from teaching anything that suggested the evolution of man was found unconstitutional. A replacement law was considered again in December of 1981. In the way this trial was reported, we see the bias against Christianity that has developed in these years. On December 21, 1981, the *Washington Post* reported on the trial this way:

The ACLU and the New York firm of Skadden Arps attacked the Arkansas law with a powerful case. Their brief is so good that there is talk of publishing it. Their witnesses gave brilliant little summaries of several fields of science, history of sciences, history and religious philosophy.

Contrast that description with the one given of the believers in creationism. They were

described as,

impassioned believers, rebellious educators and scientific oddities. All but one of the creation scientists came from obscure colleges or Bible schools. The one who didn't said he believed diseases dropped from space, that evolution caused Nazism, and that insects may be more intelligent than humans but are hiding their abilities.(2)

Charles Colson, modern-day prophet, refers to this event as one more piece of evidence that the church has indeed lost influence and even respect in this country.(3)

In this way the schools have been forced to step back from anything religious in character. Only "facts" can be taught. Today the situation in most public schools is such that God cannot be mentioned, and no mention of the Christian history of our country is allowed. Therefore, schools have stepped back from any moral education. S. Barton Babbage described the erosion of morality in our education system this way:

If you want a bomb, the chemistry department will teach you how to make it; if you want a cathedral, the department of architecture will teach you how to build it; if you want a healthy body, the department of physiology and medicine will teach you how to tend it. But when you ask whether and why you should want bombs or cathedrals or healthy bodies, the university is dumb and impotent. It can give help and guidance in all things subsidiary but not in the attainment of the one thing needful.(4)

Other cases have come to the courts in our country where the church and its beliefs have been limited. In 1984 a jury in Tulsa awarded \$390,000 to a woman who had been disfellowshipped from her church because of continuing adultery. The church, the Collinsville Church of Christ, adhered to the guidelines of Matthew 18:15-17 in confronting the woman in question. Eventually, since there was no repentance on the woman's part, an announcement was made to the church that all of their counsel, encouragement, prayer and exhortation had not restored her. Therefore, they were going to withdraw fellowship from Marian Guinn. The jury's reasoning in this case was put this way by one juror, "I don't see what right the church has to tell people how to live."(5)

In Evansville, Illinois, another case was decided in 1981. Mary May, a teacher at the Harper Elementary School was told that she and her fellow Christians could not meet in the school for Bible study and prayer prior to the beginning of school on Tuesday mornings. When Mary May sued the board of education, saying that her First Amendment rights had been violated, the court found against her. The argument was that elementary school children might be negatively affected by an authority figure like a teacher carrying a Bible.

In 1984 there was a ruling against a city crèche display. The city of Pawtucket, RI, each year had an annual Christmas display that had Santa Claus with sleigh and reindeer, Christmas trees, and a manger scene. The crèche was challenged. The Supreme Court, in a 5-4 decision, said that the city had a right to display the crèche because, in the words of then Chief Justice Warren Burger, the scene served a "legitimate secular purpose...a neutral harbinger of the holiday season, useful for commercial purposes, but devoid of any inherent meaning."(5) How far the church has fallen in influence!

The most far-reaching decision of the court has been the decision of *Roe v. Wade* in 1973, allowing abortion on demand. In spite of the alliance of many church leaders, abortion is still available at this writing, and life has become described as tissue.

Immigration has certainly had an impact as well. Immigrants now come from many different countries, and the church has not effectively begun enough new churches to receive and assimilate the varieties of peoples coming into our country.

Internal Decay

Another contributor to the decline of the church in the United States has been the “fall” of well-known Christian figures. The admission of sexual misconduct by Jim Baker and Jimmy Swaggert had a devastating effect on religious television. From 1986 to 1988 viewership of religious TV declined from seven million to three million as people lost faith in Christian leadership.

Political Activism

In the 1980’s and 90’s there was another stream of activity that drained spiritual fervor from the churches and the country. Simply put, the church turned to politics as the answer to moral decline. This movement began in 1976 with a series of “I Love America” rallies across America. These were initiated by Jerry Falwell, pastor of Thomas Road Baptist Church in Lynchburg, Virginia. The theme for the rallies was not conversion to Christ, but a call to return the country to basic morality. The movement went national very quickly, and began to have political impact as they took on the name, *The Moral Majority*.

Falwell credited the action of Moral Majority members for the election of Ronald Reagan. It was the activity of registering church members to vote that swung the tide toward Reagan, a political conservative, he claimed—with some justification. Reagan, in response, appointed officers of the Moral Majority as advisors to his campaign.

By the end of Reagan’s second term, however, the organization was in decline. Contributions decreased, and eventually the group was disbanded in 1989. The reason given was that the goal of a firmly established “religious right” had been reached.

Despite the official end of the Moral Majority, a change had come in the understanding of the church. The way to bring about change in the country was now seen in political terms. A familiar theme was that we need to “Take America Back,” back to the faith of the founding fathers, back to a time of morality, or take it back as in take back power.

This change in the role of the church had a huge impact on those who were not part of it. In 2007 David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons published a book with the title *UnChristian*. (David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *unChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity...and Why It Matters* (Baker Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2007) It was a report on surveys done with people outside the church, especially young adults. One of the critiques of Christians was that we are “too political”. In other words, they saw it as a “major problem” that Christians are expending time and energy on trying to impact legislation in the political realm rather than working on trying to improve lives. And that political activity makes them suspicious of the agenda of the church, and therefore they were uninterested. As one writer, Dan Kimball put it in the title of his book, *They Like Jesus, But Not The Church*. (Dan Kimball, *They Like Jesus, but Not The Church*, Zondervan, @2007).

The suspicion of church with a political agenda led to the marginalization of Christianity as a force in America.

Signs of Renewal

During this same period, however, there has been also a strain of religious renewal in our country. The charismatic movement was part of the means that God used to excite people about Jesus Christ even while mainline denominations were on the decline. This movement has generally been dated from 1960, when Dennis Bennet, rector of St. Mark’s Episcopal Church in Van Nuys, California, said that he had experienced what the Pentecostals called Spirit-Baptism. He began to advocate speaking in tongues. The unique aspect of Bennet’s experience and others in the church

who shared it with him is that they expressed no desire to leave their denomination. Bennet resigned, however, and took the pastorate of St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Seattle. At the time, the congregation was on the decline, but under his leadership turned around and began to grow.

Other church leaders in other denominations also became spokesmen for renewal in the charismatic sense. Larry Christenson (Lutheran), Harold Bredesen (Reformed) Howard Ervin (Baptist), J. Rodman Williams (Presbyterian), all advocated a deeper experience of the Holy Spirit, but did not encourage people to leave their denominations. In February, 1980, a poll taken by *Christianity Today* showed that about 29 million Americans consider themselves to be charismatic.

After the charismatic movement there came what is being called "The Third Wave." C. Peter Wagner, professor at Fuller Seminary, coined the phrase to describe those who desire a deeper experience of the spectacular spiritual gifts such as healing and involvement in spiritual warfare, but do not require speaking in tongues as the evidence of the Spirit's presence. The emphasis that such movements have placed on the immediate experience of God has been one means of preserving the church.

As mentioned earlier, conservative churches also increased in membership during this period of time. With the social upheaval that has characterized the period, it seems that many did not want to leave the consistency of the traditional values behind them. In 1976 much was made of Jimmy Carter's evangelical beliefs and his claim to be "born again."

In the 1980s people from the Boomer generation "returned to church." As this generation aged, married and began to have children, they returned to their moral roots. However, often their return was not to the church of their youth. Many times it was to the growing phenomenon of Megachurches. These churches, with more than 2,000 in membership, have grown in influence in the Christian world of the United States. With an emphasis on excellence, on non-denominational ministry, and on contemporary music and relevant preaching, these churches have grown while mainline denominations have continued to decline during the 1990s. The best known of these, Willow Creek Community Church in Barrington, IL, has even formed an association of like-minded churches.

Another sign of renewal was a movement among Christian men. It was called "Promise-Keepers". In keeping with our theme to this point, this national movement was begun by a football coach. Bill McCartney, then the head football coach at the University of Colorado, had the vision for a gathering of men with an agenda "for training and teaching on what it means to be godly men." The first gathering was at the University of Colorado's event center. From there the vision was for a series of meetings across America in stadiums. The first of these was in July, 1991. A considerable group of 4,200 attended. But soon stadiums were filling around the country, often with 45,000 to 50,000 men gathering to hear speakers, sing songs of worship, and to make promises to be godly men, faithful husbands and good fathers.

The high point for Promise Keepers came on October 4, 1997 with a gathering in Washington, D.C. It was thought that a million men came for these event, though numbers are difficult to verify.

In 1998 financial difficulties arose as attendance dropped at regional rallies, and soon the organization drifted into unimportance on the national scene. In evaluating this movement we can say that the regional rallies produced some excitement, but, as far as we can tell, they did not contribute to the growth of the church in the United States.

So there have been signs that the church is not dead, but it is not strong, either. The emphasis on self-realization has left our society without absolute values. This is true to such an extent that when people determine what is best for them, according to Robert Bellah's 1985 study, *Habits of the Heart* (7), they look either for self-fulfillment or self-realization as the highest of values. In other words, our decisions are made, not on the basis of what is right, but on the basis of what

will be best for us. Even the religious activity of our day and age is seen in those terms. Commitment to a church is often defined by what it does for us, and when it no longer fulfills us, we feel free to move on.

The lack of Bible knowledge indicates that there seems to be little motivation for Christians today to learn about their faith. Many studies have shown that Christians are, generally speaking, biblical illiterates, with few being able to name more than four of the ten commandments, name the gospel writers, or knowing whether stories cited are found in the Old or New Testament.

Yet, in spite of all the forces of declension, there are signs that a revival could be starting. A Gallup poll in 1988 reported that 84% of Americans believe in the divinity of Christ, an increase from 78% in 1978. *Newsweek* magazine in 1990 reported on the phenomenon of baby boomers going back to church. John Naisbitt, in his book, *Megatrends 2000*, reports, “The last time the U.S. experienced such a deeply religious period was during the 19th century, when the country’s economy changed from agriculture to industry.”(8) He goes on to say, “In this century we have watched the ideal of progress give way to the return of faith. The worship of science and the rational to a great extent has been thrown over for a religious revival that specifically values the emotional and the nonrational.”(9)

In other words, forces seemed to be at work to awaken us spiritually. The Spirit seemed to once again be making headway in the battle against apathy. But at the time of the publication of the second edition of this book in 2012, things look rather bleak for the future of the church. Consider the following statistics that characterize what is happening spiritually in this country:

- 20% of Americans now claim no spiritual affiliation.
- 30% of adults under 30 claim no spiritual affiliation.
- It is widely reported that somewhere between 78% to 88% of “churched young people,” those who grew up and were nurtured in the church, drop out when they go away to college.
- Attendance at church (or synagogue), long considered to be 40 to 44% of the people in the country is now estimated to be 17% to 19%

That last statistic needs some explanation. In surveys that have been done by the Gallup and Barna organizations, the question has been asked like this: “Have you in the past seven days attended religious services?” Consistently about 44% of the population has answered “yes”. But in recent years the dependability of that figure has come into question as a result of follow-up. After surveying an area, the further step was taken of going into the area on Sunday and counting the people in all the churches. The result is that only between 17 and 30% are attending church on any given weekend. (see <http://www.gallup.com/poll/117409/Easter-Smaller-Percentage-Americans-Christian.aspx> and http://www.religioustolerance.org/rel_rate.htm). Further, for the first time in the history of the United States those who identify themselves as Protestants are in the minority.

If there was ever a need for revival, it’s now. So what should the church do in the face of the moral decline and the seeds of spiritual awakening? In the next chapters we will see what the church can be doing to encourage the movement that is going on, as well as become an effective channel of God’s power to broaden the scope of the renewal that has been taking place.

Notes:

1. Emmanuel Gospel Center, “Why Start New Churches (in the U.S.): PowerPoint online presentation by ACC Consulting. www.egc.org/churchplanting links, 7 March 2003.
2. Edwin Scott Baustad, *A Religious History of the United States* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1990), p. 321.

3. "Creation Trial: Less Circus, More Law," *Washington Post* (December, 1981), A-3-b.
4. Charles Colson, *Kingdoms in Conflict* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), p. 215.
5. S. Barton Babbage, "Secularism in the Schools," *Christianity Today* (April 12, 1974), p. 57.
6. *Ibid*, p. 210.
7. Colson, p. 207.
8. Robert N. Bellah, *Habits of the Heart* (Los Angeles: University of CA Press, 1985).
9. John Naisbitt and Patricia Aburdene, *Megatrends 2000* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1990), pp. 271272.
10. *Ibid*, p. 295.

Chapter 14: A Call to Prayer

Hudson Taylor, the great missionary to China, was once puzzling over two missions over which he had oversight. In each mission was a man who was gifted in evangelism and cared for the people. Each community seemed open to the gospel message. Yet one mission was thriving while the other was just hanging on. What caused the difference? It was while Taylor was on a tour in the United States, garnering new supporters and encouraging old ones, that he saw what was behind the flourishing mission. At one of the meetings a couple had questioned him about the mission where people were regularly committing their lives to Jesus Christ. When Taylor asked why they were wondering about that particular mission, they replied, “We pray for that mission and that missionary every morning and evening.” That, Taylor realized, was what was making the difference.

The impact of prayer is not something that is limited to China. Prayer is another of the common factors in the periods of revival that have characterized our history in America. We do not have specific evidence about the prayer of the church that preceded the Great Awakening. However, we do have a plea of Jonathan Edwards. In 1746, when the Great Awakening had waned and the number of converts was on the decline, he wrote a classic booklet on prayer entitled, “An Humble Attempt to Promote Explicit Agreement and Visible Union of God’s People in Extraordinary Prayer, for the Revival of Religion and the Advancement of Christ’s Kingdom on Earth, Pursuant to Scripture Promises and Prophecies Concerning the Last Time.” In that day and age the title of a book was supposed to describe the contents of the book, not be a “hook” to get people interested, and that explains its length.

Edwards recognized, in this 140-page booklet, that there was a connection between the Spirit of God bringing about awakening and the prayer of God’s people. Therefore, he pleaded for people to join together in prayer. To our knowledge, not much happened with this plea until the end of the century.

The Second Great Awakening, as we have seen, began with the “Concerts of Prayer.” These times of agreement and visible union were the channel that opened the way to renewal and revival in the country. Then, in the ministry of the revivalists, prayer circles and prayer meetings became prominent as the people began to recognize the connection between prayer and people coming to faith.

The Prayer Meeting Revival of 1857, of course, had prayer at its heart. As those first six men gathered with Jeremiah Lanphier to pray for each other and people they knew in the business district of New York, God answered with a national awakening. The ministry of Dwight L. Moody and other revivalists who became prominent during the post Civil War period also recognized the

necessity of prayer prior to holding mass evangelism meetings. Dwight Moody fine-tuned the new measures of Charles Finney, and appropriately gave much attention to prayer.

The ministry of Billy Graham also has had a great emphasis on prayer as the primary means to prepare for revival. One of the key members of the Billy Graham crusade team in the early revival meetings was Willis Haymaker, a Presbyterian minister who became a “front man” for Graham. He would travel to cities prior to the crusade and organize the publicity, the committees, and the prayer ministry. In the Great Columbia Evangelistic Crusade of February, 1950, Haymaker covered the city with home prayer meetings. Thus, Haymaker said of that successful crusade, “Billy stepped right into a revival. It had been ‘prayed down.’”(1)

The Call to Prayer

If we are to see revival in our day, the church must respond to the call to prayer. Prayer has always been an important part of the life of the church. Early Christians were taught to pray at 9:00 a.m.,

12:00 noon, and again at 3:00 p.m. By the turn of the first century the Didache, a Christian teaching document, emphasized the need for prayer at the third, sixth and ninth hours of the day (the times mentioned above). Hippolytus of Rome, who lived around A.D. 215, taught stages that this prayer should go through:

At the third hour, also one should recall how Christ was crucified; then at the sixth hour how darkness supervened and Christ prayed on the cross with a loud voice; so too at the ninth hour it should be recalled how water and blood issued from his side and how God sent his word to the saints to enlighten them that Christ’s death heralded the beginning of his resurrection. (2)

Other early church fathers indicate that prayer during the hours mentioned above, as well as in the morning, evening, and often at midnight, was at the heart of a vital relationship with God. It was the means that God used to release His power during a period of growth for the church. And gradually, during the early history of the church, the pattern of prayer was developed into an intricate system. An early church document whose author is unknown, *The Pastor of Hermas*, gives us an insight into how prayer became systemized. Joseph Jungmann reports on the prayer section of this document in this way:

In the Pastor of Hermas we find prayers related to the author’s treatment of visions, mandates and parables, prayers for forgiveness of sin, prayers especially in which God is thanked for his benefits... In a comprehensive prayer the inmost soul of the writer is revealed; its range reaches to the creator whose providence controls and orders all things and to Christ his beloved son who has chosen and sanctified us. Then follow prayers of intercession for all in distress, for the poor and the sick, for the hungry and those astray. Finally his horizon widens in a prayer that all peoples may recognize “that you alone are God and that Jesus Christ is your (divine) Son and we your people and the sheep of your fold” (c. 59,4). And a renewed intercession for the leaders of the community ends in a note of praise offered to God “through the high priest and leader of our souls Jesus Christ through whom he is glorified forever” (c. 62,3).(3)

This was the pattern in the early church.

Every major renewal in the history of the church has been preceded by a time of intensified prayer, beginning with Pentecost (Acts 2). Prior to that first general outpouring of the Holy Spirit, we read that “They all joined together constantly in prayer...” (Acts 1:14). Before the great missionary journeys of Paul, we read that the church in Antioch was gathered together for fasting and prayer, and it was in that context that the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them” (Acts 13:1). The Reformation period was preceded by Martin Luther spending significant time in prayer. In the winter of 1512 he locked himself in

the tower of the Black Monastery in Wittenburg and prayed about the things that he was discovering in his study of Scripture.

The Methodist revival in England was ushered in by the earnest seeking prayer of the Holy Club in which John and Charles Wesley and George Whitefield were involved. And, as we have seen, the revival times in the United States involved earnest, focused, persistent prayer. God's promise in Scripture to Solomon at the time of the dedication of the temple has proven true throughout the years. His promise was, "If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves, and pray and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land (2 Chronicles 7:14).

What is happening in the church today in the area of prayer? The evidence in the past few decades has been mixed. Two surveys done in the 80s indicated that prayer was not a priority for Christians. One survey done in England in 1984 indicated that the average Christian spends one and a half minutes in prayer each day.(4) Ministers did not do a great deal better. The statistics gathered indicated that 56% of the clergy pray for less than 15 minutes per day. Only 1% said that they pray for more than 30 minutes per day. Surveys in the United States produced similar results. One pastor did a survey that indicated that people in the U.S. churches spend less than five minutes per day in prayer, ministers about eight minutes per day. Is it any wonder that we are not experiencing the power that the early church saw, or the revival that we seem to desire so greatly?

The good news, however, is that things seem to be changing. An issue of the "National & International Religion Report" began with this headline: "The Most Hopeful Sign of Our Times: A Growing Prayer Movement Points America Toward Spiritual Revival." Here are some of the highlights from that report:

Times Square Church recently shut down all local programs in order to concentrate exclusively on prayer for the desperate needs of New York City. The 5,000-member urban church led by evangelist David Wilkerson is one of America's fastest growing. Hundreds of thousands of believers gathered at municipal buildings to pray for America on May 7, the National Day of Prayer, just days after tragic incidents of racial violence erupted in Los Angeles and other cities. The American Family Association said the "meet at City Hall" events were organized in more than 2,500 locations. Groups of 70 pastors each gathered in four different cities (Spokane, Wash., Minneapolis, Cleveland, and Colorado Springs) last fall to pray for nationwide revival. One group met for just half a day, while another spent four full days in prayer and fasting.

No one in any of the groups knew that similar meetings had been planned at the same time. Last fall, an estimated 1 million junior high and high school students prayed for revival during "See You At the Pole," a prayer event sponsored by national youth ministries. A prayer movement has been brewing in Cleveland, Ohio, for almost nine years. In the last two years, between 6,000 and 7,000 people (including 1,000 teenagers) have taken part in city-wide prayer rallies. In Minneapolis, 300 congregations have committed themselves to pray for revival for seven years, just "to see what God will do." In Los Angeles, between 300 and 1,000 pastors gather every quarter to spend half a day in prayer for their city and the nation. Just days after the recent LA riots, about 700 area pastors from assorted backgrounds united in prayer at First Presbyterian Church in Hollywood. In New England, a prayer movement is growing on many levels in a five-state area. Some region-wide prayer rallies have attracted thousands of participants.(5)

C. Peter Wagner, noted authority in the area of church growth, has said that the increase in prayer activity in the 1980s in our country points to a revival within ten years.(6) And there certainly seems to be a return to spirituality after the events of 9-11. The Sunday after the attack on the World Trade Center in New York saw a 40% increase in church attendance. Prayer meetings around the country were well attended as Christians and others sought the comfort of a sovereign God in the midst of a confusing event.

Prayer Focused Outward

What is the prayer life of your church like? What is your prayer life like? If it is somewhat typical of what we have become in the United States, the prayers of the church are primarily focused inward. This was noticeable during a Wednesday evening “Prayer Meeting” that I attended. There was a time for prayer requests, which took up most of the time. Prayer was only occasionally offered for an individual that was present; most requests were for brothers, aunts, parents, uncles, etc., for healing of health problems, change in economic circumstances, for a house to be sold, for restoration of a marriage, and the like. No one prayed for the unbelievers in the community or in the world.

In 1997 *Newsweek* magazine did a story on prayer (March 31, 1997). One part of the article lists the kinds of things for which people pray. Here’s some of that list:

- 82% pray for health and success in life
- 75% pray for strength for life or to overcome a personal weakness.
- 72% pray for special needs like a job search.

What I found interesting in reading those statistics is that our prayers, generally speaking, are incredibly self-centered. Who is praying for unbelievers to come to faith?

One of the great changes in the character of prayer during the periods of revival is that they began to focus outward rather than inward. Far too often we treat God as some cosmic vending machine--we put in the right amount of prayer and feel like we’re pushing the right buttons to get what we want. Instead, we need to see prayer as something that prevails upon the Lord to send power that His will may be accomplished in this world.

An idea that could help to focus our prayers outward, and has helped to give renewed energy to some churches is the prayer triplet idea that was developed in England. During the preparation for Billy Graham’s visit there in 1985, a man named Brian Miller was given the task of developing a means of motivating people to pray for the country. As he prayed, meditated, and studied the Scriptures, he developed what has become known as the prayer triplet. In essence it is three people covenanting to pray together for unsaved friends, family and acquaintances. Each person in the triplet lists three people that they want to see come to salvation. Brian Mills sums up the scheme this way:

Three people agree to meet for prayer regularly; Each shares the names of three others and the group is thereby committed to pray for nine people who would not consider themselves Christians; The group prays for all the known needs of the nine and especially that they may discover the reality of God’s love in Christ; The group prays for each other in their relationships with the nine; The group prays for spiritual awakening throughout the land. The three people then look for opportunities to relate and witness to the people on the list.(7)

Prayer can take place anywhere, and need not be for a long period of time. Some triplets found that they could meet at work during a coffee or lunch break. Others met in homes in an evening. The results were astonishing, and a great encouragement to those who prayed. The Billy Graham Association adopted the principle as its means of preparing the soil for a Billy Graham crusade.

Another idea that has been used in a church setting is that of praying people in. The intercessors in the church get together once each week to pray about the needs of the neighborhood. They divide the area around the church into north, south, east and west of the building. They then take a visual tour of the area in prayer, asking that God will bring contact with

a church member, or motivate the people in that area to come to church. One of the intercessors in a church using this method went so far as to spend time driving through her district, stopping at the homes with “For Sale” signs up, praying that God would bring someone into that home that her church could touch. Then, when the house was sold, she would pray that the people coming in would be touched by the Holy Spirit. She would then report the new neighbor to the calling team of the church, and two people would be sent out to make a welcome call.

Another congregation became outward focused in its prayers by having all of its neighborhood Bible studies engage in unique prayers prior to their meetings. The members of the study would go door-to-door through the neighborhood just prior to beginning their study, asking people if there were any needs in that house that they could pray for that evening. Often requests about health, job-related problems, or relationship concerns would be shared. The Bible study would then begin with prayer for these shared needs, and the person who lived in that neighborhood would then follow up prior to the next meeting to see how God answered the prayer.

As prayers were answered, people would be interested in the power that was displayed and the caring that was extended. Several came later to the Bible study, and many of those came to church. Paul Yonggi Cho, pastor of Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul, Korea, largest church in the world, shares how he disciplines his outward prayer:

I sit before the Lord and begin to thank Him for His goodness...After thanking, praising and worshipping God, I can ask His blessing on every appointment, counseling session and meeting I will have that day. In detail, I ask God's blessings upon my associates (I have over three hundred associate pastors); our missionaries (who are in forty countries); and my elders and deacons. I then inquire of the Lord for His direction on every decision...After praying for each department of my church, each government official and our national defense, I pray for my family, naming their needs clearly and specifically to our Lord. Then, using my imagination, I travel to Japan where we have an extensive ministry...Leaving the shores of Japan, I travel the great Pacific Ocean to America... I pray for the President, the Congress and the other institutions in the United States. I pray for the Christians in America that they may experience revival in their churches...I pray for the thousands who send their prayer requests to our New York office...I travel south and pray for Latin America...I then travel across the Atlantic Ocean and pray for Europe...Eastern Europe is a particular concern to me because of the oppression and opposition which exists. God is most concerned about each Christian who is meeting secretly in Eastern Europe and I must pray for their safety and success. Africa, Australia and New Zealand are also areas where God desires to move...Then there is my own continent of Asia...(8)

I have quoted Dr. Cho's prayer life at length here to give an example of what outward focused prayer looks like, and to point out that the practice is possible. This was written some years before the drastic changes in Eastern Europe that have opened the windows for the Christians living in that area of the world, and the doors to further mission work. This, I am sure he would say, was a direct answer to the prayers that he and other faithful intercessors have been praying.

We need to train church members in our country to pray with a view that goes beyond the walls of the church and the intimacy of the home. The movement to prayer that has begun is of the Holy Spirit. However, in order to channel the power that is released, we should begin to train people in our churches to pray with an outward focus. When you read through the gospels, it becomes clear that one thing Jesus taught His disciples was to pray. He did not teach them to preach; they were expected to pick that up as they followed Him, and to be empowered for it as

the Holy Spirit enriched their life. However, He did take the time to teach them to pray, giving them the Lord's Prayer as a guideline.

The pattern of Jesus is in contrast to that in the typical church today. We spend time teaching people to teach, to preach, to counsel, to lead small groups, to witness to their friends and neighbors, but very few classes exist that teach people to pray with an outward focus. There are many resources coming into the Christian market, however. The church can use them well.

Begin to pray for yourself and your church, that God may motivate you to outward-focused prayer. Pray for the attitude of

A.B. Simpson, the founder of the Missionary Alliance Church. Once a visitor in his home arose early in the morning. On his way to the kitchen for breakfast, he passed Simpson's study. He stopped as he heard the earnest prayer of this man of God, asking for peoples and nations to come to the Lord. He traveled in his prayer from nation to nation, naming them as he turned the globe before him. Then, in climax to his prayer, he embraced the entire globe, and with tears on his cheeks prayed for God to open up the world to good news

Spiritual Warfare Prayer

We need to recognize also in prayer that when we are praying for revival and renewal in our churches and country, we are engaging in spiritual warfare. Paul closes his letter to the Ephesians with the reminder to

Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. (Ephesians 6:11, 12)

When Paul looked at the problems facing the church, he saw them not only in terms of interpersonal difficulties, but in terms of the spiritual battle that was going on behind the scenes. The battle is referred to elsewhere in Scripture as well. In Daniel 10 we are told of a vision that Daniel received. He immediately began to pray and fast, asking for insight into what he was to do with that vision. After twenty-one days of fasting and prayer, a man appeared to him. Among other things, he indicated that the answer to Daniel's prayer had been delayed because of a spiritual battle that took place:

Do not be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to them. But the prince of the Persian kingdom resisted me twenty-one days. Then Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, because I was detained there with the king of Persia. (Daniel 10:12-13)

Commentators believe that the reference to the prince of the Persian kingdom is a reference to some demon or demonic power that was resisting the things of God in that area. People of God, there are demonic powers out there. They have a goal of keeping your friends, your family, your country from experiencing the knowledge and blessing of God. If we are going to see a revival occur in our day, we are going to have to learn to do spiritual warfare on behalf of those who are unbelievers. We are going to have to do spiritual warfare against unjust structures in our land and country.

How do you do spiritual warfare? Begin by putting on the armor of God that Paul lists in Ephesians 6: the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the shoes that demonstrate a readiness to share the gospel of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the spirit, which is the Word of God. Be prepared to meet the enemy by having these qualities and abilities as a part of your life. Then, in your prayer, when you sense that the country or

neighborhood, or person you are praying for is under the influence or oppression of the evil one, command him to be gone.

One of the signs that revival is on the horizon is a new understanding of how spiritual warfare prayer relates to the mission enterprise of the church. God is raising up leaders who are making us aware of the fact that any evangelism that is done involves warfare. We are, in the sharing of the gospel, raiding the Enemy's territory, and we should be aware that he won't give up his property without a fight. John Dawson, director of "Youth With A Mission" in Los Angeles, is one of those leaders. He writes:

Unless you understand biblical warfare you will be frustrated, angry, confused and ineffective in your ministry to the city. You may be attempting to coordinate Christian concerts, pioneer a church or reach businessmen. The principle is still the same: We need to bind the strong man and gain a place of authority over Satan before we will see the full fruit of our labors...If we are not using our biblical spiritual weapons, we are failing the people we are attempting to serve.(9)

Dawson goes on to say that there is evidence in Scripture for the existence of territorial spirits, demons that are deployed by Satan over a region. To be effective in doing the work of the kingdom, we must identify these, he says, and battle them with prayer and fasting, commanding in the name of Jesus, praising God, meditation, and a godly lifestyle.

This same theme is echoed in a book edited by C. Peter Wagner. *Engaging the Enemy* (10) is a gathering of essays by well-known practitioners in the outreach of the church of Jesus Christ, each one dealing with some aspect of spiritual warfare and how it applies to evangelizing the world.

As God opens our eyes and our hearts to increased prayer, directed toward the unbelieving world around us, the answer should come in revival. Are you praying for the unbelievers in your circle of friends and family?

Notes:

1. John Pollock, *Billy Graham* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), p. 69.
2. Joseph A. Jungman, *Christian Prayer Through the Centuries*, trans. By John Coyne (New York: The Missionary Society of St. Paul, 1978), p. 10.
3. Jungman, p. 13.
4. Brian Mills, *Three Times Three Equals Twelve* (Eastbourne: Kinsway Publications, 1986), p. 49.
5. David Bryant, "The Most Hopeful Sign of Our Times: A Growing Prayer Movements Points America Toward Spiritual Revival," *National and International Religion Reports* (July, 1992), pp. 1, 2.
6. C. Peter Wagner, statement made in a workshop on prayer.
7. Mills, p. 180.
8. Paul Yonggi Cho, *Prayer: Key to Revival* (Waco: Word Books, 1984), pp. 136-138.
9. John Dawson, *Taking Our Cities for God* (Lake Mary, Florida: Creation House, 1989), p. 70.
10. C. Peter Wagner, ed., *Engaging the Enemy* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1991).

CHAPTER 15: LEADERSHIP

There was nothing outstanding about him that would have caused you to identify him as a future leader in the church. In fact, he had nothing that we often associate with people of influence: an extensive education; a family connection; or sums of money. No, he began his life in very humble circumstances, born on the family farm in Sibley, Iowa, on March 8, 1917. During the dustbowl years he was sent to California by the family to earn money there to be sent home. That began a cycle of activity that defined the next two years of his life: off to California in the winter, back home for weeks of planting, then back to California for the summer, and back home for harvest.

When the family financial crisis was past, he decided to stay in California, and ended up buying a herd of cows and beginning his own dairy. He worked hard on the dairy, began a family that eventually included 7 children, and he became a leader in his local church.

His name was Hubert. I came to know him in 1983 when I became pastor of his church. I say “his” church, because in many ways it was. Hubert was someone who had tremendous influence in this congregation. I met him first in the search committee. I was being interviewed as a potential staff pastor for the growing congregation. Hubert chaired the search committee. Through the process of questioning on both sides we came to the conclusion that we could work together, because we saw something of the same future for the church: outreach and continued growth. He had a passion for people still not in the church and sensed something of the same concern in me. So for 18 years, until his death, we worked together to grow the church numerically and spiritually.

I begin this chapter on leadership telling you something about Hubert because this study of revival periods has reminded me that God has a tendency to choose ordinary people to accomplish extraordinary things. Think about the prominent people in the Bible. God could call someone like Gideon, a coward hiding from the Midianites, a “mighty warrior” (Judges 6:12), and an important battle against overwhelming odds was fought and won. A forgotten son, David, is called to be king and becomes the man after God’s own heart. A bumbling, uneducated man like Peter is called to serve as one of the foundations stones of the church.

This same tendency on the part of God is played out when we consider the revival periods of the United States. God calls ordinary people from unexpected places to do extraordinary things as they became leaders in the church.

Leadership

They became leaders in the kingdom. What is a leader? There are many different definitions of this activity, as you might expect. The most simple is leadership guru John Maxwell’s: “Leadership is influence, or the ability to get followers.” (1) In this sense, everyone is a leader. But some people, like those in our study, rise to unusual levels of influence, touching thousands and

millions of lives and changing the face of Christianity in this country. What is it that they do? Rather than just talk about leaders, I prefer to talk about the process of leadership. This definition describes what happens in this thing called leadership. Leadership is a dynamic process that includes these elements: A **leader** (with all his character pluses and minuses, his particular gifts, strengths and weaknesses) interacts with the **culture** (the traditions and patterns of a group of people) to produce a **vision** (a view of a preferable future, or how the culture can be changed in order to better relate to the present realities) and introduce the **actions** necessary to make the vision become a reality.

In each major revival period there was a leader or two who has become identified with the period. This person was responsible for bringing about changes necessary so that ultimately the culture was changed by new actions or plans. Let's look at each of them and think through their contributions to the changes in our history.

Jonathan Edwards: As noted in chapter 2, Edwards was groomed for ministry from his childhood. All of his education was geared toward following his father's footsteps into the pastorate. He received the best education available to someone in the colonies in that day. Yet he was not considered a dynamic leader, one who would influence a generation of people and the character of religion in this country. He read his sermons, speaking with no gestures or dramatics. He had no overarching long-range plan for revival; in fact, the coming of revival surprised him as much as anyone. Yet what happened supernaturally through his ministry was so powerful that people were drawn to Northhampton to learn the "secret" of revival. He was responsible for giving the Great Awakening its beginning through his preaching and for developing the theology of the revival.

George Whitefield: Whitefield was the dynamic speaker that Edwards was not. He was also ordained in the church of England. He was, in many ways, the first itinerant evangelist to be involved in revival in this country. He took revival from the church to the field.

Charles Finney: Born on the frontier, educated in one-room schools, and ignorant of spiritual things. No formal theological training until after he had been involved preaching in revival meetings. This is a different kind of spiritual leader than Jonathan Edwards! Yet he, too, influenced a generation of believers in this country as he became the model and the focus of spiritual energy during the Second Great Awakening. Finney is best known for the techniques of revival, especially the use of the "new measures."

Jeremiah Lanphier: Businessman turned evangelist, though very unsuccessful in his early attempts to build up the church he was serving. He is remembered for giving up the organizational techniques and moving the church toward a deeper understanding of prayer as the power for revival. He had no theological education, and only a basic understanding of the techniques of revival.

Dwight Moody: Moody was an uneducated shoe salesman when his career as an evangelist was launched. Not only was he uneducated, but he was not eloquent in the way of Charles Finney, nor theologically astute as Jonathan Edwards. Yet his skills as a salesman were used mightily to bring the gospel to millions. He was especially known for emphasizing God's love rather than judgment, and was known for advancing the organization of the revival meetings by making them city-wide crusades.

Billy Sunday: Though only one of many revivalists during the period when revivalism reigned in America, Sunday is also worth noting. Once again, he had no theological education, and, in fact, was a professional baseball player. Yet, he is known for making social issues the focus of revival meetings, especially the sale of alcohol and the practice of gambling.

Billy Graham: Billy at least had some education in Bible School, both in Florida and then at Wheaton college, though no official seminary training or ordination. Billy built upon the work of

Moody, but has been especially known for his ability to give an invitation to Christ in a power-filled way.

It's quite a list of people, isn't it? When I first finished reading and researching for this book a friend asked me, "What did you learn?" My immediate response was, "We're too old and too educated for God to use to bring about revival." In retrospect, that was a bit of an overstatement, since God can use whomever He wishes. However, it does seem to be a pattern that God will often use people that we human beings wouldn't think of as we plan and prepare for revival. This pattern continues today in the lives of some people that God has used to make a significant impact in the growth and development of the kingdom. Consider these people:

Coach Bill McCartney: The interdenominational movement called Promise Keepers traces its beginning to March 20, 1990, as reported in the previous chapter. Here's the fuller story of this movement begun by an ordinary person used to accomplish extraordinary things. Bill McCartney, then head football coach for the University of Colorado, was traveling to a Fellowship of Christian Athletes meeting in Pueblo, CO with his friend Dave Wardell. On the way they began talking about Christian discipleship, especially as it related to men. How could they help Christian men grow spiritually? They envisioned thousands of men gathering in sports stadiums across the United States for worship and prayer, and then sending them out to live the Christian faith together in supportive relationships. Later that year, in July, a meeting of seventy-two men planned the first conference, a gathering of men to take place at the University of Colorado at Boulder in July, 1991. That first conference drew 4,200 men. At the gathering the men were asked to bring 12 men to the various conferences in 7 different locations. That next year, 1992, almost a quarter of a million men attended Promise Keeper stadium events. Over the next four years more than two million men attended the expanding Promise Keepers events around the country. This huge success led Bill McCartney to resign his position as head coach of the University of Colorado in order to devote his time more to his family and more to the organization.

Promise Keepers soon went beyond the stadium events to developing resources for Bible study and discipleship. Promise Keeper organizations also expanded in 1995 to the world, with the opening of offices in New Zealand, Australia and Canada.

In 1998 a decision was made to offer all the conferences at no charge, so that there would be no hindrance to men hearing the gospel. That year, in spite of a severe cash crunch, 450,000 men attended stadium and arena events in 19 different locations.

Since 1998 the impact of Promise Keepers seems to be on the wane, with fewer resources in the pipeline of publication and fewer men attending the events (by their estimate, 176,000 in 2002). However, this movement is one of the closest things we have to a revival in that it came in the midst of a spiritual lull, and the church was experiencing a renewed prayer movement. This movement had a national and international impact on the spiritual lives of over 5 million men who attended the conferences. Probably many more men were affected by those who carried the movement back to their own churches..

Where did the leadership for this renewal come from? Not from the official church. The leadership was focused in a man lovingly referred to as "Coach," Bill McCartney, a man with no theological training and no position in the church that would qualify him for becoming a spokesman.

Let's look at another person who has had widespread influence in the church in the 1990s: **Bill Hybels.** Hybels pastors one of the largest Christian churches in the United States, Willow Creek Community Church. In the early 1970s Bill was the Youth Pastor in the South Park Church in a suburb of Chicago. Using creative dramas, contemporary music and messages that were highly relevant to the culture of the youth of that area, the ministry grew from a handful of teenagers to an estimated 1000 per mid-week service. Hybels, a student at Trinity College, with a major in

Biblical Studies, was inspired by the challenge given by one of his professors to be involved in the church. The professor, Dr. Gilbert Belizikian, said,

Do any of you students want to do something truly great with your life? Do you want to sign up for the most compelling, far-reaching challenge in this world? Do you want to discover real excitement? Then commit yourself to Jesus' vision of establishing communities of God here on this earth. Devote yourself to the church!

A decision was made to make the ministry more than a youth ministry. It was time to start a church, one patterned after Acts 2:42-47. Hybels and his group did a survey of the community, seeking to determine why unchurched people didn't attend. They used the information gathered to form the ministry plan for a new congregation, a church for the unchurched. The first service was held in a rented movie theatre on October 12, 1975. Only 125 people showed up. The next week the number had dropped. But then things began to take off, and within three years there were more than 2,000 attenders per week.

Hybels' influence, along with the church's, has been expanded through the creation of the Willow Creek Association. For \$249 per year a church with a similar vision to reach the unchurched can join this organization and have access to the many resources that the church produces, as well as the many conferences that are sponsored.

Megachurches, of which Willow Creek is one of the most visible and influential, represent a change in the church culture in America. Churches of over 2000 members represent less than 1% of the congregations in the United States, and yet have become the definition of what a local church should be. Lyle Schaller, in his book, *The Very Large Church*, notes that the culture has changed. There has been a move to "bigness" in stores, in schools, in the culture in general. People are used to a "one stop shopping" experience in the world, and they are looking for it in the church. As Schaller reflects,

Instead of preparing children for a life in a world of small institutions, for the past half century the American culture has been equipping people to live in a world of big institutions. This new culture organized around big institutions is governed by a different rule book from that which was used in the old culture composed largely of small institutions.(3)

Because this new culture looks for larger churches, new leaders had to emerge, people who were trained not just to be scholars and shepherds, but to be leaders.

So who would God call to become a foundational leader in this process? A man like Bill Hybels. A graduate of college (with a major in Biblical Studies), but not a theological school; a man groomed to be involved in the family business, but who felt a call to do business for God.

There are many others that we could point to as well, people who had a traditional theological education and many who did not. What do we learn about leadership? Several things, I believe. First, we learn that God can and will call leadership from surprising places. The next leaders in revival in your church and our world may come from the world of business, or agriculture, or from the church. God is a specialist in picking ordinary people to do extraordinary things.

Secondly, I believe that we learn that God empowers people through the prayers and support of God's people. Tony Campolo once told the story about his church seeking a new pastor. When the news was published that the search committee was recommending a recent seminary graduate, Campolo went to the chairman of the committee to express his disappointment. He indicated that their church was a large, influential church. It should look among the "stars" of the church to invite to be pastor, someone who has the experience to qualify him for success. A young man just out of school may not ever become great. It's too great a risk for the church. The chairman of the

search committee let Campolo talk for awhile, and then said, “But Tony, we’re going to pray him great.”(4). This leader understood something very important about leaders: God chooses them, prepares them, calls them, and then grows them, often in response to the prayers of people. Think of how Billy Graham became a leader in response to prayer.

Thirdly, we learn that leaders usually are the result of revival. You see this in the life of Finney, of Graham, and of Moody. The revival had started, and people from the harvest became leaders in the harvest. This is an important fact of which the church should take note. This means that if you aren’t experiencing renewal in your church, a new leader may not be the answer. Rather, you should begin with prayer, seeking the powerful flow of the Holy Spirit. Then, once the power of God is flowing, see who He calls to be a part of it.

Leadership is a vital part of the history of these revivals. It will be for the future. Who will God call? That’s up to Him. Our task today is to prepare the soil with our prayers.

Notes:

1. John Maxwell, *Developing the Leader Within You*, Thomas Nelson Publishers (Nashville, TN), 1993, p. 1.
2. Bill and Lynne Hybels, *Rediscovering Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), p. 46.
3. Lyle Schaller, *The Very Large Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), p. 14
4. Tony Campolo, from a talk.

CONCLUSION

So what do we say to that search committee that we met in the introduction? You will remember that they wanted someone who would lead the church to growth and revival. So what should they prioritize? There are several things that any leaders and any church should be aware of as they think about and plan for the future.

1. Pray

This seems almost too simple to mention, but it is crucial. The average Christian church does little in the area of prayer. Surveys have shown the Christians in American depend on “arrow prayers” uttered in crisis for their spiritual lifeline. Congregations often don’t prioritize prayer either. A few years ago I gathered a group of volunteers to contact the larger churches (more than 2,000 people in worship) in Southern California to ask one simple question: what do you do in prayer ministry? We were shocked when we gathered to report our findings. Most of the larger churches, names you would recognize, do little in the way of organized, focused prayer for revival and for the church. One of the things that we have learned in our study of revivals is that renewed church prayer is vital to opening the way for revival. So I would say to that search committee that they should immediately, prior to contacting any candidates, begin a variety of prayer initiatives in the congregation. These might include a search committee prayer time, a fasting group that combines this discipline with prayer for the church and for the provision of the right pastor to lead them, a prayer retreat, prayer partners for leaders, prayer triplets, etc. If they truly want to experience revival it will begin with prayer, not with a new program.

2. Keep an open mind

One of the things we have seen as we have studied revival is that God sometimes anoints people that we wouldn’t expect to be chosen as leaders for the church. Who would think of a Dwight Moody or a Charles Finney for church leadership? Tony Campolo’s comments we referred to are instructional for the church, I believe. The search committee should keep an open mind, considering a larger list than those who have been “successful” in leading other ministries. The committee should also have interview questions that get at a person’s commitment to prayer and things of the spirit.

3. Prepare the congregation for change

Change is difficult for any established organization. However, change is necessary in the church if it is to remain relevant to the new realities of culture. A familiar pattern in churches like

the one seeking a new pastor is to look for someone who will lead the church into the changes necessary for growth. However, they do not prepare the congregation for those changes. And so, the new pastor expects a willingness to change and meets great resistance instead. After a couple of years of battling over major and minor issues, the pastor leaves disillusioned and the congregation seeks a safer alternative. One of the realities of revival is that it has always brought change. Sometimes those changes were in the styles of worship. At other times the changes were more profound, such as the marginalization of the church itself as revivals went to stadiums. The search committee would serve the congregation well if they began identifying things that might require change prior to the arrival of a new pastor. This may require the engagement of a consultant who will help them examine the community around them, the church and its structure, and begin to strategize about the future.

4. Study to know the times

A fourth thing that I would say to that search committee is that it would be a wise activity to study their community to determine where God is preparing revival. Has there been a decline in spirituality? As we have seen, that always precedes revival. Where is there a renewed interest in spiritual things? Some time ago the congregation that I serve decided to begin a daughter church in the growing Spanish-speaking community around us. The plan was to begin a church within our own building. However, interviews with the leaders of Spanish-speaking churches in our city showed that they weren't growing. For some reason, the Hispanic population in our city was resistant to the gospel. Right near us, however, was a city that had several growing Hispanic churches. We began a daughter church there, and it has grown to independence and has planted a daughter church itself. Where is God at work? Rick Warren, pastor of one of the largest churches in the United States, says that church growth isn't all that difficult. You simply have to find out where God is creating a wave, and then ride it for all it's worth.⁽¹⁾ Where is God at work in your community? Is there a growing openness among the young adults? Seniors? Single parents? Young families? The way to determine this is to look at the demographics of your area to determine what kinds of people God has called you to serve. Then interview other congregational leaders in your community to learn what kind of people are joining their churches. This community evaluation can give you a picture of what kind of pastor might serve best in your congregation as well.

Get ready. I believe that God is going to do a great thing in our day. The stage is set. Revival is coming. Will you and your church be ready?

Endnote

1. Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), p. 15

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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