

Ordinary People, Extraordinary Things

How God Brings Revival

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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.
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8. Ibid, p. 31.
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12. Ibid, p. 31.
13. “How Pentecost Came to Los Angeles” *Pentecost Evangel* XLIV (April 8, 1956), p. 4.