

CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 23: Spiritual Awakenings in North America

Spiritual Awakenings in North America: From the Publisher

"I am profoundly convinced that the greatest need in the world today is revival in the Church of God. Yet Alas! the whole idea of revival seems to have become strange to so many good Christian people. There are some who even seem to resent the very idea, and actually speak and write against it. Such an attitude is due to both a serious misunderstanding of the Scriptures, and to a woeful ignorance of the history of the Church. Anything therefore that can instruct God's people in this matter is very welcome."

We wholeheartedly agree with this quote by the Rev. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, the eminent preacher who died a few years ago. We produced this issue on spiritual awakenings in America in the desire that it might serve as a quiet stimulus for awakening. We have been motivated by the hope that as God's people ponder their tradition of spiritual awakenings, they will earnestly yearn to pray and seek God for a new time of refreshing, such as those times that have come when Christians have felt the urgency to humble themselves, abandon their sins, and call upon God for renewal.

Most of the material for this issue was written by Dr. Keith Hardman, a devoted minister, historian, and believer in awakenings. Mr. Hardman is chairman of the Department of Philosophy and Religion at Ursinus College in Collegeville, Pennsylvania, and is the author of the books ***The Great Awakeners: Revivalists from Solomon Stoddard to Dwight L. Moody*** (Moody Press, 1983) and ***Charles Grandison Finney 1792–1875, Revivalist and Reformer*** (Syracuse University Press, 1987). His book on Finney is the first major biography of the great evangelist in over 100 years, and has received excellent reviews. Our deepest thanks to him for his hard work, enthusiasm, and painstaking care in helping us produce the issue.

The inspiration for this issue came from David R. Mains, speaker on the ***Chapel of the Air*** radio program, and Randy Petersen, a frequent contributor to Christian History. We hope, along with Mr. Mains and Mr. Petersen, that Christians across North America (and everywhere) will boldly pray for renewal. Many have questioned: Can awakening ever happen again in North America? For many reasons we might say "probably not." Yet, how can we conclude that God cannot, and will not do again what he has done before—is the Holy Spirit bound by our limits of probability? Are social, ethnic, regional, economic, sexual, and spiritual barriers too great for the God who created us? Is the One who made us all different hindered by the complex nature of our pluralistic society? Does awakening come from below ... or from above?

It is of major importance to remember that awakenings are not simply times of enhanced personal religious experience. Awakenings have social impact. In the wake of spiritual awakenings comes social restoration. Corrupt, immoral, unjust, and ungodly people and societies can return to honesty, purity, justice, and holiness. Culture can be transformed; but first must come transformed people.

We hope you will read this issue with the same careful analysis that we have come to expect from our readers. But we also hope you will read it leisurely, with an open heart and a hungry spirit. And pray. Who knows what might happen?

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Spiritual Awakenings in North America: Did You Know?

Most of our great popular **denominations** in America grew to strength because of the 19th-century awakenings.

Of the nine colonial **colleges** in America, six were born as the result of awakenings.

American and British awakenings led to the **worldwide Evangelical Awakening**, which spread the gospel around the world throughout the 19th century. In 1800, Christians were concentrated in Europe and North America; by 1900 many Christians were in China, India, and Africa.

George Whitefield, the great evangelist of the Great Awakening who preached all through the colonies, was an Anglican priest, and gladly worked with Christians from different backgrounds. His voice was so loud and clear that he could be heard by 30,000 people!

Awakenings started the **foreign missions movement** in America, and American missionary work started in a **haystack**, during a thunderstorm! In 1806, during an awakening at Williams College in Western Massachusetts, Samuel Mills and four other students hid themselves in a haystack to avoid a summer thunderstorm. While there they united in prayer, and pledged themselves to go as missionaries wherever God might lead them. Out of this group went the first American missionaries.

Some of the best impulses for **social reform** in America's history have come from awakenings. The anti-slavery movement in America was mainly a part of the reform movement generated by the Second Great Awakening, as were movements for prison reform, child labor laws, women's rights, inner-city missions, and many more.

The Third Great Awakening of 1857–1859 was brought about by **prayer** meetings in cities in Canada and America, and was led not by clergy, but by devoted laypersons.

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Awakenings in America: Seasons of the Spirit

Spiritual awakenings have brought lasting benefits to the Church and the surrounding culture. Have we forgotten our great heritage of renewals?

THE SCRIPTURES show us that God's people go through periods of spiritual renewal, and periods of spiritual decline. We might think of these times like waves and troughs, or like mountains and valleys.

During a renewal, or awakening, there will be not only a **great reviving of Christians**, but also a **large impact on the problems of society**. The period of God's blessing may last for many years, as did the Second Great Awakening in America, or be rather brief, as was the Third Awakening of the late 1850s.

When the winds of a renewal have passed, the Church may enter a period of lethargy, possibly for many years. Such cycles have already been repeated many times during the 2,000 years of Church history. It is not that the Spirit of God **cannot** sustain the higher life for Christians; rather, the Spirit allows times of decline to cause His people to pray for growth and for power.

Biblical Awakenings

In Old Testament times, renewal came to the Israelites under King Jehoshaphat (2 Kings 11–12), King Hezekiah (2 Kings 18), King Asa (2 Chronicles 15), and especially under King Josiah (2 Kings 22–23). Awakening also came at the time of Zerubbabel (Ezra 5–6), and under Nehemiah (Nehemiah 8–9, 13).

In New Testament times, awakening came upon God's people at Pentecost (Acts 2). This pouring out of the Spirit set a pattern that we see in later awakenings. Again, in Acts 4:23–37 we read of a renewal that prepared the infant Church for the fierce persecutions to come.

Forgetting Our Blessings

Despite the lasting benefits that awakenings have always brought to the Church and its surrounding culture, many Christians today know too little about this subject. Not only have many believers forgotten their great heritage of awakenings, but some historians have distorted the truth about these movements of God's Spirit. Some have portrayed awakenings as times of religious fanaticism, having no positive social effects. Unfortunately, too often Christians have done little to set the facts straight, and have let others explain away God's great works in our past. The historian William Warren Sweet said:

No phase of the religious development of America has been more misunderstood and as a consequence more maligned than has revivalism. It has been the victim of much cheap debunking.... Strange as it may seem to those who think only of revivalism in terms of ignorance ... there is a very close relationship between the history of higher education in America and revivalism.

Not only have awakenings been very instrumental in the promotion of higher education, as we will see, but **many of the finest impulses of social reform and action in American history have flowed from them**. For example, the Second Great Awakening brought a tide of opposition to slavery, and to various other social injustices.

Praise and Blame

Because awakenings have brought conversions and the spreading of biblical teaching, it is not surprising that they have been an object of scorn for unbelievers. Since the long-term results of awakenings have been so beneficial, critics have had to look elsewhere to find something they could exaggerate and ridicule. They have found an easy target in the extremes of enthusiasm, for there are always those who go too far.

The First Great Awakening did run into problems, and the Second Awakening in the West, on America's turbulent frontier, has been a favorite of skeptics for illustrations of fanaticism. On the other hand, the "harvests" of Solomon Stoddard in Massachusetts were completely orderly, as was the 1734 revival under his grandson, Jonathan Edwards.

The Second Awakening in the East was known for its dignity and orderliness, as well as for the fact that it lasted for decades, which would not have been true if it had brought disgrace.

From early in his ministry Charles Finney insisted on order and dignity, and the thousands of converts who flowed from his meetings attested to the power that attended them, and the absence of fanaticism. Describing Finney's Rochester revival of 1830–1831, historian Whitney R. Cross declared, "No more impressive revival has occurred in American history.... But the exceptional feature was the phenomenal dignity of this awakening." The Third Great Awakening of 1857–1859 was noted by the secular newspapers for its quiet orderliness everywhere, while through it more than a million converts were added to the churches!

In spite of the fanaticism that may arise and be used by some in attempts to discredit awakenings, it is surprising how many have **not** been accompanied by emotional excesses. The majority of awakenings in America—and elsewhere—have been accompanied by great orderliness and a profound, majestic sincerity. Our heritage is a testimony to the working of God's Spirit through spiritual awakenings; we can be thankful of how God has worked in our midst.

And we should continue to pray that God will send awakening.

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Patterns of Spiritual Renewal

Spiritual awakenings, whether in biblical or Church history, manifest patterns that are similar, often strikingly so. While all of the following elements may not be present in each instance, for the most part awakenings progress through a cycle whose phases include these various aspects of God's working.

1) Awakenings are usually preceded by a time of spiritual depression, apathy and gross sin, in which a majority of nominal Christians are hardly different from the members of secular society, and the churches seem to be asleep.

The causes of each decline differ widely, but when the prophetic voice and moral leadership of the Church has been stilled for some time, social evils are usually rampant. Eighteenth-century England is an excellent example. Alcoholism was at an all-time high, capital punishment was used routinely for trivial crimes, slavery was practiced throughout the British Empire, the churches were out of touch. The Evangelical Awakening led by John Wesley and George Whitefield aroused the English conscience and by direct political pressure and action, cured these and many other ills.

2) An individual or small group of God's people becomes conscious of their sins and backslidden condition, and vows to forsake all that is displeasing to God.

Christians recall past outpourings of God's grace and power, and long to see them again. When histories of awakenings have been written in later years, it has been occasionally discovered that individuals at great distances and completely unknown to each other had, prior to the awakening, been praying simultaneously to the same end!

3) As some Christians begin to yearn for a manifestation of God's power, a leader or leaders arise with prophetic insights into the causes and remedies of the problems, and a new awareness of the holy and pure character of the Lord is present.

This standard of holiness exposes the degeneracy of the age and stimulates a striving after holiness by God's people. The leaders find that their eagerness for God's moving is shared by many who have been waiting for God to act, and who will rise to follow.

4) The awakening of Christians occurs: many understand and take part in a higher spiritual life.

The evangelism of the unsaved may or may not accompany this renewal of Christians. (In the great revival of the Reformation, the bringing of salvation to those outside the Church was not a primary issue, whereas the spreading of scriptural doctrine was.) This is a good reason why it is wrong to make the term "revivalism" synonymous with "evangelism." Revival and mass evangelism are NOT the same thing.

Certainly in all genuine movements of God's Spirit, people are converted. But if a society has been bathed in the teachings of the gospel for a long period, evangelism may not be the central thrust. This was the case in the Welsh revival of 1905.

In examining the example of Pentecost in Acts 2, we see that the awakening of Christ's redeemed people and the bestowal of the Holy Spirit at the "birthday" of the Church (2:1-4) was followed by evangelism of the unsaved (2:5-12, 37-41). This illustrates the two aspects of the Holy Spirit's work in the awakening of the Church, but keeps them separate. We could say that an awakening is a widespread renewal that includes the simultaneous conversion of many people to Christ.

5) An awakening may be God's means of preparing and strengthening His people for future challenges or trials.

Throughout history, renewal has often come before persecutions and severe trials that God sent to test and teach His people.

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A Dawning in the New World

Origins of American Awakenings in New England & the Middle Colonies

Solomon Stoddard in New England

Solomon Stoddard, the popular Puritan minister of Northampton, Massachusetts, like most other colonial New England ministers, served in one church for his lifetime. He pastored the First Church of Northampton for 60 years, from 1669 until his death in 1729. Northampton, situated on the Connecticut River, was on what was then the western frontier—the very outpost of colonial civilization. It was here, through Stoddard's ministry, that American religious awakenings began.

A Voice in the Wilderness

The idea of spiritual awakenings in colonial New England began almost entirely with this capable and devoted minister. Stoddard was an evangelical, a "soul winner," and had an intense desire to reach the unconverted.

Stoddard, and the other Puritan leaders were concerned because the spiritual life of New England had greatly eroded since the time of the founding fathers. In 1679 a "Reforming Synod" was held to address the situation, which they considered desperate. In 1683, the Rev. Samuel Torrey of Weymouth lamented:

...there hath been a vital Decay, a Decay upon the very Vitals of Religion, by a deep Declension in the Life, & Power of it; that there is already a great Death upon Religion, little more left than a name to live; that the things which remain are ready to die; and that we are in great Danger of dying together with it...

This presents something of a puzzle to us today: Since awakenings among God's people were nothing new, why didn't the devout Puritans of New England remember this and seek revival? Awakenings were mighty actions of the Lord that had occurred over the centuries, great movings of the Holy Spirit, breathing new life into the Church. Had the New England faithful forgotten? No doubt many had not forgotten, but there was little unity among them in a call, or in prayer, for awakening.

The Puritans were some of the finest Bible students ever to study the Word of God. Yet Solomon Stoddard was almost alone when he insisted that an awakening was the only answer to the spiritual problems of his day. It is difficult to understand, in light of their knowledge of Scripture, how they could have overlooked those places in the Bible where awakening is presented as God's answer to a backslidden Church.

In addition, the Church had undergone periods of awakening over the centuries—the Reformation being the greatest example—and the New England pastors prided themselves on their devotion to the teaching of the Reformation, especially to the ideas of John Calvin, whom they honored as the greatest teacher of the Reformation.

Also, their homeland in the British Isles had seen previous awakenings. In 1596 an awakening had begun in Edinburgh, and from 1625 through 1630 other parts of Scotland and Northern Ireland had seen major awakenings. All this had been widely reported.

Like Trees in Winter

Yet when Stoddard urged the need for spiritual awakening upon his fellow ministers, he received only a lukewarm response. However, that did not stop him. In his writings and sermons he carefully explained what revival meant, and he almost single-handedly began the first era of active evangelism in American Christianity. He insisted upon biblical preaching that stressed the *absolute necessity* of conversion to Christ:

When Men don't preach much about the Danger of Damnation, there is want of good Preaching. Some Preachers preach much about Moral Duties and the blessed estate of Godly Men, but don't seek to awaken Sinners and make them sensible of their Danger.... These Things are very needful in their places to be spoken unto; but if Sinners don't often hear of Judgment and Damnation, few will be converted. Many Men are in a Deep Sleep and flatter themselves as if there were no Hell, or at least that God will not deal so harshly with them as to Damn them. Psalm 36:2. Ministers must give them no Rest in such a Condition. They must pull them as Brands out of the Burnings.... Ministers are faulty when they speak to them with Gentleness, as Eli rebuked his Sons. Christ Jesus often warned them of the Danger of Damnation. Matthew 5:29, 30

Stoddard felt that many preachers in his day were overly proud of their preaching abilities, and not interested enough in the content of their messages. "We are not sent into the pulpit to shew our wit and eloquence, but to set the consciences of men on fire..."

According to Stoddard, we must not expect constant revival; God does not work that way. Yet, though there may be long periods when God allows his people to backslide into sin, there may also be periods of great spiritual refreshing:

There are some special Seasons wherein God doth in a remarkable Manner revive Religion among his People. God doth not always carry on his Work in the Church in the same Proportion. As it is in Nature, there be great [variations].... So there be times wherein there is a plentiful Effusion of the Spirit of God, and Religion is in a more flourishing Condition.

This rule, he believed, operated not only in the Church, but also in the lives of individual Christians. Therefore, he did not find anything unusual in the spiritual conditions then prevailing in New England. What Stoddard saw was a "valley" period, a spiritual low point.

However, he felt that if biblical principles were applied, and if there was a proper understanding of the ways of God's working, a resurgence of God's power might be expected. In other words, he felt that if the religious leaders thought that the future spiritual course was downward, then they were simply ignorant of spiritual laws:

Learn from hence, that the Church of God is subject to great Changes. Sometimes Religion flourishes, and sometimes it languishes. It is indeed so with particular Souls; sometimes they go on from Strength to Strength, and their Hearts are lifted up in the Ways of God.... And at other Times they are in a slumbering Condition; they are like sick Men that are unfit for Service, like Trees in Winter. So it is with the Church of God; there is but little of the Presence of God among them; there is a great scarcity of Godly Men; Iniquity abounds, and the Love of many waxes Cold. At other Times, Religion is the great thing that is minded.

Practicing What He Preached

Stoddard was known as a powerful preacher, and followed his own advice completely. In response to his strong preaching and pastoral methods, five awakenings, or **harvests** as he called them, came upon his church and the area of Northampton: in 1679, 1683, 1696, 1712, and 1718. More souls were turned to Christ than at any other time in New England before the Great Awakening.

While most of New England continued in the old ways, and pastors gazed with awe and envy upon the new members flocking into Stoddard's church, he had the satisfaction of feeling that he was working out God's methods of awakening His people.

As decline continued elsewhere, some pastors did turn their ministries to more evangelical concerns, and preached for revival. Not far from Northampton, at Hatfield, the Rev. William Williams echoed similar doctrine. In Connecticut, Rev. Eliphalet Adams of New London was an ardent advocate of the revival spirit. In his printed sermons, Adams' arguments were very similar to Stoddard's, urging prayer and preaching for revival.

Solomon Stoddard completed an amazing pastorate of sixty years. Due to his failing health, the church, in 1727, called for an assistant to aid him. They selected Stoddard's grandson, Jonathan Edwards. This was a momentous decision. Edwards became the leading colonial advocate of awakenings, and America's greatest theologian.

Meanwhile, around New England outpourings of the Spirit were occurring in other towns during the 1720s. In 1721 Eliphalet Adams traveled to Windham, Connecticut, and started an awakening there. He told the throng gathered to hear him that revivals, although still widely scattered, were no longer a rarity, and that a **Great Awakening** seemed to be at the threshold.

On the Outpouring of the Spirit of God From a Sermon by the Reverend Solomon Stoddard, 1712

Doctrine: There are some special Seasons wherein God doth in a remarkable Manner revive Religion among his People.

Use: Q. How is it with a People when Religion is revived?

A. **1. Saints are quickened.** It contributes much to the flourishing of Religion, when Righteous Men flourish in Holiness, as it is foretold, Psalm 92:12.... Sometimes they run the ways of God's commandments, because God enlarges their Hearts.... This mightily increaseth Holiness among a People.

2. Sinners are converted. God makes the Gospel at times to be very Powerful.... There is a mighty Change wrought in a little Time: They that were dead are made alive, and they that were Lost are Found.

3. Many that are not Converted do become more Religious. When Israel went out of Egypt, there was a mixed Multitude that went with them. So when God is pleased to convert a Number, there be many others who have a common Work of the Spirit on their Hearts; they are affected with their Condition, reform their evil Manners, and engage in Religious Duties.... When God works savingly upon some, it is frequent that others have common Illuminations, whereby great Reformation is wrought, and the Reputation of Religion is advanced, and People are disposed to keep the external Covenant.

Observation: This reviving is sometimes of longer, and sometimes of shorter Continuance. Sometimes Religion flourishes in a Country for a great many years together. So it did for twenty-nine Years in the days of Hezekiah, 2 Chronicles 29:1.... But sometimes it is for a less space.

God is very Arbitrary [unpredictable] in this Matter. The People of God are praying, and waiting for this

Mercy. Psalm 85:6—"Wilt Thou not revive us again, that thy People may rejoice in Thee?" ***But God will take his own time for this Mercy.***

-Taken from a collection of sermons by Solomon Stoddard entitled *The Efficacy of the Fear of Hell*, printed by B. Green of Boston in 1713.

Theodore Jacob Frelinghuysen in the Middle Colonies

In September 1719 a gifted young minister sailed from Holland to the New World on board the ship ***King George***. He came to serve four churches that had been established for the scattered Dutch immigrants who had settled in the Raritan Valley of New Jersey. Not long after his arrival in New Jersey, this bold and zealous young pastor would spark controversies and spiritual fires; his persistent evangelism would eventually prepare the ground for the Great Awakening in the Middle Colonies.

Theodore Jacob Frelinghuysen, then 27, was born in Germany and was the son of a minister. After his education in Holland, he was ordained and served as the pastor of a small Dutch church. Frelinghuysen was devoted to the teachings of ***Pietism***—the evangelical movement in the Lutheran and Reformed churches that stressed personal conversion, and a life of obedient faith and love.

After arriving in New Jersey the new pastor was greeted with joy by his parishioners. But he was soon dismayed, for he found—in the words of a man who translated his sermons—that

great laxity of manners prevailed throughout his charge, ... that while horseracing, gambling, dissipation, and rudeness of various kinds were common, the [church] was attended at convenience, and religion consisted of the mere formal pursuit of the routine of duty.

In short, Frelinghuysen found that, in his opinion, much of his new congregation was unconverted.

A Rude Awakening

The Dutch farmers must have been stunned when their new pastor immediately called on them to repent and be converted to Christ. In some of his first New Jersey sermons Frelinghuysen set the tone for his evangelistic preaching for years to come. He portrayed the beginning of the conversion experience as a great "conviction" of one's lost condition, as in his sermon on Isaiah 66:2 entitled ***The Poor and Contrite [are] God's Temple:***

In a contrite spirit are found: a deep sense and clear perception of sin.... Heart-felt disquietude and sadness.... An open and free confession of sin. By reason of a sense of the greatness of his sins, he knows not whither to look or turn: but, notwithstanding, places his dependence upon the grace which God can exercise through his Son. Hence, the contrite in spirit flees from the curse of the law to the Gospel.... Thus he is driven out of himself, to the sovereign grace of God in Christ, for reconciliation, pardon, sanctification, and salvation.

Frelinghuysen declared that only those who have undergone such a conversion have salvation, and that no one else, even the most upright and moral, may entertain hope for heaven. The proper Dutch members of his congregations did not find such doctrine unacceptable in itself, but their new pastor seemed to regard many of ***them*** as unregenerate, as self-righteous, as hypocrites. He addressed them:

Much loved hearers, who have so often been at the Lord's table, do you know that the unconverted may not approach? Have you, with the utmost care examined, whether you be born again? ... Reflect, therefore, upon, and bear in mind this truth; and remember, that

though morally and outwardly religious, if you still be unregenerate and destitute of spiritual life, you have no warrant for an approach to the table of grace.

Conversion was used by Frelinghuysen as the basis for admission to communion, and therefore, in his judgment, most of his parishioners should be excluded from the Lord's Supper. Many in the congregation were denied communion, and they became outraged that their young pastor had accused them of being lost in sin. They complained to certain influential Dutch ministers in New York, and started a controversy that would finally split the Dutch Reformed Church in the New World in 1721. Frelinghuysen was not alone in his beliefs, however. Other pastors in his denomination supported his views, though they warned him about being too harsh.

Kindred Spirits

In 1726, Gilbert Tennent, a passionate young Presbyterian minister, came to New Brunswick, New Jersey, to minister to the English-speaking colonists there. Tennent's enthusiastic dedication won him Frelinghuysen's friendship. Young Tennent saw the effects of Frelinghuysen's powerful preaching, and the barrenness of his own ministry, and became quite impressed.

Tennent later described his beginning in the ministry:

... When I came there ... I had the Pleasure of seeing much of the Fruits of [Frelinghuysen's Ministry].... This together with a kind Letter which he sent me respecting the Necessity of dividing the Word aright ... excited me to great Earnestness in ministerial Labours. I began to be very much distress'd about my want of Success.... I did then preach much upon Original Sin, Repentance, the Nature and Necessity of Conversion ... labouring in the mean Time to sound the Trumpet of God's Judgments ... While I lived in the place aforesaid, I don't remember that there was any great ingathering of Souls at any one Time; but thro' Mercy there were pretty frequent Gleanings of a few here and there, which in the whole were a considerable Number....

"The Beginner of the Great Work"

Frelinghuysen's labors are an important source of the Great Awakening. The great English evangelist George Whitefield (pronounced "Wit-field"), who preached in New Brunswick, was pleased to mention Frelinghuysen and others who had prepared the way for his own efforts and the great response he found:

Among those who came to hear the Word, were several ministers, whom the Lord has been pleased to honour, in making them instruments of bringing many sons to Glory. One was a Dutch Calvinistic minister, named Freeling Housen, pastor of a congregation about four miles from New Brunswick. He is a worthy old soldier of Jesus Christ, and was the beginner of the great work which I trust the Lord is carrying on in these parts. He has been strongly opposed by his carnal brethren....

Unfortunately, we actually know little of Frelinghuysen's work. Yet, he made several important contributions, and was among the first to give answers to problems that confronted the colonial churches. Through his demand for a conversion experience, and through his strict church discipline, he strengthened the authority of the clergy and thereby the influence of the churches on the American frontier. Although it took him many years to do so, Frelinghuysen, by his strict discipline, developed a responsible church membership that did not fall prey to spiritual indifference.

To strengthen the faith of the converted, he developed private devotional meetings. These meetings were

originally organized as private meetings, open only to his converts, but in 1745 they were opened to the public. He made church laymen into lay preachers; during his frequent absences from his congregations, he appointed one or two elders to conduct the services, and this grew into having them preach.

The awakening that took place under Frelinghuysen's ministry was not large in numbers, but his numerous contributions in shaping a ministry concerned with religious renewal give him an important place in American history among the promoters of spiritual awakenings. He was a herald of the great work of God that lit up New Jersey and the other Middle and New England colonies in 1740. He lived to see the day, and died eight years later in 1748.

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God's Wonderful Working

The first Great Awakening in New England & the Middle Colonies

Decades before the Revolution that gave birth to the United States, a different kind of revolution born of God's Spirit swept the land.

New England

When Rev. Solomon Stoddard died in 1729 at 86 years, his grandson, Jonathan Edwards, who had been his assistant for two years, became pastor of the Congregational Church of Northampton, Massachusetts. His congregation could not have guessed that one day their tall, mild new minister would be called one of the best minds America has ever produced, and her greatest Christian thinker. He also would prepare the soil for a great spiritual harvest in New England in their day.

Jonathan Edwards & God's Surprising Work

In 1734, Rev. Edwards began to stress evangelism from his Northampton pulpit with a series of sermons on Justification by Faith. No immediate effects became apparent, but after some time, in December 1734 "The Spirit of God began extraordinarily to set in and wonderfully to work among us...

Soon the town was enveloped in spiritual concern. Edwards wrote about these events in his *Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God*. He referred to the awakening as a work of God:

This Work of God, as ... the Number of true Saints multiplied, soon made a glorious Alteration in the Town; so that in the spring and summer following, Anno 1735, the Town seemed to be full of the Presence of God; it was never so full of Love, nor of Joy, and yet so full of distress, as it was then. There were remarkable Tokens of God's Presence in almost every House. It was a time of Joy in families on account of Salvation being brought unto them.... ... More than 300 Souls were savingly brought home to Christ, in this Town, in the Space of half a Year.... I hope that by far the greater Part of persons in this Town, above sixteen Years of age, are such as have the saving Knowledge of Jesus Christ.

Other pastors began to promote the awakening, and it spread to over twenty communities in western Massachusetts and Connecticut, lingering for a few years in some villages. Observers who came to Northampton and were impressed touched off further revivals when they returned to their own churches to tell what they had witnessed. While there had been awakenings here and there in New England previously, never had so many towns and churches been involved at once.

Preacher & Reporter

Edwards not only promoted the awakening, but kept a careful written account of his observations. He noted that many people who came under conviction initially were concerned over their sinful behavior, but gradually they began to see that their greatest problem was internal—a sinful heart.

The *Faithful Narrative* was published in London and Boston, and went through twenty printings by 1738,

thus giving it a wide readership and popularity. As New Englanders read it and inched towards the Great Awakening of 1740 and beyond, they gradually divided into three groups:

- ***those who were opposed to anything but the usual expressions of worship, and who regarded emotional excesses as harmful to religion.*** The members of this group were called the "Old Lights." One of the champion Old Lights was a Boston minister named Charles Chauncy;
- ***those who were naturally inclined to excesses of emotionalism,*** such as the preacher James Davenport, who later drew criticism upon the Great Awakening by his wild behavior;
- ***and those who tried to be open-minded and steer a middle course between the two above extremes.*** This group, called the "New Lights," was much larger than that of the opponents of awakening. They saw in awakening much to be thankful for, and felt that excesses were not a necessary aspect of a work of God.

Edwards became the leader of this moderate group. Throughout New England there were many other pastors also who recognized that awakening was the logical answer to their preaching against the current spiritual slump.

The Great Awakener

The colonies' craving for news of awakenings was not confined to the happenings at Northampton. The events taking place in the Middle Colonies were becoming known in New England also.

Even more publicity was being given to the activities the English "Methodist" evangelist George Whitefield in England and the Southern Colonies. In Boston, the press advertised Whitefield's works and reported his movements in anticipation of his coming visit to New England. A book about Whitefield published in Boston included a preface invoking the blessing of God upon Whitefield to the end that "his purposed coming to us may be with as full a Blessing the Gospel of Christ as other places have experienc'd, only more so, by God's Grace."

Jonathan Edwards had plowed the ground by favorably preparing New England with his ***Faithful Narrative***, but it was the powerful preaching of George Whitefield that brought the Great Awakening springing to life.

Whitefield preached from Maine to Connecticut during the period 14 September to 29 October 1740. As the historian Edwin Gaustad wrote, he "came, bristling, crackling, and thundering" to an area "electrified with expectancy." He preached first in Newport, Rhode Island, and then left for Boston, where the ***News-Letter*** reported:

Last Thursday Evening the Rev'd Mr. Whitefield arrived from Rhode Island, being met on the Road and conducted to Town by several Gentlemen. The next Day in the Forenoon he attended Prayers in the King's Chappel, and in the Afternoon he preach'd to a vast Congregation in the Rev'd Dr. Colman's Meeting-House. The next Day he preach'd in the Forenoon at the South Church to a Crowded Audience, and in the Afternoon to about 5000 People on the Common: and Lord's Day in the afternoon having preach'd to a great Number of People at the Old Brick Church, the House not being large enough to hold those that crowded to hear him, when the Exercise was over, He went and preached in the Field, to at least 8000 Persons....

Both Minister & People Wept

For over a month Whitefield preached along the New England coast, through Massachusetts, New Hampshire, as far north as York, Maine. On Sunday evening, 12 October 1740, his farewell sermon in Boston was heard by an estimated 20,000 persons! Turning westward, he preached across central Massachusetts and on Friday, 17 October 1740, he arrived in Northampton. Here he met Edwards, and preached four times in his church.

Edwards and his family impressed Whitefield, as he recorded in his personal *Journal*:

Friday, October 17 ... Mr. Edwards is a solid, excellent Christian, but, at present, weak in body. I think I have not seen his fellow in all New England. When I came into his pulpit ... to remind them of their former experiences, and how zealous and lively they were at that time, both minister and people wept much.

Sunday, October 19. Felt great satisfaction in being at the house of Mr. Edwards. A sweeter couple I have not yet seen. Their children were not dressed in silks and satins, but plain, as become the children of those who, in all things, ought to be examples of Christian simplicity. Mrs. Edwards is adorned with a meek and quiet spirit; she talked solidly of the things of God, and seemed to be such a help meet for her husband, that she caused me to renew those prayers, which, for some months, I have put up to God, that He would be pleased to send me a daughter of Abraham to be my wife.

Leaving Northampton and New England on his way south, Whitefield met Gilbert Tennent on Staten Island, New York, and urged him to make a preaching tour of New England similar to the one he had just completed, "to blow up the divine fire lately kindled there." Tennent arrived in Boston in December 1740, and proved as popular to many as Whitefield had been. The Awakening continued to blossom.

Judgment & Mercy

Back on the frontier at Northampton, Edwards, in response to invitations, was traveling outside his parish to bring the New Light message. At Enfield, Connecticut he preached his famous sermon *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God* on 8 July 1741.

Edwards has often been portrayed as a hell-fire and brimstone preacher because of this sermon. Unfortunately, most people only think of this one sermon when they think of Edwards. But, as the historian Sydney Ahlstrom pointed out, Edwards, who wrote over 1,000 sermons, wrote less than a dozen of this type.

Rather than gleefully picturing the doom of sinners, as English teachers often have portrayed him, Edwards would shudder to think that any of his hearers might not heed his warnings about eternal damnation:

O Sinner! Consider the danger you are in! 'Tis a great Furnace of Wrath, a wide and bottomless Pit, full of the Fire of Wrath ... !

Some revival preachers showed little tolerance for human frailty; they believed that if audiences remained calm under fiery preaching, it indicated a lack of concern. They thought emotional outbursts indicated a supernatural moving within souls.

Edwards could not accept this: "Great effects on the body certainly are no sure evidences...." His preaching, he determined, was to appeal to the mind, and not to encourage outbursts of emotion. He was by all accounts never a spellbinding speaker, and he did not wish to be. All of his sermons were delivered in the same calm fashion—but with penetrating force.

When the congregation at Enfield could not control themselves as they listened to ***Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God***, and Edwards could not be heard for the commotion, he stopped and requested that they be quiet to hear the rest of the sermon, and refrain from weeping and crying out!

A leading opponent of the First Great Awakening, Rev. Charles Chauncy of Boston. When George Whitefield returned to Boston for a second time, he and Chauncy met by chance on the street. Chauncy said, "I'm sorry to see you here again, Mr. Whitefield." Whitefield returned the compliment saying, "And so is the Devil."

Advice & Warnings

The Great Awakening was then at its zenith, and Edwards at the peak of his fame. In 1741 he received an invitation to speak at Yale College, and some there wondered if he would scorch them with a sermon similar to the one he had preached at Enfield. But Edwards went to Yale to make converts of a different type: he wanted to turn his hearers away from the danger of indifference toward the Awakening.

In his address on ***The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God***, his aim was to show that the Awakening was from God. He argued that similar things were happening in many places, though various evangelists with different methods were involved. He attacked those who opposed the revival: "Let us all be hence warned, by no means to oppose or do any Thing, in the least to clog or hinder that Work that has lately been carried on in this Land, but on the contrary, to do our utmost to promote it."

Silence was "a secret Kind of Opposition, that really tends to hinder the Work," he said: "Such silent Ministers stand in the Way of the Work of God; as Christ said, 'He that is not with us is against us.' "

He warned that the Awakening's opponents would increase, for Satan's forces always stand ready to undermine God's work. Those in favor of the revival must "give diligent Heed to themselves to avoid all Errors and Misconduct, and whatsoever may darken and obscure the Work, and give Occasion to those that stand ready to reproach it."

And he was right, for there were some who went too far, and by their fanatical behavior invited the criticism from enemies of the awakening. He was aware of these problems, but insisted that it was a mistake to judge and condemn the Awakening because of some unfortunate side-effects, without "distinguishing the Good from the Bad."

Both Christians and non-Christians made the mistake of expecting too much from those who were awakened: "When any profess to have received Light ... from Heaven ... many are ready to expect that now they [should] appear like Angels.... "

The Threshold of the Millennium

Edwards threw an entirely different light upon the revival than its critics. He thought that, despite the fact that the Puritan Fathers' dream of a nation ruled by God and his Law had not yet come true, Jehovah might now be using the Awakening as the last ingathering of the elect before the end time.

It is not unlikely that this Work of God's Spirit, so extraordinary and wonderful, is the Dawning, or at least a Prelude of that glorious Work of God, so often foretold in Scripture, which, in the Progress and Issue of it, shall renew the World of Mankind ... And there are many things that make it probable that this Work will begin in America.

Edwards's enthusiasm for the Awakening was fired by his vision of hope for the establishment of God's

kingdom on earth. He believed that the Great Awakening could be the doorway to the Messianic Kingdom, the Millennial period foretold in Isaiah and Revelation 20, during which the redeemed of God "Lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years." It is not surprising that he felt this way, for all over New England a remarkable transformation was taking place.

The Middle Colonies

The First Great Awakening in the Middle Colonies—in New Jersey, Pennsylvania, New York, Delaware, and Maryland—grew from the seeds planted by Theodore Frelinghuysen, and from the work of an Irish immigrant minister in Pennsylvania, whose simple desire was to provide a local school for the training of pastors. These little fires were fanned into great flames by the work of the Great Awakening's traveling lightning rod, George Whitefield. Whitefield, you will recall, was the fireball who set things ablaze in New England also.

School of the Prophets

In the early 18th Century many areas of America were without a pastor. In the Middle Colonies, few men could be found to come and serve, and the few who did respond sometimes proved unfit for the harsh and demanding conditions of what was then the frontier. Then there was the problem of training men for the ministry; the closest schools were in Connecticut or Virginia. Something had to be done.

To solve this problem, the Rev. William Tennent of Neshaminy, Pennsylvania, an exceptional scholar who had been trained in Edinburgh, Scotland, decided that he would train young men for the ministry himself. Tennent had accepted a call from some small congregations in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, in 1727. A few years later he built a log building on his farm property for use as a school. In time this school came to be mockingly called the "Log College" by those who opposed Tennent and his pupils.

He came to serve the Scotch-Irish immigrants who were beginning to settle in the farming areas north and west of Philadelphia. Tennent's wife was Catherine Kennedy of County Down, Ireland, the daughter of a well-known Presbyterian pastor. They had five children. After arriving in America William Tennent left the Church of Ireland, and was accepted into the Presbyterian Church.

By 1734, four young men who had been William Tennent's pupils had been ordained as Presbyterian ministers; three of them, Gilbert, John, and William, Jr., were Rev. Tennent's sons. Gilbert Tennent, the eldest son, went on to attend Yale College. After his ordination in 1726, he was called to serve a congregation in New Brunswick, New Jersey—the same area where Theodore J. Frelinghuysen was minister to the Dutch population.

Gilbert Tennent became an avid student of the methods and preaching of Frelinghuysen, and discovered that though the two were from different backgrounds and denominations, they were quite compatible in their beliefs. Frelinghuysen taught Gilbert Tennent much about evangelism, and about the pastoral care of a congregation.

The New Lights

During these years a group was gathering around the Tennents that others soon referred to as "New Lights." In time Gilbert Tennent emerged as the natural leader of this group. He devoted his energies to the furthering of an evangelistic ministry among the Presbyterians, while his father continued to add numbers to the New Light forces through his college in the country. Before William Tennent Sr.'s work was done he had trained over twenty men for the ministry—a considerable force in those days.

The aggressive evangelistic preaching, and the personal pastoral approach of the New Light

ministers made them very popular—more popular than most of the Old Light preachers, whose sermons were usually dry and tedious moral lectures. This soon became a source of irritation between the Old and New Lights. Because of the growing animosity, at a meeting of clergy in 1738, the Old Lights tried to restrict men trained by William Tennent, Sr. in his Log College from entering the ministry.

An Episcopal Lightning Rod

While these Old and New Lights were fighting among themselves, the evangelist George Whitefield arrived in the Middle Colonies, coming ashore at Lewes, Delaware, on 30 October 1739. Whitefield claimed that he had stopped only to pick up supplies for an orphanage he planned to build in Georgia.

Arriving in Philadelphia, he was invited to preach in a Church of England pulpit, and he immediately agreed. Surely he had not planned on an evangelistic tour through the Middle Colonies, and at this time he probably knew little of the awakenings in New Jersey and New England.

Soon William Tennent Sr. appeared, probably to ask Whitefield to assist in the revival begun by the Log College men. For them, his coming seemed like a great opportunity. Nothing imaginable could possibly have created the great public interest that George Whitefield did. In Philadelphia his dramatic preaching was a sensation, even capturing the amazement of Benjamin Franklin, who became his life-long friend and admirer.

Whitefield caused such a stir that soon the fighting among the Old and New Light groups took a back seat, and diverse groups such as Moravians, Quakers, Anglicans, Presbyterians, Baptists, and Congregationalists were benefiting from the spiritual renewal, and were setting aside differences and cooperating.

Whitefield's success in Philadelphia was overwhelming. William Tennent Sr. wanted to see a continuation of this awakening to great multitudes, without opposition from local clergy, who might not like an outsider such as Whitefield coming into their areas. (In those days, clergymen did not venture into other ministers' parishes without invitations.) On November 12 Whitefield left Philadelphia for New Jersey, preaching at Burlington and then at Gilbert Tennent's church in New Brunswick, before reaching New York on November 14. When the Anglican official denied him a church to speak in, a Presbyterian pastor invited him to preach in his pulpit. He also preached outdoors to large crowds. Gilbert Tennent, who had accompanied him to New York, also took part in the preaching. Whitefield was impressed with Tennent:

[I] never heard such [a] searching sermon. He convinced me more and more that we can preach the Gospel of Christ no further than we have experienced the power of it in our own hearts.... Hypocrites must either soon be converted or enraged at his preaching. He is a son of thunder, and does not fear the faces of men.

After leaving New York, they traveled to Elizabethtown, New Jersey, where Whitefield preached from the pulpit of Rev. Jonathan Dickinson's church "to upwards of seven hundred people...." Leaving there, Gilbert Tennent took Whitefield on a tour of the "Presbyterian awakening" in New Jersey and Pennsylvania, where Whitefield met Theodore Frelinghuysen.

Whitefield was much taken with all that he saw, and with the pastors who had begun the work some years back. "They are now looked upon as enthusiasts and madmen, and treated as such by those who know not God, and are ignorant of the hidden life of Jesus Christ in their hearts." Gilbert also took Whitefield to his father's rustic Log College, and the English evangelist, a graduate of Oxford University, was impressed. Gilbert Tennent had won the mightiest preacher in Christendom to his cause, and this preacher recognized that these were not ordinary men either, and that he might learn from them.

Whitefield returned to Philadelphia and, after preaching there and at Germantown, at last returned to his

original intention to visit his orphanage in Georgia. His month-long visit in the Middle Colonies had spurred the revivalists there to greater efforts, fanned the awakening in New Jersey, and started one in the Philadelphia area. It also had greatly encouraged him in his calling as an evangelist.

Whitefield spent the summer of 1740 in Georgia, and then sailed to Newport, Rhode Island, arriving in September. After a tour of New England he returned to New Jersey. Gilbert Tennent had spent the late summer and early autumn on a two months' journey through Maryland, Delaware, and southern New Jersey, and had met with great success there in extending the awakening.

Tennent's Church, Tennent, New Jersey. William Tennent, Jr. became the pastor of this church in 1733. George Whitefield preached here in 1740. David Brainerd, a colonial missionary to the Indians, served Communion to Indian converts at this church in 1746.

An Awakened Interest in Good Education

As the Awakening was passing, the energies of the New Light clergy could be directed toward following up on the numbers of the "awakened" who were adding new power to the churches. To care for the new members and the territories opening to them, the New Lights desperately needed more churches and pastors to staff them.

In 1744 the Log College closed its doors, and the need for a college for training ministers in the Middle Colonies was again pressing. With the death of William Tennent, Sr. in 1746, one of the great influences in colonial education passed from the scene.

The two New England colleges, Harvard and Yale, were now controlled by men who had turned against the Awakening. On 22 October 1746, Rev. Jonathan Dickinson was appointed president of a new college to meet temporarily in his Elizabethtown, New Jersey, parsonage. When Dickinson died after only five months, Rev. Aaron Burr became president of the young College of New Jersey (eventually to become Princeton University). President Burr, father of the famous politician by the same name, died of the "nervous fever" in 1757 and was succeeded by his father-in-law, Rev. Jonathan Edwards, of New England fame. Edwards held the post for only a few months: he died as a result of a smallpox vaccination on 22 March 1758. The Awakening had lost a great spokesman, but his influence would live on, through his writings, and his descendants.

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Jonathan Edwards

Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758) was America's greatest theologian. He was born in East Windsor, CT. His father, Timothy Edwards, as a pastor, and his mother, Esther, was the daughter of Rev. Solomon Stoddard. Jonathan was an only son with ten sisters.

He was a very intelligent child, and entered Yale College just before his 13th birthday. After his education he became the minister of the Church in Northampton, MA. A few years later, in 1734, an awakening occurred in his congregation. In 1740 the Great Awakening swept across New England, and as many as 50,000 people were awakened to Christ and joined churches.

Edwards later served as a missionary to Indians at Stockbridge, MA. He wrote around 1,000 sermons, as well as various important works on the Bible and theology, which are still studied today.

Jonathan and his wife Sarah had eleven children. Their happy home-life was a model to all who visited. Edwards died during a smallpox epidemic soon after moving to New Jersey to become president of the College of New Jersey, later renamed Princeton University.

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George Whitefield

An Anglican minister, George Whitefield (1714–1770) was converted through the friendship of the great hymn-writer Charles Wesley, and was also a life-long friend of Charles's brother John Wesley, the famous evangelist.

Whitefield was the first to be called a "Methodist" by students at Oxford University, who wanted to make fun of the small group that met for prayer and Bible study, went to church, and helped the poor. Whitefield grew up in Gloucester, England, and worked as a boy in his parents' inn and tavern. His extraordinary speaking ability was noticed at a young age; he would have liked to become an actor, but instead his voice would be used to call thousands to Christ in Britain and in colonial America.

Whitefield played a major role, along with the Wesleys, in the awakening that swept across Britain in the first half of the 1700s. His powerful preaching caused a great stir wherever he went. He was the first modern evangelist to travel and preach to large crowds outdoors in fields and town squares.

He is mostly remembered, however, for his part in the First Great Awakening in America, where his preaching had a tremendous impact. He often preached to thousands of people; and great crowds rode large distances on horseback to hear him. Benjamin Franklin, Whitefield's friend, once calculated that (in a day before loudspeakers) Whitefield could make his voice heard to 30,000 people! The building Franklin built for Whitefield to preach in at Philadelphia later became the University of Pennsylvania. Before George Washington, George Whitefield was the most popular figure in America. He died in Newburyport, Massachusetts, in 1770, and was buried there.

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In the Wake of the Great Awakening

The Awakening not only brought spiritual renewal to God's people, and new conversions, but salt and light to the society around.

New Members

The first major result of the Awakening was the strengthening of the churches of America. The Congregationalists of New England received the greatest benefit: according to Ezra Stiles, president of Yale College, during the 20 years following 1740 the establishment of " ... above 150 new churches has taken place.... " The Awakening brought the total number of Congregational churches to 530. Historians have estimated that from 25,000 to 50,000 people were added to the membership of New England churches as a result of the revival.

The population of New England in 1750 was approximately 340,000, so that (taking the conservative estimate of 25,000 converts as our number) more than seven percent of the entire population of the New England colonies would have come into the churches as a direct result of the Great Awakening.

In the Middle Colonies, the increase in the New Light Presbyterian churches was the greatest. From 1740 to 1760 the number of Presbyterian ministers in the American colonies increased from 45 to over 100. The churches had multiplied even faster, and in 1760 there were more than 40 churches in need of pastors in Pennsylvania and Delaware alone. Substantial gains were also made in the Southern colonies.

While the Baptists had shown some opposition to the Awakening, they shared dramatically in its fruitfulness. During the period 1740–1760 in New England, Baptist churches increased from 21 to 79. In the South, the foundation was laid for the enormous Baptist expansion there later.

New Ideas

Beyond church growth, the Awakening brought major advances and changes in the religious thought—the theological atmosphere—of colonial American Christianity. The historian Sydney Ahlstrom wrote:

In the long run the influence of Jonathan Edwards ... is the most enduring result of the New England Awakening.... A new and irrepressible expectancy entered the life of the churches. A national sense of intensified religious and moral resolution was born. Millennial hopes were kindled.... Edwards' powerful witness and his development of a distinct school of theology would help to nurture these results....

New Visions

Another result of the Awakening was the boost given to missionary and educational endeavors. An increased concern for missions was manifested wherever evangelical awakening was found. In New England and elsewhere this concern showed itself in efforts to reach the American Indians. At Stonington, Connecticut, and at Westerly, Rhode Island, as missionaries worked among the tribes there were extensive awakenings that resulted in the conversions of many Indians.

Among the early converts of the Awakening at Norwich, Connecticut, was Samson Occum, a 17-year-old Mohegan Indian. The Reverend Eleazer Wheelock of Lebanon, Connecticut, a strong promoter of the

Awakening, took Occum into his home for the purpose of educating the obviously talented young man. Occum was ordained as a minister in 1759.

Wheelock had been a pastor in Lebanon, Connecticut, when awakening broke out there under the influence of Jonathan Edwards. During the early 1740s, Wheelock devised a plan for educating Indians, and for training them as evangelists to their tribes. In 1754 he opened a school for this purpose, Moor's School, named after the man whose donation had made it possible. The school was moved to Hanover, New Hampshire in 1769 and renamed Dartmouth College. Dartmouth opened its doors to Indians and white settlers alike, and graduated over 40 New Light pastors.

As previously mentioned, Princeton University owes its origin to the Awakening, growing from the work of William Tennent, Sr. and his Log College. Several other early centers of education, such as Rutgers University, the University of Pennsylvania, and Brown University had their beginnings in the surge of energy from the Great Awakening also. The spiritual renewal greatly advanced the cause of education in America.

New Liberty and Unity

The Awakening also had a significant influence upon religious and political liberty. The expansion of certain denominations, such as the Presbyterians and the Baptists, paved the way for the toleration of differing viewpoints, and for a broader concept of liberty of conscience. Denominations with major differences existing side by side, and free to promote their ideas led to the introduction of the principles that guarantee religious liberty to all.

The work of Whitefield, in a remarkable way, touched every area of colonial life and brought contact between different groups. This made the Awakening the first inter-colonial movement, and the first ecumenical endeavor of the churches in America. Due to Whitefield's broad ministry, Christian groups that had not associated with, or had even avoided other groups were caught up in a spirit of cooperation and Christian brotherhood above and beyond denominational boundaries. Different churches worked together, and saw God's work as more important than party differences.

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Spiritual Awakenings in North America: Christian History Timeline

An Overview of 180 Years

Awakenings in North America

NEW ENGLAND

1679 Solomon Stoddard's "harvests" of 1679, 1683, and 1696 at Northampton, Massachusetts

1705 Taunton, MA

1712 & 1718 Solomon Stoddard's "harvests" at Northampton, MA

Early 1720s Windham, Connecticut

1729 Solomon Stoddard dies (born 1643)

1734 Jonathan Edwards in Northampton, MA

Mid 1740s Indian Awakenings under David Brainerd

1758 Jonathan Edwards dies (born 1703)

1763–1764 General Awakenings throughout New England

1767 Norfolk, CT

1770 George Whitefield dies (born 1714)

1776 Killingly, CT

1781 Lebanon, CT

1784 New Britain, CT

1790–1810 General Awakenings throughout New England

1792 Lyme & East Haddam, CT

1792–1793 Lee, MA

1795 Farmington New Hartford, & Milford, CT

1800 & 1805 Lee, MA

1800s-1815 Collegiate Awakenings Dartmouth, Bennington, etc.

1802, 1808, 1813, 1815 Awakenings at New Haven, CT (Yale)

1810 American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions founded

1817 Timothy Dwight dies (born 1752)

1844 Asahel Nettleton dies (born 1783)

1857 Hamilton, Ontario, Canada

1858 Nathaniel Taylor dies (born 1786)

1863 Lyman Beecher dies (born 1775)

MIDDLE COLONIES

1720s–1730s Theodore Frelinghuysen Raritan, New Jersey

1725–1740 Johann Conrad Beissel and German Awakenings at Ephrata, Pennsylvania

1736–1740s New Jersey Awakening under the Tennents

1739 Whitefield first preaches in Philadelphia

1748 Theodore Frelinghuysen dies (Born, 1691)

1764 Gilbert Tennent dies (born 1703)

1790–1810s Methodist awakenings in North, South, & West

1816 Francis Asbury dies (born 1745)

1810–1840s The "Burned-over district" of upper New York State

1825–1827 Finney in Oneida Co. New York

Later 1820s–Mid 1830s Finney's Awakenings in Pennsylvania, Delaware, Ohio, etc.

1830–1831 Finney's great Rochester Revival

1831–Mid 1840s General Northeast Revivals under Finney & others

1857–1859 Major New England & Northeastern Cities

Sept 1857 Lamphier's prayer meeting in New York City

1861–1864 Awakenings in the Union Army

1875 Charles Finney dies (born 1792)

SOUTH & WEST

1750s–1770s General Awakenings in the South

1760s Devereux Jarratt's Virginia Revivals

1776 Jarratt's largest awakening

1785–1790 Methodist & Baptist Awakenings in Virginia

1787 Hampton Sydney College, Virginia

1790–1810s Methodist awakenings in North, South, & West

Late 1790s to Early 1820s Southern & Western camp meeting revivals

1801 Cane Ridge, Kentucky revival under Barton W Stone

1857–1859 Southward to Texas; Westward along Ohio Valley

1861–1865 Awakenings in the Confederate Army

1872 Peter Cartwright dies (born 1785)

American Events

1702–1713 Queen Anne's War

1755–1763 The French & Indian War

1770 Boston Massacre

1773 Boston Tea party

1775–1783 The Revolutionary War

1788 US Constitution Ratified

1790 Benjamin Franklin dies

1799 George Washington dies

1801–mid teens Tripolitan War with the Barbary Pirates

1812–1814 The War of 1812 with England

1823 The Monroe Doctrine

1833–1837 Financial Panic

1843 *Millerite revival* Adventists predict Second Coming of Christ in 1843–1844

1846–1848 The Mexican-American War

1861–1865 The Civil War

1865 Lincoln assassinated

World Events

1727 Moravian Awakening in Germany

1736 Whitefield begins awakenings in England

1738–1790s Wesleyan Awakenings in the British Isles

1790–1830 English Evangelical Awakening

1792 English Baptist Missionary society founded

1792–1914 *The Worldwide Missionary Movement* “The Great Century of Christian Advance.”

1813 India opened to missions

1841–1873 David Livingston’s mission to Central Africa

1858 China opened to missions

1859 Awakening in Ulster, Ireland

1872 Peter Cartwright dies (born 1785)

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Apostles on Horseback

Francis Asbury & the Methodist Circuit Riders—Covering America with Spiritual Awakening

When John Wesley made his famous statement "the world is my parish," he surely was including the New World. However, America turned out to be a far more fruitful Methodist mission field than he ever anticipated.

In 1771 the annual Methodist Conference met in Bristol, England. During the meetings, John Wesley arose and solemnly remarked, "Our brethren in America call aloud for help. Who are willing to go over and help them?" Among those who responded was a young man who would contribute more to the success and spread of Methodism in America than any other person: Francis Asbury.

Asbury was born in Birmingham in 1745. He was able to obtain only a few years of formal education. As a youth he was converted to Christ, and took every opportunity to hear the traveling Methodist preachers. At the age of 22 he was confirmed as a lay preacher himself.

When he answered the call for preachers to go to America, some looked on his decision as a reckless enterprise, but he was determined to go, and he never returned to England. Not long after he recorded in his diary:

October 27. This day we landed in Philadelphia... When I came near the American shore, my very heart melted within me, to think from whence I came, where I was going, and what I was going about. But I felt my mind open to the people, and my tongue loosed to speak. I feel that God is here....

In October 1772 Asbury was placed in charge of the Methodist congregations and preachers of America. He soon realized that the Methodist practice of using traveling preachers would be even more practical in America than in England. American congregations were small and separated by large distances, and establishing settled pastors was almost impossible. The plan of using "circuit riders," Asbury believed, would be most useful in the rural areas of the new country.

War and Change

Wesley became unpopular in the colonies when he openly disagreed with the call for independence. He never again regained control over American Methodism. When the Revolution broke out, with the exception of Asbury, the Methodist leadership in the Colonies returned to England. This departure of the English preachers, it was commonly thought, was a disaster for the Methodists. During the war years, as a Methodist chapel was being erected in Delaware, one onlooker remarked: "It's no use putting up so large a dwelling for Methodists, for after the war a corncrib will hold them all."

However, the departure of the English was a good thing for the movement, because it brought to the front native American leaders. It also was a fortunate stroke for Asbury, who had supported the colonists in their cause.

Frontier Christianity

In the later 1700s, life was extremely difficult and dangerous on rural farms and on the Western

frontier areas. There were no luxuries and few comforts, and few opportunities for social and cultural contacts. Indians and outlaws presented a real threat. Sometimes a month or two passed before a settler would see anyone except the members of his immediate family. The arrival of a visitor was an event of great importance, for it would bring news of the outside world.

A traveling preacher was a welcome break in the depressing routine, and might draw crowds from miles around. He would perform marriages, baptize infants, serve Communion, and his preaching would allow many to feel that God had not forgotten them.

In the decade before the Revolution, widespread indifference toward religion was growing throughout the colonies. On the frontier, it was feared, lack of interest in religion would develop into open atheism. When people moved into new, unchurched areas with no minister, they might revert to "barbarism" and thus destroy the moral order of society. This fear prevailed for decades in the 1800s, and brought urgent calls to evangelize the settlers. Under Asbury's direction, a system of traveling preachers became the exact answer to this problem.

Preaching the Circuit

The first reason for the incredibly rapid spread and growth of Methodism in America was the **circuit system**, which Wesley had developed in England.

Asbury began to direct his traveling preachers as a general moves his troops. He built up a small army of truly courageous men, largely unlearned, but well fitted for their job. Their enthusiasm and disregard of hardship became famous.

The second major factor accounting for the wide acceptance of Methodism was its **theology**. On the frontier what was preached was straight and simple, and it placed a big responsibility on the listeners to respond to the message immediately. This message was usually coupled with strict rules concerning moral issues, including prohibitions against slaveholding and liquor.

The third major factor in the spread of Methodism was the **camp meeting**, which Asbury greatly favored and promoted. Camp meetings were gatherings of people in the wilds to hear evangelistic preaching. Large crowds would travel distances and set up tents for housing. More than 20,000 people could be effectively reached at once, and they would attend eagerly. In addition, camp meetings required few preparations, as the preachers simply sent out the notice that one would be held at the stated time and place. Asbury wrote of them, "I pray to God that there may be a score of camp-meetings a week, and wonderful seasons of the Lord in all directions.... I rejoice to think there will be perhaps four or five hundred camp meetings this year." In Tennessee in October 1800 he gave a vivid description of such a meeting:

... The ministers of God, Methodists and Presbyterians, united their labors and mingled with the childlike simplicity of primitive times. Fires blazing here and there dispelled the darkness and the shouts of the redeemed captives, and the cries of precious souls struggling into life, broke the silence of midnight....

The stern demands Asbury placed upon himself and his preachers produced results. The decade of the 1780s showed spectacular gains: in 1780 there had been 42 preachers and 8,504 members; by 1790 there were 227 preachers, and 45,949 white and 11,862 black members. In 1820, by which time Asbury had died, there were 904 preachers, and 256,881 members.

Awakenings that Followed

The result of this system for moving quickly into new territories and meeting the needs of the people was that awakenings began in numerous areas of the country, particularly in the South, where Methodists early found a most inviting field.

Devereux Jarratt, an Anglican minister in Virginia who cooperated with the Methodists, oversaw awakenings in 1763 and 1776. Eventually he was traveling on a preaching circuit over 500 miles long! He carried on this remarkable ministry almost alone, against the opposition of the entire Anglican clergy. Another awakening began in Virginia in 1787, in a region known for its number of devout Methodists.

Often the Southern revivals were attended with a large amount of emotion, with weeping, shouting, swoonings, fits, even a type of wild behavior called "the jerks." Emotional releases of such violent types were common. While it has often been said that the preachers encouraged this behavior to heighten the pressures upon the unconverted, historians have not all agreed. While the preachers did not object to hearty shouts during their preaching, they would not as a rule encourage more enthusiastic behavior. Asbury, like Wesley, firmly held that everything should be done decently and in order, and this he demanded of his circuit riders.

Much of the drive for the enormous Methodist growth came from Asbury, who rose every morning at four o'clock, taught himself Latin, Greek, and Hebrew, and made it his rule to read 100 pages of good literature **daily**. His travels over rough, trackless, and dangerous wilderness, are staggering, especially in view of his illnesses. Beginning in 1798, it was his custom to make a complete circuit of vast distances, reaching from Georgia to Maine, and inland to Indiana.

Asbury never expected sacrifices of others that he wouldn't make himself. He traveled constantly throughout his lifetime. He never married, and had no home. All that he owned—pathetically little—was in the two saddlebags on his horse.

It is estimated that in Asbury's lifetime he preached well over 16,000 sermons, ordained more than 4,000 preachers, traveled on horseback or (when he was too old for that) in carriages 270,000 miles, and wore out six faithful horses! Before he died in 1816 he also had become one of the best-known figures in all America.

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CHRISTIAN HISTORY

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The Return of the Spirit: The Second Great Awakening

In the West

By the year 1800, nearly a million people had made their way west. They settled in the area west of the Blue Ridge in Virginia, in Kentucky, Tennessee, the Northwest, and in the Indian Territory. In 1803, the crowning achievement of Jefferson's first administration came: the Louisiana Purchase. This doubled the area of the United States and gave an enormous new impulse to western migration.

What appeared to be an opportunity for national expansion, however, seemed dark for the future of the Christian faith. How, believers wondered, could the Church possibly keep ahead of the vast movement to the new areas? An Episcopal preacher described the Carolinas:

**How many thousands ... never saw, much less read, or ever heard a Chapter of the Bible!
How many Ten thousands who never were baptized or heard a Sermon! And thrice Ten thousand, who never heard of the Name of Christ, save in Curses ... ! Lamentable!
Lamentable is the situation of these people.**

With the later arrival of great numbers, the situation did not improve. In every southern state, religious leaders voiced their fears and distress. A French nobleman who made a tour of the states wrote that "religion is one of the subjects which occupies the least of the attention of the American people...."

Outpourings of the Spirit

Then suddenly, about the year 1799, the atmosphere changed dramatically. In that year a Presbyterian pastoral letter stated that although there was still much immorality and vice,

We have heard from different parts the glad tidings of the outpourings of the Spirit, and of times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord.... From the east, from the west, and from the south, have these joyful tidings reached our ears.

They expressed still greater joy in 1801:

Revivals, of a more or less general nature, have taken place in many parts, and multitudes have been added to the church.... From the west, the Assembly have received intelligence of the most interesting nature. On the borders of Kentucky and Tennessee, the influences of the Spirit of God seem to have been manifested in a very extraordinary manner.

These were the beginnings of the Second Great Awakening. God had not abandoned his people. The heritage of awakening, last seen in the Great Awakening of the 1740s, was surfacing again. However, this awakening would be much longer in duration than the first, lasting from approximately 1795 through 1835. It would come in two phases, and its effect on the nation would be titanic.

The Great Camp Meetings

In the West, the Second Great Awakening began with James McGready (1762?–1817). McGready was a

stirring preacher and under his ministry an extensive awakening spread over north-central North Carolina after 1791. Perhaps equally important was his influence upon young men such as Barton W. Stone and William McGee.

In 1796 McGready became pastor of three small churches at Muddy River, Red River, and Gasper River in Logan County, Kentucky. This was in the southwestern part of the state, and, as the Methodist preacher Peter Cartwright described, it

was called Rogues' Harbor. Here many refugees from almost all parts of the Union fled to escape justice or punishment.... It was a desperate state of society. Murderers, horse-thieves, highway robbers, and counterfeiters fled there, until they combined and actually formed a majority.

The area was primitive in the extreme, and the pioneers lived hard lives, full of danger, loneliness, and privation. But McGready was a fearless preacher, and he informed his hearers that they had not left the eternal God behind them; He was as much there on the frontier as he was anywhere. McGready spoke magnificently of heaven and its glories, thundered about hell and its torments, and questioned his hearers about their salvation. His message was so powerful that by 1798 many were "struck with an awful sense of their lost estate."

The first real manifestations of God's power came, however, in June 1800. Four to five-hundred members of McGready's three congregations, plus five ministers, had gathered at Red River for a "camp meeting" lasting several days. On the final day "a mighty effusion of [God's] Spirit" came upon the people, "and the floor was soon covered with the slain; their screams for mercy pierced the heavens."

Convinced that God was moving, McGready and his colleagues planned another camp meeting to be held in late July 1800 at Gasper River. They had not anticipated what occurred. An enormous crowd—as many as 8,000—began arriving at the appointed date, many from distances as great as 100 miles. Tents were set up everywhere, wagons with provisions brought in, trees felled and their logs cut to be used as seats. Although the term camp meeting was not used until 1802, this was the first true camp meeting where a continuous outdoor service was combined with camping out.

After three tense days, the emotions of these backwoods people used to loneliness were at the boiling point. At a huge evening meeting lighted by flaming torches, a Presbyterian pastor named William McGee gave a throbbing message on a doubting Peter sinking beneath the waves. McGready recalled:

The power of God seemed to shake the whole assembly. Towards the close of the sermon, the cries of the distressed arose almost as loud as his voice. After the congregation was dismissed the solemnity increased, till the greater part of the multitude seemed engaged in the most solemn manner. No person seemed to wish to go home—hunger and sleep seemed to affect nobody—eternal things were the vast concern. Here awakening and converting work was to be found in every part of the multitude; and even some things strangely and wonderfully new to me.

The Gasper River camp meeting was the turning point of the Awakening in the West. Interest in spiritual things now became commonplace; concern for one's salvation was uppermost in that region where recently lawlessness had ruled. Other huge camp meetings were held in later months, and the area of revival soon spread into Tennessee.

Cane Ridge

Yet the full force of the movement was yet to be experienced, and it came about through the activity of Barton W. Stone (1772–1844), Presbyterian pastor of the Cane Ridge and Concord churches, northeast of Lexington, Kentucky. Stone traveled to Logan County to observe McGready's work, and returned home to plan a similar meeting for August 1801 at Cane Ridge.

Being better publicized than the meetings in Logan County, Cane Ridge attracted an amazing multitude. The numbers arriving, coming from as far as Ohio and Tennessee, were estimated between 10,000 and 25,000. (Lexington, then the largest town in Kentucky, had fewer than 1,800 citizens!) Stone looked on as "the roads were crowded with wagons, carriages, horses, and footmen moving to the solemn camp."

While Stone and his colleagues had not expected these numbers, preparations had been made so that the crowds could be divided into separate congregations. Invitations had been sent by the Presbyterians to Methodist and Baptist preachers from far and near, and Stone was delighted that "all appeared cordially united in it. They were of one mind and soul: the salvation of sinners was the one object. We all engaged in singing the same songs, all united in prayer, all preached the same things."

The Rev. Moses Hoge described the Cane Ridge camp meeting, in an account that could stand for similar meetings of that period:

The careless fall down, cry out, tremble, and not infrequently are affected with convulsive twitchings....

Nothing that imagination can paint, can make a stronger impression upon the mind, than one of those scenes. Sinners dropping down on every hand, shrieking, groaning, crying for mercy, convulsed; professors praying, agonizing, fainting, falling down in distress, for sinners or in raptures of joy!....

As to the work in general there can be no question but it is of God. The subjects of it, for the most part are deeply wounded for their sins, and can give a clear and rational account of their conversion....

Emotional Awakenings

Cane Ridge became famous not only for its numbers, but also for its excesses of enthusiasm. Hysterical laughter, trances, and more bizarre forms of behavior were seen occasionally. This wildness was of course grossly exaggerated and often used to discredit the camp meetings by their enemies. Nonetheless, it could not be denied that audiences at frontier awakenings often became highly emotional.

Most clergymen opposed this, but often it was beyond their power to control, and in some ways it was inevitable. The roughness of frontier life, its absence of social controls, and the scarcity of social contacts for those living in isolated cabins, made such people very susceptible to uncontrolled displays when they found themselves in the company of large numbers. And under the intensity of much powerful preaching within just a few days, emotions boiled over.

However, though camp meetings were sometimes the scenes of excesses, they were much more the scenes of great spiritual awakening. The rough, violent, irreligious frontier, which many felt threatened to undo the morals of the new nation, was being tamed by the Lamb of God.

In the East

Although many prayed for new awakenings in the second half of the 1700s, their prayers seemed to go unanswered. Historian Sydney Ahlstrom has written, "God seemed almost to have withdrawn his blessing from New England, and above all from those who most cherished 'true' doctrine." Instead came the discouraging rise of groups that denied basic teachings of Christianity, such as Universalists, Unitarians,

and Deists. These "infidels" caused a widespread drift from the settled religious customs and practices in New England and throughout the colonies after 1750.

Timothy Dwight, the grandson of Jonathan Edwards, described the period before and during the American Revolution:

The profanation of the Sabbath ... profaneness of language, drunkenness, gambling, and lewdness, were exceedingly increased; and, what is less commonly remarked, but is not less mischievous, than any of them, a light, vain method of thinking, concerning sacred things, a cold, contemptuous indifference toward every moral and religious subject.

The clergy's complaints were not exaggerations, and Dwight's observation that war is fatal to morals was accurate. Along with a political and economic depression, the religious situation in the two decades following the war has been termed "the period of the lowest ebb-tide of vitality in the history of American Christianity." Some towns in New England saw only four or five new members join the church in a year.

Gloom, Doom, & Deism

Eastern clergymen were not concerned only with the distressing state of things at home. The romance of the West beckoned, and multitudes of seekers answered the call, sorely reducing the population of many Eastern towns. As new states sprang up to join the Union, churchmen were faced with the frightening prospect that the raw wilderness was an ungodly force, threatening to bring a moral breakdown to the entire nation.

In 1789, not long after the events surrounding the American Revolution, the new nation turned its thoughts to another revolution, in France. At first it was generally approved in America, but soon the truth of the widespread murder and lawlessness in France became known. Dwight and many other clergymen were not slow in making the connection between the French adoption of *Deism* and the atrocities of the French Revolution.

Deism taught that God was not involved in the world and that human reason, not God's Word, was the ultimate authority and judge of right and wrong. The anger of the clergy at this foreign brand of infidelity turned to fury when anti-Christian writings were first circulated in America. In 1784 Ethan Allen, the Revolutionary War hero who captured Fort Ticonderoga, published *Reason the Only Oracle of Man*. In 1794 Thomas Paine, who had helped America in the cause of freedom, wrote *The Age of Reason*, a book that ridiculed the Old and New Testaments as unworthy of a good God. "... It would be more consistent that we called it the word of a demon than the word of God," he blasted. A large edition was published in France and sent to America to be sold for a few pennies a copy, or given away.

While the other Deists aroused Christian anger, it was Thomas Jefferson who came to represent Deist views to the minds of many. Religion for him was simply a moral code, not a divine revelation. Jefferson boldly questioned the truth of various statements in the Bible. His views, which he expressed frequently in the years leading to his election as president in 1800, convinced many ministers that he deserved their strong criticisms. He in turn became an opponent of the clergy.

For believers in supernatural Christianity, it was a sad, dark day. The spirit of infidelity seemed to be rising. Jehovah was surely withholding his showers of blessing from this disobedient, backslidden nation.

Rays of Hope

Despite these fears of God's desertion of the new nation, awakenings had been underway for some time in areas of New England and the South.

In Virginia, starting at Hampden-Sydney College, an awakening started that spread through several Virginia counties from 1787 to 1789. Hearing of these Virginia awakenings, New Englanders longed for a similar outpouring of divine grace, and seemed to be rewarded when a renewal broke out in Lee, Massachusetts, in 1792. The Rev. Alvan Hyde of Lee described the awakening:

... A marvellous work was begun, and it bore the most decisive marks of being God's work. So great was the excitement, though not yet known abroad, that into whatever section of the town I now went, the people in that immediate neighborhood, would leave their worldly employments, at any hour of the day, and soon fill a large room.... All our religious meetings were very much thronged, and yet were never noisy or irregular.... They were characterized with a stillness and solemnity, which, I believe, have rarely been witnessed.... To the praise of sovereign grace, I may add, that the work continued, with great regularity and little abatement, nearly eighteen months.

In addition to the Lee revival, there had been a number of minor awakenings throughout Connecticut for some years. "Precious harvests" were being gathered. The answer to the prayers of the faithful seemed to arrive in new "outpourings of the Holy Spirit."

Timothy Dwight & Yale

Those seeking awakening in New England soon found their leader in Timothy Dwight(1752–1817). Dwight had decided to follow in the footsteps of his grandfather Jonathan Edwards, and entered the ministry in 1777. He was a chaplain in the Revolution. Some years after the war, in 1795, he was elected president of Yale College.

Before Dwight arrived at Yale, the students were undisciplined and rebellious, and had little use for the Christian Faith. Even some of the faculty could not claim to be Christian. Soon after Dwight became president, battle lines were drawn. There were two alternatives, Christianity or infidelity, and there was no middle ground. After a while the students learned to admire and appreciate Dwight's abilities, his openness in discussing sensitive subjects, and his concern for their souls. A change began to take place.

Early in the spring of 1802 two students were overwhelmed with conviction of their sins. In a short period they came to faith in Christ and assurance of forgiveness. After making a public profession of their faith, they joined the college church. This made a large impact on the other students. In the ten days before vacation, fifty young men declared themselves to be eager to find salvation. Wherever the students gathered, in their rooms, at meals, and around New Haven, the great subject of conversation was eternal salvation.

Dwight disapproved of "enthusiasm," or displays of emotion such as had been seen during the Great Awakening; orderliness and lack of fanaticism typified all that was done. Many feared that when the students left for spring vacation, the revival might cease. Instead the reverse occurred. The students carried home with them news of Yale's turnaround, and the impulse spread. When they returned after the summer, more offered their lives to God. Dwight witnessed the conversions of 80 out of the total enrollment of 160 students.

A new awakening came in April 1808 which was almost as powerful as that of 1802, and succeeding revivals came to the students in 1813 and 1815. These awakenings marked only the beginning of a movement which swept Connecticut.

The Spirit of Change

Timothy Dwight was not only the central figure in the college revivals that radiated from Yale to other New England schools, but through his writings and his leadership, he established the desire for awakenings as a permanent feature of American Protestantism from 1800 until the beginning of the Civil War.

The second great change brought about largely by Timothy Dwight came from his ideas and practices concerning how awakenings happen. He placed more emphasis on human choice than his Puritan forefathers had, and for that reason signals another major shift in American Christian thought and practice. The historian Sydney Mead expressed this well:

As for the revivals, Edwards' connection with the First Awakening was much different from Dwight's connection with the Second. Edwards preached sincerely and vividly of what he had experienced and apparently was genuinely surprised when the revival began. Dwight deliberately set out to start a revival.... To Edwards the revival was a by-product of his shared experience: to [Dwight] revivals were the calculated means to an end.

It is fascinating that Timothy Dwight, his grandfather Jonathan Edwards, and his great-great-grandfather Solomon Stoddard, each represents a major turning point in the history of awakenings in America.

Each of these men would have argued that awakenings were the work of the Holy Spirit, but there was the increasing feeling that **God invited men to cooperate with him** by praying and preaching for revival. The stage was now set for a major shift in the methods of conducting awakenings. Onto that stage stepped Charles G. Finney.

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Peter Cartwright

One of the greatest frontier preachers and Methodist circuit riders was Peter Cartwright (1785–1872). He grew up in the western wilderness, and became one of the most famous evangelists and planters of new churches in the West. As he traveled he usually conducted several worship services a day. He was known for his powerful, bold preaching (and his ability to deal with backwoods ruffians if the need arose).

Cartwright baptized almost 10,000 converts, and preached almost 15,000 sermons. He left the circuit in Kentucky and Tennessee in 1824 because of his distaste for slavery, and transferred to Illinois. There he was elected to the legislature twice. He lost in a run for Congress in 1846 to Abraham Lincoln.

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Charles Grandison Finney & the Second Phase of the Second Great Awakening

Charles Finney, and all of the new theology and practices associated with him, came charging upon the religious scene in the United States in late 1825. At that point the length of the Second Great Awakening was remarkable; for over a quarter-century it had blessed America, fostering the sending of missionaries abroad, the founding of schools and colleges, and the conversion of tens of thousands.

One of the foremost evangelists had been Asahel Nettleton, a quiet, scholarly Calvinist who insisted on reverence in his meetings. But it would be Finney who propelled the awakening onto center-stage in America, and gave it another fifteen years of life. The side-effects became more widespread than ever before: out of it came power for the antislavery crusade, women's rights, prison reform, temperance, and much more.

Finney was tall and handsome, and he had penetrating, hypnotic eyes which riveted his audiences. His eyes were "large and blue, at times mild as an April sky, and at others, cold and penetrating as polished steel," one observer stated. Along with that, he possessed a majestic voice, which could be immensely persuasive with crowds. In addition, he had studied to be an attorney, and he turned the legal logic he had developed, and his courtroom skills, to the use of the pulpit.

In Finney's day preaching was often very formal. As he plunged into evangelistic work in the back woods of upper New York State in 1824, he offended some who said he destroyed the dignity of the pulpit with his direct, personal style. But Finney's informal preaching had a rapid-fire impact on large congregations, and converts grew in number. Many warned him that being dramatic in the pulpit might turn away the educated. Just the opposite proved to be the case. Finney remarked, "They would say, 'You will not interest the educated part of your congregation.' But facts soon silenced them on this point.... Under my preaching, judges, and lawyers, and educated men were converted by scores ... Under their methods, such a thing seldom occurred."

By late 1825 he had left behind the rural areas, and began campaigns in the area of Utica, New York. When Finney opened evangelistic meetings in the town of Western, NY, in October 1825, he could not suspect that he was beginning seven years of the most intense evangelistic activity that the United States has seen. The results would be far reaching and crucial in modern evangelism to this day.

The revival Finney began in Western soon spread to nearby towns. When he moved to Rome, NY, 500 converts were soon made. Then he moved his work to the city of Utica; a Presbyterian pastor there said the services were made "solemn and sometimes terribly so by the presence of God which made sinners afraid and Christians humble and still." In Utica another 500 converts were made, and 1,000 added to the rolls of churches in the surrounding area.

As Finney's fame grew, some of his practices were condemned. Asahel Nettleton, particularly, charged that Finney introduced "New Measures" which upset the order of society and church life. These new methods included praying for persons by name, allowing women to pray and testify, encouraging people under conviction to come forward, mobilizing the entire community through groups of workers visiting homes, and displacing the routine services of the church with special services held

each evening, sometimes for periods of weeks.

Yet, for every critic who found fault, Finney had supporters who praised his aggressive evangelism. The New Measures were successful and valid new evangelistic techniques, his followers urged. Still, the methods were so new and striking that they were bound to stir controversy.

A concern was raised about the possibility of fanaticism and disorder in Finney's meetings. Rumors and exaggerations had, of course, been flying; according to these, Finney was a wild eyed ranting of the most dangerous type, who was bringing the Second Awakening into disgrace. Finney and his supporters made it clear that they were as firmly opposed to the ranting and uncontrolled physical excesses of the Kentucky frontier revivals as anyone.

A New Leader with New Ideas

Charles Finney emerged, at age thirty-six, as the leader of the campaign for awakening in America, the recognized head of the Second Great Awakening, and the heir of Timothy Dwight. Demands poured in for his preaching in the major cities of the Eastern seaboard.

Soon he clashed again with older views, for Finney's entire concept of awakening was new. He taught that awakening was not a miraculous act of God, but a simple use of human choice. He saw revivals very differently from Stoddard, Edwards, Whitefield, or Wesley, who understood that Christians could do nothing about periods of sin and backsliding until the Holy Spirit brought about renewal. Finney put the initiative in the hands of Christians: if they did the right things, revival would come. There was nothing at all miraculous about the coming of revival. Many said then—and have since—that Finney changed American religion from God-centered to man-centered.

Whatever people's opinions on these issues, there was no denying that Finney was winning great numbers of converts wherever he spoke. In the fall of 1830 the pinnacle of his evangelistic career was reached when he began meetings in Rochester, New York. The meetings continued until 9 March 1831, and brought him international fame. Historian Whitney R. Cross wrote:

No more impressive revival has occurred in American history. Sectarianism was forgotten and all churches gathered in their multitudes.... But the exceptional feature was the phenomenal dignity of this awakening. No agonizing souls fell in the aisles, no raptured ones shouted hallelujahs. Rather, despite his doses of hell-fire, the great evangelist, 'in an unclerical suit of gray,' acted 'like a lawyer arguing before a court and jury,' talking precisely, logically, but with wit, verve, and informality. Lawyers, real-estate magnates, millers, manufacturers, and commercial tycoons led the parade of the regenerated ...

According to another leading American minister, Lyman Beecher, a hundred thousand in the nation made religious affiliations within a year, an event "unparalleled in the history of the church."

The life of the entire area was profoundly influenced. Former enemies and critics frequently became firm supporters, acknowledging that at Rochester there was little or nothing to criticize, but much to praise. Taverns closed. The theater became a livery stable. The man who became district attorney stated that after the revival the crime rate in Rochester dropped by two-thirds, and remained that way for years.

It seems as if the nation was waiting for this, for as Western New York State was swept by the Spirit's moving, awakening spread across the entire country. The awakening at Rochester was almost singularly responsible for a national awakening in 1831. The event was so remarkable, it

became internationally known. Under the ministries of men influenced by Finney, and others, awakenings seemed to be everywhere in 1831, and they would continue for years to come.

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Asahel Nettleton

A popular awakening preacher in the early 1800s was Asahel Nettleton (1783–1844) of Connecticut. Nettleton was a very successful evangelist, and saw as many as 30,000 conversions. In his meetings, the atmosphere was quiet, dignified, and solemn. He always involved local pastors in his awakening work, and emphasized the need to teach and nurture any who were converted. A bachelor, Nettleton lived simply, accumulated no property, and did not charge any fees. When Charles Finney began to become popular, Nettleton was the most outspoken in criticizing him for his innovations; he thought Finney's informal approach was not as dignified and reverential as it should be. Nor did he like Finney's method of pressing for immediate decisions. Nettleton suffered poor health for most of his life, and died at the age of 61.

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In the Wake of the Second Great Awakening

If the great numbers of converted people flooding into the churches had been the only result of the Second Awakening, that would have been satisfactory. But this Awakening is notable for more than that, for it had a greater impact on secular society than any other in American history through its vast social concern. For this reason it is worthwhile for Christians today to know about its influence, for they can be very pleased with what it accomplished.

The Benevolent Empire

There were many things wrong with the United States then, and Charles Finney, among others, became convinced that the gospel was meant by God to do more than **just get people saved**. It was also to clean up society, and one instrument for doing this in the 19th century was called the Benevolent Empire. This was a great network of volunteer societies organized to attack social problems.

Since the late 1820s, Finney had been moving to include social reform in his program for awakening, and he felt very seriously that converts should immediately be put to urgent work in the battle against sin. "Every member must work or quit. No honorary members" in the Kingdom of God, he wrote. During the first three decades of the 1800s, Lewis Tappan and many other influential Christian laypeople organized thousands of societies that touched every phase of American life. Slavery, temperance, vice, world peace, women's rights, Sabbath observance, prison reform, profanity, education—all these and more had specific societies devoted to their betterment.

In the Rochester Revival of 1830–1831, Finney had first become concerned with the temperance crusade, and from then on he lent his influence to the entire spectrum of causes. By 1834 the total annual income of the "Benevolent Empire" was about today's equivalent of **one hundred thirty million dollars**, which rivaled the entire budget of the federal government in those days!

Among the dozens of organizations in the Empire, the most important were the "Great Eight" benevolent societies, which included the **American Bible Society**, founded in 1816; the **American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions**, founded in 1810; the **American Sunday School Union**, founded 1817; the **American Tract Society**, founded in 1826; the **American Temperance Society**, founded in 1826; and the **Americans Home Missionary Society**, founded in 1826.

Heritage of Freedom

A distortion made by some historians, similar to their misrepresentations of the character of awakenings in general, is their version of the story of the anti-slavery movement. According to them, Christians had little or nothing to do with it. William Lloyd Garrison is given most of the praise for the abolitionist movement, and Garrison was harshly anti-Christian. However, through his fanaticism Garrison had alienated almost everyone by 1836, while the abolitionist associates of Charles Finney gathered more support each year. Gilbert H. Barnes in his book, **The Anti-slavery Impulse 1830–1844**, has accurately shown how Christians worked to free the slaves, stating:

The conjunction of so many elements of the Great Revival [1831] in the anti-slavery agitation was more than coincidence.... In leadership, in method, and in objective,

the Great Revival and the American AntiSlavery Society now were one. It is not too much to say that for the moment the antislavery agitation as a whole was what it had long been in larger part, an aspect of the Great Revival in benevolent reform.

Charles Finney's vision of a truly Christian America, which he promoted constantly, seemed actually attainable in 1835. It would be a nation ruled by the moral government of God. The obligation of each Christian is inescapable: every child of God is to "aim at being useful in the highest degree possible," preferring the interest of God's Kingdom above all other interests.

It was a grand vision. And to a remarkable degree the Benevolent Empire achieved its goals in the first half of the nineteenth century, making lasting contributions to national life, eliminating much evil, and bringing Christian values into the mainstream of American society.

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The Time for Prayer: The Third Great Awakening

During the Third Great Awakening of 1857 to 1859, 10,000 people in New York City alone gathered together daily—even left work—to pray. The same thing was taking place all over the country, in small towns as well as in great cities.

By 1820 it seemed that the Second Awakening was waning; yet within a few years it had sprung to life under the ministry of Charles Finney. His enormous success inspired a large number of “professional evangelists” to come to the fore from the ranks of every major denomination. By 1840 the concept of large campaigns led by preachers who were not pastors of specific churches was generally accepted. From 1840 until the 1870s numerous preachers entered the ranks of traveling evangelists.

Despite all this, the religious life of America was in decline from 1840 to 1857. Many causes were responsible. Agitation over the issue of slavery in both the North and South had reached fever pitch, and hatreds boiled. Great numbers were disillusioned over spiritual things because of the extremes of the Millerites, a radical group that had widely proclaimed that Christ would return to earth between 21 March 1843 and 21 March 1844. When this did not happen, William Miller, the leader, reset the date at 22 October 1844, and again those who had trusted his prediction were disappointed and infuriated. So widespread was the clamor that even the general churches who had nothing to do with the Millerite delusion were mocked. In October 1857 a financial panic occurred, with banks failing, railroads going into bankruptcy, and financial chaos arising everywhere. A civil war seemed unavoidable to many because of the slavery question. America tottered on the brink of disaster.

Canadian Harvests

Meanwhile, in Canada an awakening was starting. From June through October 1857, Dr. Walter Palmer and his wife Phoebe conducted camp meetings in Ontario and Quebec with crowds of 5,000 and more. They then went to Hamilton, Ontario, where they had to wait for a train connection to New York City. Hearing that they were in town, Samuel Rice, a Wesleyan minister, invited them to speak at the McNab Street Wesleyan Methodist Church. The meeting was so well received that the Palmers were invited to speak again the next evening, and 21 people were converted. Due to the response, the Palmers stayed for several weeks, during which time 600 people professed faith in Christ. The Third Awakening had begun.

Phoebe Palmer was usually the main speaker at meetings, while her physician husband assisted her. The revival was declared by both Canadian and American newspapers to be a model of orderliness. That winter the Palmers traveled to Oswego, Binghamton, and Union, New York, for meetings that drew interdenominational support. In August 1858 they journeyed to Canada’s Maritime Provinces. In St. John there were 400 conversions, and in Halifax, 170 professed faith. Next they went to Prince Edward Island, where 700 conversions were recorded under their preaching.

As the historian Timothy Smith showed in his book *Revivalism and Social Reform*, there was an earnest expectation of awakening, and much prayer in many places for it in 1857. In cities large and small there were interdenominational prayer meetings. One prayer meeting, held daily at 4 p.m. in Bethel, Connecticut, was attended by “farmers, mechanics, and storekeepers,” and claimed 400 conversions. Many smaller towns had similar daily or weekly prayer sessions.

Closed on Account of Prayer

So there was nothing unique about the weekly prayer meeting that Jeremiah Lanphier began on 23

September 1857 on Fulton Street in New York City. Lanphier was a 48-year-old businessman who began work as an urban missionary for the North Dutch Reformed Church in July 1857. Two days after Lanphier's prayer meeting began, the Bank of Pennsylvania failed in Philadelphia, sending shock waves through America's financial community. In a few days' time, enough people were attending Lanphier's meeting that it began to meet daily.

On October 10 the New York stock market crashed, putting many stockbrokers and clerks out of work, and shutting down businesses everywhere. Many people went into bankruptcy; the panic shattered the previous complacency. Soon the crowds attending the Fulton Street laymen's gathering overflowed into the nearby John Street Methodist Church. Charles Finney had declared that before this New York "seemed to be on such a wave of prosperity as to be the death of revival effort." This attitude changed dramatically. The financial panic, it seems, was the catalyst that triggered the awakening. Within six months 10,000 people were gathering daily for prayer in numerous places throughout New York.

In a short time the **New York Times** reported that the nationally known pastor, Dr. Henry Ward Beecher, was leading 3,000 people in devotions at Burton's Theater. Once while he was reading Scripture, Beecher was interrupted by singing from an overflow prayer meeting crowd in an adjoining barroom! He then led the group in thanksgiving that such a thing could happen.

Other major cities also developed prayer meetings. The form of worship was always the same: any person might pray, give a testimony or an exhortation, or lead in singing as he or she "felt led." Although pastors such as Beecher often attended and lent their enthusiastic support, laypeople provided the leadership.

Little planning was done for the meetings, the chief rules were that a meeting should begin and end punctually, and that no one should speak or pray for very long. In Chicago, the Metropolitan Theater was filled every day with 2,000 people. In Louisville, Kentucky, several thousand crowded each morning into the Masonic Temple, and overflow meetings were held around the city. In Cleveland, the attendance was about 2,000 each day, and in St. Louis all the churches were filled for months on end.

Front-Page News

What impressed observers, and the press, was that there was no fanaticism, hysteria, or objectionable behavior, only a moving impulse to pray. Finney commented, "The general impression seemed to be, 'We have had instruction until we are hardened; it is now time for us to pray.'" Little preaching was done. As the people gathered they were largely silent; there was a great overarching attitude of glorifying God.

One account tells of a European cargo ship that sailed into New York harbor during the awakening and was boarded by the harbor pilot, who was a Christian. As he guided the ship into port, he told the captain and crew what was going on in the city, and a great hush fell over them all, which seemed to him the power of the Spirit. By the time they reached the dock, most of the crew had committed their lives to Christ.

In February 1858 James Gordon Bennett began to give extensive space to the awakening in his paper, the **New York Herald**. Not to be outdone, Horace Greeley, editor of the **New York Tribune**, gave still greater coverage to the meetings, until in April 1858 he devoted an entire edition of the **Tribune** to a special revival issue.

Other papers quickly followed suit in reporting the great numbers of people all throughout the nation attending the prayer gatherings and professing faith in Christ.

In the Wake of the Third Great Awakening

The YMCA, which had recently been founded, arose to play a large part in the Third Great Awakening in cities such as Philadelphia and Chicago. The organization was for years a specifically evangelical Christian ministry intended to provide Christian training and a wholesome atmosphere for underprivileged young men who lived and worked in the big cities. Timothy Smith has written of the "fervently religious orientation of the mid-century YMCA" and "its intimate bond with the churches. Leading ministers participated in the 'Y' affairs at all levels."

The Philadelphia YMCA sponsored a prayer meeting that drew 300 people daily. It began at noon, but people started gathering at 11 so they would be assured of a seat. The 'Y' also held an evangelistic campaign using a tent that could hold 1,200 people.

The Chicago YMCA served as a great training school for laypersons. Dwight L. Moody received his first opportunities for Christian service there.

The colleges of America were heavily influenced by the Awakening of 1858. Beyond the many conversions that took place, large numbers of enthusiastic students volunteered for service in foreign missions, or in the ministry.

The historian J. Edwin Orr wrote:

... The influence of the awakening was felt everywhere in the nation. It first captured great cities, but it also spread through every town and village and country hamlet. It swamped schools and colleges. It affected all classes without respect to condition.... It seemed to many that the fruits of Pentecost had been repeated a thousandfold... the number of conversions reported soon reached the total of fifty thousand weekly....

Coming on the eve of the Civil War, with the land torn apart by bitterness, the Awakening of 1858 was astounding. God seemed to be strengthening his people for the great trial to come. Yet the awakening did not end with the coming of the opening shots of the Civil War in 1861.

During the agonies of war, both the northern and southern armies experienced awakenings in the camps. Early in the war a large awakening occurred in the Army of Northern Virginia, and spread throughout the Confederate forces. Even in the tragic atmosphere of death and suffering, the awakening continued.

CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 23: Spiritual Awakenings in North America

Sleepers Awake

This Issue Began with the quote from Rev. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, "I am profoundly convinced that the greatest need in the world today is revival in the Church of God.... " After this look at American awakenings, we might ask: Should Christians around the world today expect more awakenings? Could widespread awakening happen again in America? Will future awakenings be confined to the mission fields of developing nations—the Third World?

Has the West grown so hardened through humanism and our adoration of material things that we don't care about, and can resist, the moving of the Holy Spirit? Has our faith grown cold?

Only God knows these things. However, we do hear of tremendous awakenings in Korea, where 10,000 people gather daily in Seoul to pray. We hear of movements toward Christianity in Indonesia and the southern half of Africa. Yet to many in the West, things look bleak. Have we had our day?

It is worth reflecting here that things must have looked equally bleak to Martin Luther 500 years ago, after 1,000 years of the gospel smoldering under spiritual confusion and widespread ignorance of God's Word. Then came what could be called the mightiest awakening since Pentecost, the Reformation. Dare we think that God cannot or will not do such a thing again?

The Lord informs us in the New Testament that "this gospel of the kingdom will be preached to all nations, and then the end will come" (Matthew 24:14), and that "Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of Gentiles has come in," but that the "natural branches" will be grafted back into the olive tree, "And so all Israel will be saved." (Romans 11) We know that there is still missionary work to be done to bring awakening to the peoples of the world, and we know that at some time a great awakening will come upon the Jewish people, and that many of them will turn to the Messiah. We can, at the very least, through these promises look forward to future awakenings.

Rev. Lloyd-Jones also said in our quote that " ... Anything that can instruct God's people in this matter is very welcome." We hope and pray that these articles have helped you to know a little more of our great heritage of awakenings, and that God's people everywhere will earnestly pray for renewal, and, filled with hope, diligently seek spiritual awakening.

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Praying Boldly

Concluding thoughts on our great need to pray

David R. Mains is director of the Chapel of the Air radio ministry, and was formerly a pastor at Circle Church in Chicago. He has written several books; this article is adapted from the chapter "Praying Boldly," in his book *The Sense of His Presence* (Word Publishing, 1988)

"Revival and prayer always go together. They are inseparably linked."

I have a conviction that to experience another day of awakening in the Church, leaders are going to have to model what **boldness** in prayer is all about.

Boldness regarding prayer is mentioned frequently in the New Testament, and I'm convinced that boldness for the most part is lacking in the prayers of the Church and desperately needs to be rediscovered. Never has there been awakening without God's people learning the efficacy of prayer.

The Church knows boldness when all its people pray exactly as though they were talking to Jesus face to face. The less Christians sense his presence, the less bold or confident they will be when coming before him in prayer. This doesn't take the deductive reasoning of a genius to figure out; why put a lot into a conversation if you think the person you're talking to is not listening? Why be bold when your mind hasn't been captured by the majesty of the One to whom you come to speak? The modeling of prayer in our worship services as little more than verbalizations says to observing people, "Don't expect much, folks, because we don't really sense that the King is near enough to be responding at the moment."

How would the life of the Church be transformed if we were all actually to hear Jesus say, "My subjects, I'm attentive and receptive right now to what you as a people have to say to me."

I often get a feeling, when people share their prayer requests, that the requests relate more to surface issues than to substantive ones. Seldom do the matters at hand touch in any way the deep concerns of the King who is being addressed. Instead, most of the requests expressed seem to center on the comfort of the subject voicing it. I believe that the church must learn to refrain from voicing requests that would sound silly were the King bodily present to hear and to respond.

If our prayers in church were actually spoken as though we were talking to Christ face to face, sooner or later a spiritual reality would begin to make itself known. This authenticity would then be caught by Sunday morning attendees, and eventually would make its way into the small prayer groups in the church, as well as into individual prayer closets and private groanings before the Lord. God's people would rapidly begin to know a new and mighty confidence and boldness. When we realize that this is the King of the universe and that he has truly given us his attention, that realization results in boldness. And before we know it, we see early signs of awakening. Revival and prayer always go together. They are inseparably linked.

Some might think boldness in prayer means storming into heaven's courts demanding attention. This is not boldness in the way Christ taught it or modeled it. Instead, boldness is the picture of a confident servant coming to his master in an attitude of praise. The mindset is one of wanting most of all to serve the Lord well. Knowing God's will and doing it is the primary desire.

How the Church today languishes for this kind of praying. And in order for us to know success in this area, I believe huge adjustments must be made. I challenge all concerned Christians to examine their personal and corporate prayer lives in this light.

I suspect that the way to begin correcting this problem is in the privacy of our own times alone with Christ. And whether it's a short session or a long season of prayer—the question of importance is this: Are you conscious that Christ is there in the room with you, or are you just talking to the walls? Are you **bold** in prayer?

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