Encyclopedia of Religious Revivals in America

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List of Entries

individuals and groups. The Great Awakening, for example, helped to spawn a new kind of trans-denominational evangelicalism in North America, while the Second Great Awakening encouraged the formation of numerous voluntary associations devoted to various social causes (e.g. abolitionism, temperance, women's rights, etc.). The social and institutional legacy of a given revival may be extremely complex, involving both new divisions and new associations.

These seven characteristics are an indication that religious revivals, for all their influence on the individuals who undergo them, have definite social, historical, and cultural effects. The shared ecstasy that has often occurred in the midst of revivals can leave lasting effects on the participants. The sociologist Émile Durkheim referred to this as "collective effervescence" and he noted that powerful, shared experiences can engender new sense of social identity. It may lead people to view themselves and one another in new ways. It may lead laypersons to challenge those in positions of authority. It may lead people of differing social classes, races, or genders to discover a new affinity with one another. An enduring—and notoriously complex—issue pertains to the social effects of religious revivals. Was the 1740s Great Awakening—in stressing the religious identity, value, and dignity of ordinary people—a kind of inadvertent preparation for the American Revolution in 1776? Some have argued in the affirmative. Was the Second Great Awakening of the early 1800s a key factor in promoting opposition to slavery in the United States prior to the Civil War? Once again, some scholars have said yes. Though the matter is hardly settled, there is at least some evidence linking religious revivals with movements of social change and reform, and this underscores the fact that revivals are corporate events that may affect large groups of people and leave enduring changes in their attitude, sensibility, and outlook.[11]

Introduction

The Academic Study of Religious Revivals

Revival as a Neglected Topic

Academic research on revivals is in a formative stage. On the one hand, there are innumerable works devoted to specific revival movements and revivalists and the bibliographies in the second volume contain about 5,600 entries. On the other hand, relatively little has been done to synthesize and interpret this vast body of literature. Scholars have only just begun to identify the leading trends, themes, issues, and problems for research in the study of religious revivals. One hindrance to progress in this area has been the prevailing university culture, and another has been the ethos of the churches and church-based seminaries.

Few university professors during the twentieth century had much personal connection with or experience of revivals. A measure of detachment from the people or community that one is studying—as any journalist or anthropologist will say—may be needed to give objectivity to one's study and writing. On the other hand, too much detachment can result in lopsided or imbalanced interpretations. Twentieth-century academics who had only read about eighteenth- and nineteenth-century revivals but had never witnessed a revival service often assumed that revivals were a vestige of the past. They were soon to be as scarce as the wooly mammoth. During the 1940s, both the Dean of Harvard Divinity School and William Warren Sweet—a leading historian at the University of Chicago—declared that religious revivals were disappearing. The "best pulpits," said Sweet, no longer mentioned the older "doctrine of conversion."[12] Yet the predictions failed. During the post-World War II era, Billy Graham's revival services thrust him into national and international prominence, Fundamentalist and evangelical congregations added new members as the so-called Mainline Protestant churches declined, and the Pentecostals—the most revivalistic group of all—surprised almost everyone by growing exponentially and then moving upward on the social ladder. The Charismatic Movement of the 1960s and 1970s brought the Pentecostal revival message to mainline Protestants and Roman Catholics, and many of these new "Spirit-filled" Christians were highly educated and affluent. They broke the cultural stereotype of the tongues-speaker as a snake-handler with missing teeth.

A handful of scholars did superb work on North American evangelicalism during the last generation, but religious revivalism was not their primary focus. George Marsden, Mark Noll, Harry Stout, and Nathan Hatch collectively published dozens of first-rate volumes on evangelicalism. They are among the best-published religion scholars, in any sub-discipline, in the United States. Yet, by and large, their works focused on intellectual and cultural aspects of evangelicalism and they paid less attention to experiential issues. The reason may lie in the social and intellectual circumstances of the era. During the 1970s and 1980s, scholars of evangelicalism were striving to demonstrate the intellectual viability of evangelicalism as a field of study—often in the face of skeptical faculty colleagues. Leading evangelical scholars were seeking to discover an American evangelical intellectual tradition. In consequence they directed their attention to areas of intellectual and cultural strength within evangelicalism—the writings of Jonathan Edwards, Calvinistic or Reformed theologies, evangelical engagement in social reform, and Biblical interpretation. To turn from the dialectical subtleties of Jonathan Edwards's writings to the sermons and books of later revivalists could be a bit like leaving a Mozart piano concerto for a professional wrestling bout. Nineteenth- and twentieth-century American revivalists showed vigor and verve, and yet offered little in the way of an intellectual tradition or legacy. Indeed, as Mark Noll argued in *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (1995), and as Richard Hofstadter had earlier argued in *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* (1963), the revival tradition in North America was not only un-intellectual but anti-intellectual in many of its expressions and effects.

At Protestant church-related seminaries—in distinction from research universities—there has been a general recognition of the importance of revival movements in American religious history. Seminaries often encouraged research into religious revivals that played a role in their respective denominational histories. Seminary professors have done much of the best writing on religious revivals in America. On the other hand, there were limiting factors in the seminaries no less than in the universities. What might be called the denominational mindset hindered a broad-based study of revivals, and it curbed the sympathy and curiosity that might otherwise have flowed beyond institutional boundaries. By and large, Baptists studied Baptists, Presbyterians studied Presbyterians, and so on with all the other religious groups—Methodists, Quakers, Roman Catholics, Pentecostals, and Charismatics. Since most seminaries in North America are maintained by Protestant denominations, the denomination may expect its professor of church history to function as a resident expert on denominational history. The consequence is that Protestant denominational historians have often been more concerned with investigating and celebrating their founders than with understanding religious revivals as such. Similar issues have appeared in the study of African-American history and in women's history. Black scholars have produced the bulk of scholarship on African American revivals. Non black scholars have not generally given much attention to African American religion in general and African American revivals in particular. Women scholars were pioneers in women's history, including the study of women revivalists. The greatest obstacle to the study of religious revival by North American scholars may not have been secular indifference in the universities but Christian factionalism in the churches and seminaries.

Interpreters and Interpretations of Revivals

Two authors of the later twentieth century stand out among others for their efforts to formulate a general interpretation of religious revivals in America. The popular writer and revival preacher, James Edwin Orr, wrote a number of works from the 1950s through the 1970s that

amassed factual data on North American and global revivals. Yet despite the abundant information they supplied, Orr's books contained almost nothing in the way of historical, social, or cultural analysis. A revival for Orr was essentially the same whether it happened in Indiana or in India, and consequently Orr did not offer a socially contextual analysis of the revivals he recounted in his numerous books. Orr defined a revival simply as the "outpouring of the Holy Spirit"—a phenomenon not accessible to ordinary academic inquiry. Among university scholars of the last century, William J. McLoughlin of Brown University, was the acknowledged leader in the study of American revivals. He wrote a series of pioneering works, including *Modern Revivalism: Charles Grandison Finney to Billy Graham* (1959) and *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform: An Essay on Religion and Social Change in America, 1607–1977* (1978). McLoughlin in his 1959 book defined revivalism as "any series of spontaneous or organized meetings which produce religious conversions whether they occur in one church, a dozen churches, or in hundreds of churches under the leadership of a spectacular itinerant evangelist."[13] In the 1978 book he wrote: "Revivalism is the Protestant ritual (at first spontaneous, but, since 1830, routinized) in which charismatic evangelists convey 'the Word' of God to large masses of people, who, under this influence, experience what Protestants call conversion, salvation, regeneration, or spiritual rebirth."[14] Common to both the earlier and later descriptions of revivals by McLoughlin was a stress on the dominating personality of the revivalist and on conversion as the revivalist's goal.

The present author, in his edited volume, *Embodying the Spirit: New Perspectives on North American Revivalism* (2004), expressed both appreciation and criticism of McLoughlin's work on religious revivals. My bibliographic essay took issue with McLoughlin for overemphasizing the influence of revival preachers and for neglecting the role of laypersons in initiating and guiding revivals. The Revival of 1857–58, for example, was a widely diffused and powerful revival and yet not directly associated with any notable preacher or leader. Another problem in McLoughlin is the idea that religious revivals happen among Protestants but not among Roman Catholics. Moreover, McLoughlin's perspective is limited by his assumption that "conversion" is the purpose of revival preaching. Closer analysis indicates that conversion is only one of a number of possible aims of revival preachers and revival meetings. Early Methodist revivals and the later Holiness Movement focused on sanctification as much as conversion, while Pentecostal and Charismatic revivals have stressed the baptism of the Holy Spirit, healing, deliverance, and speaking in tongues. Most problematic of all, McLoughlin separated "revivals" from "awakenings" in his 1978 book, claiming that individual experience needed to be distinguished from large-scale cultural change. Yet separating the individual from the community in this fashion may create more problems than it solves, and my argument in *Embodying the Spirit* was that it is better to conjoin these two aspects in interpreting revivals.

Believers and scholars have generally interpreted revivals in differing ways. Participants in revivals have often asserted that revivals are God's work and that no natural causes can explain them. Genuine revivals are due to a supernatural "outpouring of the Holy Spirit," which, if due to any human factors at all, is a result of concerted prayer. On the other hand, there have been devout authors—including Jonathan Edwards—who invoked natural causes alongside of supernatural or divine factors as causes or reasons for revivals. In the aftermath of the Revival of 1857–58, Christian writers noted that the financial panic of 1857 helped to set the stage for the revival among New York City businessmen, and so they invoked natural alongside of supernatural forms of explanation. Among scholars, there is no consensus as to why revivals occur. Some have noted that the causes of revivals are complex and cannot be reduced to a single causal factor, and that poverty or economic depression alone is not a cause for revivals. If poverty were a major

causal factor, then the 1930s would have been a golden age for religious revival—which it was not. Eras of religious revival do not seem to correspond to periods of social strain or turmoil in American history. Scholars have debated whether American revivals have followed a clear pattern of increasing and then declining religious fervor (the cyclic pattern) or rather unfold in a more-or-less continuous development through time (the linear pattern).[15] Another recent debate, initiated by Jon Butler, concerns the colonial spiritual awakenings of the eighteenth-century. Butler argued that revivals during the 1740s were isolated and sporadic, and that the idea of a single, trans-colonial event known as a "Great Awakening" is in fact an "interpretive fiction" originating in the mid-1800s rather than the mid-1700s.[16]

Scholarly explanations for revivals move in multiple directions.[17] McLoughlin's approach, as noted, highlights the personality and influence of the revivalist in causing revivals. Another viewpoint is basing on an idea of communications and networking. According to this view, revivals "happen" when information and fervor flow between otherwise isolated groups and they develop a sense of participation within a larger movement. The star preacher of the Great Awakening, George Whitefield, had a uncanny sense of how to connect evangelical believers scattered in different denominations, how to use the newspapers to gain publicity, and how to use even the opposition against him to advance his cause. Richard Lovelace stressed Whitefield's unifying influence among evangelicals, while Harry S. Stout identified Whitefield's theatricality and media skill as essential to his appeal. Both viewed Whitefield's networking as a key aspect of the Great Awakening.[18] A different approach to explanation is based on so-called primitive psychology. In a century-old book, *Primitive Traits in Religious Revivals* (1905), Frederick Davenport viewed American revivals as an expression of non-rational instincts and emotions that needed to be put under rational control. Davenport implied that religious revivals were destined to disappear in the process of social evolution—an idea challenged by the stunning growth of twentieth-century Pentecostalism. He also aligned his theory of primitive psychology with indefensible racist and chauvinist notions of the superior rationality of white males. Yet Davenport's work highlighted an important theme that deserved fuller consideration, namely, the involuntary or non-rational aspects of revivals, such as the "jerks," falling down, and other bodily manifestations that occurred in the Great Awakening, the Cane Ridge Revival, and Pentecostal revivals. Some explanation is needed as to why people in revivals exhibit such powerful but unintentional bodily symptoms. Ann Taves has recently written on the "fits, trances, and visions" associated with revivals, and so addresses some of the questions posed by Davenport a century ago.[19]

The theory of material or social deprivation—propounded by sociologist Charles Glock, and applied to Pentecostalism by historian Robert Mapes Anderson—holds that revivalist groups offer their members a superior religious status to compensate for their inferior social or economic status.[20] While this theory helps to explain the spread of revivalist movements like Pentecostalism among America's—and later the world's—impoverished masses, it fails to explain to explain why certain revivals (e.g., the Charismatic Renewal) have been influential among people of wealth and influence. The deprivation or compensation theory, argues Grant Wacker, does not account for the initiative, drive, and self-reliance of the leaders and laypersons participating in revivals. The theory portrays them as passive spectators to revival movements, and not as agents in their own individual and social transformation.

Wacker, together with Alan Gilbert, Bernard Semmel, and John Corrigan, offered an interpretation of revivals that might be classified as functionalist. This perspective, indebted to Emil Durkheim, interprets revivalist religion in terms of its function in establishing personal identity

and a sense of communal belonging. Wacker comments that early Pentecostalism was "less an effort to escape adversity than a creative resource for dealing with it."[21] Gilbert and Semmel viewed eighteenth-century evangelicalism in Britain as a response to the "anomie and social insecurity" that was caused by urban migration and separation from the life of traditional village communities. Early Methodism offered a "revolutionary message of liberty and equality" to masses of people alienated by the new industrial society.[22] The Revival of 1857–58, for John Corrigan, provided American males an opportunity to show their emotion—even through public weeping—and thus established the display of emotion as a category of collective identity.[23] In her study of gospel hymnody, Sandra Sizer notes that people spoke of the relationship with God or Jesus in terms of emotions "articulated in a communal context." Thus "prayer, testimony, and exhortation were employed to create a community of intense feeling, in which individuals underwent similar experiences … and would thenceforth unite with others in matters of moral decision and social behavior."[24] Shifting from emotion to economics, George Thomas found a close correlation between entrepreneurship and revivalist religion in the nineteenth-century United States, and suggested that revivalism can be seen as an adaptation of Christianity to fit the economic, social, and cultural milieu of entrepreneurial capitalism. Self-determining individuals from the marketplace entered the house of worship on Sunday as self-determining individuals. "The revivalist myth," says Thomas, "was cognitively compelling because it corresponded to their everyday experience as shaped by the dominant cultural myth of individualism."[25]

While it is not clear that any of the proposed theories of revivals is superior to all the rest, the functionalist viewpoint—when combined with insights from the other viewpoints—may go furthest in explaining how those who have participated in religious revivals both responded to the influences of their culture and shaped their culture in intentional ways. Yet after the explanations have been wagered and weighed, one recalls the eighteenth-century words of Jonathan Edwards, who in his *Faithful Narrative* (1737) referred to revivals as a "surprising work." Or as Martin Marty—today's best-known interpreter of American religion—has written: "Why do revivals occur? Answer: 'I don't know.'"[26]

Notes

1. Jerald C. Brauer, Preface to Jonathan M. Butler, *Softly and Tenderly Jesus is Calling: Heaven and Hell in American Revivalism, 1870–1920* (Brooklyn, New York: Carlson Publishing, 1991), xv.

2. William J. McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform: An Essay on Religion and Social Change in America, 1607–1977* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1978), 1.

3. David B. Barrett, George T. Kurian, and Todd M. Johnson, eds., *World Christian Encyclopedia*, 2 vols., 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 1:4.

4. Margaret M. Poloma, "The 'Toronto Blessing': Charisma, Institutionalization, and Revival," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 36 (1997): 257–71.

5. Steve Rabey, "Pensacola Outpouring Keeps Gushing," *Christianity Today*, March 3, 1997, 54–57; Rabey, "Brownsville Revival Rolls Onward," *Christianity Today*, February 9, 1998, 80–81; Leo Sandon, "Pentecost in Pensacola," *Christian Century*, August 27—September 3, 1997, 748–49.

6. This paragraph is not meant to suggest that Calvinists have always supported revivals. Self-described Arminian and Wesleyan Christians have been more consistently positive in their attitude toward revivals than Calvinistic Christians. To a remarkable extent, Calvinistic or Reformed Christians have been historically prominent in arguing for both pro-revival and anti-revival positions. Jonathan Edwards himself was more cautious in defending revivals and more overt in his criticisms of revivals than many later revivalists have realized. On the confessional tradition in Reformed Christianity, and its opposition

to religious revivalism, see the illuminating works by D. G. Hart, *The Lost Soul of American Protestantism* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002), esp. 1–56, and James Bratt, *Antirevivalism in Antebellum America: A Collection of Religious Voices* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005).

7. Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 4: The Great Awakening*, C. C. Goen, ed. (New Haven: Yale U. P., 1972), 149–50.

8. Charles Finney, *Memoirs of Rev. Charles G. Finney.* (New York, 1876), 12–23, excerpted in Hugh T. Kerr and John T. Mulder eds., *Conversions: The Christian Experience* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 104–12, citing 111.

9. Though nearly a century old, Max Weber's analysis of religious reform in various world religions is still pertinent. See my analysis and critique "Prophet or Loss? Reassessing Max Weber's Theory of Religious Leadership," in David Noel Freedman and Michael J. McClymond, eds., *The Reivers of Paradise: Moses, Buddha, Confucius, Jesus, and Muhammad as Religious Founders* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 613–58.

10. The paragraph that follows is dependent on Richard M. Riss, *A Survey of 20th Century Revival Movements in North America* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1988), 3–7.

11. Further discussion of the possible social effects of revivals is found in Michael J. McClymond, "Issues and Explanations in the Study of North American Revivalism," in Michael J. McClymond, ed., *Embodying the Spirit: New Perspectives on North American Revivalism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 1–46, esp. 22–31.

12. William Warren Sweet, *Revivalism in America: Its Origin, Growth, and Decline* (New York: Scribners, 1944), xii–xiv.

13. William G. McLoughlin, *Modern Revivalism: Charles Grandison Finney to Billy Graham* (New York: Ronald Press, 1959), 7.

14. McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform*, xiii.

15. On the linear vs. cyclic question, see the "Symposium on Religious Awakenings" published in *Sociological Analysis* 44 (1983): 81–122, comprising R. C. Gordon-McCutchan, "Great Awakenings?" (83–95), Timothy L. Smith, "My Rejection of a Cyclic View of 'Great Awakenings'" (97–102), William G. McLoughlin, "Timepieces and Butterflies: A Note on the Great-Awakening-Construct and Its Critics" (103–10), John L. Hammond, "The Reality of Revivals" (111–15), John Wilson, "Perspectives on the Historiography of Religious Awakenings" (117–20), and Timothy L. Smith's response (121–22).

16. Jon Butler, "Enthusiasm Described and Decried: The Great Awakening as Interpretive Fiction," *Journal of American History* 69 (1982): 305–25, cited and critiqued in McLoughlin, "Timepieces," 107–8.

17. A fuller account of explanatory models for religious revivals is in McClymond, "Issues and Explanations," in McClymond, ed., *Embodying the Spirit*, 31–43.

18. Richard F. Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life: An Evangelical Theology of Renewal* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1979), 39; Harry S. Stout, Stout, *The Divine Dramatist: George Whitefield and the Rise of Modern Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991) 60–61.

19. Ann Taves, *Fits, Trances, & Visions: Experiencing Religion and Explaining Experience from Wesley to James* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999).

20. Charles Glock, "The Role of Deprivation in the Origin and Evolution of Religious Groups," in R. Lee and Martin Marty, eds., *Religion and Social Conflict* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964), 24–36; Robert Mapes Anderson, *Vision of the Disinherited: The Making of American Pentecostalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 229.

21. Grant Wacker, *Heaven Below: Early Pentecostals and American Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 10, 200–201.

22. Michael J. Crawford, *Seasons of Grace: Colonial New England's Revival Tradition in Its British Context* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 8; citing Alan D. Gilbert, *Religion and Society in Industrial England: Church, Chapel, and Social Change, 1740–1914* (London: Longman, 1976), 87–93, and Bernard Semmel, *The Methodist Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 5, 7–9, 198.

23. John Corrigan, *Business of the Heart: Religion and Emotion in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 251–67, citing 251.

24. Sandra S. Sizer, *Gospel Hymns and Social Religion: The Rhetoric of Nineteenth-Century Revivalism* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1978), 52.

25. George M. Thomas, *Revivalism and Cultural Change: Christianity, Nation Building, and the Market in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 7, 83.

26. Martin E. Marty, "Afterword," in McClymond, ed., *Embodying the Spirit*, 273.