

**Historiographical Paper: Revivalism in America**

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## Introduction

Since Joseph Tracy's *The Great Awakening: A History of the Revival of Religion in the Time of Edwards and Whitefield* (1842), historians have intensely debated the significance, place, and process of revivalism in America. Church historians wrote the earliest histories of revivalism, and they advocated for revivals of religion, if the revivals aligned with the historian's personal doctrinal or sectarian positions. Since then, two primary schools of historiography have developed in the interpretation of revivalism in America. One school sees revivals as continual happenings, while the other sees revivals as cyclical events. Cyclical historians often characterize revivalism in intellectual and sociological terms, and they adopt a declension model of religion that focuses on society-at-large. The other school tends to cast revivalism in religious terms and adopt an ascension model of religion and focus on individuals. With the works of Jon Butler and Nathan Hatch, a revisionist synthesis has emerged which sees revivalism as expressing characteristics of both cyclical and continual positions.

## The Earliest Histories

In *The Great Awakening* (1842), Tracy looked back at colonial America and pulled from "controversial publications of that day," including pro-revivalist Jonathan Edwards's "Thoughts on the Revival of Religion in New England in 1740" as well as the counterbalance in Charles Chauncy's "Seasonable Thoughts on the State of Religion in New England."<sup>1</sup> Tracy also investigated several of the pamphlets, sermons, and memoirs of George Whitefield in his history as well as church records and town histories including Trumbull's popular *History of Connecticut* and Charles Hodge's *Constitutional History of the Presbyterian Church*.<sup>2</sup> Tracy

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph Tracy, *The Great Awakening: A History of the Revival of Religion in the Time of Edwards and Whitefield* (Boston: Tappan & Dennet, 1842), v.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, v-vii.

emphasized the “new birth” or “awakening” experience in the Great Awakening, whereby people become aware of “the very thought that they know not whether they are in the way to heaven or not.”<sup>3</sup> Tracy claimed that “the history of the Great Awakening is the history of this idea, making its way through some communities where it had fallen into comparative neglect.”<sup>4</sup> For Tracy, studying the history of the Great Awakening “should teach a lesson of faith, of encouragement, of cheerful hope, even in the darkest times.”<sup>5</sup>

In *Religion in America* (1844), Samuel Baird described the history of religion in colonial America as taking place in four periods. Baird wrote from the perspective of a Presbyterian church historian. The first period lasted from 1607 to 1660 and was a period “in which religion greatly flourished” because of the labor of Cotton Mather, Thomas Hooker, James Davenport, and more, “who laboured long, and very successfully, for the salvation of souls.”<sup>6</sup> Tribulation characterized the second period, from 1660 to 1720, because of wars with the Indians, such as in King Phillip’s War, and because of the “disastrous consequences of the union of Church and State.”<sup>7</sup> The third from 1720 to 1750 “was distinguished by extensive revivals of religion” led by Jonathan Edwards, Prince, Frelinghuysen, Dickinson, Finley, and the Tennents in the Northern and Middle States, Davies in Virginia, the Wesleys in Georgia, and Whitfield who “traversed from colony after colony.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Tracy, x, 46.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, xiii.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 431.

<sup>6</sup> Samuel J. Baird, *Religion in America, or An Account of the Origins, Progress, Relation to the State, and Present Condition of the Evangelical Churches in the United States* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1844), 100.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

Baird agreed with Joseph Tracy's characterization of this period as the "Great Awakening" and remarked Tracy's history "is by far the fullest account of the early revivals in America that has yet appeared, and being derived from authentic sources, is worthy of entire credence."<sup>9</sup> The final period in Baird's investigation of colonial America is from 1750 to 1775 and "was one of great public agitation."<sup>10</sup> Baird wrote that the whole period of Colonial America was "168 years as, comparatively speaking, one of decline, and even deadness, in the greater part of Protestant Europe," but that signs of life did show in pockets of Christian practice in America.

Baird remarked, "It is a remarkable fact, that the United States and Texas are the only countries in all Christendom where perfect religious liberty exists, and where the government does nothing, by 'favor' or otherwise, to promote the interests of any one religion."<sup>11</sup> Baird's desire for Christianity in America was that through the "Voluntary Principle" to "double the number of evangelical Protestant ministers" since the number of evangelical ministers was not sufficient.<sup>12</sup> While Baird shared Tracy's characterization of Edward's and Whitefield's lives as being a period of "Great Awakening," his subsequent history on what some have called the Second Great Awakening was highly critical of revivalism of New School Presbyterians like Albert Barnes and Charles Finney because of how it had torn apart denominational structures.

Baird, an Old School Presbyterian, was critical of revivals that emphasized individual decisions and the use of the *New Measures* including the anxious bench or seat, all-night prayer meetings, and other emotional displays of worship. For Baird, emotional responses simply could not produce what a voluntary act of the will could produce for ministers in the church. Baird

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<sup>9</sup> Baird, *Religion in America*, 101.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 319.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 323.

wrote disparagingly of Charles Finney's use of *New Measures*. In his *History of the New School* (1868), Baird characterized Charles Finney as "the first preacher, who adequately attempted to employ the theology of New Haven, in its practical relations."<sup>13</sup> Baird was critical of this "New Divinity" or "New Haven" theology that Nathaniel Taylor had introduced and Charles Finney had championed, which personalized Calvinism and made Calvinism individualistic.<sup>14</sup> The Old School had emphasized "a strict conformity to the standards, in doctrine and order."<sup>15</sup> In this way, Baird's histories celebrate revivals that hold to certain doctrinal standards and decry others that introduced heresy and division from his point-of-view.

Unlike Baird, in *A History of American Christianity* (1897), Leonard Bacon's history is very favorable towards this "New Haven" Theology. Bacon agreed with Baird that the "grounds of explicit complaint against the party called 'New School' were principally twofold—doctrine and organization."<sup>16</sup> As Timothy Smith observed, Bacon served as a pastor in New Haven, Connecticut, from 1825 to 1866, and he hosted protracted meetings with Nathaniel Taylor before Taylor's death in 1858.<sup>17</sup> Bacon's history then cast a positive light on the New School and the *New Measures*. Bacon agreed with Baird in that there were three schools of Calvinism within the Presbyterian Church:

unmitigated Scotch Calvinism, the modification of this system, which became naturalized in the church after the Great Awakening, when Jonathan Dickinson and Jonathan Edwards, from neighbor towns in Massachusetts, came to be looked upon as the great Presbyterian theologians; thirdly, there was the "consistent Calvinism," that had been still

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<sup>13</sup> Samuel J. Baird, *History of the New School, and of the Questions Involved in the Disruption of the Presbyterian Church in 1838* (Philadelphia: Claxton, Remsen & Haffelfinger, 1868), 217.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, xi.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>16</sup> Leonard W. Bacon, *A History of American Christianity* (New York: Christian Literature, 1897), 294.

<sup>17</sup> Timothy L. Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform: American Protestantism on the Eve of the Civil War*. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1957), 38.

further evolved by the patient labor of students in direct succession from Edwards, and that was known under the name of "Hopkinsianism."<sup>18</sup>

Like Baird and Tracy before him, Bacon attempted to use Edwards to justify his personal doctrinal position. Hopkinsianism, Taylorism, the New Haven theology, and what Amasa Parker called the "New England theology" were essentially the same thing, but historians have called this movement by these different names. Increasingly, historians appealed to a direct link to Jonathan Edwards in their advocacy for their position in revivalism. Demonstrably, Bacon postulated that "the dynasty of the Edwardeans is continued down to the middle of the nineteenth century" through "Taylor of New Haven, and Finney of Oberlin, and is represented among the living by the venerable Edwards A. Park, of Andover."<sup>19</sup> The "prevailing trait of this theology" is how truth should be preached. The answer for Bacon and others was as a "revival theology."<sup>20</sup>

Baird lamented the denominational schism that had struck the Presbyterian Church in 1837, but Bacon saw that although "sectarian divisions tend strongly to perpetuate themselves,"<sup>21</sup> Christians were able to achieve "the occupation of the [American] continent with Christian institutions by a strange diversity of sects."<sup>22</sup> According to Bacon, when sects could work together as the Presbyterians and Congregationalists had done within the "Plan of Union," the Benevolent Empire was formed as evidenced in "the American Education Society (1815), the American Sunday School Union (1824), the American Tract Society (1825), the Seamen's Friend

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<sup>18</sup> Bacon, 294.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 375.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 403.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 419.

Society (1826), and the American Home Missionary Society (1826).”<sup>23</sup> Additionally, Congregationalists, “without regards to returns of sectarian advantage,” had been “preeminently the builders of colleges and theological seminaries.”<sup>24</sup> Subsequent histories of revivalism often hone in on one of these topics that Bacon had introduced including his discussion of voluntary societies and the formation of colleges and seminaries.

In “The Second Great Awakening as an Organizing Process, 1780-1830: An Hypothesis” (1969), Donald Mathews described the revivalism as less of a “break-up of Calvinism,” and more as a “vast mobilization of people.”<sup>25</sup> Mathews believed that the Awakening was an organizing movement and not simply a “Calvinist reaction,” that the “Revival began in the early 1780s and continued to grow over more than a generation, involving not merely one section, but the entire nation,” and that the Awakening was a nationalizing force.<sup>26</sup> Mathews styled the Awakening as the shifter in “common world experience” from national institutions to local organizations and wrote that “it may have been the greatest organization and mobilization of women in American history.”<sup>27</sup>

### **The Traditional Continuity Approach to Revivalism**

William Warren Sweet’s most popular work *Revivalism in America* (1945) saw revivalism through the lens of biography, and his analysis consisted heavily of narrative on the origin and growth of revivalism. Sweet saw revivalism in Colonial America as “the story of the

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<sup>23</sup>Bacon, 259.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 333.

<sup>25</sup> Donald G. Mathews, “The Second Great Awakening as an Organizing Process, 1780-1830: An Hypothesis,” *American Quarterly* 21, no. 1 (1969): 43.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 43.



beginning of the Americanization of organized Christianity.”<sup>28</sup> Sweet believed that revivalism represented “the rapids in the stream” of American Christianity and lamented that revivalism’s impact had waned in 1945 because of what he saw a focus on society over individualism.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, Sweet believed that the translation of Old-World practices into the New World led to revivalism. Revivalism expressed itself through a “gradual adoption of new and untried ways of meeting peculiar American needs.”<sup>30</sup> For Sweet, American society was a people in constant motion that led to “an individualistic society,” and the reason revivalism flourished was “because its appeal was to individuals.”<sup>31</sup>

Sweet also challenged the concept of the Second Great Awakening, noting that from the 1820s through the Civil War was the period in which most colleges were founded by the pro-revivalist Methodists and Baptists.<sup>32</sup> In “The Rise of Theological Schools in America” (1937), Sweet noted, “During and following the Great Awakening, numerous “log colleges” arose among the Presbyterians.”<sup>33</sup> For Sweet, the translation of the Old World to New, not only produced revivalism, but it also sparked the first theological seminaries in Colonial America.<sup>34</sup> The establishment of these “log colleges” as well seminaries east of the Alleghenies was in part due to the “increased demand for ministers as a result of the great revival which swept over the

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<sup>28</sup> William W. Sweet, *Revivalism in America: Its Origin, Growth, and Decline* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1945), 24.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, xii.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

<sup>33</sup> William W. Sweet, “The Rise of Theological Schools in America,” *Church History* 6, no. 3 (1937): 261.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 264.

country.” As Sweet also observed, of those established west of the Alleghenies, the “overwhelming majority” were founded by churches favoring revivalism.<sup>35</sup>

Timothy Smith’s *Revivalism and Social Reform: American Protestantism on the Eve of the Civil War* (1957) reiterated many of Sweet’s themes. Smith also recognized the revivals of 1857-58 ushered in the “modern era of revivals, missions, and benevolent institutions.”<sup>36</sup> Within the benevolent empire, Smith found interdenominational fellowship and the concept of “brotherly love” to be the “supreme virtue.”<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, Smith highlighted that between 1840 and 1865, “revival measures and perfectionist aspiration flourished in all the major denominations” as a continuation of the Second Great Awakening.<sup>38</sup> Smith, like Sweet, saw revivals as continually happening without a respite even during and through the Civil War, and Smith saw the revivalism of Dwight L. Moody as evidence of that continuation after the War.<sup>39</sup>

In *The Lively Experiment: The Shaping of Christianity in America* (1963), Sidney Mead compiled eight of his previously published articles and continued to develop in the spirit of Sweet and Smith with one different point of emphasis. Mead was Sweet’s student and colleague at the University of Chicago and Mead’s first major work concerned the revivalism of Nathaniel Taylor.<sup>40</sup> Mead believed that the “Christianity which developed in the United States [after 1800] was unique.”<sup>41</sup> Mead asserted that denominationalism was the reason for this uniqueness. In a

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<sup>35</sup> Sweet, *Revivalism*, 149-50.

<sup>36</sup> Smith, 62.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>40</sup> Sidney E. Mead, *The Lively Experiment: The Shaping of Christianity in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), xii.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 103-4.

chapter dedicated “Denominationalism,” Mead defended his focus on the period from 1787-1850 because he believed it represented the “formative era” of American Protestantism.<sup>42</sup>

Mead noted that in some ways, William Warren Sweet’s characterization of revivalism fit into Frederick Jackson Turner’s frontier thesis in a return to a focus on “primitive Christianity.”<sup>43</sup> Previously, Mead had observed that in *The Burned-over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York* (1950), Whitney Cross had challenged the assumption that “religious ‘enthusiasm’ or ‘excitement’—were ‘frontier phenomena.’”<sup>44</sup> For Mead, the story of American Christianity was, in some ways, the story that the “primitive conditions on the frontier,” forced denominations to rebuild and “incorporate new elements derived from the local situation.”<sup>45</sup> However, Mead warned that an unstable definition of frontier could provide too much “elasticity” for proper interpretation.<sup>46</sup> Cross supported the claim that “the peak of fervor reached in 1826 is often attributed to Charles Finney’s single-handed influence.”<sup>47</sup> Cross echoed Baird in observing that “Finney’s chief contribution in the New York campaigns was not a theology but a set of practices.”<sup>48</sup> Cross concluded, “religious enthusiasm, even as it destroyed itself, built a path—perhaps followed by as many persons as traveled any

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<sup>42</sup> Mead, *Lively Experiment*, 106-7.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 200.

<sup>44</sup> Sidney E. Mead, “Review of *The Burned-over District* by Whitney Cross,” *The Journal of Religion* 32, no. 3 (1952): 221.

<sup>45</sup> Mead, *Lively Experiment*, 200.

<sup>46</sup> Mead, “Review,” 221.

<sup>47</sup> Whitney R. Cross, *The Burned-Over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800-1850* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1950), 13.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 160.

other route-toward the more modern conceptions of liberal religion which the zealots had originally so consistently abhorred.”<sup>49</sup>

Mead’s focused extensively on the growth in denominations that favored revivalism. Mead echoed Baird’s sentiments when he addressed the “American experiment in freeing the churches from state control.”<sup>50</sup> Mead’s history stands as an important counterweight to Perry Miller’s and William McLoughlin’s histories.

### **Intellectual Life, Cyclical Awakenings, and Turning Points**

In *New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century* (1939), the intellectual historian Perry Miller showed the impact that Puritans had on American intellectual life. Miller, a self-described atheist, was fascinated by the impact of religious practice on intellectual life, and all of Miller’s histories take an intense look at this interplay. As historian Jon Butler put it succinctly, “Miller discussed the Puritans of Massachusetts as a near model intelligent society shaped by a dynamic Calvinism.”<sup>51</sup> Miller claimed that not “until Jonathan Edwards was there a mind capable of sustained independent speculation.”<sup>52</sup> In his next book, *New England: From Colony to Province* (1953), Miller focused on the connection between Puritan decline and American declension in the first ten chapters of the book. With the spreading adoption of the “Half-Way Covenant,” Miller saw that the clergy “could no longer put a king in their pockets,” but that they depended on maintaining “their place in the hierarchy of being” less by learning and more by being able to

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<sup>49</sup> Cross, 357.

<sup>50</sup> Ernest R. Sandeen, “Review of *The Lively Experiment* by Sidney Mead,” *The Journal of Religion* 44, no. 4 (1964): 331.

<sup>51</sup> Jon Butler, “Three Minds, Three Books, Three Years: Reinhold Niebuhr, Perry Miller, and Mordecai Kaplan on Religion,” *Jewish Social Studies* 12, no. 2 (Winter 2006): 19.

<sup>52</sup> Perry Miller, *New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1939), 63.

maintain and gain congregants.<sup>53</sup> Miller claimed, “Out of his initial skepticism, Stoddard inaugurated the era of revivalism, with his grandson [Jonathan Edwards] was to bring to a climax.”<sup>54</sup> Miller saw in the revivalist career of Jonathan Edwards as the dates of the climax to the Great Awakening. In the Great Awakening, Miller also saw revivalism as an expression of the struggle of Puritan thought and life maintaining a foothold in American life.

In *The Life of the Mind in America: From Revolution to the Civil War* (1965), Miller began with the revivalism of Charles Finney as being definitive of the Second Great Awakening. Miller noted, “The stages by which the intransigent individualism of Edwards’s preaching moved into the mass exhortation of Cane Ridge are almost imperceptible. But by 1830, by the great days of Finney, the transformation is complete.”<sup>55</sup> Because of the immense popularity of Miller’s other histories, Charles Finney started to take a more prominent and featured role in histories of revivalism. Miller postulated, “Finney began with a realization that the complexities of Protestant theology—Lutheran or Calvinist—had no relation to the actualities of American life.”<sup>56</sup> Through the works of revivalists from especially 1800 through 1830, Miller tracked how revivalists like Finney believed they had rescued “the community...from a descent into atheism.”<sup>57</sup> For Miller, the interplay between the rise of Evangelicalism expressed through revivalism and “the legal mentality” were the two “devious paths through which America made

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<sup>53</sup> Perry Miller, *New England Mind: From Colony to Province* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953), 118.

<sup>54</sup> Miller, *Colony to Province*, 283.

<sup>55</sup> Perry Miller, *The Life of the Mind in America: From the Revolution to the Civil War* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1965), 11.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

its way out of the eighteenth century into the nineteenth century.”<sup>58</sup> Since Finney had been a lawyer before a revivalist, he served Miller’s purpose well.<sup>59</sup> Miller held Timothy Smith’s belief that the Awakening of “1858 lifted the populace to its most grandiose conception of unity just before slavery sundered the country.”<sup>60</sup> In “Charles Finney and the Modernization of America” (1984), James Moorhead went further and proclaimed that Finney himself had ushered in modernity. Moorhead emphasized Finney’s interdenominational cooperation and the “social cohesion” that his approach provided.<sup>61</sup>

In *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform* (1978), William McLoughlin shirked “the old Protestant definition of revivalism and awakenings” and analyzed revivals from an anthropological perspective.<sup>62</sup> McLoughlin worked from the framework Anthony F.C. Wallace laid out in his article entitled “Revitalization Movements” in *American Anthropology*.<sup>63</sup> McLoughlin sought to identify the four stages in the structure of the human experience that produced an awakening of religion. For McLoughlin, all revivals and awakenings were simply the way society engaged in an “organizing or reorganizing process.”<sup>64</sup> Every awakening of religion was a structured social event that featured a period of individual stress, cultural distortion, the building of new structures or rebuilding of fractured old organizational structures,

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<sup>58</sup> Miller, *Life of the Mind*, 180.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

<sup>61</sup> James H. Moorhead, “Charles Finney and the Modernization of America,” *Journal of Presbyterian History* (1962-1985) 62, no. 2 (1984): 97, 99.

<sup>62</sup> William G. McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 7.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 9-10.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

and finally, the rise of a champion of the “new light” vision.<sup>65</sup> McLoughlin outlined four periods of religious awakening including the First Great Awakening from 1730-60, the Second Great Awakening from 1800-1830, the Third Great Awakening from 1890-1920, and the Fourth Great Awakening from 1960-90. McLoughlin characterized revivals of religion as cyclical events that were the reasons for, responses from, and reactions to massive social changes.<sup>66</sup>

McLoughlin’s primary effort was connecting the religious awakenings to social events. For example, McLoughlin claimed, “If conversion was the fundamental personal experience of the First Great Awakening, itinerant preaching was the fundamental social phenomenon.”<sup>67</sup> McLoughlin saw itinerant preaching as a new form of mass communication as giving birth to “intercolonial unity and the forming of a single American identity.”<sup>68</sup> In his analysis on the impact of the First Great Awakening, McLoughlin quoted extensively from Gordon S. Wood and argued that there was a “fundamental link between the First Great Awakening and the Revolution.”<sup>69</sup> For McLoughlin, the old Puritan covenant and Republican politics had bred the Revolution.

McLoughlin connected each religious awakening after the First Great Awakening to specific major movements in American history: the Second Great Awakening to the “solidification of the Union and the rise of Jacksonian participatory democracy,” the Third to “the rejection of unregulated capitalistic exploitation and the beginning of the welfare state,” and the Fourth to “a rejection of unregulated exploitation of human-kind and of nature” to promote

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<sup>65</sup> McLoughlin, 12-6.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

conservation and human rights.<sup>70</sup> Throughout his history, McLoughlin buttressed the links between revivalism and cultural change. In fact, McLoughlin rejected classifying “the Great Prayer Meeting Revival of 1857-58” and Dwight Moody’s revivals from 1875 to 1885 as the Third Great Awakening because those revivals did not produce significant shifts in the “prevailing ideological consensus.”<sup>71</sup> For McLoughlin, revivalism’s value was in its reorientation of society and the unifying effects revivalism produced around that effort.

In “The Second Great Awakening in Urban Centers: An Examination of Methodism and the ‘New Measures’” (1972), Richard Carwardine provided a critique “to the near-revolutionary role in the birth a ‘modern revivalism’” that McLoughlin credited Finney with creating in *Modern Revivalism: Charles Grandison Finney to Billy Graham* (1959).<sup>72</sup> “Such an emphasis has served to reinforce the long-held view,” Carwardine wrote, “that, virtually single-handed, Finney created the mid-nineteenth century revival style of the cities.”<sup>73</sup> Carwardine’s position was that Finney simply succeeded in giving the *New Measures* of revivalism “a wider popular base and to make them palatable to a somewhat more respectable class of people than most of those reached by the Methodist.”<sup>74</sup>

In “The New Lebanon Convention” (1950), Charles Cole saw that so-called meeting on July 18, 1827, as the turning point of Finney from being an obscure burned-over revivalist preacher to a figure of national prominence because of his stand against Lyman Beecher. For

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<sup>70</sup> McLoughlin, 11.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 141.

<sup>72</sup> Richard Carwardine, “The Second Great Awakening in Urban Centers: An Examination of Methodism and the ‘New Measures,’” *Journal of American History* 59, no. 2 (1972): 328.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 328.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 339.



Cole, the *New Measures* were controversial, and Finney had won the fight. In “A Turning Point in American Revivalism? The Influence of Charles G. Finney’s ‘Memoirs’ on Historical Accounts of the New Lebanon Convention” (1998), Gary Hiebsch critiqued the importance of this meeting to revivalism.

### **Reaffirming Connection to Edwards**

Allen Guelzo in “An Heir or a Rebel? Charles Grandison Finney and the New England Theology” (1997), linked Charles Finney directly to Jonathan Edwards. In doing this, Guelzo repudiated the American declension model that McLoughlin, Miller, and Cross had emphasized in the life of Finney. In line with Bacon and James Johnson’s “Charles G. Finney and a Theology of Revivalism” (1969), Guelzo positioned Finney as a follower of Edwardseanism and Nathaniel William Taylor. Instead of something new, Finney had simply been a repeat or “coda” of what Amasa Parker of Andover Seminary in the 1850s called Jonathan Edwards’s “New England Theology.”<sup>75</sup> This characterization challenged the concept of the “so-called ‘Second Great Awakening’ of the 1820s” since “reinterpreting Finney as an heir rather than a rebel against the New England theology stresses consistency and continuity rather than departure from the pattern of the eighteenth-century awakening.”<sup>76</sup> Instead of being a product or proponent of Jacksonian democracy, Guelzo positioned Finney as a Jonathan Edwards man. Guelzo noted that this flew in the face of McLoughlin’s Finney. McLoughlin had observed, “Finney was so far from Edwards in his philosophical outlook that it may seem odd that he frequently quotes Edwards to buttress his views on specific aspects of revival preaching.”<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Allen C. Guelzo, “An Heir or a Rebel? Charles Grandison Finney and the New England Theology,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 17, no. 1 (Spring 1997): 64, 94.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

### The Revisionist School

Jon Butler and Nathan Hatch offer revisionist perspectives of the historiography of revivalism. Butler and Hatch argue a middle ground in the historiography between these two approaches. In “Enthusiasm Described and Decried: The Great Awakening as Interpretive Fiction” (1982), Jon Butler offered his most significant contribution to the historiography of revivalism. Butler challenged the conception of The Great Awakening as a single event in American history. Instead, Butler saw the “eighteenth-century revivals of religion in America as erratic, heterogeneous, and politically benign.”<sup>78</sup> Furthermore, Butler rejected McLoughlin’s belief that there was a “link between the revivals and the American Revolution.” Butler did not believe that the revivals fostered any “significant experiential unity in the colonies.”<sup>79</sup> Butler took issue with calling the Great Awakening an event because he believed that “seldom has an ‘event’ of such magnitude had such amorphous beginnings and endings.”<sup>80</sup> Butler followed up this critique combatting the declension model of faith and revivalism in *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (1990).

In *The Democratization of American Christianity* (1989), Nathan Hatch argued that the theme of democratization is central to understanding the development of American Christianity. Hatch examined five distinct traditions, or mass movements, that developed early in the nineteenth century: the Christian movement, the Methodists, the Baptists, the black churches, and the Mormons. These movements shared “an ethic of unrelenting toil, a passion for

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<sup>78</sup> Jon Butler, “Enthusiasm Described and Decried: The Great Awakening as Interpretive Fiction.” *The Journal of American History* 69, no. 1 (September 1982): 325.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 324.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 310.

expansion, a hostility to orthodox belief and style, a zeal for religious reconstruction, and a systematic plan to realize their ideals.”<sup>81</sup>

While Hatch does examine these denominations in detail, he is quick to state that the book is not a denominational study. Instead, Hatch asserts that these Protestant denominations all had leaders that “went outside denominational frameworks to develop large followings by the democratic art of persuasion.” Ironically, these leaders—“Barton Stone, the Christian (Disciples of Christ); William Miller, the Adventist; Francis Asbury, the Methodist; John Leland, the Baptist; Richard Allen, the African Methodist Episcopal; and Joseph Smith, the Latter-Day Saint)”—and not the common people are the focus of the book.<sup>82</sup> These people rose up from the common people to lead the churches, which in turn had a greatly affected American culture. In this way, “the democratization of Christianity has less to do with the specifics of polity and governance and more with the incarnation of the church into popular culture” through the direction of these leaders.<sup>83</sup>

The authority of these denominational leaders was based authority not on “education, status, ordination, or state support, but on the ability to move people and retain their confidence.”<sup>84</sup> To move people, leaders knew they had to persuade people and get them to support their cause. As Hatch observed, these leaders “measured the progress of religious standards, not by the prevalence of faith and piety, justice and charity and the public virtues in society in general.”

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<sup>81</sup> Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 4.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

Hatch noted how Charles Finney charged young ministers to throw away their sermon notes and speak extemporaneously from the heart and use illustrations from everyday life and even humor. This emphasis on extemporaneous preaching was part of the shift “from doctrinal to narrative preaching” and “introduced a powerful tool of persuasion.”<sup>85</sup> Hatch claimed that “the rise of evangelical Christianity in the early republic is, in some measure, a story of the success of common people in shaping the culture after their own priorities rather than the priorities outlined by gentlemen such as the framers in the Constitution.”<sup>86</sup> For Butler and Hatch, revivalism’s power was not in the powerful elite but in the common people it motivated.

### **Conclusion**

The historiography of revivalism is, in some ways, as vast and varied as the revivals that historians have attempted to describe. Sociological and intellectual historians see the positive developments of social organization, benevolent societies, and intellectual life in America, while religious historians see the denominational developments as pivotal for American religion and society-at-large. While some see revivals as continual happens and others as cyclical events, all these historians characterized revivalism as impactful to American history. Historians of revivalism should be cautious in overemphasizing one single event, person, or place as being central to understanding revivalism. Specific events, people, and places are important to revivalism, but the impact and issues of revivalism are as unique as the historians themselves.

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<sup>85</sup> Hatch, 138.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

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