

AN INTERPRETIVE ANALYSIS OF THE LAYMAN'S  
PRAYER REVIVAL OF 1857–1858

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Doctor of Philosophy Committee  
of the  
Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Philosophy  
in the Church History Department

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May 2006

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### *Importance of the Study*

History can be a fascinating discipline. One should not assume it is a simple recitation of past events. Such an assumption can lead even the brightest of students to gloss over their history books with not only mechanical indifference, but with naive deference. Often, there is little focus on the dynamic nature of historical interpretation. This is unfortunate because the study of history is both dynamic and interpretive.<sup>1</sup> Past events are indelibly forged and unchangeable. This truth, however, does not preclude the necessity of careful investigation, cautious interpretation, and honest reporting.

In his book *Revivalism and Social Reform*, Timothy L. Smith observed that “accuracy and impartiality are the historian’s cherished goals.” Therefore, “unless Christianity is dependent upon propaganda, its case is better served when historians hew to this line as best they can, letting the chips fall where they may.”<sup>2</sup> Care and caution are

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<sup>1</sup>James E. Bradley and Richard A. Muller, *Church History, An Introduction to Research, Reference Works and Methods* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 34. Regarding proper historiography the writer stated, “The problem of the past is not only related to the subjective question of the present interpretation; it is also related to the nature of historical evidence... All that we have are results and traces. From those results and traces we then construct something that we call history, which is no longer so much ‘what happened’ as the way we construct connections between the surviving traces.”

<sup>2</sup>Timothy L. Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform: American Protestantism on the Eve of the Civil War* (Gloucester, Mass: Peter Smith, 1976), 10.

essential in interpretation because even the historian with the best intentions must navigate through and around several barriers before he can produce a credible account of a historical event.

First, to produce accurate historical research one must consider primary sources as foundational. However, even primary sources require proper critical analysis.<sup>3</sup> Though they are essential for research one cannot assume they are always accurate. Even primary sources are often the products of either accidental or dubious revisionism.<sup>4</sup>

Second, the student of history must understand that he cannot fully recreate the historical event he is studying. He must be selective of his sources.<sup>5</sup> It is one's theological and philosophical presuppositions that will naturally determine what sources are utilized and what sources are ignored. Third, it is important that the historian realize that the primary and secondary sources he uses in research were written by men and women who also filtered and interpreted their work through theological and philosophical

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<sup>3</sup>Bradley and Muller, *Church History, An Introduction to Research*, 39.

<sup>4</sup>R. G. Collingworth, *The Idea of History*. ed. T. M. Knox (New York, 1946) 245. Collingworth wrote: "For any source may be tainted: this writer prejudiced, that misinformed, this inscription misread by a bad epigraphist, that blundered by a careless stonemason; this potsherd placed out of its context by an incompetent excavator, that by a blameless rabbit. The critical historian has to discover and correct all these and many other kinds of falsification. He does it, and can only do it, by considering whether the picture of the past to which the evidence leads him is a coherent and continuous picture, one which makes sense."

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, 236. Regarding the selection of sources Collingworth had this to say: "No historian, not even the worst, merely copies out his authorities; even if he puts in nothing of his own, he is always leaving out things which, for one reason or another, he decides that his own work does not need or cannot use. It is he, therefore, and not his authority, that is responsible for what goes in." Bradley and Muller state in their book *Church History* that "it is of the very essence of sound historiography that it be selective." p. 48.

presuppositions.<sup>6</sup>

Fourth, the historian must therefore discover whether or not there were any conflicting interpretive trends that impacted, or inspired the authors of the primary sources. If there were, these conflicting interpretations must be gathered, studied, criticized and if possible, synthesized. If this is not done, the contemporary historian will fall prey to the presuppositions and agendas of past authors and will at best propagate an embellished history.<sup>7</sup> At worst, he will disseminate a lie.<sup>8</sup>

A fifth concern centers on the personal agendas of historians. It is not possible for the historian to approach the study of history with perfect objectivity. During a forum on scholarship George Marsden addressed the issue of historiography and personal agenda. He noted that historians who substituted personal agendas “for those of the subjects whom they are studying” constituted “one of the perennial problems for scholars.”<sup>9</sup> Marsden wrote that having a personal agenda did present a challenge, but it did not necessarily result in bad scholarship. He advocated that scholars acknowledge they are limited by their own perspectives and biases “and then look for better ways to communicate across communities.” Scholars must be willing to communicate and engage

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 231-249. This process of filtering and interpretation is what R. G. Collingwood described as the historical imagination.

<sup>7</sup>Bradley and Muller, *Church History*, 51. In this section Bradley and Muller argued that within primary sources there is already a built in interpretation. Therefore, the historian must critically examine the data within the source.

<sup>8</sup>David Hackett Fischer, *Historians' Fallacies: Toward a Logic of Historical Thought* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1970). This book is a compilation of various fallacies and mistakes often made by historians during their research.

<sup>9</sup>George Marsden, “The Decade Ahead in Scholarship,” *Religion and American Culture* (Winter 1993) 12.



other scholars who hold different agendas and ideologies.<sup>10</sup>

It is incumbent upon today's historians to understand the different hurdles that can affect one's ability to produce competent and accurate research. The historian must be cognizant of his world and familiar with the world he chooses to study. He must comprehend both his own personal bias and agenda and the biases and agendas of the authors of the sources he studies. This will lead him to cross examine primary sources with other primary sources.

By understanding one's own limitations and by addressing the limitations of primary sources one can offer a more accurate and holistic interpretation of an historical event. With these considerations in mind, this dissertation will seek to examine and understand the event known as the Layman's Prayer Revival of 1857–58. In her book, *The Prayer Revival of 1857-1858*, Dr. Kathryn Teresa Long wrote that “the awakening has become a historical event mentioned by many authors, examined in depth by only a few.”<sup>11</sup> Until recent years, this particular revival received little notice.<sup>12</sup> Fortunately, it is now starting to receive legitimate recognition.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 10-11.

<sup>11</sup>Kathryn Teresa Long, *The Revival of 1857-58* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998) 4.

<sup>12</sup>In the twentieth century there have been at least six dissertations written specifically on the Prayer Revival. All but one of these were written before 1964. The only twentieth century historian to devote serious time and publication to the event is J. Edwin Orr.

<sup>13</sup>Timothy L. Smith. *Revival and Social Reform: American Protestantism on the Eve of the Civil War* (Gloucester, Mass: Peter Smith, 1976) 9. Here Smith offered a challenge to anyone who desires to study the Prayer Revival: “The beliefs and practices of the mass of ordinary men are most important. Preoccupation with the learned and sophisticated minority is as misleading as over attention to the crackpot fringe... we must

Studying this event is important for several reasons. First, this writer discovered that the Prayer Revival of 1857-58 has, in comparison with other periods of revival and awakening, received little recognition.<sup>14</sup> Second, statistically, more people were allegedly converted to Christian faith during the Layman's Prayer Revival than during any other event in American History.<sup>15</sup> For this reason alone, it needs to be studied. Third, if Christians today can accurately study, and interpret the Prayer Revival, it may be possible to reproduce the foundational elements that prepared the United States for this great movement and thereby pave the way for a similar revival in this day.

This study deals at length with historic revision. It is important that the reader

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go beyond the solemn quarterlies published for clergymen and sift the literature which their parishioners read. Vast collections of devotional and biographical tracts, popular histories of revival and reform movements, and files of weekly denominational news papers remain almost unexplored. Here lie the records of events as contemporaries actually saw them, interpreted in the light of their own doctrines, hopes, and prejudices.”

<sup>14</sup>This writer surveyed several dozen Church History and general history books. Among the books surveyed were widely accepted and utilized works such as Williston Walker's *Church History*, Kenneth Scott Latourette's *A History of Christianity*, Mark A. Noll's *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada*, Justo Gonzalez's *The Story of Christianity* vol. 2, Latourette's *A History of the Expansion of Christianity* vol. 5. Though all of these works allude to the First and Second Great Awakenings, none offer a single reference to the Prayer Revival of 1857-58. Other Church Histories such as Earle E. Cairns' *Christianity Through the Centuries* 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., Noll's *The Old Religion in a New World*, Edwin Scott Gaustad's *A Religious History of America*, Thomas A. Askew's *The American Church Experience*, Leonard Woolsey Bacon's *A History of American Christianity*, and Winthrop S. Hudson's *Religion in America* 6<sup>th</sup> edition offer very brief references to this revival. All interpret the Prayer Revival in the greater context of the Second Awakening.

<sup>15</sup>J. Edwin Orr, *Good News in Bad Times, Signs of Revival* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1953) 26, 29. By surveying church records, Orr calculated that more than 1,000,000 converts were added to the church within twenty-four months of the Prayer Revival's outbreak. By the end of the Revival that number increased to approximately 2,000,000. It must be noted that Orr did not divulge exactly how he arrived at these numbers.

understand that this dissertation is in itself a thoroughly revisionist work. Historic revisionism is not intrinsically negative. Therefore, it is not the desire of this writer to ensconce historic revision in pejorative terms. There is; however, an attempt to challenge any revision that pushes historiography away from accuracy. When history does start to meander from factual data it is then important that historians revise their research in order to turn historiography back into the sphere of credulity.

### *Purpose of the Study*

The scope of this research will be the Layman's Prayer Revival of 1857–58. The majority of other works which address the Prayer Revival focus mainly on its geography and impact.<sup>16</sup> The focus of this dissertation will be on interpretation. Through the study of primary sources this dissertation will identify at least three variant interpretations. One major supposition of this work is that these interpretations influenced the substance and nature of the primary sources. Further, this study will also contend that these interpretations were not the products of dubious revisionism. They were, as this writer will illustrate, the products of theological presuppositions.

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<sup>16</sup>J. Edwin Orr has written more on the Prayer Revival of 1857-58 than any other author. However, none of his books which pertain to the this revival offer in depth interpretation. Instead, they record the geographical, social, political and religious impact. To date, the volumes of primary source news paper reports studied by this writer have all addressed impact. The most important and often cited primary source books are Samuel Irenaeus Prime's *The Power of Prayer*, and *Prayer and its Answer*. William C. Conant's *Narratives of Remarkable Conversions*, Talbot W. Chambers *Noon Prayer Meeting of The North Dutch Church*, and James W. Alexander's *Revival and its Lessons*. All of these primary source books approach the Prayer Revival from the perspective of its impact on church and society. The only truly interpretive works that this author has discovered is Kathryn Teresa Long's *The Power of Interpretation: The Revival of 1857–58*, published in 1997 and Timothy L. Smith's *Revivalism and Social Reform: American Protestantism on the Eve of the Civil War*, which was published in 1976.

The proposition of this dissertation will be threefold. First, the Layman's Prayer Revival of 1857–58 was neither a Third Awakening, nor a distinct Awakening. It was the crescendo of the Second Awakening. Second, this work will propose and demonstrate that most, if not all of the primary source accounts were heavily influenced by the theological agendas of those who wrote the histories. Third, the Layman's Prayer Revival can, therefore, only be properly understood when all the variant primary source documents are synthesized into one holistic interpretation.<sup>17</sup>

The purpose of this dissertation will be twofold. First, by establishing that the Prayer Revival was the crescendo of the Second Awakening, this work will challenge any interpretations that suggest the Layman's Prayer Revival was either a third or a distinct awakening in itself. Second, it will develop a holistic understanding of the Revival by defending both its providential nature and human agency.<sup>18</sup> By doing this, the writer endeavors to support the providential nature of awakenings. At the same time, however, by documenting the reality of human agency, this work will diminish the mythical folklore that often surrounds and permeates many Christian interpretations of the event.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Roy J. Fish. *When Heaven Touched Earth: The Awakening of 1858 and its Effects on Baptists* (Azle, TX: Need of the Times Publishers) 133-149. In his book Roy J. Fish included a chapter titled "When He is Come: Characteristics of the Prayer Revival." Some of the subheadings in this chapter includes "Lay Activity," "The Primacy of Prayer," "Lack of Emotional Excess," and "Universal Approval." When one looks at his footnotes it is immediately recognized that virtually all of his sources are either Calvinists or are periodicals that lean towards a Calvinistic interpretation. This was probably not intentional, nevertheless, it offers a good representation of a non holistic historical account of the Prayer Revival that is slanted towards one mode of interpretation.

<sup>18</sup>This writer believes that both providence and human agency are always present during awakenings. It is not an either or, but a both/and proposition.

<sup>19</sup>One great example of such an interpretation can be read in an article published on the front page of the *New York Times* on May 11, 1858. In this article John McLean an

### *Sources of the Study*

The first and most important sources are the primary sources. These sources are found in manuscripts, newspaper periodicals, religious papers, journal articles and books (all of which are dated during or prior to the Prayer Revival). The primary sources offer the first tier of interpretations of the event. There are also a number of books and articles which were written in the nineteenth century. These are works written after the Revival, but by those who experienced it. This offers a second tier of interpretation. A third source is the secondary sources written by those who have no first hand experience with the Prayer Revival. These sources rely heavily upon the interpretations of prior sources. The final source are dissertations that focus on, or at least address the Layman's Prayer Revival.

### *Organization of the Study*

The title of this dissertation is "An Interpretive Analysis of the Layman's Prayer Revival of 1857-58." This dissertation is divided into seven chapters including the Introduction and Conclusion.

The chapter titled "A Case Study of Samuel Irenaeus Prime," critically analyzes Prime's book *The Power of Prayer*, which is the most quoted primary source of the Prayer Revival. This chapter will reveal internal conflicts within the *Power of Prayer*. It

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Associate Justice of the United States Supreme Court stated "The present religious movement is unlike any that have preceded it. In its commencement and progress it seems to be connected less with the ordinary instrumentalities of the gospel and to depend more directly on the operations of the Holy Spirit. On the land and on the sea extraordinary conversions have been witnesses with little or no human agency. But in this great Christian movement they see the hand of Providence which was so often indisposed to guide our destiny."

then reveals conflicts between the *Power of Prayer* and other primary sources. The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate that the primary sources of the Prayer Revival must be critically analyzed and not accepted with passive deference.

The chapter titled “The Prayer Revival of 1857-58,” is divided into three sections. The first offers a brief survey of Jeremiah Lanphier and his involvement in starting the Fulton Street prayer meeting. The second offers insights to the infamous business revulsion that occurred one month after the prayer meeting commenced. The third section addresses the sweeping affect of the revival.

The chapter titled “The Prayer Revival of 1857-58: Perception and Reality,” is divided into three sections. The first section defines and distinguishes the terms revival and awakening. The second offers insights on the problems of revisionism in revival histories. The third section is a study of the spiritual climate of the United States between 1843 and 1857. This section offers growth statistics of Protestant churches from 1840 to 1857, and challenges the consensus that there was a spiritual decline during this period.

The following chapter which is titled “Agents of Outreach During the Prayer Revival of 1857-1858” is divided into three sections. The first section outlines the prolific element of human agency during the Prayer Revival. The second offers a case study on the American Tract Society and records its activity before and during the Prayer Revival. The third second section surveys the impact of the Y.M.C.A. both before and during the Prayer revival.

The following chapter is titled “A Contrast of Three Interpretations of the Revival of 1857-58.” There are three sections in this chapter. The first offers insight into the Calvinistic interpretation of the Revival. The second records the foundational elements of

the Arminian interpretation of the Revival. The third section examines the foundational elements of the journalistic interpretation.

The “Conclusion” will be a redress of all that has been addressed in the dissertation. The proposition will be restated and then a brief synopsis of the main body of the dissertation will be written. This redress and synopsis will establish the proposition point by point.

## CHAPTER 2

### A CASE STUDY OF SAMUEL IRENAEUS PRIME

Earlier in this dissertation the statement was made that even primary sources require proper critical analysis, and that one cannot assume they are always accurate. Even primary sources are often products of either accidental or dubious revisionism. In this chapter, the writer critically analyzes the document he considers to be the seminal primary source for the Layman's Prayer Revival. This analysis will demonstrate that even the most important primary sources to the Layman's Prayer Revival are often laced with internal contradictions and anecdotal data. Such discovery leads the serious historian to question if any one primary source can stand alone, or whether it needs to be buttressed with other primary sources. The obvious answer is that in order for any primary source to be utilized, it must be compared with other primary sources. Only then will one be able to develop a holistic understanding of the event being studied. In this particular case—the Layman's Prayer Revival.

#### *Samuel Irenaeus Prime*

Samuel Irenaeus Prime's works are the most quoted of all the primary sources dealing with this historic event. He is the most obvious person to analyze. Whereas Prime is the most quoted person, his book *The Power of Prayer* is the most quoted of his books. This makes the *Power of Prayer* the most quoted primary source of the Layman's Prayer Revival of 1857 and 1858. Therefore, this section will make a case study of Samuel



Irenaeus Prime's *The Power of Prayer*.

By reporting on the growing spiritual fervor of the Prayer Revival through "Old School lenses," Prime stressed the providential character and national influence of the movement. He all but ignored the incredible financial panic that occurred just one month after Jeremiah Lanphier started the noon day prayer meetings in the Old Dutch Reformed Church.<sup>1</sup> He glossed over the increased evangelistic activity of the New England churches (which started a full year before the Prayer Revival). He did not mention the Baptist and Methodist denominations (the two denominations that gained the most converts during the revival), and he absolutely ignored the impact and even existence of the Y.M.C.A. and colportage.

#### The Power of Prayer and its Internal Conflicts

In the opening pages of *The Power of Prayer*, Prime declared "This revival is to be remembered through all coming ages as simply an answer to prayer."<sup>2</sup> However, Prime then discussed in some length how Lanphier approached newspapers and "called on some of the editors of the religious papers to have them notice the interest that is daily manifested in our meetings."<sup>3</sup> This raises a question. Was the revival "simply an answer to prayer." Or was it also a product of interest stirred by its daily reporting in the religious and secular papers?

Not only did Lanphier approach the newspapers, but he also walked the streets

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<sup>1</sup>Kathryn Long, *The Revival of 1857-58*, 13.

<sup>2</sup>Samuel Irenaeus Prime, *The Power of Prayer* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991), 3.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, 10.

inviting people to attend. Prime, himself, quoted this from Lanphier's journal:

“Prepared for the prayer meeting today at noon. Called to invite a number of persons to be present. Spoke to men as I met them in the street, as my custom is.”<sup>4</sup> He further quoted Lanphier who wrote: “Called on a number to invite them to attend the noon day prayer meetings.”<sup>5</sup> These quotes that were taken from Lanphier's journal were all dated October of 1857. However, Prime wrote that the “great revival had actually commenced and had been in progress for some time, before any public mention had been made of it.”<sup>6</sup> Prime contradicted himself here. He quoted from Lanphier's journal where he (Lanphier) invited people by both word of mouth and correspondence. He also asked newspaper editors to report on the prayer meetings. This was all done less than a month after the prayer meeting at the Fulton Street church started. Then, Prime suggested that the revival was in progress for some time before there was any public mention of it. Both statements cannot be accurate. It was either one or the other.

Another area where Prime seemed to be in conflict was over lay and clergy involvement. “Another feature of this work,” wrote Prime, “is that it has been conducted by laymen.” He boasted that “It began with them. It continues with them.” He then stated that ministers “assume no control”<sup>7</sup> of the prayer meetings. However, Lanphier, himself, was under the employment of the North Dutch Church of Fulton Street. He was not a

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 8-9.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 9.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 10.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 33.

layman. He was a church worker, a city missionary.<sup>8</sup> He was paid by the North Dutch Church to reach the city with the gospel. Thus, the most important personality of the Prayer Revival was not a layman, but a paid professional minister. In function and vocation, Lanphier was very much part of the clergy.

Prime stated that ministers assumed no control of the prayer meetings. However, he also wrote that during the first months of the noon day prayer meetings that both “pastors and laymen” who belonged to churches in both New York and Brooklyn, “had been to one or more of these meetings, and had been warmed by the holy fire already kindled.” These pastors and laymen were so impacted by these meetings that “as the sparks from the burning building are borne to kindle other fires, so these carried the fire to their own churches.”<sup>9</sup> If both these positions are correct, then the reader is to assume that pastors went to prayer meetings, were inspired by prayer meetings, returned to their churches and started prayer meetings, but assumed no control of the prayer meetings. However, at the same time, laymen who did the same, returned to their churches, started and controlled their respective prayer meetings.

Prime exalted the notion that “it was everywhere a revival of prayer.” He wrote that “it was not prayer meetings in imitation of the Fulton street meetings.” However, in the same paragraph he then stated that “the same characteristics that marked the Fulton street meeting marked all similar meetings.”<sup>10</sup> One must ask, were they different or the

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<sup>8</sup>Prime’s *Power of Prayer* and 18-29 and Chamber’s *Noon Prayer Meeting*, 39-44, offer background information on Lanphier.

<sup>9</sup>Prime, *The Power of Prayer*, 10.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 16.

same?

The reader is asked to believe that the subsequent prayer meetings which spread throughout the city were spontaneous and independent of, but just like the Fulton street meetings. But, they were never imitations. In Prime's understanding, the similarity of the prayer meetings was not evidence of human concert, but divine providence. Prime wrote that both ministers and lay-persons attended the Fulton Street Prayer meetings and took the "holy fire already kindled" back to their respective churches. Also, Prime recorded that Lanphier contacted both secular and religious news papers and reported the events of the prayer meetings. According to Prime, these news papers reported the substance and experiences of these prayer meetings. In truth, Prime provided much more evidence of human concert than he did of divine providence.

Another point of contention is Prime's record of the New York pulpit during the Prayer Revival. He wrote of the character of preaching that began to prevail during the revival. "Let us look at some of these passages... the sermons by a great number of preachers, selected without any preconcert..."<sup>11</sup> He then listed a number of revivalistic sermons preached during that time. However, the only sermons referenced by Prime were those preached from the pulpit of the Dutch Reformed church on Fulton Street. He offered no record of what any other church was preaching. Regarding the lack of "preconcert," Prime already mentioned that ministers from all over New York and Brooklyn visited the Fulton Street meeting and "carried the fire to their own churches."<sup>12</sup> If they carried "fire" to their own churches, then it is very probable that this supposed

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 13.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 10.

“fire” translated into sermons. Reason dictates that if ministers gathered together for prayer and were impacted, that they certainly brought their experiences with them to the pulpit.

Prime went to some length to report the stealthy nature of the Prayer Revival. The reader is left to believe that revival swept the nation as one simultaneous event without any collaboration of any human agent. He wrote that “so gradually and unostentatiously had all this wide spread religious interest risen, that one meeting for prayer scarcely had any knowledge of what was doing in any other.”<sup>13</sup> How did Prime know this? If the Nation’s religious and secular papers were filled with testimonies and people all over New York were leaving these prayer meetings blessed and sharing God’s love—as Prime reports—then it was very probable that the various prayer meetings knew exactly what was transpiring at the others. Prime stated that this “spread of religious interest” was gradual and unostentatious. However, J. Edwin Orr reported that in the first twenty four months of the revival, there were over 1,000,000 converts nation wide.<sup>14</sup>

Regarding preaching, Prime wrote “there had been no eloquent preaching, no energetic and enthusiastic appeals; no attempts to rouse up religious interest.”<sup>15</sup> Unfortunately, he twice contradicted his own statement. In his own words he said this of the preaching during the Prayer Revival: “The Holy Spirit seems to lead the minds of ministers to those portions of his word which he designs to make the fire and the hammer

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 16.

<sup>14</sup>J. Edwin Orr, *Good News in Bad Times*, (Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 1953) 25-6. See also footnote #15 on page 5.

<sup>15</sup>Prime, *The Power of Prayer*, 16.

to break the flinty heart in pieces.”<sup>16</sup> He further declared, “What a world of love must have been in these sermons. With what untold anxieties did these preacher strive to win sinners to Christ.”<sup>17</sup>

Regarding the attempts to “rouse religious interest,” Prime stated that Lanphier first approached religious papers, then he contacted secular papers and asked them to publish testimonies of the prayer meetings. Prime also quoted this from Lanphier’s journal: “We distributed the tract entitled ‘Three Words,’ and each one was to give it to some friend.” Then he quoted: “The tract given out today was entitled ‘One Honest Effort.’ It was to be prayed over and then given away.”<sup>18</sup> These quotes from Lanphier recorded by Prime suggest that Lanphier was very involved in attempting to “rouse up religious interest.” Prime insisted that there were “no attempts” by preachers “to rouse up religious interest.” However, he then declared that preachers preached in such a way as to “break the flinty heart in pieces.” They strove with “anxieties” to “win sinners to Christ” and enveloped their sermons in a “world of love.” Did they or did they not attempt to “rouse religious interest?” Prime said no, but even his own statements challenge his position.

Another area of conflict is over Prime’s position on the need for human agency. He disparaged churches from attempting to exhaust themselves with evangelistic outreach. He admonished over zealous churches by writing: “churches have taxed to the utmost for a few weeks both soul and body of every earnest man they could enlist. Such

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 13.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 15.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 17.

efforts must be relaxed. Flesh and blood cannot sustain them.” However, on the same page Prime wrote: “we must shake off old habits of mind, and arouse ourselves earnestly to the unprecedented demands of the time. God never called any former generation of men on this earth, as we are now called.”<sup>19</sup> He never spelled out what the “unprecedented demands” were. Also, he never defined what his generation was “called” to do.

Obviously, he believed they were “called” to do something, yet he encouraged churches to relax the enlisting of “earnest” men in an attempt to sustain a God sent revival.

Prime understood revival as an event that was produced, propagated, and fulfilled within the sphere of God’s sovereign will. Human agency was nothing more than a passive element:

The revival was nowhere attended nor preceded by any special measures intended and adapted to produce intense excitement on the subject of religion. All these union prayer meetings have been the effects of a great first cause. God poured out the Spirit of grace and supplication, and to his name be all the glory. As nearly as possible was this awakened interest simultaneous over all this western world.<sup>20</sup>

Even this declaration is challenged with his own words. Up to this point, Prime recorded the Prayer Revival in chronological order. His own record of the event demonstrated that the revival was not simultaneous. It did experience explosive growth, but it was growth that could be tracked. Prime wrote that there were no “special measures intended and adapted to produce intense excitement.” however, in the paragraph following this statement he wrote this:

Among the indications of an awakened religious interest in the west was the calling of a convention on revivals at Pittsburgh late in last Autumn... A committee was appointed, who drew up an address to the churches... It was

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 21.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 36.

recommended that this address be read from the pulpit by pastors... and that official members of the respective churches be called to meet in each church to discuss the same subjects as the convention had discussed... that a plan of personal visitation be adopted... families should be visited by the pastor... multitudes of ministers... delivered discourses on the necessity and practicability of revivals... All these arrangements told upon the country with great power and the awakening received an intelligent and mighty impulse.<sup>21</sup>

This demonstrated a high degree of organization. Significant measures were “adapted to produce intense excitement on the subject of religion.” It suggests that ministers had much to do with the perpetuation and organization of the revival. Also, this convention was not unique. A similar convention was held at Pittsburgh in 1828 with the same focus.<sup>22</sup> Meetings and conventions were commonly organized where delegates spoke about the need for revival.

After declaring there were “no special measures intended and adapted to produce intense excitement on the subject of religion,”<sup>23</sup> Prime then went into considerable detail as to how local churches engaged in systematic visitation throughout New York and Brooklyn. He stated, “So far as this city was concerned, the organized systems of tract

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 37-8. This particular convention recorded by Prime was the Pittsburgh convention which was conducted by Old School Presbyterians on December 1, 1857.

<sup>22</sup>The Republican Complier, *Synod of Pittsburgh*, November, 19, 1828. During this Synod, seven resolutions were adopted. 1. That every minister of the Gospel seek with all earnestness a revival of religion in his own soul. 2. That every minister examine the condition of his charge (his church). 3. To cleanse the polluted sanctuary, and bear testimony against all vices and sin. 4. To enforce discipline against sin in order to avert God’s judgement. 5. That ministers compel their members to be stewards of their time and actively engage in ministries that will advance God’s kingdom. 6. That the members of the Synod will visit churches and call Christians to humble themselves, return to God, and commit to fervent prayer. 7. That the Presbyters present at the Synod take these subjects into consideration and secure them within their own churches.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 36. It is very possible that Prime’s reference to “no special measures” did not indicate a lack of organization, but a lack of the revival methods employed in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.



and Sunday School visitation had much to do with the beginning of the revival, with its spread, and with its continuance to the present hour.”<sup>24</sup> He explained how churches of New York developed a thorough system “of searching out and exploring the destitutions of this great city, and inducting the neglected and neglecting perishing thousands to attend upon the worship of God.”<sup>25</sup> The primary vehicle for this outreach and evangelism was the Sunday School. Prime recorded that churches visited both the rich and the poor, the destitute and the fashionable. As a result of these “special measures” conducted by human agency, Prime declared this:

the numbers were greatly increased of those who visited the house of prayer. All denominations nearly were benefitted by this work, and many of the shared in the labor of it. In many Sunday schools the members were doubled, all increased. In this way, thousands of persons—some from the brown stone fronts, and some from the garrets and cellars, swelled the numbers, who were seen on Sunday morning wending their way to the sanctuary... This system of visitation was adopted and carried out in New York and Brooklyn about the same time. It was an organized plan adopted by the churches to visit in their respective localities and search out every kind of destitution.<sup>26</sup>

#### *Comparing the Power of Prayer with Prayer and Its Answers*

If one compares the rhetoric engaged by Prime in his first book, *The Power of Prayer* and his book *Prayer and its Answers*, which was written twenty five years later, he will quickly recognize that the language of the latter book is much more sedate. In his book *Prayer and its Answers*, Prime offered no observation that the revival of 1857 abated. However, his rhetoric was considerably less flamboyant.

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 38–9.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 38–9.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 38–9.

In *The Power of Prayer*, Prime asked, “Shall the work cease? Shall a revival of religion, in some respects the most remarkable the church has ever enjoyed, come to an end... No one can think that God chooses to have it so.”<sup>27</sup> With these words, Prime declared to his readers that the Prayer Revival would be a lasting one. He proclaimed that the revival was “such a work of grace as the modern Christian world has never seen?”<sup>28</sup> It was a movement that was “gilded by the rays of a brighter sun than had ever shone upon the moral and religious world before. This was believed. It is believed now.”<sup>29</sup>

Prime used exalted terms in his first book *The Power of Prayer*. However, when one reads between the lines of *Prayer and Its Answers*, it is obvious that the fervor over the prayer meetings was much less intense in the years proceeding 1857-58. This rhetoric no longer revolved around revival wrought by prayer, but the fact that prayer was buttressed by faith. Unlike *The Power of Prayer*, the operative words linked to prayer in *Prayer and Its Answers* was not revival but providence and faith. For example, Prime stated:

When the unbelieving objector tries to push us to the wall by opposing the inflexible will of God to our theory of prayer, we answer him by saying that our religion has its ground in faith. Our faith is that God hears and answers, and faith is the fruit of the Spirit... When God instructs us to pray... it is the very substance of our religion to accept the offer and expect fulfillment of the promise. To be bothered about the nature of God, the infinite littleness of our efforts, and the vastness of His concerns, as reasons why He will not take notice of our requests is all idle... These facts and considerations are preliminary to the narratives to be

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 20.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 26.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 27.

presented in this volume<sup>30</sup>

In his book *Prayer and its Answers*, there were no accolades about a revival, such as has never been seen, sweeping the world. There were no exhibitions of men and women all over the city falling under the conviction of sin. There were no illustrations of prayer meetings exploding and multiplying over the city and the nation. It was mainly a book about one prayer meeting—the Fulton Street prayer meeting held in the Dutch Reformed church. The lion’s share of this book contained anecdotes of prayers being answered all over the world. Prime never explicitly wrote that the state of religion and the impact of the revival waned considerably.

Despite what was no longer happening in New York—mainly a revival of religion—Prime still celebrated the continuing of the noon day Fulton Street Prayer meeting. However, his praise centered around the format of the meeting and not its impact. Lauded was the evidence that the prayer meeting still possessed no “dangerous sentiments, or of exhibiting unusual and unscriptural methods... It has had no artificial or factitious excitement to keep it up... The interest has not been sustained by physical demonstrations, shoutings, trances, visions, or miracles of any sort.”<sup>31</sup> Because of its longevity, Prime declared that the Fulton Street prayer meeting answered the question “How shall a prayer meeting be made the most interesting and the most useful?”<sup>32</sup>

He wrote that had this particular prayer meeting contained any “physical

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<sup>30</sup>Samuel Irenaeus Prime, *Prayer and its Answers* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1882) 21–2.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, 163–4.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, 163–4.

excitement” or “religious intoxication” that “there is no good reason to believe it would have survived its infancy. Long before this time it would have been consumed in its own fires, and its ashes would have been cold.”<sup>33</sup> Prime concluded that this particular prayer meeting survived because “pursuing the sober and godly tenor of its way, retired, humble, noiseless, seeking only the presence and guidance of the Holy Spirit, it has lived, flourished, and brought forth fruit abundantly... And its faith has been intelligent, rational, and calm. Therefore, there has been no fanaticism and no failure.”<sup>34</sup>

To this point one will conclude that twenty-five years after the Prayer Revival started, the Fulton Street prayer meetings were still viable and powerful. However, once again, Prime contradicted his own words. In his concluding chapter of the book he wrote this:

The numbers in attendance on the Fulton Street Prayer meeting are so small as to be scarcely appreciable in the midst of a million of swarming, busy, buying and selling people. One church crowded to repletion would hold but a few compared with the multitude that care for none of these things. But if any central church were open, and at noon every day a thousand men should spend half an hour in its courts in mingled prayer and praise, it would indicate a higher stage of Christian life than is now to be found in the marts of commerce and the raging competitions of the Exchange.<sup>35</sup>

The closest Prime came to admitting that the state of religion was in decline was in this concluding statement: “This is a plea for the assertion by Christians in every day life of their purpose to restore to their proper relations the objects for which they live.”<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 163–4.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 163–4.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., 166-7.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 168.

### Conflicts with other Primary Sources

Not only is Prime's *Power of Prayer* fraught with internal conflicts, but there are also a number of conflicts with other primary sources. Prime stated that "on the 17<sup>th</sup> of March, Burton's Old Theatre, in Chambers street, was opened by a number of merchants."<sup>37</sup> Though this meeting was started by businessmen, Prime neglected to add that the Y.M.C.A. was also involved. *The New York Times* recorded that it was the Y.M.C.A. that actually leased the theater.<sup>38</sup> According to William Connant's *Narratives of Remarkable Conversions*, businessmen initiated the meeting, but it was the Y.M.C.A. that organized it. In his *Narratives*, Connant made this statement:

On the 17<sup>th</sup> of March, Burton's old Theatre, in Chambers street... was thrown open at mid day for prayer... The meeting was initiated by the merchants doing business in Chambers street... Rev. T. L. Cuyler, who conducted the first meeting, addressed the audience as follows: "At the request of a Committee of the Young Men's Christian Association, I have come to conduct the service today."<sup>39</sup>

In *The Power of Prayer*, Prime noted that "In New England, the present great revival commenced almost simultaneously in many cities, villages and townships."<sup>40</sup> Once again, this was not accurate. According to the *Christian observer*, revivals were sweeping across the nation as early as February which was seven months prior to Lamphier's first prayer meeting.<sup>41</sup> The revival did not start September of 1857. It started

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<sup>37</sup>Prime, *The Power of Prayer*, 22.

<sup>38</sup>"Prayer Meetings at Burton's Old Theatre," *New York Times* (March 18, 1858).

<sup>39</sup>Connant, 359-60.

<sup>40</sup>Prime, *The Power of Prayer*, 27.

<sup>41</sup>"Religious Intelligence," *Christian Observer* Vol 36. no 9 (February 26, 1857).

much earlier. However, Prime's narrative leads the reader to believe otherwise.

Prime wrote earlier in this work, "this love of prayer and love of souls... disarmed all opposition, so that not a man opened his mouth in opposition."<sup>42</sup> Yet Bacon, in his *History of American Christianity* wrote that all was not unified during the Prayer Revival. He wrote of "old men who were ready to weep."<sup>43</sup> They lamented that there was "no sustained enforcement on the mind and conscience of alarming and heart searching doctrines; no protracted meetings in which from day to day the warnings and invitations of the gospel were set forth before the hesitating mind."<sup>44</sup> These "old men" complained that there was little agonizing over sin. The invitations that did occur were nothing more than "superficial piety, springing up like seed in the thin soil of rocky places."<sup>45</sup>

John Jenkins, pastor of Calvary Church in Philadelphia produced a pamphlet titled *Plain Thoughts on The Present Great Awakening*. It was published in 1858 and it addressed the Prayer Revival. In this pamphlet he encouraged ministers to speak out in support of the revival that was sweeping through Philadelphia. He was concerned because "some have already attempted to influence the minds of the people either for or against this wonderful state of things. Some have pronounced it a fanatasm bordering on blasphemy; others have expressed a strong belief that the work is of the Holy Spirit."<sup>46</sup> John Jenkins offered these several quotes from men in Philadelphia who were skeptical of

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<sup>42</sup>Prime, *The Power of Prayer*, 12.

<sup>43</sup>Bacon, 344-5.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., 344-5.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 344-5.

<sup>46</sup>Jenkins, 2-3.

the prayer meetings:

excitement, after all, may be at the bottom of this movement, says one of our readers. If not with new wine, these men are drunk with unnatural enthusiasm; with draughts of religious excitement, quaffed at these large meetings; they are thus carried into extravagances. What, indeed, but unnatural excitement could lead men to crowd in such vast numbers into places of prayer.<sup>47</sup>

Conant also observed that there were those in New York who were not pleased with the prayer revival. In his book *Narratives or Remarkable Conversions*, he stated that “Among the Methodist agencies in the Revival, is a Prayer-meeting Association... The Prayer-meeting Association are achieving great success. In consequence of their zeal in the work, the profanely inclined have christened them The Flying Artillery of Heaven.”<sup>48</sup> It was the religious community that did not appreciate the “enthusiasm” of this Methodist Prayer Meeting Association that dubbed it the Flying Artillery of Heaven. However, it was the Flying Artillery of Heaven that did not appreciate the sedate and emotionless character of the Prayer Revival.

This section earlier addressed sermons preached from the New York Pulpits. It is true that Prime only recorded sermons preached from the Dutch Reformed church of Fulton Street. However, there was another book published in 1858 which recorded a selection of sermons preached that year from a variety of denominations within the cities of New York. This book is titled *The New York Pulpit in The Revival of 1858. A Memorial Volume of Sermons*. According to the introduction, the intention of this compilation of sermons was to offer a record of the “pungent expression of their [New York ministers] heart and mind, at a time when God is doing great things in their

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<sup>47</sup>Ibid., 22.

<sup>48</sup>Connant, 365.

churches.”<sup>49</sup> The sermons recorded in this book challenge Prime’s assertion that ministry methods were not “adapted to produce intense excitement on the subject of religion.”<sup>50</sup> The pages of this book are filled with riveting sermons which are saturated with illustrations and rhetoric designed to stir the hearts of all who heard. One sermon, in particular, illustrated the urgent and passionate plea of New York ministers during the Prayer Revival. The reverend Theo L. Cuyler, pastor of the Reformed Dutch church in Market Street New York, preached a sermon titled “Past Feeling.”<sup>51</sup> This sermon, like so many others in *The New York Pulpit*, urged its listeners to some course of action and this urging was done with deliberate and passionate rhetoric. This was quite contrary to Prime’s insistence that there were no efforts to produce excitement on the subject of religion. If the sermons recorded in *The New York Pulpit* are an accurate portrayal of the average sermon preached weekly from the pulpits of New York during the Prayer Revival then one may argue that efforts to “produce intense excitement on the subject of religion” was a foundational element of the revival.

#### Other Concerns with Prime

When studying other primary sources it becomes obvious that the Y.M.C.A. and the colporteurs of the nation’s Bible and Tract societies played a significant role both

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<sup>49</sup>*The New York Pulpit in The Revival of 1858, A Memorial Volume of Sermons* (New York: Sheldon, Blakeman, & Company, 1858) xi.

<sup>50</sup>Prime, *The Power of Prayer*, 21.

<sup>51</sup>*The New York Pulpit in The Revival of 1858*, 50-60. In this sermon, rev. Cuyler traced the life of a person whodigressed from a young and compassionate youth to a hardened criminal. From this illustration the sermon then launched into an urgent plea for the listeners to not forsake God to the point that their hearts become brazen, unfeeling, unrepentant, and past feeling.



before and during the Prayer Revival.<sup>52</sup> Despite the important, and perhaps essential role performed by these two institutions, Prime did not even acknowledge their existence.

Prime also reported on the love and unity of the prayer meetings. Love and unity is a universal theme in both primary and secondary sources. Prime declared that “the whole atmosphere was love... Hence there was no room for sectarian jealousies.”<sup>53</sup>

However, this love and unity must be interpreted through the lens of mid-nineteenth century, pre-emancipation, pre-suffrage Protestant Christian America. For a brief time, these prayer meetings did not allow women to attend, and when African Americans entered the meetings they were quickly segregated and shuttled into a separate room.<sup>54</sup>

Prime declared that this revival was unlike any revival America, or even the world, had seen. In the following quote one will see why this particular revival was so important to the Calvinist community in general and Prime in particular:

The character of the work was as remarkable as its inception and extent... It lacked almost everything that made up the leading features of the revivals of 30 and 32. There was no revival preaching. There were no revivalists; no revival machinery, such as was common to those days. The ‘anxious seat’, and the labor of peregrinating revival makers were all unknown. In former times, a revival, even in New England, set in motion much that was stirring, and to many minds very objectionable. Now there was nothing of the kind.<sup>55</sup>

The above quote illustrates why so many in the reformed tradition embraced this revival.

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<sup>52</sup>See chapter title Evangelism Before the Prayer Revival of 1857-1858. In this section both the Y.M.C.A. and colportage are addressed in detail.

<sup>53</sup>Prime, *The Power of Prayer*, 11-12.

<sup>54</sup>See chapter title The Prayer Revival of 1857-1858. For a more detailed explanation of gender and race tensions read Kathryn Teresa Long’s *The Revival of 1857-58: Interpreting and American Awakening*, chapter 4 “Gender Tensions and the Masculinization of Urban Piety,” also, pages 103-106.

<sup>55</sup>Prime, *The Power of Prayer*, 30.

For over one hundred years the United States experienced waves of revival, but at last, there was a revival that looked the way a revival should look.

Much of Prime's "historical" account of the "facts" of the Prayer Revival sound more like a sermon than an historical record. It is often difficult to determine when Prime was being historical and when he was being hyperbolic.<sup>56</sup> Nevertheless, this writer believes Prime to be an essential primary source to the Layman's Prayer Revival. His literary contribution to the revival will, therefore, not be neglected in this dissertation. It is, however, important for one to use Prime in conjunction with other primary sources.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup>This "sermonizing" by Prime is a typical method utilized by nineteenth century historians. It is a method that bleeds well into the twentieth century. One good example of a twentieth century history that applies this same form of rhetoric and hyperbole is Leonard Woolsey Bacon's *A History of American Christianity*, (New York: Charles Schibner's Sons, 1928). A great example of his sermonizing of a historical event can be seen in Bacon's account of Jonathan Edwards' biography of David Brainerd. Bacon writes: "The story of his life and death, written by Jonathan Edwards out of that fatherly love with which he had tended the young man's latest days and hours, may not have been an unmixed blessing to the church. The long protracted introspections, the cherished forebodings and misgivings, as if doubt was to be cultivated as a Christian virtue, may not have been an altogether wholesome example for general imitation. But think what the story of that short life has wrought! To how many hearts it has been an inspiration to self-sacrifice and devotion to the service of God in the service of man, we cannot know." p. 181. It is probably very true that *The Life of David Brainerd* was a "blessing to the church," and that "many hearts" were inspired. Unfortunately, the only statement that Bacon makes that can be ascertained with any certainty is "we cannot know." This section of Bacon's work may be great for an altar call, but it is not credible historiography.

<sup>57</sup>The need to cross reference primary sources is one of the fundamental arguments of this dissertation.

## CHAPTER 3

## THE PRAYER REVIVAL OF 1857–58

*Jeremiah Lanphier and the Fulton Street Prayer Meeting*

According to Samuel Irenaues Prime, Jeremiah Lanphier was born in Coxsackie, New York in 1809.<sup>1</sup> He became a resident of New York City probably around 1838. Once in the city he found work “in mercantile pursuits.” In 1842 he made a profession of faith and joined the Tabernacle Church. He later joined the Nineteenth Street Presbyterian Church which was then pastored by Dr. James Waddell Alexander.<sup>2</sup> There he remained for eight or nine years. Early in 1857 he joined the North Dutch Reformed Church on Fulton Street. On July 1, he was appointed by the church to work as a city missionary.<sup>3</sup> Though he was employed without any plan of instructions, his major task was to provide ministry to the most neglected portion of the city—the lower ward.<sup>4</sup>

Lanphier immediately began to work. His primary focus was on the homes surrounding the church. After dividing his ministry field into districts, he went door to

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<sup>1</sup>His name is sometimes spelled “Lamphier.”

<sup>2</sup>*The New York Pulpit in the Revival of 1858*, 13. This footnote does not establish that Lanphier was a member of the Nineteenth Street Presbyterian Church. It establishes that Dr. James W. Alexander was the pastor there. Prime, in the *Power of Prayer* simply states that Lanphier joined Alexander’s church, but does not reference the church.

<sup>3</sup>Samuel Irenaeus Prime, *The Power of Prayer* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991) 7.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, 7.

door and visited the majority of them inviting the residents to worship with him at the North Dutch Church. His desire was to call upon each family and if possible, every individual in his field.<sup>5</sup> During this time he gave special attention to children and worked diligently to enroll as many as he could into the Sunday school. Also dotted around the church was a large number of hotels and rooming houses. Lanphier made regular visits to these dwellings and invited both the residents and the tenants to attend the services of the Dutch Church.<sup>6</sup>

After each day of work, Lanphier retired to the consistory room of the Dutch Church for a time of prayer and reflection. These periods of prayer were a great consolation and he was convinced that any success on the streets was to be in direct proportion to his prayer life.<sup>7</sup> While he was in this ministry, he did achieve some success, but in his heart he was not satisfied with the work. One day, he inquired of the Lord and asked, “Lord what wilt thou have me to do.”<sup>8</sup> In his journal, Lanphier wrote, “As I was walking along the streets, the idea was suggested into my mind that an hour of prayer, from twelve to one o’clock would be beneficial to business men, who usually in great numbers take that hour for rest and refreshment.”<sup>9</sup> Though Lanphier was not given any

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<sup>5</sup>P. F. Jerome, “The Revival of 1857-58 and the Association,” *The Association Outlook*, (1898) 18.

<sup>6</sup>Marvin D. Hoff, “The Fulton Street Prayer Meeting,” *Reformed Review* 17 (September, 1963) 27-28.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, 27-28.

<sup>8</sup>Frank Grenville Beardsley, *Religious Progress Through Religious Revivals* (New York: American Tract Society, 1943) 43-4.

<sup>9</sup>Prime, *Power of Prayer*, 7-8.

plan of instructions, such a ministry did not address the “most neglected portion of the city.” Nevertheless, his commitment to prayer and the consolation he received from it led him to approach the elders and deacons of the North Dutch Church and ask permission to open the church for a noon day prayer meeting.<sup>10</sup> The request was accepted. Lanphier then drew up and circulated the following handbill to advertise this meeting:

How often Shall I Pray? As often as the languages of prayer is in my heart; as often as I see my need of help; as often as I feel the power of temptation; as often as I am made sensible of any spiritual declension, or feel the aggression of a worldly earthly spirit. In prayer we leave the business of time for that of eternity, and intercourse with men for intercourse with God. A day Prayer-Meeting is held every Wednesday, from twelve to one o’clock, in the Consistory building, in the rear of the North Dutch Church, corner of Fulton and William Streets (entrance from Fulton and Ann Streets).<sup>11</sup>

It was Lanphier’s desire to have a prayer meeting which was out of the ordinary. The format was to be simple. Everyone was invited, but no one was allowed to occupy more than five minutes in remarks, or prayer. This design accommodated the businessman who desired to participate for only five minutes, or for the full hour.<sup>12</sup>

Beardsley noted:

The idea was to have singing, prayer, exhortation, relation of religious experience as the case might be; that none should be required to stay the whole hour; that all should come and go as their engagements should allow or require, or their inclinations dictate.<sup>13</sup>

On September 23, 1857, at twelve o’clock noon, the door of the third floor lecture room was opened for prayer. On that day, Lanphier waited in the room not certain anyone

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<sup>10</sup>Hoff, *The Fulton Street Prayer Meeting*, 27-28.

<sup>11</sup>Orr, *Good News in Bad Times*, 12.

<sup>12</sup>Prime, *Power of Prayer*, 8.

<sup>13</sup>Beardsley, *Religious Progress Through Religious Revivals*, 43-4.

would show up. Beardsley recorded:

At half past twelve the step of a solitary individual was heard upon the stairs. Shortly after another, and another; then another, and last of all, another, until six made up the whole company! We had a good meeting. The Lord was with us to bless us.<sup>14</sup>

Thus, the noonday businessmen's prayer-meeting was inaugurated! However, it must be noted that Jeremiah Lanphier was not the first person to initiate a weekly layman's prayer meeting in New York. Such meetings were common only one year earlier. The Dutch Reformed Church on Fulton street had a previous noon day prayer meeting which disbanded at the coming of summer. This occurred only a few months before Lanphier initiated his own and probably about a month before he was appointed as a city missionary for the Dutch Reformed Church.<sup>15</sup> Since these earlier meetings were in progress when Lanphier—who was then a businessman—became a member of the Dutch Church, he would have been aware of them and very possibly a participant. This meant when he re-started the meetings, he probably already had a network of contacts. It also meant that a noon day prayer meeting was not a novel idea for the Dutch Reformed Church.

What is also noteworthy is that Lanphier is reported to have consulted Edward Colgate, the local leader of the Y.M.C.A. before he started the prayer meetings. This consultation led to the possibility of a joint sponsorship of the prayer meetings. The implication here is that responsibility for the prayer meeting would be shared by the

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 43-4.

<sup>15</sup>C. Howard Hopkins, *History of the Y.M.C.A. in North America* (New York: Association Press, 1951) 81-82. Lanphier was appointed as a city missionary on July 1, 1857. In all probability, the former prayer meetings had only suspended about a month earlier.

Dutch Church, the Y.M.C.A. and by members of other evangelical churches.<sup>16</sup>

Irrespective of the details surrounding the formation of this prayer meeting, an historic event was about to occur. Though Lanphier was hopeful for a movement of God, it was unlikely that he foresaw the phenomenon that was about to occur.

The first week only a few participated.<sup>17</sup> By the third meeting, on Wednesday, September 30, twenty persons were present. The Next meeting was held on October 7, at which time the attendants of the prayer meeting decided to hold daily meetings. Prime declared:

This meeting was so animated and encouraging a character, that a meeting was appointed for the NEXT DAY [emphasis Prime's], at which a large number attended... The meetings were moved to the middle-lecture room. From this point on, the meetings were held daily. On October 14<sup>th</sup>, over one hundred present.<sup>18</sup>

The momentum from this point was explosive. The meeting quickly overflowed and eventually filled three rooms in the Dutch Church. Soon, hundreds, who were daily being refused admission because there was no room to hold them, were leaving the church in great disappointment. This demand for more room led the Y.M.C.A. to open daily noon day prayer meetings at the John Street Methodist Church and lecture-room.<sup>19</sup> Within a couple of months there were over twenty prayer meetings in New York alone. Similar meetings also developed in virtually every major city in the United States.

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<sup>16</sup>Russell E. Francis, *Pentecost: 1858, A Study in Religious Revivalism* (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1948) 51.

<sup>17</sup>Some sources record three, others record six.

<sup>18</sup>Prime, *The Power of Prayer*, 8-10.

<sup>19</sup>Henry C. Fish, *Handbook of Revivals: For the use of Winners of Souls* (Boston: James H. Earle, 1874) 67.

*Business Revulsion and Financial Panic*

After a financial panic in 1839 the United states experienced phenomenal financial prosperity. The nation was extending westward. Its geographical boundaries were growing. Immigrants by the millions were pouring into the country. Railroads were being built all over the nation and the industrial revolution was in full throttle. Naturally, Wall Street was in the middle of this financial frenzy with its bulls, bears and speculative trading.

Unfortunately, lessons of the past were not heeded and on October 13, 1857 the United States experienced another nation wide financial collapse. It is known as the Business Revulsion of 1857. In New York alone, fifty-seven out of fifty-eight banks had to suspend activity until December 12. Banking centers throughout the nation followed suit. There were a host of factors involved in this financial crash. In his dissertation, *The Great Awakening of 1857 ad 1858*, Carl Lloyd Spicer made this comment regarding the beginnings of the financial revulsion:

The varied industrial activity created a demand for cheap labor. This labor was supplied by the immigration from the British Isles and continental Europe... The labor market was glutted with newcomers from Europe. Struggle loomed between employer and employee... (also) The cupidity of capitalism was surpassed by the blind and irrational development of the West. Laissez-faire had prompted the development of easy credit facilities and the consequent speculation in land and property values. In 1857 this over-expansion of credit, which was based on wild cat security, reached a climax. In October Wall Street collapsed and great speculative fortunes vanished over night.<sup>20</sup>

J. Edwin Orr, in his book, *The Fervent Prayer* noted its considerable impact on New York City. Dozens of banks called in their loans. Thousands of merchants were

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<sup>20</sup>Carl Lloyd Spicer, *The Great Awakening of 1857 and 1858* (Ph.D. Dissertation: Ohio State University, 1935) 22.



forced to hand over all their capital. “Banks failed and railroads went into bankruptcy. Factories were shut down and vast numbers thrown out of employment, New York City alone having 30,000 idle men.”<sup>21</sup>

So great was this revulsion that in both 1857 and 1858, President James Buchanan addressed this financial panic and economic collapse in his State of the Union addresses. In the opening paragraph of his 1857 address he stated that “our country in its monetary interests is at the present moment in a deplorable condition.” Despite all the wealth and resources of the nation he further said “we find our manufactures suspended, our public works retarded, our private enterprises abandoned, and thousands of useful laborers thrown out of employment and reduced to want.”<sup>22</sup>

Fortunately, this was a short lived revulsion. In his 1858 State of the Union address, Buchanan was still very guarded, but more optimistic. With words buried towards the end of the speech he declared, “The periodical revulsions which have existed in our past history must continue to return at intervals so long as our present unbounded system of bank credits shall prevail.” He then said “But the effects of the revulsion are now slowly but surely passing away.” Buchanan noted that because of the “energy and enterprise of our citizens” that within a year the nation would be restored to “a state of wholesome industry and trade.” Already he rejoiced that the cities were gaining new capital, the interest rates were low and consumer confidence was on the rise. With this he confidently asserted that “prosperity will again smile throughout the land.”<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>J. Edwin Orr, *The Fervent Prayer* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1974) 1.

<sup>22</sup>*President James Buchanan’s State of the Union Address, 1857.*

<sup>23</sup>*President James Buchanan’s State of the Union Address, 1858.*

Buchanan was correct in his prediction. By the early spring of 1858 the nation was recovering from this collapse. By January of 1859 it was virtually complete. On January 31, 1859, the United States Patent office issued its *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Patents for 1858*. This report records the following statement:

It will be observed that the depression under which the business of the office was laboring at the date of the last annual report has passed away, and that the rebound from the disastrous effects of the revulsion of 1857, then so confidently predicted, has already been fully realized.<sup>24</sup>

This was a short lived crisis; however, during the event there was considerable suffering. Spicer noted that in the East, “the effect of the collapse of credit on industry was unusually severe.” And that “unemployed men loitered in the highways, in the city street, and the village shops.”<sup>25</sup> In some cities this crisis led to large demonstrations and protests. In others it led to riots and death.<sup>26</sup>

This financial collapse occurred just one month after Lanphier started his weekly noon day prayer meeting. Within weeks, a revival started to sweep New York City. Different sources have different interpretations on the impact, or significance of this revulsion. There are a few sources that report the financial collapse as a historical event, but make no effort to interpret whether or not it played a role in the revival. Some sources credit this business revulsion as being the catalyst for the revival. Others discount it on

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<sup>24</sup>*Annual Report of the Commissioner of Patents for 1858* (Report of the Commissioner of Patents for the Year 1858 United States Patent Office January 31, 1859).

<sup>25</sup>Carl Lloyd Spicer, *The Great Awakening*, 24.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, 25. Spicer noted that this business revulsion had very little impact in the South. A number of banks were suspended there, but its staple industry—cotton—held firm. This gave the south a feeling of confidence in their economy, superiority in their morality and politics, and independence from northern capital., 26.

the premise that the prayer meeting started and was gaining interest before the financial panic. Also, there had been financial panics and collapses in the past and none triggered a revival.

### The Business Revulsion: An Opportunity For Revival

There are a few authors who deemed it necessary to address the financial revulsion of 1858, but offered no explicit opinion whether or not it played any concise role in the revival. Charles Finney, in his *Memoirs*, where he addressed the Prayer Revival, made no mention of the financial revulsion.<sup>27</sup>

Bacon mentioned the suddenness of the financial revulsion. As a consequence, “men had leisure for thought and prayer, and anxieties that were fain to cast upon God, seeking help and direction.” He noted how a “happy thought occurred” to Jeremiah Lanphier who then opened the consistory room, at the North Dutch Church, for common prayer. This offered opportunity for “many business men as might be disposed to gather there in the hour from twelve to one o’clock.” Bacon’s understanding of the revulsion appears to be that it was not a catalyst for revival, but an opportunity for one.

In Conant’s *Narratives*, he offered the same impression as Bacon. He wrote that the “financial disorder” was one that “prevailed with increasing severity for many weeks” until it “reached its crisis.” The result was an “overwhelming panic that prostrated the whole monetary system of the country.” It was in the midst of this conflict, Conant noted, that Lanphier was prompted by the Lord to “do something for the relief of the distressed

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<sup>27</sup>Rosell, Garth M. and Richard A. G. Dupuis, ed. *The Memoirs of Charles G. Finney: The Complete Restored Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1989) 559-72. Though Finney twice mentioned the financial crash of 1837 and its impact on his personal ministry, he made no mention of the financial revulsion of 1857 (pps. 381, 387).

merchants of the city.”<sup>28</sup>

Other sources denied that the revulsion was any catalyst for the revival. Prime, for example, spoke of the calamity of the financial panic. He wrote of “a sudden and fearful convulsion in the commercial world.” He noted that the calamity “was so speedily followed by the reports of revivals of religion and divine grace, that it has been a widely received opinion that the two events stand related to one another, as cause and effect.” However, Prime argued that, by the time of the revulsion, the prayer meetings were already established and growing. “The Spirit of God had been manifest in the midst of them... These pious people had been gathered in meetings for prayer, before the convulsion began.” Though the prayer meetings did grow in attendance after the revulsion it was not a matter of cause and effect. This “new infusion of life” was “from above.” Prime declared that “This revival is to be remembered through all coming ages as simply an answer to prayer.”<sup>29</sup>

Talbot W. Chambers, in his book *The Noon Prayer Meeting of the North Dutch Church*, also argued against the notion that the business revulsion launched the Prayer Revival. He used the financial crash of 1837 as his example. According to Chambers, the commercial revulsion of 1837 was “quite as wide-spread and unexpected as that of 1857, and tenfold more disastrous; yet there was then no unusual turning to religion, no mighty movement of the popular mind, no upheaving of the foundations.”<sup>30</sup> The logic of this

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<sup>28</sup>William C. Connant, *A Narrative of Remarkable Conversions* (New York: Derby & Jackson, 1858) 357.

<sup>29</sup>Prime, *Power of Prayer*, 1-3.

<sup>30</sup>Talbot W. Chambers, *The Noon Prayer Meeting of the North Dutch Church, Fulton Street New York: Its Origin, Character, and Progress, With Some of its Results*

argument was that if financial panics promoted revivals, then the panic of 1837 would have produced a revival ten times greater than the revival of 1857.

Of the five accounts mentioned above, Finney did not even acknowledge the business revulsion of 1858. However, one must note that he believed the revival was in progress as early as 1856. It is very possible that he made no mention of the revulsion because to him it was no factor in an ongoing revival with origins that preceded it by one year.

Bacon and Conant both mentioned the significant and devastating impact of the revulsion in the business sector. However, they neither denied, nor confirmed that it served as any catalyst for the revival. They did not deny that the revival was intensified after the revulsion. To them, it was an historical event that provided an opportunity for Christians to reach out to a nation that was stung and incapacitated. The nation was at a stand still. Now it was in a position to hear God.

Prime and Chambers, Unlike Finney, mentioned the revulsion in some detail. Unlike Bacon and Conant, they were explicit in their denial that the financial panic was catalytic to the revival. However, they agreed with Bacon and Conant that explosive growth occurred after the revulsion. They too, understood the revulsion as a means to provide an opportunity. Prime interpreted the business revulsion as God's judgement on America's "recklessness, extravagance and folly."<sup>31</sup> This judgement would no doubt cause men to cry unto the Lord, however, it was a tool for revival. The catalyst was God's providence.

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(New York: Board of Publication of the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church, 1858) 284.

<sup>31</sup>Prime, *Power of Prayer*, 2.

### The Business Revulsion: A Catalyst For Revival

During the financial panic and the revival of 1857, John Jenkins was a minister in Philadelphia. In 1858 he published a tract entitled *Plain Thoughts on the Present Great Awakening*. In this tract he had much to say about the business revulsion. He wrote it was “undeniable that God, in his providence and in his grace, overrules temporal disasters for the progress of Christ’s kingdom.” It was not possible for Jenkins, nor his readers, to forget “the gloom almost reaching despair” that was caused by the financial crisis. Jenkins recollected how everyone could “remember the anxious, careworn, pallid brow of the merchant the mechanic the laborer.” It was his perception that “many Christians viewed these disasters as a lesson which Providence had come down to teach the people.” He noted that “Christian men, as they conversed together respecting the general disaster, were frequently heard to say: ‘This crisis will be followed by a large spiritual prosperity in both the Church and the country.’” Jenkins then wrote; “This seems to have been the general impression.” This according to Jenkins, was the catalyst for the establishment of the prayer meetings:

It was in the midst of the calamity, in the centre of the great commercial mart of the country, and with a view to relief of those who were bowed down by disappointment and losses, and were consequently suffering great mental distress, a few Christians men established ‘A Business-Men’s Prayer-Meeting.’... Was it not perfectly natural that driven as they were to distraction, that feeling as they did the very ground taken from beneath their feet... they should seek in infinite power and grace that help of which they felt so great a need? Really Christian was the sight, to behold distressed men repairing to the place in which prayer was wont to be made... men who knew not the comfort of prayer at such a time.<sup>32</sup>

Twenty percent of Jenkins’ pamphlet was focused on the Business revulsion. His

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<sup>32</sup>John Jenkins, *Plain Thoughts on The Present Great Awakening* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Book Store, 1858) 3-9.

publication established the financial panic as a foundational element that drove men throughout the United States to the throne of Grace.

On May 27, 1858 *The Christian Advocate and Journal* offered an article titled *The Great Revival*. In this article, the business revulsion was spoken of as God's judgement for a nation bent on greed and financial gain. It wrote that "God was forgotten by the masses," and "the national heart was completely absorbed in the great master passion for aggrandizement." Consequently, the whole nation was "prostrated in the dust in its great commercial and industrial interests." Men in their "ruined estate, very naturally led to reflection." This reflection caused men to seek the Lord and everywhere men "began to pray. Union prayer meetings were resorted to." This article declared "how true is it that the process by which individuals and nations are frequently brought to God is through some severe visitation of the Divine Providence."<sup>33</sup>

The 1859 journal report of the sixth annual convention of the Y.M.C.A. declared the business revulsion to be "the origin of this work of grace." This journal reported that the financial crisis "paralyzed the commercial heart of the nation." This left the country's business life at a "stand still." During this time "the minds of men" were "free for a moment to higher considerations than earthly treasure." It was at this time, according to the journal, that "Christ moved upon their hearts, Christians felt his quickening presence... the dews of Divine grace descended until the whole heavens seemed to drop mercy and pardon."<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>"The Great Revival," *Christian Advocate and Journal* (Vol. 33. No. 21. May 27, 1858).

<sup>34</sup>*Journal of Proceedings of the Sixth Annual Convention of Young Men's Christian Association of the United States and British Provinces. Held on July 13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup>,*

Historian Warran Candler, in his *Great Revivals and the Great Republic*, wrote that as the nation increased in wealth and power that godliness declined. He stated that “men forgot God in pursuit of gold... The heart of the young republic was set on wealth, and the zeal of the people for religion became lukewarm.” As a result of the financial crash, “the wheels of industry stood still, and the noisy cries of greed were hushed, men stopped to hear the voice of the Spirit calling them to repentance.” They heeded the call and revival ensued. Candler thus concluded that “the Revival of 1858 began outside the Churches, in the center of the nation’s commerce.”<sup>35</sup>

Henry C. Fish wrote in his *Handbook of Revivals* that revivals frequently were preceded by some great calamity. Before the Prayer Revival, churches in America were cold and worldly. Greed for gain filled the great cities, the small villages and even the whole land. He wrote:

Speculation was at fever-heat, and the wildest projects turned men’s brains, and drove them recklessly on the race for riches. As a natural result, frauds, defalcations and failures became common; until finally the crash came, and the castles in the air, as well as the solid accumulations, were seen everywhere toppling to the fall. As with the twinkling of an eye, golden dreams vanished and millionaires became bankrupts. God meant it for good. He would drive out mammon that himself might reign. He made poor the merchant princes that they might be rich in heavenly gain.<sup>36</sup>

A final example of a source that interpreted the commercial revulsion as a catalyst for revival is James W. Alexanders *Revival and Its Lessons*. In his collection of papers he

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*15<sup>th</sup>, and 16<sup>th</sup>, 1859, at Troy, New York* (Richmond, VA: Macfarlane and Fergusson, 1859) 137-8.

<sup>35</sup>Warren A. Candler, *Great Revivals and the Great Republic* (San Francisco, CA: Publishing House of the M. E. Church, 1924) 210-12.

<sup>36</sup>Henry C. Fish, *Handbook of Revivals*, 65-6.



wrote that “The occasion may be fitly seized for a brief retrospect of the scenes through which we have been led.” He then deliberated on “the greatest commercial alarm which our country ever experienced.” This alarm was the financial revulsion of 1857. In the following quote, Alexander described the purpose for this revulsion:

In the present instance, it pleased God, in his marvellous lovingkindness, by the ploughshare of his judgements to furrow the ground for precious seed of salvation, and to make distresses touching worldly estate to awaken desire for durable riches and righteousness... From the very heart of these trials emerges spiritual yearnings, thirstings, and supplications after the fountain of living waters. We can not always trace the sequence of events, but it is certain that the meetings for prayer, which noted the dawn of this great Revival, had their beginning while we were still amidst the throes of our commercial distress.”<sup>37</sup>

Jenkins, Fish, Candler, Alexander and *The Christian Advocate* and journal all argued that the commercial revulsion of 1857 was a catastrophic event and interpreted it as God’s judgement on America. The United States forgot God and pursued personal wealth instead. This business revulsion was brought to America by God’s providence. God brought America to its knees financially which drove Americans to their knees spiritually.

Nineteenth century religious literature exhibited a sense of repugnance over the greed and lasciviousness of a country that acquired too much wealth in too little time. Much flowery speech was used to describe the lamentations of America’s spiritual dearth along with its base desires of worldliness and avarice. However, these writers never offered any concrete historical documentation supporting the claims of either spiritual declension or increased worldliness. Such statements were made as a simple matter of fact.

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<sup>37</sup>James W. Alexander, *Revival and Its Lessons: A Collection of Fugitive Papers, Having Reference to the Great Awakening* (New York: Anson D. Randolph, 1859) 5-6.

It was assumed by these writers that spiritual growth and financial prosperity existed only in diametric opposition.<sup>38</sup> A nation possessed one, or the other, but not both. Therefore, when a nation prospered in wealth it invariably suffered in spirit. Why? Because man could not serve both God and mammon. It was this kind of world view that motivated early nineteenth century Christians to insist that the financial prosperity that developed after 1840 was coupled with a nation wide spiritual tailspin. Therefore, when the Business Revulsion of 1857 occurred, it was quite natural to assume it was evidence of God's wrath and judgement.

In one rare instance, the *New York Daily Times* published a story actually praising the wealth of the nation. Wealth, when channeled in the right directions, was good. In this article the writer stated that the proof of prosperity was not determined by financial resources, but by the way financial resources were spent. When merchants and industries invested in "education and religious objects," it proved that "with the means, there is a right state of thinking and feeling." The writer then proclaimed that "this is one of the most striking features of the present day. There is not a paper, from any quarter, that does not contain some illustrative fact."<sup>39</sup> According to the author of the article, the manner in which wealth was spent in this nation was "the most striking feature of the present day." However, this article was a lone voice among a cacophony of lamentations over the danger of financial prosperity.

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<sup>38</sup>Theodore L. Cuyler was a pastor in New York during the Prayer Revival of 1857-58. In his Autobiography, *Recollections of a Long Life*, he wrote that "Materialism and Mammonism work against spiritual religion, and the social customs which wealth brings are adverse to spiritual life." 272.

<sup>39</sup>*New York Daily Times*, July 31, 1854.

### *Sweeping Prayer Revival*

Though the Prayer Revival started in a modest manner, it quickly grew and spread across the nation. Its first area of influence was in the great cities of the East. It then moved into other cities throughout the West and South. However, it was not only an urban movement. Orr wrote that it affected all classes of people in every geographical setting. The revival “seemed to pervade the land, and men’s hearts were strangely warmed by a power that outpoured in unusual ways.”<sup>40</sup> Though it started in the cities, it quickly moved throughout the rural communities. This section will offer a general survey of the Prayer Revival’s progress. First there will be a brief look into the movement of the revival through the urban centers of the country. Then a short survey will cover the revival’s movement in the rural areas. The purpose of this section is to provide the reader with a very general overview of the national scope of the Prayer Revival.

### Sweeping Urban Circles

The prayer meetings in New York spread quickly. Beardsley wrote that by late Spring of 1858 “these meetings multiplied until some twenty prayer meetings were in operation in New York alone.”<sup>41</sup> A young Philadelphian, who was a member of the Y.M.C.A. visited the prayer meeting at the Dutch Reformed Church on Fulton Street. He was so deeply impressed that he decided to return to Philadelphia and start a prayer meeting there.

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<sup>40</sup>J. Edwin Orr, *The Second Evangelical Awakening in Britain* (London: Morgan and Scott, 1949) 17.

<sup>41</sup>Beardsley, 180.

This meeting was first held at the Methodist Episcopal Union Church. After a slow start, it was moved to a small room at Dr. Jayne's Hall. By March 9, the meeting grew to over three hundred and moved to the main hall. After that, three thousand persons assembled there each day for prayer. One Y.M.C.A. journal recorded that "from this period the mid of the whole community seemed turned to the subject of religion." The journal then estimated that "from 10 to 15,000 persons have listened to the proclamation of the saving truths of the gospel in this hall in one day."<sup>42</sup>

William C. Conant offered reports of prayer meetings throughout the Union. By March of 1858 there were prayer meetings in cities such as Philadelphia, Newark, Paterson, Jersey City, Albany, Plainfield and Hoboken. Meetings then spread into other New York cities such as Troy, Peekskill, Kingston, Utica, Schenectady, Syracuse, and Buffalo. Within weeks, Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Cincinnati, Chicago, Detroit, Louisville, St. Louis, Washington, Baltimore, Richmond, Lynchburg, Boston, Springfield, New Bedford, New Haven, New London, Bethel, Portland, Concord and Providence along with other cities throughout the country also opened noon day prayer meetings.<sup>43</sup>

The speed at which the Prayer Revival swept across the nation was phenomenal. Within one year its effects were felt from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and from Canada to the Gulf of Mexico. Typically, this was an urban revival, but it also impacted the rural community. Beardsley noted that not only was this revival moving in the great cities, but "the movement spread until there was scarcely a village or hamlet throughout the

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<sup>42</sup>Journal of Proceedings of the Sixth Annual Convention of Young Men's Christian Association, 143-4.

<sup>43</sup>Conant, *Narratives*, 367-379.

Northern states, where similar meetings were not held.”<sup>44</sup>

### Sweeping Rural Areas

When looking at the metropolitan areas listed in the previous section, it becomes obvious that very few cities in the South are mentioned. There are at least two reasons for this. First, in the South there were no large metropolitan areas, therefore, this primarily urban movement did not resonate in the South. Second, because of slavery, some of the sources that recorded the events of the Prayer Revival refused to accept that God would move in the South. Therefore, they made no attempt to offer any records of the Prayer Revival in the South. Charles Finney went to some lengths in his *Memoirs* to declare that God did not move in the South precisely because of the sin of slavery. Beardsley echoed this sentiment in his *History of American Revivals*.<sup>45</sup>

Early twentieth century historian Warren Candler challenged both these assumptions. He noted that in the South, “there were no large cities, but a widely scattered rural population... But they were not less abundant and blessed. Indeed, they were, in proportion to the population, greater in the South than in any other section.” For an example, Candler recorded that the Methodist Episcopal church in the South grew by 43,388 members in 1858. This explosive growth led Candler to declare, “That meant glorious revivals, especially during the years 1858, 1859, and 1860.”<sup>46</sup>

The Prayer Revival did sweep New England’s urban centers. However, there was

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<sup>44</sup>Beardsley, 182.

<sup>45</sup>Rosel, *Memoirs of Charles G. Finney*, 559, and Beardsley, F. G. *A History of American Revivals*, 227-28.

<sup>46</sup>Candler, *Great Revivals and the Great Republic*, 216-17.

also considerable impact in the rural communities. Orr wrote that in proportion, the Revival in the smaller communities was stronger than in the large cities. In a two month period over ten thousand conversions were recorded by two hundred and sixty smaller communities.<sup>47</sup>

Candler wrote that the large cities and towns from Maine to California all shared in the Prayer Revival. Also, he noted that “there is hardly a village or town to be found where a special divine power does not appear to be displayed. It really seems as if the millennium were upon us in glory.”<sup>48</sup> Orr believed that the Prayer Revival emanated from New York and flowed out in three separate streams. The first flowed north into New England. The second southward as far as Texas. And the third moved west along the Ohio valley.<sup>49</sup> He wrote that this revival was felt everywhere in the nation. He recorded that “It first captured the great cities, but it also spread through every town and village and country hamlet.”<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup>Orr, *Fervent Prayer*, 14.

<sup>48</sup>Candler, 219-20.

<sup>49</sup>Orr, *Fervent Prayer*, 11.

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*, 11.

## CHAPTER 4

## THE PRAYER REVIVAL OF 1857–58: PERCEPTION AND REALITY

*Defining and Distinguishing the Terms “Revival” and “Awakening”*

In this very brief, but important section the two terms “Revival” and “Awakening” will be defined. These terms are often used interchangeably; however, this author desires to distinguish the two.

J. Edwin Orr, in his book *The Re-Study of Revival and Revivalism*, defined revival as a time of “refreshing from the presence of the Lord.” Indicative in revival was both the “divine origin as well as human object.” It conveyed the meaning of “restoration and renewal, never of missionary outreach or evangelism.”<sup>1</sup>

William G. McLoughlin in his book *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform: An Essay on Religion and Social Change in America, 1607–1977*, defined awakenings as “periods of cultural revitalization that begin in a general crisis of beliefs and values and extend over a period of a generation or so, during which time a profound reorientation in beliefs and values takes place.”<sup>2</sup> He distinguished revival from awakening by writing that

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<sup>1</sup>J. Edwin Orr. *The Re-Study of Revival and Revivalism* (Pasadena, CA: School of World Mission) ii–iii.

<sup>2</sup>William G. McLoughlin. *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform: An Essay on Religion and Social Change in America, 1607–1977* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978) xiii. In essence, McLoughlin’s book is an attempt to understand spiritual America via a Sociological matrix. This writer rejects much of McLoughlin’s interpretations of the revival, but, accepts his definition of an awakening.

“revivals alter the lives of individuals; awakenings alter the world view of a whole people or culture.”<sup>3</sup>

By defining an awakening in this manner, McLoughlin was forced to conclude that the Prayer Revival was a revival and not an awakening. He rejected the belief that the Prayer Revival was a third Great Awakening. He wrote this regarding the Prayer Revival:

The Prayer Revival did not create “any major shift in the prevailing ideological consensus or any major reorientation in the belief-value system that had emerged after the Second Great Awakening. In fact, [it] confirmed and sustained that consensus.” It was an extension or reaffirmation of it.<sup>4</sup>

There was indeed a crisis of beliefs and values. However, there was not a profound reorientation in beliefs and values. Despite the phenomenal nature of the Prayer Revival, there was little innovation. The main characteristics of the revival such as lay involvement, union prayer meetings, tract and Bible distribution, and media coverage did not originate with the Prayer Revival.

This writer defines a revival as a spiritual revitalization of an individual, and or, a region. The result of a revival is spiritual growth, evangelism, church growth and kingdom growth. An awakening incorporates all the elements of a revival but extends even further. An awakening not only impacts the church, but it fundamentally impacts, and even changes whole cultures and societies.

Using the above definition, this dissertation will demonstrate that the Prayer Revival of 1857-1858 was not a distinct awakening, but—as its label suggests—a revival. Significant and phenomenal yes, but, in itself, it was not an event that transformed either

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., xiii.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 141.



the greater society within the United States, or the myriad of cultural enclaves within society. It did, however, exemplify and display elements of revivalism and awakening forces that were already present. It was, as will be argued, the crescendo of the Second Great Awakening.

### *Revival and Revisionism*

It is neither the purpose nor the scope of this portion of the dissertation to provide an argument as to why there is historic revision-only to establish the fact that there is. Also, it is not the desire of this writer to condemn revisionism. This dissertation in itself is a revisionist work. Because historical documents are often products of revisions (whether accidental, or dubious), it is necessary for today's historians to base their work on holistic research. The result of such research will often be the production of revisionist histories. This is both good and necessary.

It is therefore essential for the historian to understand two axioms. The first is that he, or she, approaches history with personal agendas. The second is that the sources were written by people with personal agendas. There is nothing intrinsically wrong, or unethical about having an agenda. However, if the historian is not honest, his agenda may mutate into a litmus through which he will filter all data. It is at this point that historical revision which moves the writer from fact of folklore becomes certain.

In an article titled "The Decade Ahead in Scholarship," George Marsden articulately captured this problem of agenda. His position was that all historians know that total objectivity is unobtainable. He thus declared since "we are all controlled by our biases, we might as well just admit it and use history to champion the causes with which

we agree.”<sup>5</sup> He then noted that such an approach was problematic. It would lead some historians to disregard the facts and write whatever they wanted. Others might, as Marsden wrote, “revert to mid-nineteenth-century historiographical standards.” He lamented that this period produced “Presbyterian, Methodist and Catholic histories, and so forth, each arguing in lawyer-like fashion for the superiority of their own tradition.” However, today instead of denominational debates, scholarship revolves around “liberal, neo-conservative, feminist, anthro-phobic, Euro-phobic, funda-phobic, and the like.”<sup>6</sup>

Despite the problems related to agenda driven historians, Marsden argued that being agenda driven is not only good, but necessary:

One of the perennial problems for scholars is that they are liable to substitute their own agendas for those of the subjects whom they are studying... The balance that we ought to strike regarding this issue is, it seems to me, a delicate one. Since our jobs as historians are to interpret earlier eras, we have to translate the concerns of the past into terms that make sense to our audience today. So having our own agenda is necessary to interpretation... Are we truly celebrating the diversity of cultural traditions if we ask their representatives, in effect, to check their religious beliefs at the door when they enter a university or religious department?<sup>7</sup>

Regardless of the virtue, or vice of having an agenda, what is obvious is that historians have them. Therefore, it is incumbent that one assumes that any primary source he uses will have the personal agenda of its author encoded within the text. It is also necessary to realize that even primary sources are themselves tools of historic revision.

This section will discuss why the primary sources of the Prayer Revival went to such lengths to laud the calm, solemn nature of the revival and why these same sources

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<sup>5</sup>George Marsden, ‘Forum: The Decade Ahead in Scholarship,’ *Religion and American Culture* (Winter 1993) 10.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 10.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 13.

exalted prayer above all other virtues. For further reading, the appendix of this dissertation offers an illustration of revisionism within the sphere of American revival history by offering a brief case study on revisionism of the First Great Awakening. Such a study is pertinent to the Prayer Revival of 1857-1858 because the conventionally accepted interpretation of the First Great Awakening was the template used by nineteenth century writers who documented the Prayer Revival.<sup>8</sup>

#### Historical Revision and the Prayer Revival of 1857-58

It was earlier stated that the conventionally accepted interpretation of the First Great Awakening provided a template for many of the mid-nineteenth century writers who documented the Prayer Revival. The template utilized was one developed at the very outset of the Second Great Awakening by New Divinity leaders. These leaders, according to Joseph Conforti, “began an interpretive process that continued into subsequent phases of the revival: invoking the past to explain the present and anticipate the future.”<sup>9</sup> Conforti wrote, “This Second Great Awakening transmuted individual recollections of the colonial revivals into social memory—group pictures of the past that wielded interpretive power over the present.”<sup>10</sup>

#### *The Prayer Revival and its lack of Enthusiasm*

If one reads primary source accounts of the Prayer Revival, he will recognize the

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<sup>8</sup>For further reading see Joseph Conforti. “The Invention of the Great Awakening, 1795–1842,” *Early American Literature* 26 (1991) 104-05.

<sup>9</sup>Conforti, “Invention,” 101.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, 101.

universal exaltation of the demeanor of the event. This calm non-enthusiastic characteristic of the Prayer Revival was to many of its contemporaries the resounding evidence that the it was an authentic work of God.

The calm gentle spirit of the Prayer Revival was considerably different from the enthusiastic and often wild camp meetings and tent revivals of the early nineteenth century. The primary source writers of the Prayer Revival juxtapositioned the different events and reported with zeal the serenity of their revival as opposed to the extravagant behavior of the revival of the 1830s. However, they were not the first authors in American history to distance themselves from former, less attractive, elements of revival.

This was done a generation earlier by the New Divinity preachers who had distant ties to the First Great Awakening. These ministers employed both historical and theological ties to the awakening of the 1740s. They too, like the documentors of the Prayer Revival, decried radicalism. However, unlike the later writers of the Prayer Revival, the New Divinity did not reject the enthusiasm of old. Instead, they edited it out of their historical accounts. The towering example of this is their edited version of Jonathan Edwards. Conforti argued that these New Divinity preachers, in their efforts to contrast the extravagances of Kentucky frontier revivals with the eighteenth century awakening, “deradicalized the revivalistic legacy of Edwards” and offered instead a “tradition of sober, clerical-directed local revivals.”<sup>11</sup>

This is more, or less, a passive form of revision. Instead of documenting all known aspects of an event, the historian chooses, instead, to only report those elements that support his agenda. The New Divinity leaders saw the transformation of the colonial

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 101-02.

awakening from personal recollection to American historical consciousness. By the time of the Prayer Revival, the newly formed understanding of the First Awakening was becoming both the precedent for, and judge of, all contemporary religious events.<sup>12</sup> The templet was being established and the eye witnesses of the Prayer Revival were going to use it. Dr. Kathryn Teresa Long, in her book *The Revival of 1857-58*, offered this statement regarding the link between the New Divinity historians and the Calvinist writers of the Prayer Revival:

During 1858 and 1859 an influential core body of primary-source material had appeared. Through this literature, Reformed clergymen had managed an impressive interpretive feat, one that built on the efforts of earlier New Divinity historians. They had placed the 1857-58 awakening squarely within the context of a “deradicalized” or formalist American revival tradition, one shaped by Calvinists, characterized by a series of national awakenings and sanitized of emotional excesses.<sup>13</sup>

For example, Talbot W. Chambers, in his *Noon Prayer Meeting of the North Dutch Church*, wrote that the revival was neither started, nor perpetuated by eloquent orators, noted revivalists or any “display of intellectual abilities.” He noted that there was “nothing to gratify a refined taste, or stimulate a jaded imagination, or cater to itching ears.” There was no enthusiasm to be found. According to Chambers, “it was simply a gathering of men who turned aside from secular cares to consecrate an hour to prayer or

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 104-5. Conforti wrote “Trumbull and other New Divinity leaders initiated the transformation of the colonial awakening’s place in American historical consciousness from personal recollection, to social memory, to full-fledged, if partisan, interpretation of a heroic past... [they] asserted, the colonial revival not only established the historical precedents for the Second Great Awakening, but it also represented the ‘traditionality’ against which contemporary religious events were to be judged.”

<sup>13</sup>Long, *The Prayer Revival of 1857-58*, 17.

praise.”<sup>14</sup>

When Samuel Irenaeus Prime described the character of the Prayer Revival he declared it to be “as remarkable as its inception and extent.” He celebrated the notion that “it lacked almost everything that made up the leading features of the revivals of 30 and 32.” Regarding enthusiasm, “there was no unrestrained excitement, no exuberant and intemperate zeal... that there is enthusiasm—a well regulated and joyful enthusiasm—we use the word in the best sense—we are most happy to admit.”<sup>15</sup>

These declarations by Prime and Chambers resonated with the same sentiments as the New Divinity who denied any radical enthusiasm of the First Awakening, but embraced religious affection as defined by Edwards.<sup>16</sup> Prime and Chambers, like the New Divinity historians, tended to report the elements of history they agreed with and omitted those in which they did not.<sup>17</sup>

Neither Prime, nor Chambers bothered to mention a group of prominent Methodist laity nicknamed the Flying Artillery. Conant wrote that this group traveled from church to church initiating prayer meetings. He spoke of these men as being “especially zealous in their exhortations” and that they were “achieving great success.”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Chambers, *The Noon Prayer Meeting*, 70.

<sup>15</sup>Prime, *The Power of Prayer*, 30-1.

<sup>16</sup>Edwards, *Religious Affections*.

<sup>17</sup>Three examples of Prime’s willingness to omit major elements of the Prayer revival was his absolute omission of Methodism, the Y.M.C.A. and Bible and Tract colportage. Chambers did speak of Methodism and the Y.M.C.A., but he did not offer any real recognition of colportage. In fairness, it must be noted that the proponents of the Y.M.C.A. and colportage also engaged in this same form of selective writing.

<sup>18</sup>Conant, 365.

In one strange turn of events, Peter Cartwright, in his *Autobiography*, actually blamed the Calvinists for any unwarranted enthusiasm. He wrote that the problem with extreme enthusiasm did not rest with the Arminians. It was produced by Presbyterian preachers and members who “not being accustomed to much noise or shouting, when they yielded to it went into great extremes and downright wildness, to the great injury of the cause of God.” Cartwright noted that young Presbyterian ministers were taught a confession of faith that required them to embrace unconditional election and reprobation. However, during times of revival “they, almost to a man, gave up these points of high Calvinism, and preached a free salvation to all mankind.”<sup>19</sup>

Without doubt, the revival of 1857-58 was far more sedate than the camp meetings and protracted meetings which occurred at beginning of the eighteenth century. But, why was it important for men like Prime and Chambers to exalt the apparent serene nature of the Prayer Revival? To answer this question, one must be aware of the theological battle that had been waging for over a century. That battle was between the Calvinists and Arminians. Both Calvinists and Arminians agreed that genuine revivals and awakenings were born in the will and providence of God. Where they disagreed was over the importance, and/or necessity, of human agency.

The classic example of an Arminian perspective is Charles Finney’s *Revival of Religion*,<sup>20</sup> which is a book comprised of sermon lectures that were designed to promote revival. Lecture fourteen is entitled *Measures to Promote Revivals*. The proposition of

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<sup>19</sup>Peter Cartwright. *Autobiography of Peter Cartwright* (New York: Carlton And Porter, 1857) 46. In all probability, this is an anecdotal overstatement.

<sup>20</sup>Charles G. Finney, “The Christian Classics,” *Revival of Religion* (Virginia: CBN University Press, 1978) 261.

this lecture was that God did not establish any particular system of measures for revival, therefore, it was up to Christians to experiment with new methods and find out what new measures could be employed to bring revival. Finney declared:

THE GOSPEL [emphasis added by Finney] was then preached as the appointed means of promoting religion; and it was left to the discretion of the Church to determine what measures should be adopted, and what forms should be pursued, in giving the Gospel its power.<sup>21</sup>

A good example of a Calvinist understanding of promoting religion can be seen in an article published in 1831 in *The Princeton Review*. The title of this article is “An Inquiry into that Inability Under Which the Sinner Labours, and Whether It Furnishes Any Excuse for His Neglect of Duty.” This article depicted the utter futility of any minister who attempted to rouse religious interest in the minds of the unconverted:

Be exceedingly careful, therefore, to adopt no measures, and to give no advice, but such as are plainly warranted in the scriptures of truth... if at any time, the zealous preacher urged upon his hearers, in private, the duty of repentance, he was sure to hear the echo of his own doctrines; we are incapable of doing any thing; until God shall be pleased to work in us to will and do of his good pleasure, it is useless for us to attempt anything.<sup>22</sup>

The editors of the *Princeton Review* were so resolute in their stand against human agency that for the next twenty years it became a recurring theme. In 1841, *The Princeton Review* published John Woodbridge’s article “Revivals: or the Appropriate Means of Promoting True Religion.” Here, Woodbridge accused anyone who participated in any extravagant method for promoting revival of “kindling UNHALLOWED FIRE UPON

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 261.

<sup>22</sup>“An Inquiry into that Inability Under Which the Sinner Labours, and Whether It Furnishes Any Excuse for His Neglect of Duty,” *The Princeton Review* 3 (July 1831) 360-1.



THE ALTAR OF THE LORD.” (emphasis added by Woodbridge)<sup>23</sup>

Calvinists, such as Samuel Irenaeus Prime, James W. Alexander, and Talbot W. Chambers embraced and reported on the Prayer Revival with utmost haste for two reasons. The obvious reason was that it was indeed a genuine outpouring of the Spirit of God. However, what set this revival apart for them was that it finally gave the Calvinist world a revival that looked the way they always believed a revival should. At last, they found what they were looking for.

*The Involvement of Laity and Clergy*

Another element of the Prayer Revival that was championed with the utmost vigor was the lay involvement. One of the labels of this movement is the Layman’s Prayer Revival. This paper does not challenge records that indicate intense lay activity during the revival. That cannot be denied. Nor, does it attempt to prove that the clergy were more active than were the laity. However, it does seek to point out that the attention given to the laity, as opposed to the clergy, was out of proportion. Though there was considerable involvement and activity among the clergy, it was the laity who received the praise and recognition.

For example, Prime stated that “another feature of this work is, that it has been conducted by laymen. It began with them. It continues with them. Clergymen share in the conduct, but no more than laymen, and as much as if they were laymen.”<sup>24</sup> Prime further asserted “they [the clergy] are often seen in these assemblies. But they assume no

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<sup>23</sup>John Woodbridge, “Revivals: or the Appropriate Means of Promoting True Religion.” *The Princeton Review* 14 (June 20, 1841) 44-5.

<sup>24</sup>Prime, *The Power of Prayer*, 33.

control.”<sup>25</sup>

However, Conant, in his *Narratives of Remarkable Conversions*, did not make any assertion that the laity were more involved in leadership than the clergy. He gave equal weight to both. When Conant reported on the opening of a prayer meeting in the Methodist Church in John-street, he remarked that “this meeting... is hardly ever conducted by a clergyman or an old man.”<sup>26</sup> Yet, he also recorded that when the prayer meeting at Burton’s Old Theatre on Chambers street was opened [by laymen], it was first led by Rev. T. L. Cuyler.<sup>27</sup>

In his Autobiography, *Recollections of a long Life*, Theodore L. Cuyler confirmed his involvement in the first prayer meeting at Burton’s Old Theatre. His involvement in the noon day prayer meetings extended beyond just the Theater. Cuyler offered this remark regarding his participation in the prayer meetings:

In 1858 there began a marvelous work of grace, which extended throughout not only the churches in New York, but throughout the whole country... The flame thus kindled in that meeting soon extended to my church in Market Street... The special feature of the revival of 1858 was the noon-day prayer meeting. It was my privilege to conduct the first noon meeting in Burton’s old theatre in Chambers Street, and in a few days after, a similar one in the Collegiate Church in Ninth Street, and also the first prayer meeting in a warehouse at the lower end of Broadway.<sup>28</sup>

Conant also recorded that in the city of Hudson four evangelical churches led by Rev. Dr. Demarest, Rev. Mr. Smith and the Rev. Mr. Leavitt “inaugurated a Union

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 33.

<sup>26</sup>Conant, 361.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 362.

<sup>28</sup>Theodore L. Cuyler. *Recollections of a Long Life: An Autobiography* (New York: The Baker and Taylor Co., 1902) 85-6.

prayer-meeting for each day in the week.”<sup>29</sup> On the following page he wrote that “In Utica, in December last, the pastors of the various evangelical churches united in holding weekly Union prayer meetings in the different churches.”<sup>30</sup>

However, the majority of the time, when Conant recorded the various prayer meetings, he did not specify if they were started by either laymen or clergy. It is probably safe to assume that a majority of these meetings were started by laity. Nevertheless, Conant’s *Narratives* offer a picture of intense activity and leadership among the clergy.

Chambers championed the lay involvement and leadership during the revival. He wrote “the responsibility for interest and success has been made to rest directly upon the laity as such. It is true clergymen were not excluded, but on the contrary, were gladly welcomed.” He asserted that “the sacred office of the ministry was in no degree trenched upon. There was no rash interference with institutions of Divine appointment and immemorial usage.” The primary mover and shaker of the Prayer Revival was the layperson. Nevertheless, Chambers recognized the important, and perhaps essential role of the clergy. He witnessed a wonderful cooperation between clergy and laity:

The energies of men were employed in coordination with the commissioned minister of Christ, or under his direction; and so far from the two agencies clashing, each was furthered by the other, working in its appropriate sphere. There is a work which the ministry alone can perform, because they alone are called and trained for it. And there is a work which laymen only can do, because no minister who seeks properly to discharge the other duties of his office, can find the requisite time for this... There is therefore ample room for both these instrumentalities, and both should be employed.”<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>Conant, 370.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 371.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 296-7.

Chambers, like Prime, exalted the role of the layperson during the Prayer Revival. However, he also recognized the important role of the minister. For him, it was not an “either/or,” but a “both/and” proposition.

The Media also reported extensively on the efforts of ministers during the Prayer Revival. During the month of March 1858, in only three publications, the *New York Times* reported on the labors of over thirty different ministers.<sup>32</sup> On April 4, 1858 the *Allen County Democrat* praised both ministers and lay members in the city of Lima for “going hand in hand laboring together for the good of souls.”<sup>33</sup> Even as early as 1857, news papers were recognizing that a revival was in progress and endeavored to notice various ministers who were reaping a harvest.<sup>34</sup>

In 1935 Carl Lloyd Spicer wrote a dissertation titled “*The Great Awakening of 1857 and 1858.*” In this dissertation he offered considerable documentation regarding the work of the clergy during the revival. He asserted that “there were hundreds of other clerical and laymen... who gave of their time and energy.”<sup>35</sup> As for the minister, “the part played by the clergy in the popular revival of religion in 1857 is interesting, for in many instances it profoundly shaped the direction of the movement.”<sup>36</sup> Spicer then mentioned a number of ministers who were involved in the promotion and perpetuation of the Prayer

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<sup>32</sup>*The New York Times*, March 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup>,

<sup>33</sup>*The Allen County Democrat*, Lima (Ohio, April 4, 1858).

<sup>34</sup>*Zionist Herald and Weekly Journal*, 10 vol 28, no. 3, (January 21, 1857); *Christian Observer*. vol 36. no 9. (February 26, 1857).

<sup>35</sup>Carl Lloyd Spicer, 79.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, 48.

Revival:

Along with Charles Finney and Henry Ward Beecher in the Congregational fold should be mentioned the Rev. Dr. Henry W. Bellows, Pastor of the Church of All Souls, New York City... In the spring of 1858 he worked with other ministers to promote the revival. Other prominent Presbyterian leaders were Drs. William L. Breckenridge, Charles Hodge, N. L. Rice, and E. D. McMasters.<sup>37</sup>

Spicer also mentioned the labors of other ministers such as Elder Jacob Knapp, Baptist Humphrey R. Jones, Methodist Episcopal ministers Bishop Waugh and Bishop Pierce, and Protestant Episcopal minister Dudley A. Tyng and Dwight L. Moody as being important personalities who worked in and promoted the revival.<sup>38</sup>

In one of the most recent works published on the Prayer Revival, Dr. Kathryn Teresa Long also picked up on the lack of recognition accorded to ministers. She urged readers not to “overshadow the active clerical role both in supporting many noon meetings and in sustaining revivals in their churches.”<sup>39</sup> She then offered several accounts of “exhausted ministers” who worked feverishly during the Prayer Revival.<sup>40</sup> To date, there are no narratives on laymen who worked to the point of exhaustion in order to

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<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 71-72.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 75-79.

<sup>39</sup>Long, 59.

<sup>40</sup>Long, 59-60. Dr. Long mentioned these examples as testimony to the work of many ministers: Henry Ward Beecher, who postponed his other activities and devoted full time to the new revival (Clifford E. Clark, Jr., *Henry Ward Beecher: Spokesman for a Middle-Class America*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1978, 132); Francis Wayland, who drove himself to exhaustion during the Revival (Francis Wayland and H. L. Wayland, *A Memoir of the Life and Labors of Francis Wayland*, New York: Sheldon, 1867, 2:215); Thomas Osborn who labored night after night and spent his days going house to house (“Thomas Gilbert Osborn, [1820-1888]” *Minutes of the New York East annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, New York: Phillips and Hunt, 1888, 70); and John H. Boccock who labored for ninety days without a rest C. R. Vaughan, “Biographical Sketch” in John H. Boccock, xv. Boccock 1813-1870).

promote the Prayer Revival.

Months before the Prayer Revival commenced, the Y.M.C.A. was already busy organizing their association prayer meetings throughout New York City. The desire and efforts by the Y.M.C.A. to start prayer meetings would later become an indispensable element of the Prayer Revival. In April of 1857 the *Quarterly Reporter of the Young Men's Christian Association* noted that without "the increased sympathy of the clergy of the city," and their "heartly approbation we could not expect to have the full confidence of the Christian community."<sup>41</sup> This was of vital importance to the Y.M.C.A. because even though it was a para-church organization its members considered themselves "in all things auxiliary and subservient to the church."<sup>42</sup>

Months before the Prayer Revival, the Y.M.C.A. recognized the essential role of the clergy in their prayer meetings. This recognition continued on through the revival. April 1858, in the city of Troy, New York, the *Young Men's Christian Journal* noted that because of growth, a prayer meeting was moved from the Y.M.C.A.'s associational office to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Street Presbyterian Church. Once there "the daily meetings were continued for a

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<sup>41</sup>*The Quarterly Reporter of the Young Men's Christian Association in North America*, vol. 4, no. 2. (April, 1857) 42.

<sup>42</sup>*Journal of Proceedings of the Sixth Annual Convention of the Young Men's Christian Association*, 140. In one journal article a representative of the Y.M.C.A. in Springfield, Ohio wrote of the dismal performance of his association. From July 1856 to May 1858 they held no meetings. In a cry of desperation he wrote "I wish some dear brother would send you and article for the Journal on the "duty of the ministry and the church" to Young Men's Christian Associations, and it could be read from every pulpit in the land. Young men, and especially young Christians, easily get discouraged when they see that they are not aided and encouraged by the "Fathers in Israel," who should give their prayers, exhortations, and purses, if need be, in helping on this glorious cause." Recorded in the "Home Department," *Young Men's Christian Journal*, no. 9, vol. 5, (Richmond, VA: Macfarlane and Fergusson, March, 1860), 275.

number of weeks, under the care of our city pastors and the members of our association, and for a time were largely attended.”<sup>43</sup>

Another point that is noteworthy is that during the years of the Prayer Revival, New England was experiencing an oversupply of ministers. Spicer reported that in 1858 there were fifty Congregational ministers in Massachusetts alone who were without ministerial charges.<sup>44</sup> In 1859 the *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* reported that as many as two-fifths of all college students entered a theological seminary after graduation. In 1858 at a prayer meeting for colleges, Mr. Larabee, leader of the prayer meeting, noted that of the 26,687 students that graduated from Bowdoin, Waterville, Williams, Amherst, Brown, Yale, Trinity and Wesleyan University, that 7,192 graduated as ministers.<sup>45</sup>

Spicer noted that even though the South and West were destitute for ministers, the majority of college educated ministers chose rather to remain in the North East. Therefore, in the middle of the Prayer Revival, the North East was inundated with thousands of fresh ministers eager and ready to take part in the ministry of the revival. One can only assume that a very large number of the active laity were actually ministers, who were fresh out of college, but without a pulpit to fill.

As late as October of 1859, ministers in Philadelphia were still vigorously attempting to maintain the noon day prayer meetings. In early September of 1859 a

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<sup>43</sup>“Home Department,” *Young Men’s Christian Journal* (April, 1859) 83.

<sup>44</sup>Spicer, 50.

<sup>45</sup>*The Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* vol. XXXI, (1859) Rev. Charles Hodge, ed., Philadelphia,

pamphlet was circulated for the purpose of designating the first Monday of October as a day of special prayer. This pamphlet listed twenty-six churches with their pastors. On September 12, some fifty ministers, who were attending the prayer meeting at Jayne's Hall remained by invitation. After a short discussion they passed the following resolution:

Minister's prayer meeting on Monday, October 3, at 9:00. Laity are to be invited. All present will endeavor to add to the interest of the usual noon prayer meeting of that day. All ministers, on the Sunday previous to October 2, are to call the attention of their people to the subject of the unity of the Spirit among Christians of every name.<sup>46</sup>

This pamphlet stated that it was the laity who were invited. In this instance, a prayer meeting was clearly a clergy-led event. According to Prime, the Prayer Revival began, continued and was conducted by laymen. He asserted that clergy assumed no control of these prayer meetings. However, other sources disagree. Conant acknowledged a high level of involvement by ministers. Chambers recorded a symbiotic relationship between the clergy and laity. The secular and religious papers of the day recognized the considerable involvement of the clergy in the Prayer Revival. At best, Prime's assertion regarding lay involvement was an overstatement and his dismissal of minister involvement was gross understatement.

*The Spiritual Climate of the United States Between 1843-1857*

Virtually all contemporary sources that address the Prayer Revival of 1857 make the assertion that between the years 1843 and 1857 there was a period of both numerical

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<sup>46</sup>Philadelphia Meetings, October 3, 1859. *Annual Concert of Prayer for the Unity Of The Spirit, Philadelphia* [Pamphlet] (Henry B. Ashmead, Book and Job Printer, 1860) 5.



and spiritual declension.<sup>47</sup> This declension did not take place! The sources that do make this claim all reference the same quote. What is disconcerting is that this quote is from a secondary source that was over fifty years removed from the actual revival. Not only was this secondary source removed by over fifty years, it offered no data to support its claim.<sup>48</sup>

The only contemporary source that attempted to document this declension was J. Edwin Orr's *The Event of the Century*. Of all the historians who documented a time of declension, he was the only one to offer any primary sources and statistics. However, the only statistics he noted did not show decline but growth. His argument was that the rate of growth between 1843 and 1856 was not as great as in prior years. Orr offered an unconvincing argument which will be challenged in this section.

This belief in a spiritual declension fosters the notion that the Prayer Revival was a movement that was distinct from the Second Great Awakening. Part of the proposition of this dissertation states that the Prayer Revival of 1857-58 was not a distinct awakening, but the crescendo of the Second Great Awakening. The primary object of this section is to show evidence that there was no overall substantial numerical, or spiritual decline in the Protestant church between the years of 1840 and 1857. During this period some denominations dwindled, some plateaued, and others flourished. However, when all the denominations are grouped together, the data demonstrates that there was continual growth and progress within the Protestant churches of the United States. This progress

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<sup>47</sup>Listed here are a few examples of contemporary works that speak of a spiritual declension between 1843 and 1857: Roy Fish, *When Heaven Touched Earth*; Malcolm McDow and Alvin L. Reid, *Firefall*; J. Edwin Orr, *The Fervent Prayer, The Light of the Nations, and The Event of the Century*; Warren A. Candler, *Great Revivals and the Great Republic*; and Williston Walker, *A History of the Christian Church*.

<sup>48</sup>The source is Frank Grenville Beardsley and will be addressed later.

started before 1800 and continued unabated through 1860. Any activity beyond 1860 is outside the scope of this dissertation and will therefore not be addressed.

This section is divided into two parts. The first addresses the belief of declension. It will be demonstrated here that this conviction was based on personal and anecdotal information and was not carefully documented with empirical data. The second part will utilize statistical data and primary source testimonials to rebut to belief that there was either quantitative, or qualitative decline in the Protestant churches of America. The primary period of focus will be between the years of 1840 and 1857.

### The Belief of Spiritual Declension

#### *Decline According to Source Accounts*

“Decline is the other word which describes one aspect of life in the United States in the time period preceding 1857.”<sup>49</sup> These words penned by Roy Fish echo the sentiments of most accounts of the Prayer Revival of 1857. There is nothing new to such a sentiment. Financial prosperity and/or moral decline are woven into the fabric of pre-awakening culture. Before any recorded awakening, there is always a period prior to the event which is perceived as a period of financial prosperity and social decline. In *The Great Awakening*, Joseph Tracy wrote that “as the business and pleasures of this life demand present attention, religion is put off to a more convenient season.” He wrote that “the result is an increasing laxity of morals.” Tracy noted that this was the “downward

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<sup>49</sup>Roy Fish, *When Heaven Touched Earth* (Azle, Texas: Need of the Time Publishers, 1996) 24.

progress in New England.” before the First Great Awakening.<sup>50</sup> Warren A. Candler in his *Great Revivals and the Great Republic*, wrote that the Second Great Awakening, in 1800 was “preceded by a period of great religious declension.”<sup>51</sup> Fish noted that all the major denominations in the United States experienced a series of unusual revivals. However, this experience started waning in the early 1840s. He wrote that the “fires of revival” were “extinguished” by a combination of events. The result was that the years between 1843 and 1857 “became years of declension in most American church scenes.”<sup>52</sup>

Williston Walker in his *A History of the Christian Church* spoke of a decline in the intensity and frequency of revivals after the 1840s. He then stated that a nationwide revival “burst out again in a new crescendo in 1857-1858.”<sup>53</sup> McDow and Reid are a little more optimistic with regard to the years of decline. They wrote that “while occasional glimmerings of revival burned American soil in the 1840s and 1850s, a noticeable loss of spiritual fervor came across the nation during this time.”<sup>54</sup> Nevertheless, they too stressed the notion of a period of spiritual decline.

Candler also supported the idea of a spiritual declension. In his *Great Revivals and the Great Republic*, he went to some length to not only describe what happened, but why it happened. He noted that before 1840 the nation experienced a period of “religious

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<sup>50</sup>Tracy, 7-8.

<sup>51</sup>Candler, 164.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., 24.

<sup>53</sup>Williston Walker, *A History of the Christian Church*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1985) 653.

<sup>54</sup>McDow and Reid, *Firefall*, 251.

prosperity. As the United States increased in religious prosperity, it also increased in wealth and power. Between 1840 and 1857 this increase in wealth and power led to an increase in godlessness.” Candler wrote that “men forgot God in pursuit of gold.” This zeal for wealth caused the hearts of the country to become lukewarm towards religion.

America departed from God and was “finally prostrated by its evil idolatry.” God brought forth a financial panic that brought America’s financial prosperity to a crashing halt. Candler then noted that as the “wheels of industry stood still” the “noisy cries of greed were hushed.” As men listened to the voice of repentance, “another revival of national extent began.”<sup>55</sup> Like McDow and Reid, Candler looked at this in an optimistic light. Regarding the declension and financial crash, Candler wrote that:

The nation was backslidden, but not apostate from the faith. Men knew the truth; even the layman of the countinghouse and the forum knew well enough the gospel of Christ’s salvation. Hence the revival of 1858 began outside the Churches, in the center of the nation’s commerce.<sup>56</sup>

J. Edwin Orr had much to say about a spiritual declension preceding the Prayer Revival. He wrote that between 1843 and 1855 “religious life in the United States of America was in decline. There were many reasons for decline, political and social as well as religious.”<sup>57</sup> In his *Light of the Nations*, Orr recorded that during this time of declension, there were several years when the number of those joining the church barely kept pace with losses from discipline and death. He commented that the “tide that had

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<sup>55</sup>Candler, 210-12.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., 212-13.

<sup>57</sup>Orr, *The Fervent Prayer*, 1.

flowed in so strongly was now ebbing out rapidly.”<sup>58</sup> Orr repeated this exact sentiment almost verbatim in *The Event of the Century*.<sup>59</sup>

When one studies the above accessions to a period of spiritual declension, he will quickly notice how similar these statements are to each other. When footnotes are studied the familiarity of these statements becomes clear. They all quoted from the same secondary source. Regarding the documentation of a spiritual declension from 1843 to 1857, almost all roads point to Frank Grenville Beardsley.

In his *Religious Revivals Through Religious Progress*, Beardsley declared that the influence of the Second Awakening impacted the United States for a half century. During this period, Beardsley claimed that there was an “almost unbroken succession of revivals, thereby constituting an era of evangelism unparalleled in the history of the nation or the world.”<sup>60</sup> However, this succession of revivals did not last. The following was a statement written by Beardsley:

Towards the close of the first half of the century, however, for a time revivals almost wholly ceased throughout the country. For several years, from 1843 to 1857, the accessions to the churches scarcely equaled the losses sustained by death, removal or discipline, while a widespread indifference to religion became prevalent.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup>Orr. *Light of the Nations*, 100.

<sup>59</sup>Orr. *The Event of the Century*, 7-12.

<sup>60</sup>Beardsley, 39.

<sup>61</sup>*Ibid.*, 40. Beardsley made another statement similar to this in *A History of American Revivals*, (New York: American Tract Society, 1912), 214-15. In this book he offered the following statement: “It was a time of spiritual declension. From 1840 to 1845 much excitement was aroused in various parts of the country on account of the views propagated by William Miller and others in sympathy with him concerning the second advent of our Savior and the end of the world... Finally the confidence of the public became shaken and the excitement was at an end. The faith of many was staggered, not a

This is the quote that filtered into virtually every contemporary account of the Layman's Prayer Revival of 1857-58.<sup>62</sup> It is always quoted with complete deference. Not only did Beardsley make this claim with no real documentation, but the tertiary sources that quoted him also failed to offer support with further documentation.

In his 1845 publication of *Letters on Revivals of Religion Addressed to Ministers of the Gospel*, Finney wrote at length about a spiritual decline in religion. He wrote that "about the year 1835, I was led, I believe by the Spirit of God, to perceive that the course of things was tending rapidly towards the decline of revivals."<sup>63</sup> During this period he saw "little growth in grace in the churches; and that their increase of spiritual strength, and of aggressive power, was by no means commensurate with their increase in numbers."<sup>64</sup> In other words, the churches were growing in number, but not in spirit. The growth was quantitative and not qualitative.

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few became infidels, others passed over to materialistic views, while those who returned to the churches were for a time unfitted for Christian service. As a consequence public confidence in religion became impaired, and churches were made the subject of ridicule and abuse. Revivals were few. From 1843 to 1857, there were several years during which the accessions to the churches scarcely equalled the losses sustained by death and discipline." Like his statement of decline, many tertiary sources quoted his assessment of Miller with absolute deference.

<sup>62</sup>Here is a list of some secondary source authors who spoke of the spiritual decline and quoted Frank Grenville Beardsley's *Religious Progress*, pg. 40, (of 1912, also a secondary source) as their only source: Roy Fish. *When Heaven Touched Earth*, 24-5, 29. Malcolm McDow and Alvin L. Reid. *Firefall*, 251. J. Edwin Orr. *The Fervent Prayer*, 1. Orr. *The Light of the Nations*, 100. Orr. *The Event of the Century*, 7-12. Orr's *The Event of the Century* is the only work that made an attempt to provide extra data in an effort to document the spiritual declension between 1843 and 1857.

<sup>63</sup>Charles G. Finney, *Letters on Revivals of Religion Addressed to Ministers of the Gospel* (Manchester: W. Bremner, 1861), 92.

<sup>64</sup>*Ibid.*, 93.

Throughout these letters Finney wrote of a superficial faith that was becoming so characteristic within the churches. He reported that there was “much less probing of the heart by a deep and thorough exhibition of human depravity.”<sup>65</sup> He believed that there was less stress on divine influence.<sup>66</sup> In another letter, he wrote that sinners were urged to submit to the Lord before they understood what submission meant.<sup>67</sup> He even wrote two letters spelling out the dangers of too much excitement.<sup>68</sup>

*Rebutting the Source Accounts of Decline*

As noted, McDow, Candler, Walker and Roy Fish all recorded that there was a period of spiritual declension between 1843 and 1857. However, none offered any data or statistics to support their claim. Their source was Beardsley who published his history some fifty years after the actual revival.

Orr did attempt to build a case for decline, but his efforts are unconvincing. To argue his case for spiritual decline, Orr cited Heman Humphrey and Henry Clay Fish. Therefore, in order to challenge Orr’s proposition of spiritual declension, his citations of Humphrey and Fish must be addressed.

In 1859, Heman Humphrey published his book titled *Revival Sketches and Manual*. In this book, Humphrey wrote that suddenly, after the business revulsion of

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<sup>65</sup>Charles G. Finney, *Letters on Revivals of Religion Addressed to Ministers of the Gospel* Compiled by Donald Dayton. (Bethany Fellowship, 1979), 15-16.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., 16.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., 18.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., 38-51.

1857, “God interposed in a way which but few if any would have chosen or thought of.”<sup>69</sup> He then claimed that “It was just then that God put it into the heart of a humble individual to propose a daily prayer meeting.”<sup>70</sup>

In Humphrey’s zeal to ascribe God all the glory, he unfortunately got some of his facts wrong. The thought that God would start a revival through prayer was anything but a method “which but few would have chosen or thought of.” For the Calvinist, who understood revival as a cyclical event, prayer was always the key human component. One may even argue that for the Calvinist who understood revival as a cyclical event, prayer was the only human component. For years, Calvinists entreated the citizens of the United States to seek the Lord in prayer.

Back in January of 1831 the *Princeton Review* published an article titled *Hints Concerning Prayer Meetings*. In this article, the writer stated “the propriety and expediency of social prayer meetings was one of the main things which formed the line of distinction between friends and opposers of vital piety.” He later wrote that of all the weapons at a Christian’s disposal, “none are more universally accessible, more powerful than PRAYER.” [emphasis added by author of article].<sup>71</sup>

In 1832, Calvin Colton published his book *History and Character of American Revivals of Religion*. Colton urged Christians who “desire a revival of religion” to “assemble anywhere, and at any time” for the purpose of prayer. He encouraged believers

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<sup>69</sup>Heman Humphrey, *Revival Sketches and Manual. In Two Parts* (New York: American Tract Society, 1859) 278.

<sup>70</sup>*Ibid.*, 275-6.

<sup>71</sup>“Prayer Meetings,” *The Princeton Review*, vol. 3 (New York: January, 1831) 37-44.



to “meet as often as every day, if there is a spirit to support it.” As long as there was a demand for prayer, Christians should gather together and pray. If need be, “every morning and every evening.” Colton did however, discourage any attempt to force prayer meetings. To do such would fall under the guise of “extraordinary measures for the revival of religion.”<sup>72</sup>

Humphrey wrote that “God put it into the heart of a humble individual to propose a daily prayer meeting.” This too is historically inaccurate. Lanphier did not propose to start a daily prayer meeting. He proposed to start a noon-day businessman’s prayer meeting to be held weekly. It was only after the explosive growth of the meeting that the scores of participants in the prayer meeting pressed the leadership to move from weekly to daily meetings.

The inference here with Humphrey was the same as with Alexander, Prime and Chambers. Those who read these works were led to believe that Lanphier’s move to start a noon-day prayer meeting among business men in New York was something unique and different. This dissertation will later demonstrate that the concept of a business man’s prayer meeting was not a novel idea. It was not even unique for the Dutch Reformed Church at Fulton Street.<sup>73</sup>

Also, Humphrey’s comment on the “increasing coldness and worldly conformity in the churches” between 1845 and 1857 was at best anecdotal. Typical of nineteenth century ministers, who attempted historiography, he made declarative statements but

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<sup>72</sup>Calvin Colton, *History and Character of American Revivals of Religion* (London: Frederick Westley, and A.H. Davie, 1832) 79.

<sup>73</sup>See the section titled *The Y.M.C.A. and its Organizational Role in the Daily Prayer Meetings*, 142.

offered no real data to support his claims. The only evidence that Humphrey offered with regards to spiritual declension was his word.

Orr wrote that “in Heman Humphrey’s review, the panic of 1857 and the revival of 1858 concluded the period of decline.” With this sentence, Orr transitioned from Humphrey to Henry Clay Fish. He wrote that Fish, who was a contemporary to Humphrey, “propounded this somewhat similar interpretation in 1873.”<sup>74</sup>

Orr buttressed this statement by footnoting Fish’s *Handbook of Revivals*. However, when this writer looked at Fish’s *Handbook of Revivals*, he saw no such interpretation. In the passage that Orr cited, Fish was addressing a series of revivals in the United States. He recorded revivals incidents in 1791, 1792, 1799, 1803, 1807, 1814, 1831, and 1815-1840.<sup>75</sup> After offering these records of revivals, Fish made this declaration:

Thus, whatever view we take of the work, this was a most gracious period in the religious history of Christendom. Besides the rich harvests of priceless souls then gathered, these revivals stand directly connected, as we shall see in the next chapter, with all those aggressive movements which are turning the world’s wildernesses into fruitful fields.<sup>76</sup>

This quote concluded Fish’s section on what he interpreted as the fourth revival period which lasted from 1790 to 1842. The following section covered what Fish declared to be the fifth revival which was the Prayer Revival of 1857. When surveying these two sections, it becomes clear that Fish did not “propound” any interpretation. He simply

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<sup>74</sup>Orr, *The Event of the Century*, 8.

<sup>75</sup>Henry Fish, *Handbook of Revivals*, 62-65.

<sup>76</sup>*Ibid.*, 65.

addressed what he conceived to be five epochs of revival.<sup>77</sup> Fish neither stated, inferred, supported, nor denied that there was a spiritual decline between 1842 and 1857. It was at best an embellishment for Orr to make such a suggestion.

Following his suggestion of spiritual decline, Orr quoted Timothy L. Smith's *Revival and Social Reform*. He noted that Smith did not share his conviction that the period before the Prayer Revival was marked by decline. Smith argued that any belief in spiritual decline after 1840 "seems in direct contradiction to the facts."<sup>78</sup> Orr did not challenge the assertion with any data. He presented it as "an opposite opinion"<sup>79</sup> and then dismissed it with the following qualification:

Perhaps it can be said that such revivals, in the common sense of the quickening of believers that resulted from a local or general outpouring of the Spirit, had diminished, and that revivalism (in a less logical sense as congregational evangelism) was still continuing, but no longer as fruitfully in the growth of local churches of the deepening of Spiritual life.<sup>80</sup>

Orr then offered statistics of numerical growth among Methodists and Baptists. He asserted that the growth experienced by the Methodist Church from 1852 to 1857 "approximated the growth of families, making modest allowance for the immigration of British Methodists." Orr suggested that in most states the Methodists were growing only in biological growth. In other states, they were in decline. According to Orr, between 1852 and 1857, the Baptists fared no better. They enjoyed a paltry annual growth of

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<sup>77</sup>Ibid., 32-3.

<sup>78</sup>Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform*, 62.

<sup>79</sup>Orr, *The Event of the Century*, 8.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid., 9.

3.5%.<sup>81</sup> He then recorded how the Presbyterian, Congregational, and Protestant Episcopal churches also struggled during this period.

Though Orr asserted that the spiritual decline lasted from 1843 to 1857, he only offered data on churches between the years of 1853 and 1857. Orr documented the annual rate of growth for the Presbyterian church to be only about 1.5%. However, according to the *Bureau of the Census' Historical Statistics of the United States: Colonial Times to 1970*, the growth was more significant.<sup>82</sup> Also, it will be demonstrated later in this dissertation that Orr's assessment of the Baptist and Methodist Churches also offered conclusions of decline that were inaccurate.

From 1840 to 1860 the population of the United States grew from seventeen million to over thirty one million. The annual growth was about 3.5%. During this same period the Methodist Church grew in membership from 894,753 to 1,802,927. This was an annual growth of over 4%. According to the "American Baptist Home Mission Society," from 1840 to 1860, American Baptist churches in North America increased in membership from 572,122 to 1,025,135. The rate of growth here is equal to the population growth of the United States.

Orr argued for decline, however, what he offered was growth. Statistics will show that the rate of increase among churches between 1840 and 1860 was almost identical to

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<sup>81</sup>Ibid., 10.

<sup>82</sup>Bureau of the Census. *Bicentennial Edition, Historical Data of the United States: Colonial Times to 1970*, Part 1 (U.S. Department of Commerce: Bureau of the Census) 362. This table is posted on page 97 of this dissertation. One possible reason for this discrepancy between Orr and the Bureau of Census is that Orr included both Old School and New School Presbyterians. The Census did not distinguish between Presbyterian denominations. Perhaps the census included the Cumberland Presbyterian church also.

the growth between 1800 and 1840. Some denominations posted a numerical decrease, but they were the exception. From 1840 to 1857 church membership was on the rise. Even though some denominations did not increase as rapidly as in years before, the aggregate of all the Protestant denominations showed growth.

Timothy L. Smith offered the very provocative argument that if there was any decline in religion it was not due to wealth and worldliness. The culprit was anti-mission ultra-Calvinism. Smith asserted that the anti-mission schism after 1820 among the Baptists brought about wide spread rejection of any special measures for the conversion of the lost. This led associations in Ohio, Georgia, Alabama and Tennessee to almost unanimously spurn any “evangelizing efforts in the two decades after 1830.”<sup>83</sup> If Smith was correct, then the very religious leaders who lamented over the spiritual and numerical declension of their churches were the ones who probably caused it. If contemporary historians wish to uncover the powers and influences that quelled the revival of 1840 and diminished the rate of increase among churches for the next dozen years, then they probably need to divert their attention from the secular impulses of the age and focus instead on the internal conflicts within the church itself.

In *The Churching of America*, Roger Finke and Rodney Stark strongly challenged the notion of spiritual declension. The issue was one of perception and not reality. Finke and Stark noted that in 1776, Congregationalists, Episcopalians and Presbyterians claimed 55% of all Americans who were active in a religious body. However, by 1850 the three combined represented only 18%. In 1776 the Congregationalist church was the largest mainline denomination in the United States. By 1850 it was one of the smallest.

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<sup>83</sup>Smith, 7.

However, in this same time period, the Methodist and Baptist churches grew. In 1776, the Methodist and Baptist churches claimed 23% of America's religious body. By 1850 they represented 54.7%.<sup>84</sup> These two authors noted that "frequently, a lack of religious activity is asserted when all that is lacking is a preferred brand of religious activity."<sup>85</sup>

America did not experience either spiritual or numerical declension from 1840 to 1860. It experienced a denominational shift from 1776 to 1850. As the population moved westward, it was the Baptists and the Methodists who were able to make inroads in the frontier culture. The Presbyterians, Episcopalians and Congregationalists found it extremely difficult to maintain self sufficient churches in these regions. Finke and Starke noted that it was not uncommon for journals funded by the Presbyterians, Episcopalians and Congregationalists to speak of geographical regions of the country as being "destitute of the stated ministry of the gospel of every denomination." However, when taking a closer look at these very regions, one discovered the presence of "many churches and many ministers of the gospel... but they were all Baptists or Methodists."<sup>86</sup>

The majority of secondary sources build the case that there was a period of spiritual declension between the years of 1843 and 1857. It is very important to note, however, that the most quoted primary sources of the Prayer Revival made no mention of this spiritual declension. Nevertheless, they did speak of the evils of prosperity. Theodore L. Cuyler in his *Recollections of a Long Life: An Autobiography* wrote that "Materialism

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<sup>84</sup>Roger Fink and Rodney Stark. *The Churching of America, 1776–1990* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1992) 54-5.

<sup>85</sup>Finke and Stark, *The Churching of America*, 4.

<sup>86</sup>*Ibid.*, 65.

and mammon work against spiritual religion, and the social customs which wealth brings are adverse to spiritual life.”<sup>87</sup> Talbot W. Chambers, William C. Conant, Samuel Irenaeus Prime and Alexander Waddell all addressed the business revulsion of 1857, but they said nothing about a spiritual declension between 1843 and 1857.

Conant declared the very opposite to be true. According to him, the period before the Prayer Revival was not marked by declension, but by “spiritual refreshings.” He considered the century before the Prayer Revival to be marked by a seamless succession of revivals and spiritual growth:

Generally, we must regard the century in which we live, perhaps rather the last hundred and twenty five years, as an epoch decidedly characterized by revivals, and by the increasing recognition, cultivation, and expectation of revivals, until the last half century, and still more eminently the last quarter century, has presented to view such a succession and general distribution of spiritual refreshings, and such a general increase of believing prayer and sustained, systematic, evangelical effort among Christians, as to encourage the hope that a period of loftier aim and steadier progress—in other words, of permanent revival—may be even now setting in.<sup>88</sup>

To Conant, the Prayer Revival was the culmination of a century of revivalism. The difference between he and other later sources that decried spiritual declension was that he surveyed the total Christian landscape of the United States.

However, even among primary sources there was some discrepancy in the records of growth in the various denominations. In September of 1857 *The Christian Advocate and Journal* published an article entitled “Decline of Methodism.” The article opened with great praise and laud for the way God blessed Methodism. But in the second paragraph the writer stated that “a careful study of her history reveals the painful fact that,

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<sup>87</sup>Cuyler. *Recollections of a Long Life: An Autobiography*, 271-2.

<sup>88</sup>Connant, 358–9.

as a church, her power for good is steadily declining.” However the writer’s next sentence betrayed his proverbial axe to grind: “She is not, with her increased facilities, effecting as much as when her circumstances were less favorable.” The Methodist Church was now rich and comfortable and the writer did not like that. He lamented that the Methodist church was now “advanced in intelligence, and therefore in mental power, but her moral power is diminished.”<sup>89</sup> He further stated:

While she is multiplying her material wealth, she is impoverishing her spiritual treasury; while she is moving forward, she is going downward, instead of upward... To some who never look beyond the surface of things, and are ever exclaiming, “Methodism is bound to take the world,”... if they will open their eyes for once to the real dangers that beset us, they will see that at present there is far more danger that the world will neutralize Methodism.”<sup>90</sup>

The writer then offered two tables of statistics. The first showed the numerical growth of Methodism from 1773 to 1856. The second table offered the decadal growth during the same period. The tables listed in the article was considerably different from a table of growth this writer received at the Methodist Archives at Drew University. According to the table in the *Christian Advocate* the decade between 1790 and 1800 produced 4% growth for the Methodist Church. According to the table from Drew University, the Methodist Church enjoyed a decadal growth rate of 12.7%. In the subsequent years, the numbers continue to conflict. On the following page is a table offering a side by side comparison the statistics of growth from both the *Christian Advocate* and the Drew University Methodist Archives:

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<sup>89</sup>*Christian Advocate and Journal*. Vol. 32. No. 39. (New York. September, 24, 1857).

<sup>90</sup>*Ibid.*



Year	Growth According to the Christian Advocate	Growth According to the Drew University Archive
1790-1800	6%	12.7%
1800-1810	7.5%	168.6%
1810-1820	4%	53.5%
1820-1830	7%	86.5%
1830-1840	6%	78.5%
1840-1850	4% <sup>91</sup>	39.4%
1850-1860		44.6% <sup>92</sup>

Both statistics cannot be correct. The *Christian Advocate* did not divulge the source of its statistics, nor did it specify whether or not the table represented the Methodist Church in total, or just one geographical region. Without actual numbers behind the percentages, it is impossible to tell. What is evident is that if the Methodist Church experienced the paltry growth listed by the *Christian Advocate* then it could not have grown into the largest Protestant denomination in the United States by 1850.

Interestingly, when this article appeared, churches across the United States were already feeling the winds of revival. In one month New York would be swept with the Prayer Revival. This article demonstrated how those who lamented over spiritual declension did so through tunnel vision. The writer of the article in the *Christian Advocate* did not like the direction of the Methodist church and therefore assumed it was in a spiritual tailspin. His assessment of the Methodist Church was not remotely accurate.

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<sup>91</sup>Ibid.

<sup>92</sup>United Methodist Church Historical Archives. The web link to this site is <http://www.gcah.org/membership.htm>. The title of the chart is the *United Methodist Membership As Compared to the United States Population Census*.

When lamenters recognized declension within their own denominations or in their own geographical context, they assumed the crisis was nation wide and endemic in all other denominations. In December of 1852, the *New York Daily Times* conveyed a story that was earlier printed in *The Boston Traveller*. This article gave a summary of statistics of Congregationalism in most of the New England States. It spoke of a number of vacant churches and of ministers who had no pastoral charge.<sup>93</sup> There is no reason to doubt the article. However, one must realize that Congregational churches represented only one aspect of New England Christianity. While Congregationalism was in decline nation wide, the Baptist and Methodist denominations were flourishing.<sup>94</sup>

Finney's *Letters on Revival* provided the most compelling argument for spiritual decline that was studied by this writer. Therefore, if the belief in spiritual decline is to be sufficiently rebutted, his *Letters* must be addressed.

It is easy to detect a sense of nostalgia in Finney's letters. He spoke of "the revivals which occurred ten or twenty years ago" and how other ministers of his acquaintance "long to see the days return when we shall have such revivals as we saw years ago."<sup>95</sup> In his perception, the revivals which occurred after 1835 were less dynamic,

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<sup>93</sup>*New York Daily Times*, (December 25, 1852).

<sup>94</sup>From 1840 to 1855 the Methodist Church enjoyed consistent and healthy growth. However, during this time the *Methodist Quarterly Review* did not publish a single article on revivals. It wrote instead about "Methodism." During this period same period, the Princeton Review published dozens of articles on the state of religion, the need for revival, the need for proper religious methods, the need for sound doctrine, the need to stay away from enthusiasm and the like. During this time, Methodist churches were experiencing significant growth, while the traditional Calvinist denominations were not. Mainline Calvinist denominations spoke about revival while the Methodists experienced it.

<sup>95</sup>Finney, *Letters* (Manchester: W. Bremner, 1861), 92., 14.

less spiritual and less impacting. The fact that there was “little or no opposition made by impenitent sinners to revivals” was evidence enough to suggest that carnality and not spirituality fueled the new movements.<sup>96</sup>

One is compelled to ask what was it that led Finney to perceive a spiritual decline a full five years before anyone else did? When one looks closely at these letters, it becomes apparent that Finney’s grievances with the churches, and particularly the pastors, was not empirical. They were personal. This whole work was a diatribe. In one of the letters Finney declared “the fact is, brethren, a revival must take place among ministers.”<sup>97</sup>

His gripe was not with the churches, but with the ministers. His letters were not addressed to churches, but to ministers. In his *Letters*, Finney indirectly offered the sources of his displeasure. His *Letters* revealed at least four personal reasons why he was not happy with the state of religion. First, his expectations were not met. In one letter Finney wrote that “I expected that ministers and old professors of religion, would follow up these powerful revivals by most careful training of young converts. But my expectations in this respect were by no means realized.”<sup>98</sup> Finney’s perfectionist tendencies could not allow him to accept any religion that was not absolutely pure and untainted with worldliness.

Second, he apparently had some guilt over the manner in which he conducted himself in the past. Finney helped to pioneer a method of evangelism that signaled out

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<sup>96</sup>Ibid., 16.

<sup>97</sup>Ibid., 102.

<sup>98</sup>Finney, *Letters*, compiled by Dayton, 93.

unconverted individuals and put enormous pressure on them to repent and be converted. In his early ministry, Finney made much use of evangelistic tools such as the anxious bench. According to his *Letters*, it was obvious that he no longer desired to employ methods of ministry that put too much stress on an individual's natural ability to seek salvation. He admitted in his *Letters* that in an effort to "rout sinners...I have laid, and I doubt not that others also have laid too much stress upon the natural ability of the sinner... This has grieved the Spirit of God."<sup>99</sup> Though Finney believed he repented of this method, the unfortunate truth was that the proverbial Genie was out of the bottle and ministers across the nation were continuing to employ it.

Third, Finney's *Letters* indicated that he was desiring to shift the emphasis of his ministry from evangelism of the lost to spiritual health of the saved. However, he was continually frustrated by churches and ministers that only wanted him as an evangelist. He wrote that when he was invited to preach at "certain churches, they have been willing that I should, if I would preach to sinners; but they were not willing that I should preach to the church."<sup>100</sup> Finney concluded that he was not invited to challenge the spiritual health of congregations because the pastors themselves were back-slidden. In a stinging admonishment to pastors he posed the question; "Is it not true that you have resisted the reformation of your own heart, and the efforts that have been made to revive the church, and to elevate the standard of holiness within her boarders." He then asked; "Have you not been more afraid of sanctification than you have of sin?"<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>99</sup>Ibid., 16.

<sup>100</sup>Finney, *Letters*, 96.

<sup>101</sup>Ibid., 97.

A fourth reason for Finney's perception of spiritual decline revolved around the diminishing of revival methods. In his estimation, fewer churches were employing outside evangelists. They were holding fewer protracted meetings. He interpreted this as "discountenancing the labours of Evangelists."<sup>102</sup> To Finney, revival meetings were essential to the church. He wrote; "they are our life; they are the salvation of the church; they are the hope of the world."<sup>103</sup> Revival meetings were so essential that Finney implored ministers "in the name of our Lord Christ, to keep as far as possible from the appearance of the thought of discountenancing or looking coldly on revival efforts."<sup>104</sup>

Finney admitted that churches were steadily increasing in numbers. However, his understanding of religion was such that he could not accept this growth as anything other than carnality. The church looked different than he expected. Ministers continued to employ methods of evangelism he pioneered even though he himself discarded them. Churches were not inviting him to preach on the subjects he wanted and they were not holding as many revival meetings as he thought they should. To him, this all meant spiritual decline.

It is ironic that many of the grievances Finney expressed in these letters—such as too much excitement, artificial means to promote revivals, carnality, and lack of reliance on the power of God—are the exact same charges that Calvinist clergy laid upon him.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>102</sup>Ibid., 99.

<sup>103</sup>Ibid., 101.

<sup>104</sup>Ibid., 101.

<sup>105</sup>See Article VII. "Lectures of the Revivals of Religion by Charles Finney" *Princeton Review* 7, Issue 3 (July 1835), 482-528. And Article VI. "Lectures on Revivals of Religion by Charles Finney" *Princeton Review* 7, Issue 4 (October 1835), 626-674.

Calvinists didn't like the way Finney conducted business and they did not like his methods and theology. For example, Finney complained that promoting revivals of religion were "so mechanical, there is so much policy and machinery, so much dependence on means and measures, such much of man and so little of God."<sup>106</sup> In like manner the *Princeton Review* wrote this regarding Finney and his new measures:

According to his theory, the gospel, which its divine author left complete in all its parts and proportions, and most admirably adapted to secure its destined ends, must utterly fail of its effect unless there be added to it a set of machinery of man's invention.<sup>107</sup>

The *Princeton Review* published this article in 1835. According to Finney that was the same year he perceived a decline in religion. The same year when Finney was complaining about the "mechanical" measures of many ministers, the *Princeton Review* published two separate articles on Finney which accused him of employing "machinery of man's invention." It is plausible that the "Princeton Review" and Charles Finney were both right. It is equally plausible they were both wrong. Both had agendas and both had pre-suppositions of what revival should look like and what means and measures should be employed.

Finney stated that this decline started as early as 1835. However, Henry Clay Fish wrote that the United States was in a period of revival from 1815 through 1840.<sup>108</sup> All of the secondary sources quoted in a previous chapter did not record any spiritual decline until after 1840. It is very interesting that none of the proponents of spiritual decline that

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<sup>106</sup>Finney, *Letters*, compiled by Dayton, 102.

<sup>107</sup>"Lectures of the Revivals of Religion" *Princeton Review* 7 (October 1835), 631.

<sup>108</sup>Henry Fish, *Handbook of Revivals*, 62-65.

were studied in this research were in agreement with Finney's timetable. They all perceived this decline after the year 1840. Was Finney more sensitive to the Spirit and more cognizant of religion in America than any other minister of his day? Or, was he simply overstating his case? Was America really experiencing a spiritual decline, or did Finney just have an axe to grind? If Timothy Smith was correct in his assessment that perfectionist tendencies were on the rise during this period it is obvious that these tendencies were not perfect enough for Finney.<sup>109</sup>

### The Challenge to Spiritual Declension

It has already been noted that secondary sources on the Prayer Revival almost universally parroted the mantra that there was spiritual declension in the United States between the years of 1843 to 1857. It was also demonstrated that even primary sources presented perspectives that did not correlate with the evidence. Regardless of the source, if evidence suggests that the source is incorrect, or incomplete, then the historian is obligated to analyze the source in light of new evidence and draw conclusions based on the evidence, and not on personal preference and agenda.

The broad consensus of contemporary scholarship is that there was a period of spiritual declension in the United States from 1843 to 1857. However, this writer believes the evidence suggests that the consensus is incorrect. First, when sources did comment on this declension, they made assertions with no supporting data. Second, the numbers and

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<sup>109</sup>It is very possible that Finney's *Letters* are more of a reflection of personal preference and not social reality. If so, it would not be the first time Finney was guilty of this. In his *Memoirs* he concluded that the Prayer Revival of 1858 did not impact the South because God would not bless anyone who condoned slavery. However, evidence clearly demonstrates that the South, despite its support of slavery, was also considerably impacted by the prayer revival.

statistics of churches, religious organizations, Bible and Tract societies and the U.S. census reports paint a picture of growth and not decline. For this reason, it is important that today's scholars take another look at the religious landscape in America between the years of 1843 and 1857.

### *Numerical Growth According to Statistics*

Historians such as Beardsley and Orr argued that there was a period of declension among Protestant churches during this period. However, the data from the general assembly minutes from many of the mainline Protestant denominations offer a very different story. This section will therefore offer statistical data from different Protestant denominations within the United States. Once the data from all the denominations are gathered, they will be combined to offer the reader an accumulative growth rate that will challenge any notion of declension. The main focus will be between the years 1840 and 1860. This section will establish that there was considerable quantitative growth during this period of supposed decline.

The need for holistic research is especially important when surveying statistical data. When surveying only one or two denominations, it is easy to deduce that there may have been declension between the years 1840 and 1860. This is the error that Orr made in his book *The Event of the Century*.<sup>110</sup> However, when different Protestant churches are combined, the aggregate number paints a much more positive picture. To support this claim, a series of tables containing the records of various denominational minutes will be presented. Except for the table taken from the 1860 Bureau of Census data, all data in this

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<sup>110</sup>Orr, *The Event of the Century*, 9-11.



section was obtained from the general assembly minutes of the respective denominations.

The table below represents the growth of churches and communicant members of the Presbyterian Church of the U.S.A. (Old School) from 1839 to 1857.

Year	Communicant Members	Annual Growth	Percentage of Annual Growth	Number of Churches
1839	128,043			1,823
1846	174,714	46,671	36.45%	2,297
1847	179,714	50,00	2.86%	2,376
1848	192,022	12,308	6.85%	2,459
1849	200,830	8,808	4.59%	2,512
1850	207,254	6,424	3.2%	2,595
1851	210,306	3,052	1.4%	2,675
1852	210,414	108	.05%	2,733
1853	219,263	8,849	4.2%	2,879
1854	225,404	6,141	2.8%	2,976
1855	231,404	6,000	2.7%	3,079
1856	223,755*	-7,649	-3.3%	3,146
1857	244,825	21,070	9.4%	3,251
Increase	244,825	116,782	91.2%	1,428 <sup>111</sup>

The following table represents the growth of churches and communicant members of the Presbyterian Church of the U.S.A. (New School) from 1839 to 1860.

Year	Communicant Members	Growth	Percentage of Growth	Number of Churches
1839	100,850			1,286

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<sup>111</sup>*Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. With an Appendix*, vol. 13, [Old School] (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian Board of Publications, 1839-1857).

1840	102,060	1,210	1.2%	1,375
1843	120,645	18,585	18.2%	1,496
1846	145,416	24,771	20.5%	1,581
1849	139,047	-6,369	-4.4%	1,555
1850	139,797	750	.05%	1,568
1851	140,076	279	.02%	1,579
1852	140,652	576	.04%	1,602
1853	140,452	-200	-.01%	1,626
1854	141,477	1,025	.07%	1,661
1855	143,029	1,552	1%	1,659
1856	138,760	-4269	-3%	1,677
1857	139,115	355	.03%	1,679
1858	143,510	4,395	3%	1,687
1859	137,990	-5,520	-4%	1,542
Increase	137,990	37,140	37.9%	256 <sup>112</sup>

The above tables represent the growth of the New School Presbyterians and the Old School Presbyterians during the entire period in question. Below is a conglomeration of both tables.

Years 1839 to 1857	Communicant Members	Total Growth	Percentage of Growth	Total Churches
Old School in 1839	128,043	-	-	1,823
Old School in 1857	244,825	116,782	91.2%	3,251

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<sup>112</sup>*Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.*  
[New School] (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian Board of Publications, 1839-1860).

New School in 1839	100,850	-	-	1,286
New School in 1857	139,115	38,265	37.9%	1,679
Annual Increase	-	8,614		101
Total Increase	382,815	153,922	66.67%	1,821

Orr wrote that from 1852 to 1857 the Old School and the New School

Presbyterian churches combined posted an annual growth of 1.5%, less than half of biological growth.”<sup>113</sup> Orr’s assessment was based on data from 1852 to 1857. He did not cover the whole period of supposed decline. However, the statistics in the tables above were gathered from the *Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of the U.S.A. from 1839 to 1860*. Between the years 1843 and 1857 Orr recorded that the Presbyterian church’s annual growth was 1.5%.<sup>114</sup> According to the above tables, from 1852 to 1857 the New School Presbyterian church endured an annual decline of .4% while the Old School enjoyed an annual growth of 3.2%. Combined, the Old and New School Presbyterian denominations posted a 2.3% growth rate during this period. The Old School Presbyterian church experienced a growth rate that was double Orr’s assessment. When the decline of the New School is added, the cumulative growth is still .8% higher than Orr’s calculations-almost a full percent.

The following table records the decadal growth of the United Methodist Church

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<sup>113</sup>Orr, *Event of the Century*, 10.

<sup>114</sup>*Ibid.*, 10.

from 1790 to 1860.

Year	EUB	Methodists	Total	% of Growth
1790		57,858	57,858	
1800		65,181	65,181	12.7%
1810	528	174,560	175,088	168.6%
1820	10,992	257,736	268,728	53.5%
1830	23,245	478,053	501,298	86.5%
1840	38,992	855,761	894,753	78.5%
1850	61,175	1,185,902	1,247,077	39.4%
1860	141,841	1,661,086	1,802,927	44.6%
Increase	141,313	1,603,228	1,745,069	2,916% <sup>115</sup>

From 1790 to 1860 the Methodist church grew by over 1.7 million members. This represents growth of 2,916%. From 1840 to 1860 the church grew by 908,175 members, representing a growth of 94%. This is an annual growth of almost 4%.

The following table describes the number of members, the number of Baptist churches and the spread of Baptist churches throughout the United States. It covers the years between 1790 and 1860.

Period	Number of Members	Percentage of Growth	Number of Churches	States with Baptist Churches
1784	35,101		871	16
1792	65,345	86%	881	17
1812	172,972	165%	2,164	22
1832	385,459	122.8%	5,331	26

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<sup>115</sup>*United Methodist Membership As Compared to the United States Population Census.* [www.gcch.org/membership.htm](http://www.gcch.org/membership.htm). July 1, 2005.

1840	572,122	48.4%	7,787	29
1851	801,770	40.1%	9,549	34
1860	1,025,135	27.9%	11,902	37 <sup>116</sup>
Percentage of Growth		2,821%	1,266%	100%

Orr, in *The Event of the Century*, recorded that Baptist churches experienced a 3.5 percent annual growth between 1852 and 1857. The above chart, which can be found in the book *Baptist Home Missions of North America*, corroborates this statistic. From 1840 to 1860 this chart shows the growth in membership to be 79%. This translated to an annual increase of approximately 3.5%. When comparing the growth rate of Baptist churches between the years 1840 and 1860 with previous years, the growth trends from 1784 to 1860 show a fluctuation in statistical growth. Still, the chart reveals consistent and considerable growth.

From 1812 to 1832 Baptists enjoyed an increase of 122.8%. The years between 1840 and 1860 recorded an increase of 79%. This demonstrates a 44% decline in the percentage of growth. However, the period between 1812 and 1832 posted a numerical growth rate of 212,487 while the years between 1840 and 1860 revealed a numerical growth rate of 453,013. Though one can argue that the percentage of growth declined from 122% to 79%, the actual growth increased from 212,487 to 453,013. In total membership, the Baptist church between the years 1840 and 1860 outgrew the Baptist church of 1812 and 1832 by over 100%. This was not decline. It was phenomenal growth.

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<sup>116</sup>*Baptist Home Missions in North America*, (New York: Baptist Home Mission Rooms, 1883), 554-5.

The following example of statistical growth was taken from the Bureau of Census' *Bicentennial Edition of Historical Statistics of the United States: Colonial Times to 1970*. In this publication, the Bureau of Census tracked the growth of the Presbyterian, Methodist and Southern Baptists churches. The table below records the part of the chart that covered these churches from 1841 to 1860. Once again, statistics will clearly show that during the period of supposed decline, the Presbyterian, Methodist and Southern Baptist churches were experiencing considerable growth.

Year	Presbyterian	Methodist	S. Baptist	Total	% Growth
1857	244,000	1,372,000	580,000	2,196,000	45% Growth
1845	172,000	995,000	352,000	1,519,000 <sup>117</sup>	

The supposed spiritual decline started after 1843. The full table as presented by the Bureau of Census covers from 1841 to 1860. However, the SBC was not formally organized until 1845. For this reason, the only portion of the table utilized here dates from 1845.

According to this chart, the total growth rate of the three denominations from 1845 to 1857 was 45%. In 1843 the approximate population of the United States was 18.9 million. By 1857 the population grew to approximately 29 million. This represented a decadal population growth rate of about 34.5%. During the mid-nineteenth century there were dozens of Protestant denominations in the United States. However, if one excludes all but these three denominations, the growth of Protestant Churches within the United

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<sup>117</sup>Bureau of the Census. *Bicentennial Edition: Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970*, Part 1 (U. S. Department of Commerce) 362.

States from 1843 to 1860 was 11.5% higher than the general population growth.

Nevertheless, these were not the only Protestant denominations in the United States. The following table records the rate of communicant membership growth for the Episcopal church from 1835 to 1863.

Year	Diocese	Communicant Members	Growth	Percentage of Growth	New Churches
1835	19	36,416			
1838	23	45,930	9,514	26%	
1841	25	55,477	9,547	21%	20
1844	26	72,099	16,622	30%	39
1847	27	67,550 <sup>118</sup>	-4,549	-6%	59
1850	28	79,802	12,252	18%	61
1853	30	105,136	25,334	32%	90
1856	31	119,540	14,404	13.7%	154
1859	33	139,611	20,071	16.8%	162
1862	23	124,340	-15,304 <sup>119</sup>	-11%	134
Total	33	149,983	113,567	312%	719 <sup>120</sup>

The 1847 statistics did not include data from the New York Diocese. The 1844 journal recorded that the New York Diocese posted its membership at 13,436 communicants. Thus, if the total membership for this diocese remained stagnant, then the

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<sup>118</sup>Neither the 1847, nor the 1850 annual minutes included statistics from the New York Diocese. Therefore, the decline posted on the table is not accurate.

<sup>119</sup>The data for 1862 does not include the communicant members of VA, NC, SC, GA, FL, AL, MS, LA, TX, or TN. If the aggregate number of these ten states are added to the 1862 report then the communicant membership of 1862 posts an increase of 10,372 instead of a decline of 15,304. This brings the membership of 1862 to a total of 149,983 and not 124,340.

<sup>120</sup>*Journal of the General Convention of the Episcopal Church, 1841-1862.*

actual number of communicant members for 1847 was 80,986. This would represent an increase of 8,887 members, a three year increase of 11% and not a decrease of 6%. New York also failed to deliver their membership report to the 1850 convention. Once again, if the number remained stagnant from 1844, then the total membership of 1850 was 93,238. This represents an increase of 12,252, a three year increase of over 13%.

The communicant church membership increase for the Episcopal church between the years 1841 and 1859 was 84,134—a 152% increase in total communicant membership. The average annual growth of the Episcopal church from 1841 to 1859 was approximately 6%. Thus the growth of the Episcopal Church from 1841 to 1859 outpaced the population growth of the United States by over 2%.

Another example of growth among Protestant denominations can be found with the African Methodist Episcopal Church. The following table records the number of members and churches within this denomination between the years of 1816 and 1896.

African Methodist	Episcopal Church		
Period	Number of Members	Percentage of Growth	Number of Churches
1816	400		7
1836	7,594	1,798.5%	86
1866	73,000	861.3%	286
1896	518,000	609.6%	4,850 <sup>121</sup>

This chart reveals that the African Methodist Episcopal church membership grew

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<sup>121</sup>Richard R. Wright, *1816-1916 Centennial Encyclopedia of the African Methodist Episcopal Church* (Philadelphia, PA: Book Concern of the A. M. E. Church, 1916) 5.



from 400 to 73,000 between 1816 and 1866. From 1816 to 1836, the church had an annual growth of approximately 329 members. Between the years 1836 and 1866 the church enjoyed an annual growth of approximately 3270 members. From 1866 to 1896 the church experienced an annual growth of approximately 14,834. All three periods experienced growth that is almost statistically identical. The African Methodist Episcopal Church between 1816 and 1896 enjoyed a consistent statistical growth that far outpaced the statistical growth of the general population of the United States.

This final chart displays a list of Protestant denominations in existence during the first half of the nineteenth century. The information in this chart will be used to verify that church membership increased during the years of supposed spiritual decline.<sup>122</sup>

Denomination	Year	Churches	Members
Associate Presbyterian	1845	211	13,477
Associate Reformed	1845	243	26,973*
Baptists	1848	9,888	731,906

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<sup>122</sup>This chart was compiled out of data from John Winebrenner. *History of all the Religious Denominations in the United States*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Harrisburg, PA: John Winebrenner, V.D.M, 1848). The table was constructed from the data provided by this book. Not all of the denominations listed had complete records. Most of the records provide both the number of churches and church membership, but not all. All numbers in the table with an asterix represents data that was not provided by Winebrenner. In order to get these numbers, all the references with complete records were compiled and added. Then the aggregate number of churches was divided into the aggregate number of members. This gave a nation wide average church membership of 111. If the data listed the number of churches, but not the total membership, then the number of churches was multiplied by the arbitrary number of 111, thus producing a statistical total membership. If the data listed the total membership, but not the number of churches, then the membership was divided by 111, thus producing a statistic for total number of churches.

Also, the data listed was compiled from different years. The years range from 1840 to 1848. Most denominations listed grew between 1840 to 1848. However, for the purpose of simplicity, it is assumed that all denominations listed posted 0% growth until 1848. Thus, the numbers of all denominations will be recognized as data from 1848.

Free Will Baptists	1846	1197	55,232
Free Communion Baptists	1840	51	2,470
Six Principle Baptist	1845	19	3,000
English 7 <sup>th</sup> Day Baptists	1849	57	3,661
Christian Connection	1847	1,800*	500,000
Church of God	1849	155	12,000
Congregational	1840	1,300	160,000
Dutch Reformed Church	1843	267	96,302
Disciples of Christ	1849	1,802	200,000
Protestant Episcopal Church	1844	1,185	500,000*
Evangelical Association	1843	135*	15,000
Quakers	1849	1,351*	150,000
German Reformed Church	1842	250	27,750*
Lutheran	1845	1,367	135,031
Moravians	1849	54*	6,000
Methodist Episcopal	1843	9,665*	1,072,811
Methodist Protestant	1843	541*	60,000
Wesleyan Methodist	1843	180*	20,000
African Methodist Episcopal	1847	180*	20,000
Mennonites	1847	400	60,000
Amish	1847	1,126*	125,000
Presbyterian	1843	2,092	159,137
Cumberland Presbyterian	1847	800	10,000
Reformed Presbyterian	1845	35*	3,853
United Brethren in Christ	1847	1,800	65,000
United Society of Believers	1847	6	1,850
Total		38,157	4,326,453

In 1840 the population of the United States was 17,069,453. In 1840, the sum total membership of the Baptist, Methodist and African Methodist Episcopal churches was approximately 1,483,175. This represented almost 9% of the total population. In 1860 the population of the United States was 31,443,321. In the same year the collective membership of these three denominations was approximately 2,891,062. This represented approximately 9.2% of the total population of the United States. With these three denominations alone, the growth of Protestant America between the years 1840 and 1860 outstripped the growth rate of the general population of the United States by over 4%. This represented an increased of the overall percentage of church membership in the United States. If all the other Protestant denominations simply maintained their numbers, then, as these plateaued denominations are added to the amassed church membership, the overall percentage will continue to grow even further.

Beardsley remarked that between 1843 and 1857, “the accessions to the churches scarcely equalled the losses.”<sup>123</sup> However, the data posted in the tables challenge his assertions. According to the above table, the total number of Protestant churches in the United States in 1849 was 38,157. The aggregate Protestant church membership was 4,326,453. In 1850 the U.S. population was 23,191,876. Thus in 1850, Protestant church membership in the United States was about 18.6% of the population of the United States.

It was earlier demonstrated that the Methodist, Baptist and African Methodist Episcopal churches alone posted growth that outpaced the population increases. If these three denominations are removed from the above chart, the combined Protestant church membership in 1850 was 21, 367,159. If the 1.5% annual growth recorded by Orr is

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<sup>123</sup>Beardsley, 40.

applied to the denominations represented in the above chart, then the total Protestant church membership by 1860 grew to 5,096,339. In 1860 the accumulated membership of the Methodist, Baptist and African Methodist Episcopal church was 2,891,062. Thus, the total Protestant church membership in 1860 was 7,987,401.

The U.S. population in 1860 was 31,443,321. Therefore, if the growth of all Protestant denominations in the United States (Other than the Methodist, Baptist, and African Methodist Episcopal churches) were as minimal as the Presbyterians (as documented by Orr), then in 1860, the cumulative Protestant church membership in the United States grew to about 25.4% of the total population. This represented a 7% net increase of church membership over the U.S. population from 1850 to 1860.

When one looks at the actual increases of church membership, baptisms and church plants of all Protestant denominations across the board, the statistics will reveal that between 1840 and 1857 the Protestant church in the United States enjoyed consistent and substantial growth. This increase was statistically consistent with the overall increase of Protestant churches from 1800 to 1840. This evidence seriously challenges the contemporary consensus of decline. The contemporary consensus writes about decline, but the data from denominational minutes recorded growth.

### *Spiritual Growth According to the Sources*

The last section offered data supporting quantitative growth among Protestant churches between the years 1840 and 1860. This section will offer sources to support the notion that there was also qualitative spiritual growth during this period. There will be no attempt here to prove that the spiritual fervor from 1840 to 1855 was greater, or even

equal to the religious fervor of the 1830s and after 1856. The focus is to demonstrate that there was religious fervor and a sense of anticipation during the period. It can even be argued that as the rate of numerical increase diminished, the religious fervor, coupled with a zeal for revival increased. Even though Orr argued for declension during this period, he conceded that revivalism was on the rise.<sup>124</sup> Smith declared that “The revival measures and perfectionist aspiration flourished increasingly between 1840 and 1865 in all major denominations—particularly in the cities.”<sup>125</sup>

Before going any further, Beardsley’s famous statement must be redressed:

Towards the close of the first half of the century, however, for a time revivals almost wholly ceased throughout the country. For several years, from 1843 to 1857, the accessions to the churches scarcely equalled the losses sustained by death, removal or discipline, while a widespread indifference to religion became prevalent.<sup>126</sup>

In the last section the belief in a time of numerical declension was challenged by presenting growth statistics of the various Protestant denominations. It was then demonstrated that the aggregate membership of these denominations revealed a period of consistent growth. When contrasted with the actual statistics of church growth, Beardsley’s statement depicting a plateaued church must be dismissed.

In this section, the belief of spiritual declension will be addressed. Here it will be demonstrated that Beardsley’s comment about the cease of revivals and widespread indifference to religion was also incorrect.

According to sources such as Samuel Irenaeus Prime, Talbot W. Chambers, and

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<sup>124</sup>Orr, *The Event of the Century*, 8-9.

<sup>125</sup>Smith, 8.

<sup>126</sup>Beardsley, 40.

Frank Grenville Beardsley, America before the financial collapse of 1857 was a cesspool of materialism, selfish indulgence, and all forms of avarice. However, Prime and Chambers did not specify an identifiable time period when there was any spiritual, or numerical decline among the Protestant Churches.

Historian Philip Schaff had a very different interpretation of the United States than did Beardsley. In 1854, three years before the Prayer Revival, while addressing fellow colleagues in Berlin, he made this statement:

The United States are by far the most religious and Christian country in the world. Table prayer is almost universal, daily family worship' is the rule 'in religious circles.' and church attendance is 'inseparable from moral and social respectability'... New York with a population of 600,000 had 'over 250 well attended churches.'"<sup>127</sup>

Schaff further declared that in America "there are probably more awakened souls, and more individual self-sacrifice for religious purposes, proportionally, than in any other country of the world."<sup>128</sup> He then said that Scotland may be the only exception.

Schaff offered these observations during the height of America's financial prosperity. Yet, he did not observe any detrimental affect of wealth on the religious climate or spiritual fervor of the country. The reason for this is elementary. During the period of perceived spiritual declension, the churches in the nation were actually growing and developing, not only numerically, but spiritually.

The 1840s and 50s witnessed an explosion in missionary endeavors on both local and international soil. The nation was being canvassed by colporteurs. Methodist, Baptist,

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<sup>127</sup>Winthrop S. Hudson and John Corrigan, *Religion in America*. Sixth ed. (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1999) 181.

<sup>128</sup>Smith, 18.

Presbyterian, Episcopal, and African Methodist Episcopal churches were being planted across the frontier lands. Even with the massive immigration, the growth rate of church membership was exceeding the growth of the population. Religious colleges and Seminaries were developing throughout the States. Denominational papers were being published and circulated in greater volume than ever. As William Conant declared, it was a time of “spiritual refreshings.”<sup>129</sup>

During this period, the Methodist, Baptist and African Methodist Episcopal churches were not the only denominations to experience significant growth. What may be regarded as one of the most important chapters in American Lutheranism began in 1830 and ended in 1862.<sup>130</sup> The period in which Beardsley declared a season of decline was actually the most fruitful years of the American Lutheran Church. In the 1850s Lutheranism attained its greatest strength in the United States.<sup>131</sup> Until the 1830s the growth and development of the Lutheran church was gradual. It kept pace with the immigration of the German population. Therefore, when over a million and a half Germans entered the U.S. between the years 1830 and 1860, the Lutheran church grew at three time the rate of the general population.”<sup>132</sup>

It is obvious that the lion’s share of increases in the Lutheran church was due to transfer growth and not conversion growth. Nevertheless, it grew. There is no reason to believe that the German immigrants gravitated towards churches that had nothing to offer

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<sup>129</sup>Connant, 358.

<sup>130</sup>Edmund Jacob Wolf, *The Lutherans In America*, 353.

<sup>131</sup>Ibid., 390.

<sup>132</sup>Spicer, 43.

them. The Lutheran church offered the immigrants a familiar environment, a familiar style of worship, and a familiar culture.

Just because the increase was attributed to transfer growth does not imply that the church was in spiritual decline. This increase did not occur without effort. The Lutheran church actively sought out these immigrants. From 1846 to 1854, new synods were formed in Missouri, Buffalo, and Iowa. New congregations were formed throughout these areas. Along with new churches, missionary activity was initiated among the Cheyennes in Nebraska and the Crow Indians in Wyoming.<sup>133</sup> Despite numerous conflicts between liberal and conservative Lutherans, the church enjoyed consistent growth for over twenty years.

The previous section offered statistics on the African Methodist Episcopal Church. This is another denomination that attained much growth between 1840 and 1860. In 1816, the AME church was established in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Delaware and Maryland. At the time it boasted only 400 members. By 1836 it had started churches in Ohio, New York and Massachusetts and had over 7,500 members. By 1856 the denomination had churches in Illinois, Missouri, Louisiana, Kentucky and Canada. The membership reached over 20,000. The growth continued unabated for a whole century. By 1916, the AME had over 7,500 churches and 650,000 members.<sup>134</sup> From 1816 to 1916 the denomination enjoyed strong growth. This growth did not diminish between the years 1840 and 1857. During that period, spiritual and numerical declension was unheard of in

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<sup>133</sup>Ibid., 44.

<sup>134</sup>Wright, *Centennial Encyclopedia of the African Methodist Episcopal Church*, 5-6.



the AME denomination.

Between 1840 and 1857, revivals and revivalism were endemic throughout the United States. During this period, according to Timothy Smith, revival fervor became “a dominant mood in urban religious life.”<sup>135</sup> Both secular and religious news papers were inundated with both cries for the need of revival and accounts of revival activity.<sup>136</sup> In 1848, the *Star and Banner* of Gettysburg Pennsylvania, in a column titled “Religious Revivals,” reported that religious papers from around the country were writing about “the existence of unusual religious interest in their vicinity.” After citing revival incidents in ten different states, the article made this declaration:

indeed, from nearly every section of the country, we are receiving intimations of the existence, here and there, of special religious interest at the present time; and this is not confined to any particular sect or denomination and as would appear not generally the result of any special exertions, but of the blessings of Heaven on the ordinary means of religious improvement.<sup>137</sup>

John Corrigan in *Business of the Heart*, noted that in Boston alone there were city wide revivals in 1823, 1826, 1827, 1830-31, 1840-42, and 1849-50.<sup>138</sup> Corrigan further stated that “in the several decades leading up to the great events of 1858, revivals were

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<sup>135</sup>Smith, 62.

<sup>136</sup>One example of such reports is found in *The Daily Sanduskian*. (Sandusky, Ohio: May 1, 1850) pg. 2. “The Oswego Commercial Times of April 27<sup>th</sup> says, that a deep religious interest was manifested at that place about two months ago, which still continues, and that over 400 persons have been united with the different churches. Besides these, many have been converted who have not yet united with any of the churches.” Such reports are common weekly additions to secular newspapers during the years between 1843 and 1857.

<sup>137</sup>“Religious Revivals,” *The Star and Banner* (January 21, 1848).

<sup>138</sup>John Corrigan, *Business of the Heart: Religion and Emotion in the Nineteenth Century*. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002), 12.

more or less standard feature of Protestant life in Massachusetts.”<sup>139</sup> The issue of decline was one of perception and not necessarily reality. Corrigan had this to say about this dichotomy of perception:

Church leaders agonized constantly over the condition of their congregations, complaining about the loss of vitality in religion and pointing to the signs that warned of the onset of spiritual corruption. Indeed, at the same time that the press reported revivals in churches and towns, they published letters from ministers, or ran editorials, that entreated readers to pray for divine help in stemming the tide of declension... Theodore Parker took a longer historical view, arguing that the churches had in fact institutionalized the machinery of complaint, that ministers since 1636 had preached unceasingly about the decline of piety. In any event, the clergy complained even during times of revival.<sup>140</sup>

In 1854, three years before the Prayer Revival, Nashua, New Hampshire and Lawrence Massachusetts reported revivals that lasted several weeks. In Campton, New Hampshire, there was a revival with such power that one observer commented ““We could no longer hesitate to say, ‘The Pentecost has fully come.’”<sup>141</sup> In *Trans-Atlantic Revivalism*, Richard Cardwine argued that revivals were a consistent and systematic element of the American religious landscape for the entire first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. After examining incidences of religious revivals during the Second Great Awakening, he noted that they occurred from 1790 to 1865. During this seventy five year period, Cardwine wrote, “it is of course possible to find evidence of revivals in almost every year of this period if those of limited geographical and numerical extent are included.”<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>139</sup>Ibid., 13.

<sup>140</sup>Ibid., 13-14

<sup>141</sup>Smith, 51. Smith is quoting from *The Puritan Reader* (Feb. 16, 1854).

<sup>142</sup>Richard Cardwine, *Trans-Atlantic Revivalism: Popular Evangelicalism in Britain and America, 1790-1865* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1978) 45. Cardwine is able to document that Methodism enjoyed consistent growth from 1790 to

Smith stated that “no argument is required to establish the popularity of religious awakenings among Methodists before the Civil War.” Revivalism, holiness and spiritual fervor were common elements among Methodist congregations. Smith offered the reason for this:

Long promotion of camp meetings had stamped Wesleyanism with a fervor which city churches expressed in yearly seasons of special religious interest called “protracted meetings.”... The fact that only four noteworthy full-time evangelists appeared in the church before 1857—John Newland Maffitt, James Caughey, and Dr. And Mrs. Walter Palmer, who were laymen—only emphasizes the point that every bishop, college president, presiding elder, and circuit rider was expected to be a constant winner of souls.<sup>143</sup>

During the period of supposed declension, Phoebe Palmer experienced her most fruitful years of ministry.<sup>144</sup> Throughout her ministry, she kept a detailed diary of her experiences. On December 29, 1844 she wrote that the previous year was “marked with a good degree of outward prosperity.” She was encouraged to see that “holiness in the M.E. Church seems to be gradually on the rise.”<sup>145</sup> This statement was entered into her diary just two months after she wrote a letter to William Miller. A good number of secondary sources wrote that the disappointment caused by Miller’s false prediction of the second coming of Christ was one of the major contributing factors to the supposed spiritual declension between the years 1843 and 1857. However, Phoebe Palmer wrote that by December of 1844—after both failed predictions—holiness was on the rise.

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1865. Even during periods of nation wide financial, and spiritual declension, the Methodist Church was able to sustain its growth (pp. 45-60).

<sup>143</sup>Ibid., 46.

<sup>144</sup>Palmer’s ministry spanned from December 18, 1807 to November 2, 1874.

<sup>145</sup>Thomas C. Oden, ed, *Phoebe Palmer: Selected Writings* (New York: Paulist Press, 1988.) 210-11.

In her diaries, Phoebe Palmer recorded numerous revival meetings and instances of “warm times in discussing the subject of holiness.” During the time of supposed declension, she was busy traveling from city to city, state to state, revival meeting to revival meeting.<sup>146</sup> Thomas C. Oden, the editor of *Phoebe Palmer: Selected Writings*, wrote “by 1848 Nathan Bangs notes that the subjects of Christian perfectionism and entire sanctification” had “very considerably revived within six of seven years past; and that a more than usual number have sought and found the blessing of ‘perfect love.’”<sup>147</sup>

Charles Finney, in his *Memoirs*, recorded a series of revivals in the State of New York during the year 1852. One such event occurred when he was invited to preach for Henry Ward Beecher. During this time Finney recorded:

There was a growing and deepening religious influence there when I arrived and when I left... We came home and went on with our labors here as usual, with the almost uniform results of a great degree of religious influence among our students, and extending more or less generally to the inhabitants. It had become so common to have large numbers of our students inquiring from week to week, and from month to month, that the inhabitants came to look upon it as a thing of course.<sup>148</sup>

Finney further wrote about an experience with a revival that occurred among several churches and denominations in the city of Syracuse, New York during the winter of 1852.<sup>149</sup> Also in 1852 he recorded a revival that broke out in the city of Rome.<sup>150</sup>

Finney reported that there were two other revivals in Rochester before the revival of

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<sup>146</sup>Ibid., 208-44.

<sup>147</sup>Ibid., 20.

<sup>148</sup>Finney, *Memoirs*, 525-6.

<sup>149</sup>Ibid., 526-31.

<sup>150</sup>Ibid., 539-546.

1856. However, the revival of 1856 produced more converts than the previous two.<sup>151</sup>

The only other primary sources this research uncovered which spoke of any religious decline and the need for revivals during the period between 1843 and 1856 were news paper articles. However, one can document these same kinds of articles from before 1700 until well after 1950! Also, there is no evidence that the media outcry for a sweeping revival was any more intense between the years 1843 and 1856 than during any other twenty year period of American History. There is no evidence to support Beardsley's assertion that during the years between 1843 and 1856 there was a prevalent and widespread indifference to religion. Smith observed that:

the common notion that, except for occasional sporadic outbursts led by Finney, Moody, and the Y.M.C.A., revivalism declined steadily after the great Western awakening burned out around 1840, seems in direct contradiction to the facts.<sup>152</sup>

If there was indeed no spiritual decline, and instead spiritual growth, then one must ask why so many secondary sources depicted the 1840s and 50s as a time of declension. This is a fair and legitimate question. What was it that secondary sources saw that compelled them to interpret the period prior to the Prayer Revival in such a way? Nineteenth century historians James Burns and Joseph Tracy provided useful insights that may help answer this question.

James Burns, author of *Revivals: Their Laws and Leaders*, detailed what he perceived to be essential elements of a revival. In his book he offered a section titled "The Law of Recoil." He argued that all revivals must necessarily cease. All spiritual movements would fall into decay. There would come a point when the life goes out of the

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<sup>151</sup>Ibid., 550-1.

<sup>152</sup>Smith, 62.

movement. He declared that “In all revival movements this law of recoil must be recognized, and wisely and prayerfully anticipated.”<sup>153</sup> The corollary to this law was that before all revivals was a period of decay. Vestiges of an older revival existed but without life.

Joseph Tracy in his book *The Great Awakening*, commented on this same idea. His focus was on the First Great Awakening. Before the Awakening, New England was experiencing a spiritual “downward progress.” As a result “revivals had become less frequent and powerful.” There were, of course, “occasional revivals” that interrupted this downward progress,” however, “the conscience of men was sadly diminished... and the progress of Arminianism had become so manifest as to cause alarm.”<sup>154</sup>

If there is no decline, then there is no need for a revival. Therefore, before a given period can be declared to be a revival, it must be compared with a previous, less revived, time. Both Burns and Tracy argued for a cyclical interpretation of revivals. Most secondary sources that championed this notion of spiritual decline also embraced a cyclical interpretation.<sup>155</sup> In the chapter titled “Three Interpretations of the Prayer Revival of 1857-1858,” this dissertation will further examine the cyclical interpretation of revivals.

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<sup>153</sup>James Burns, *Revivals: Their Laws and Leaders*, reprint (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1960, first printed in 1909) 57-8.

<sup>154</sup>Tracy, 8.

<sup>155</sup>Today the cyclical view is termed the “Awakening-construct.” In 1983 a symposium on religious awakenings was held where this Awakening-construct was compared and contrasted to a linear view of American religion. This symposium was published as the “Symposium on Religious Awakenings” *Sociological Analysis* 44 (Summer 1983), 81-122. This symposium will be addressed later.

If one surveys secondary source accounts of the Prayer Revival, he will see sentiments expressed that are very similar to Burns and Tracy. For example, Beardsley in *A History of American Revivals*, wrote that from 1843 to 1857 “public confidence in religion became impaired, and churches were made the subject of ridicule and abuse. Revivals were few.”<sup>156</sup> Again, he offered no data to support this claim. Orr, in *The Event of the Century* wrote that “It was generally conceded that shortly after 1842... there came a widespread decline.”<sup>157</sup> Since “It” was conceded, Orr therefore, conceded. McDow, in *Firefall* wrote that “while occasional glimmerings of revival burned American soil in the 1840s and 1850s, a noticeable loss of spiritual fervor came across the nation.”<sup>158</sup>

Why was there spiritual decline before the Prayer Revival? Because there had to be! It is the way history supposedly has always progressed. This writer believes the reason why so many secondary sources embraced a time of declension with total deference is because they were interpreting history through the same cyclical lenses that so many nineteenth and early twentieth century historians used. They also interpreted the spiritual climate in the same manner they interpreted the physical growth of churches. Instead of looking at the sum total of Protestant America, they focus on particular denominations. If one’s focus is on Congregationalism, then he will naturally perceive a period of spiritual decline. However, if one focuses on the Methodist, African Methodist Episcopal, or Baptist churches, he will not see any spiritual decline. If one dares to look at the whole

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<sup>156</sup>Beardsley, *A History of American Revivals* (New York: American Tract Society, 1912) 214-15.

<sup>157</sup>Orr, *The Event of the Century*, 8.

<sup>158</sup>McDow and Reid. *Firefall*, 251.

Protestant landscape of the United States, he will see that the period between 1840 and 1857 was not a time of spiritual decline. It was a time of significant growth.

*Evidence of Revival Prior to Fulton Street*

Contemporary reports of the Prayer Revival often leave the impression that the Prayer Revival started in the Autumn of 1857. J. Edwin Orr offered a good example of this opinion. In his book *The Light of the Nations* Orr made the statement that “One of the first sections of the country to experience an awakening was the New Jersey area, which reported stirring revivals of religion as early as late October 1857.”<sup>159</sup> In his book *The Fervent Prayer*, Orr wrote that the beginnings of the revival actually started in the fall of 1857 in Hamilton, Canada.<sup>160</sup> Beardsley, in *The History of Christianity in America* declared, “Humanly speaking, this revival began in the Old North Dutch Church, located at the corner of Fulton and William Streets, New York City.”<sup>161</sup> McDow in *Firefall* wrote that between 1840 and 1857 the nation experienced “occasional glimmerings of revival.” However, this period was marked by a “noticeable loss of spiritual fervor.”

When one studies the revival reports in the newspapers of the period, they will uncover a picture that is considerably different than the contemporary assumption. According to the press, the sweeping revival started much earlier than the fall of 1857. It may be correct to say that the “Prayer Revival” started in the Autumn of 1857, but a

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<sup>159</sup>Orr, *The Light of the Nations*, 114.

<sup>160</sup>Orr, *The Fervent Prayer*, 2.

<sup>161</sup>Beardsley, *The History of Christianity in America*, 178. It must be noted that not all contemporary histories make this assumption. Malcolm McDow’s *Firefall*, which was published in 1997, makes mention of the revivals throughout the states which occurred in the early Spring of 1857.



general revival of religion was already in progress. As early as 1845 papers across the nation were reporting small and isolated instances of revival. By March of 1857 revival was sweeping throughout the North East United States. In October of 1857, when Lanphier started his prayer meeting, the revival in at least twenty different states was already eight months old.

In December of 1847, the *Zionist Herald And Wesleyan Journal* was reporting monthly on revivals that were occurring throughout the United States. One article reported of a “few cheering notices of revivals.” These revivals were reported to be springing up in “various parts of the country” and that “refreshing showers are descending on the churches.” The paper then declared that “we are exceedingly happy to perceive a rising in the religious state of the various portions of the church from which we hear. Let us pray earnestly for the spread of the holy flame.”<sup>162</sup> In another article entitled “The Churches,” the *Zionist Herald* recorded personal testimonies of various churches throughout the New England states that were in a period of revival.

In February of 1848 the *Zionist Herald* published four papers. All offered reports of revivals throughout the United States. In the February 2 issue, there were reports of revivals in the cities of Harmony, ME; Wiscasset, Cambridge, Mass; Tauton, Mass; Hooksett, N.H.; York and Pittsburgh.<sup>163</sup> In the February 9 issue, reports of revivals were recorded in the cities of Orono, ME; New Bedford; Milltown, ME; Albany, NY; Scituate;

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<sup>162</sup>“State or Religion,” *Zionist Herald and Wesleyan Journal* (Vol. 18. No. 52. December 29, 1847).

<sup>163</sup>*Ibid.*, (Vol. 19. no. 5. February 2, 1848).

Phenix, RI; Hardwick and Braintree, Mass; Winchester, NH.<sup>164</sup> In the February 16 edition, revivals were cited in the cities of South Vassalboro, Paper Mill Village, Cross's Hill; Hampton, NH; Columbia, ME; Enfield, NH; Lisbon, CT; Tuftonboro, NH; Wiscasset, ME.<sup>165</sup> In the February 23 issue, revivals were reported on in the cities of Ketch Mills, CT; Monument, MS; Wellfleet, MS; Orono, ME; Lowell, Mass.<sup>166</sup>

The *Zionist Herald* continued to report on revivals throughout the 1840s and 50s. In an article published March 1, 1848 it spoke of revivals in the cities of Webster; East Haddam, CT; Beloit, Wis; Charlemont, Mass; Portsmouth, NH.<sup>167</sup> In a July issue there were reports of revivals in the cities of Claremont, NH; and Thompsonville.<sup>168</sup> In May of 1850 the *Daily Sanduskian* reported on a "deep religious interest," during which time over 400 people were converted.<sup>169</sup>

The *Zionist Herald*, under the subheading "Churches, or Religious Intelligence," recorded revivals on a weekly basis. However, it must be noted, that after the prayer revival started, the recording of revivals escalated considerably. Also, the listings were no longer of individual churches in various cities, but of entire cities, regions and even states being impacted by revival. In one article, the *Christian Advocate and Journal* reported:

Amid the clamors of the times, the Holy Spirit is descending upon the Church almost universally... Hockstown, Baltimore Conference—Rev. Messrs. Clemm and

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<sup>164</sup>Ibid., (Vol. 19. no. 6. February 9, 1848).

<sup>165</sup>Ibid., (Vol. 19. no. 7. February 16, 1848).

<sup>166</sup>Ibid., (Vol. 19. no. 8. February 23, 1848).

<sup>167</sup>Ibid., (Vol. 19. no. 9. March 1, 1848).

<sup>168</sup>Ibid., (Vol. 19. no. 31. July 2, 1848).

<sup>169</sup>*The Daily Sanduskian* (May, 1 1850).

Brown write us: We are now closing up our term of service on this circuit, and it affords us unaffected pleasure to report that all the various interests of the Church are in a sound and healthy state.<sup>170</sup>

On February 26, 1857 the *Christian Observer* offered a report listing a whole series of revivals that were sweeping through hundreds of churches in dozens of cities in sixteen different states. Below is a synopsis of that article:

It is cheering to hear of the progress of the gospel, the revival of religion, and of the conversion of sinners to Christ, amid the den of the prevailing agitations of the day... we have interesting tokens of the presence of the Lord with his ministers and people—revival in: Pennsylvania: Venango County, Woodstown, Montgomery, Smithfield, Ruff's Creek, Providence, Latrobe, Landisburg; In New Jersey: Newark, Summerville, Hughesville, Bucyras, and Milton; In New York: Albona, Lower Merion, Logansville, New Wilmington, Tivoli; In Virginia: Waynesburg, Richmond, Abingdon, Lynchburg; In South Carolina: Charlottsville, Staughton, Pittsfield, New Bedford; Massachusetts: Mt. Holyoke, Belchertown, North Hadley.<sup>171</sup>

This article also spoke of revivals in Vermont, Maine, Illinois, Wisconsin, Indiana, Kentucky, Missouri, Iowa, and Connecticut.<sup>172</sup> All of this was taking place seven months before the Prayer Revival. Also, from January of 1857 the *Zionist Herald* consistently reported on revivals that grew in intensity and geography from week to week.

For example, on January 14, the *Zionist Herald* recorded, "Still we hear of a healthful state of progress in the churches." This article then spoke of revivals breaking out in Southbridge, South Boston, Pittsfield.<sup>173</sup> The following week, the *Zionist* offered another encouraging report. "The news from the churches is refreshing." This article then

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<sup>170</sup>"Refreshing News," *Christian Advocate and Journal* (Vol. 33. No. 6. February 11, 1858).

<sup>171</sup>"Religious Intelligence," *Christian Observer* (Vol 36. no 9. February 26, 1857).

<sup>172</sup>"Religious Intelligence," *Christian Observer* (Vol 36. no 9. February 26, 1857).

<sup>173</sup>*Zionist Herald* (Vol. 28. no. 2. January 14, 1857).

reported on churches that were experiencing revival. According to this article revivals were springing up in Charlestown, Cambridge, East Salisbury, Gloucester Harbor, and churches in Vermont. The writer commented: “We see in the horizon the little cloud, and are looking with confidence for the pouring rain.” However, in the following sentences the writer stated: “The Christian church is pretty near asleep. Souls are perishing. There is something wrong somewhere, evidently, or the church of Christ would no be so inefficient as she is.”<sup>174</sup>

These reports were mostly of individual churches within the mentioned cities. However, by February of 1858 the *Zionist Herald* reported that the revival was intensifying. It was now moving across denominations and was now starting to impact entire cities and regions. The *Herald* thus reported the following:

Our churches generally of all denominations in Northern Pennsylvania are enjoying a very gracious spirit of revival. Nearly every town in Bradford County and in some instances every school district has been visited; hundreds throughout this section have been converted or reclaimed, and the good work is still going on. In other contiguous places on the line of the New York and Erie Railroad, as Corning, Addison and Hornelsville, the gracious work has been, or is still, in progress. In all the southern parts of our Conference, and also in other places North, God is graciously pouring out his Holy Spirit.<sup>175</sup>

In 1859, Charles Finney preached a sermon titled “The Prevailing Prayer-Meeting.” During this sermon he endeavored to correct the supposition that the Prayer Revival originated in the business-men’s prayer meetings of New York. He declared that to think such a notion was “a great mistake.” He wrote that “a spirit of revival had been growing for several years in many parts of the United States.” According to Finney, the

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<sup>174</sup>Ibid., (Vol. 28. no. 3. January 21, 1857).

<sup>175</sup>Ibid., (Vol. 29. no. 8. February 24, 1858).

Prayer Revival had its genesis in Rochester New York. It was from Rochester that “the revival spread in every direction. Daily Prayer meetings were commenced, which resulted in a great many others, and the awakening gave promise of becoming general.”<sup>176</sup>

After the revival in Rochester, Finney traveled to Boston and preached there. During his stay in Boston, revival broke out in the city. In his *Memoirs*, Finney wrote that before the Prayer Revival of 1857-58 “there had been a daily prayer meeting observed in Boston for several years.”<sup>177</sup> One may argue that Finney’s declaration in which he predated the origins of the Prayer Revival was an overstatement. Still, his statement proved that with regards to the origins of the Prayer Revival, there was not universal agreement among nineteenth century evangelicals.

Regardless of its origins, by May of 1858 the Prayer Revival was at its zenith. *The Christian Advocate and Journal* proclaimed that there was a harvest of good in the East, West, North and South. The “lethargy” of an earlier day “has been cast off, and those who mourned because a spiritual dearth over spread the Churches, have put on the garments of praise.” According to the *Christian Advocate*, the “windows of heaven are open,” and God was pouring out blessings.<sup>178</sup> In the same publication, another article reported that “in nearly every station that the revival of religion had spread rapidly, and many accessions had been made to the membership.”<sup>179</sup> The following week the *Advocate*

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<sup>176</sup>Finney, *Memoirs*, 555. See footnote number 77.

<sup>177</sup>*Ibid.*, 562.

<sup>178</sup>“Prayers are Answered,” *Christian Advocate and Journal* (Vol. 33. No. 20. May 20, 1858).

<sup>179</sup>*Ibid.*,

declared that the “glorious scenes of the great model revival of Christianity on the day of Pentecost were being re-enacted in every direction before our wandering eyes.” The wide spread revival and the nation wide interest in religion that “is now obtaining throughout the length and breadth of the land, has not been approximated within half a century. In many aspects there has scarcely ever been anything like this great work of God.”<sup>180</sup>

The revival exploded in the fall of 1857. It reached its zenith in the late Spring of 1858. Yet, its origins can be traced to an earlier period. One may argue that reports of revivals between 1840 and 1856 are too few and too spread out to be defined as a national movement. However, there is very strong evidence to suggest that the nation was in the throgs of a religious revival as early as January of 1857. Finney recorded revivals in Boston as early as 1856. Before one can argue that the Revival of 1857-58 did not start until September, or October, he must first ignore the multitude of primary sources that make a different claim.

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<sup>180</sup>Ibid., “The Great Revival,” (Vol. 33. No. 21. May 27, 1858).

## CHAPTER 5

## AGENTS OF OUTREACH DURING THE PRAYER REVIVAL OF 1857–58

*The Prolific Element of Human Agency*

One of the mantras often associated with the Prayer Revival of 1857 is that God's providential hand was so powerfully expressed that there was little need for any human agency. The perceived spontaneity, absence of human agency, and explosive growth coupled with a lack of apparent organization is heralded by both primary and secondary sources as evidence of God's hand.

There were many spontaneous elements to the Prayer Revival. There was incredible explosive growth of the event. However, it would be incorrect to assume that there was not a great deal of human agency and organization involved. During the Revival there was intensive organization and intentional planning on the part of the Y.M.C.A. and the American Tract Society.<sup>1</sup>

Also, long before Lanphier opened the prayer meeting in the North Dutch Church, churches and religious organizations throughout New York were already engaging in city wide systematic visitation of its residents. As early as February of 1857, hints of a nationwide revival were already noticeable.

Human agency within the sphere of revivalism does not challenge God's

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<sup>1</sup>The American Tract Society and the Y.M.C.A. will be discussed at length in the next chapter.

providence. Lack of human agency does not prove it. The degree to which human agency can be attributed to the progress of the Prayer Revival neither buttresses nor challenges the fact that there was a revival.

The revival is called a Prayer Revival. This is certainly the case, but one must remember that it was people who prayed. People wrote the articles in the daily papers. People distributed tracts by the millions. People canvassed the communities inviting friends and family to the prayer meetings. The Prayer Revival may have originated in the mind of God, but it was carried out by human agency.

#### Systematic Visitation

There is considerable primary source documentation of systematic visitation prior to the Fulton Street prayer meeting. Conant made no attempt to “trace the origin, or rather the original agencies, of this divine work.” However, he did recognize a flurry of religious activities that occurred in the two years prior to the revival. He urged his readers to “consider the Revival Conventions, and Synodical Visitations of Churches, the Sabbath school Conventions and Systematic Visitations of parishes, which have been held in various parts of the country for some two years past.”<sup>2</sup>

On December 1, 1857 a convention, conducted by Old School Presbyterians was held in the city of Pittsburgh. Prime declared this event to be “indications of an awakened religious interest in the west.”<sup>3</sup> Over two hundred ministers and many other laymen attended. During the convention a committee was appointed. This committee drafted an

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 358–9.

<sup>3</sup>Prime. *The Power of Prayer*, 37-8.



address which was to be delivered to the churches. This address had the following recommendations:

It was recommended that this address be read from the pulpit by pastors... and that official members of the respective churches be called to meet in each church to discuss the same subjects as the convention had discussed... that a plan of personal visitation be adopted... families should be visited by the pastor... In conformity to this arrangement, on the first Sabbath in January, multitudes of ministers... delivered discourses on the necessity and practicability of revivals... All these arrangements told upon the country with great power and the awakening received an intelligent and mighty impulse.”<sup>4</sup>

This address challenged two generally held assumptions regarding the Prayer Revival. First, this represented a considerable level of organization. This organization was designed for the purpose of perpetuating the revival. Second, this convention demonstrated the considerable involvement of ministers.

Beardsley argued that such revival conventions served to quicken and prepare religious interest. Soon after the Pittsburgh convention another was organized in Cincinnati. This convention operated with the same focus and purpose as the one held in Pittsburgh. Beardsley wrote that in “New York and Brooklyn, and elsewhere a systematic Sunday School visitation, attempted some months previously, served also to prepare the way for the noon day prayer meetings.” The result of this outreach was that “thousands of persons, from the brown stone fronts and from the cellars and garrets, were induced to attend the services of the sanctuary and in the interest awakened, their hearts were as soil prepared for the sower.”<sup>5</sup>

The systematic visitation in the city of New York produced very tangible results.

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 37-8.

<sup>5</sup>Beardsley, 182-3.

In a pamphlet titled *Is The Spirit of the Lord Straightened?*, Octavius Winslow declared that “the ground was prepared for a rich harvest, by the systematic visitation of families, conducted under the auspices of the New York Sunday School Association.” Through this visitation, “the religious wants of the city were thus brought distinctly into view, and the prayers and efforts of Christians were directed towards these.”<sup>6</sup> Prime offered the following statement:

The organized systems of tract and Sunday School visitation had much to do with the beginning of the revival, with its spread, and with its continuance to the present hour. The latter part of last year a more thorough system was resolved upon of searching out and exploring the destitutions of this great city, and inducting the neglected and neglecting perishing thousands to attend upon the worship of God, and to send their children to the Sabbath school. It was determined to push this plan of visitation into the fashionable avenues as well as onto the highways and hedges of the city. The numbers were greatly increased of those who visited the house of prayer. All denominations nearly were benefitted by this work, and many shared in the labor of it. In many Sunday schools the members were doubled, all increased. In this way, thousands of persons—some from the brown stone fronts, and some from the garrets and cellars, swelled the numbers, who were seen on Sunday morning wending their way to the sanctuary... This system of visitation was adopted and carried out in New York and Brooklyn about the same time. It was an organized plan adopted by the churches to visit in their respective localities and search out every kind of destitution.<sup>7</sup>

Conant observed that this “enterprise of Systematic visitation” was set into motion “some time ago” and was “adopted by a large number of churches, of various denominations.”<sup>8</sup> The purpose of these visitations was to promote attendance. The level of organization in this endeavor was considerable. There was to be systematic visitation

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<sup>6</sup>Octavius Winslow. *“Is The Spirit of the Lord Straightened?” A Plea For A National Baptism Of The Holy Ghost, With Incidents of American Revival* (London: John Farquhar Shaw, 1858) 32.

<sup>7</sup>Prime, *The Power of Prayer*, 38–9.

<sup>8</sup>Connant, 359-60.

of assigned neighborhoods. To do this each church that was involved in the effort was given a certain territory. Their responsibility was to visit every house in their designated area. The desire was to discover the religious condition of every home in New York City, Brooklyn, and the surrounding areas. The visitation started with the poor and low neighborhoods but then extended into the wealthier “respectable and fashionable streets.”<sup>9</sup> Like Prime, Conant noted that the results of this systematic visitation was very promising:

Another of the antecedents of the revival, has been an increased activity in the Sunday Schools. Many of the Sunday Schools, particularly of this city, have, within a very recent period, doubled, and in some instances, tripled their membership; and many conversions have occurred among the young... Many new Mission Sunday Schools have been established in various parts of the city, sustained by individual churches in the neighborhood.<sup>10</sup>

The growth in the churches was felt almost immediately. This growth was also sustained for some time. In New York City, over one thousand church members were appointed as Sabbath School teachers and two thousand more were sent out as visitors. Conant reports that every month during the systematic visitation there were large numbers of conversions. These results, according to Conant, were “scattered through all the evangelical denominations in the city.”<sup>11</sup>

The canvassing of the nation by colporteurs, the organization of young men into Bible studies and prayer groups by the Y.M.C.A., and the systematic visitation into homes by the churches throughout New England produced fertile ground for an upcoming

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 359-60.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 359-60.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 413.

revival. The Prayer Revival of 1857 exploded onto the scene in September of that year. One must, however, understand that the revival was planted in an area that had been systematically cultivated for several years. That revival broke out in an environment which was saturated with visitation, tract distribution and evangelism should not be regarded as exceptional.

*Evangelism Through the Bible and Tract Societies and Colportage*

This section addresses the evangelistic efforts of colporteurs via Bible and tract societies. This writer found no evidence directly linking colportage with the genesis of the Prayer Revival. What this section does is offer an illustration of intense missions activity during the period of supposed spiritual decline.

The American Tract Society (ATS) was founded on May 11, 1825. The specific reasons for its establishment were written in its statement of purpose which declared:

To make Jesus Christ known in His redeeming grace and to promote the interests of vital godliness and sound morality, by the circulation of Religious Tracts, calculated to receive the approbation of all Evangelical Christians<sup>12</sup>

The founders of the Society were a diverse group of evangelistic Christian leaders who represented a broad theological spectrum and came from various denominations. These leaders were motivated by three trends that developed in America. The trends were spiritual, geographical and social.

First, since the 1790s, a second awakening was sweeping America. Christians had a renewed interest in missions. This translated to both a growing number of Christians devoting themselves to the work of missions and to the support of missions. As a result,

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<sup>12</sup>American Tract Society, *Statement of Purpose* (New York: American Tract Society, 1825).

from 1800 to 1825, Bible societies and tract ministries formed throughout the United States. By 1825, many of these societies decided that consolidation was needed.

A second trend revolved around geographical realities. The United States was rapidly expanding its borders. By 1820 there were twenty four states in the Union and the Louisiana purchase doubled the land mass of the new republic. With such expansion, Christians realized they needed a method of Bible and tract distribution that could take the gospel from New England, to the South and into the frontier.

The third trend had to do with societal expansion. The early nineteenth-century experienced massive waves of immigration. Between 1800 and 1820, the population of the U.S. grew from 5,300,00 to 7,250,000. The New Land Act of 1820 reduced the price of land to \$1.25 per acre. This enticed multitudes to travel west into the frontier regions. With this increase in population and westward migration came the need to develop a method to bring the gospel to the masses and to the most remote regions of the United States.

For these reasons, the ATS was organized. Within just a few short years, the society was producing millions of pieces of gospel literature in the form of Bibles, tracts, religious books and magazines. By May of 1841, approximately 20,000 volunteer Christians circulated around 1,800,000 volumes of religious literature. With the expansion of the United States territories came the need for a new system of distribution. This led the ATS committee to authorize spending money for the purpose of recruiting people to personally distribute religious literature.<sup>13</sup> To meet this need, colporteurs—

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<sup>13</sup>American Tract Society, *Circulation and Character of The Volumes of the American Tract Society for the Society's Colporteurs* (New York: American Tract Society, 1848) 41-2..

Christians who traveled, selling religious literature—were enlisted. According to the ATS’s 1866 publication, *Toils and Triumphs of Twenty Five Years*, in 1841, the system of Union Missionary Colportage was inaugurated by the officers of the ATS.<sup>14</sup>

The responsibilities of the colporteur was to be a “bearer of religious books from house to house, combating error, and talking with people of the great salvation.”<sup>15</sup> In 1828 the ATS had twelve agents in the field.<sup>16</sup> However, by 1855 the number grew to 659 colporteurs on its roles.<sup>17</sup>

Colportage did not start with the ATS. The method was borrowed from Bible and tract societies in Europe. However, its effectiveness was quickly recognized. The colporteur was highly mobile. His ability to canvas whole regions—even those inaccessible by road—made his role in the distribution of Bibles and tracts indispensable. By 1845, the *Zionist Herald and Wesleyan Journal* declared “The plan of distributing religious publications by colporteurs is achieving wonders in both Europe and America.” The paper wrote that, as colportage extended across the United States, “It is unquestionably a most efficient means of evangelization.”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>American Tract Society, *Toils and Triumphs of Twenty Five Years*, 5-6.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, 5-6.

<sup>16</sup>David Paul Nord, *Faith in Reading: Religious Publishing and the Birth of Mass Media in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004) 16.

<sup>17</sup>Except where otherwise noted, the section titled “The American Tract Society’s Early History” was referenced from ATS’s website <http://www.atstracts.org/history/history.php>.

<sup>18</sup>“Colportage: A Wesleyan Usage,” *Zionist Herald and Wesleyan Journal* (Vol. 16. no. 2. January 8, 1845).

### The Colporteur's Responsibility

The colporteur was a traveling agent of the ATS. He was a cross between a Christian missionary and a traveling bookseller.<sup>19</sup> However, the average colporteur considered himself as nothing less than a missionary sent by God to reach the masses with the gospel. The method of outreach was to go door to door, distributing Bibles and tracts. They usually sold their material, but were permitted to give literature away to extremely poor families.

The institution was called “missionary colportage” by the ATS. It was called so because colporteurs carried religious literature, Bibles and the gospel to destitute people. They were active evangelists who did not wait for people to come to them. They intentionally went out into the alleys of the cities, the secluded backwaters of the country, the dense heart of the forests, the vast ranges of mountains, the endless prairies of the west, and the dark swamps and marshes of the south. Wherever people lived is where the colporteur traveled.<sup>20</sup>

The spirit of the colporteur was one of active self denial. Their focus was on the poor and destitute and their task was to distribute printed truth. It was, according to the ATS, “but another phase of the missionary spirit—the Spirit of Christ.” Its purpose and aim was to “make known the unsearchable riches of Christ to dying sinners... through the precious blood of atonement, and the means of edification in the divine life.”<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>Nord, *Faith in Reading*, 16.

<sup>20</sup>American Tract Society. *Toils and Triumphs*, 11.

<sup>21</sup>American Tract Society. *Instructions of The Executive Committee of the American Tract Society, to Colporteurs and Agents; with Statements of the History, Character, and Object of the Society* (New York: American Tract Society, 1859) 24.

The ATS understood that religious faith was a personal concern. Men and women were to be reached singly and not in masses. It was the responsibility of “individual Christians” to do the work of saving “individual souls.” Even during periods of sweeping revival and awakening, the United States was still seething with multitudes who were either “still ignorant of the plan of salvation, or too prejudiced to place themselves in the way of learning it.” This made home evangelization and home missions a never ending necessity. For a society to cast their passion towards the lost of the world and ignore the millions in its own country who were without Christ was unthinkable. “benevolence is ill judged, if not spurious, that melts and burns for India or for China, while it turns a deaf ear to the moans of dying spirits in Iowa or Texas.”<sup>22</sup>

This mission, according to the ATS, is what gave colportage its “sweet and heavenly lustre.” The colporteur bore the gospel and pointed the “erring and the hardened sinner to Jesus.”<sup>23</sup> In the first twenty-five years, over four thousand laborers from different denominations either worked as colporteurs, or helped support colportage. As a result, during this period, millions of Christian visits were made and tens of millions of Bibles, tracts, and religious books were circulated among the unchurched of the United States.<sup>24</sup> Missionary colportage was thus seen by a number of religious papers and Christian denominations as an essential element in the building of God’s kingdom in the United States.

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<sup>22</sup>American Tract Society. *Home Evangelization: A View of the Wants and Prospects of Our Country Based on the Facts and Relations of Colportage* (New York: American Tract Society, 1848) 12-13.

<sup>23</sup>American Tract Society, *Toils and* , 91.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, 23.



### Reaching the Unchurched Masses with the Gospel

In the early to mid nineteenth century, the colporteur was considered an indispensable instrument for the proclamation of the gospel to the unevangelized population of the United States. The approach and organization utilized by the ATS was both systematic and effective. At first it organized in cities such as Baltimore, Boston, New York and Philadelphia. Then it spread into the south and western frontiers. Their work went beyond merely distributing Bibles and tracts.

The main design was aimed to bring the unchurched masses “the multitudes who have, from infancy almost, never crossed a church threshold, into the church and then on to conversion.” The only way this could be achieved was by systematic intentional outreach. Every man and woman was to be a walking revival.

The ATS realized early on that even if all the young men who were studying for ministry were to become fervent missionaries, they would represent only a handful of men thrust out to reach the masses. To assist these ministers in the gospel harvest, the colporteur system provided the minister an essential aid and carried “the cup of salvation to perishing thousands, who are in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is.”<sup>25</sup> The ATS commended local churches and mission agencies for their efforts, but still lamented that “more must be done for the evangelization of America.”<sup>26</sup>

By 1842, the ATS realized that most missionary agencies sent their workers into

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<sup>25</sup>American Tract Society, *Proceedings of A Public Deliberative Meeting of The Board and Friends of the American Tract Society* (New York: American Tract Society, 1842) 149.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, 139.

populated areas. This, however, left the majority of Americans, who lived in rural hamlets and villages, without any real accessible gospel message. Thus the ATS started to focus on the areas that they considered were being neglected:

It is a noticeable fact, that missionaries occupy successively the more prominent and populous points, trenching but slowly in a country of rapid growth upon the desolations of the country. This is natural and right; but it necessarily leaves the very destitute scattered population almost without a ray of light. Some system is indispensable, that goes out literally into the highways and hedges, and carries the bread of life to the famishing multitude, who either cannot or will not come to the gospel supper.<sup>27</sup>

Both the ATS board members and the colporteurs earnestly believed that the very existence of the United States as a republic depended on a Christian society. At one public meeting it was stated that “the intelligence and virtue of the masses of people; and our influence on other nations can only be for good, in proportion to the prevalence of the Gospel at home.”

So essential was a the need for Christian intelligence among the masses that “to leave a majority, or a large minority of the people, in ignorance of the Gospel, is not only suicidal, but detracts from the symmetry and depth of that impression, which, as a seal in the hand of God, we are destined to make on the nations of the earth.”<sup>28</sup> To neglect the masses was a dereliction of Christian duties at their most fundamental level. The colporteur thus saw it as his destiny to ensure that America was a Christian nation from the grass roots up. “Our country,” wrote one ATS member, “our whole country must be evangelized.”<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 141.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 139.

<sup>29</sup>American Tract Society, *Home Evangelization*, 5.

### House to House Visitation

The purpose of the ATS was to make Jesus Christ known through the circulation of religious materials. The instrument used was colportage. The scope was to reach the masses. The method used was house to house visitation. Not only were colporteurs committed to bringing religious literature and the gospel to every house in the nation, they were genuinely believed they could do it. They were convinced they must!

Such a feat was no small task. In the early to middle-nineteenth century there was very little infrastructure in the country. The testimonies of the difficulties faced by colporteurs was awe inspiring. One colporteur reported that his field covered two counties with twenty thousand souls and only seven educated ministers. He claimed that “multitudes hear the gospel but once a month, and many never. I found seven families on one mountain, thirty upon another, and twenty-seven upon a third, entirely separated from all good influences.”<sup>30</sup> The following statement is perhaps one of the more interesting testimonies of a colporteur:

I have organized one hundred seventy eight Sabbath schools, where there have never been any before. In some of these places the people were so poor they could not purchase even the tickets to commence with, and I have taken in pay for books, Irish potatoes, maple sugar, and other produce, and hauled it thirty five miles to market. After a time, they began to save money to buy books. One offered to buy a large Testament if I would take a gallon of brandy he had just bought from the still house, and promised he would never drink another drop. I closed the bargain, took the jug, and broke it over a rock.”<sup>31</sup>

One ATS publication bemoaned the fact that—even in the midst of an awakening—there were “families and individuals here and there, in every part of the land...

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<sup>30</sup>American Tract Society, *Toils and Triumphs*, 31-32.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, 76-77.

existing in total ignorance of Christ and his salvation.” This article further stated:

Not a ray of light from above has ever dawned on their spiritual vision. Not a message of mercy has ever reached their ear. The Sabbath brings no blessing to them. The sanctuary is an unknown place. Heathen in a Christian land... Shall these scattered millions be sought out, and the oral and printed invitation be given them to come to Christ? Is there wisdom and benevolence in a system that employs men to incite Christians of every name to share in the self denial of giving to the destitute; or, if this is impracticable, to go themselves to the homes of those who will never seek the light?<sup>32</sup>

The colporteur was a home missionary of sorts, but he was also an employee of the ATS from whom he received an annual compensation of \$150. The instructions were to “converse with the destitute, from house to house, selling the volumes where it is possible.” However, if it seemed necessary and discreet, they could give them away. Colporteurs were to do all “ for the spiritual welfare of the unevangelized that pious men and spiritual books can do with the blessing of God.”<sup>33</sup>

This instruction to go house to house was heeded with much zeal and passion. During an 1845 ATS meeting at Detroit, men pined over “the degree of destitution of the means of grace.” The report, was given “under their personal observation in visits from house to house.” Such reports only drove the colporteurs to an even deeper commitment to visit every home in their territories. The colporteur who made this report “believed he had visited every house and cabin, however distant from the main road, and had personal religious conversation and prayer with every family.”<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>American Tract Society, *Proceedings of A Public Deliberative Meeting*, 144.

<sup>33</sup>American Tract Society, *Seventeenth Annual Report*, 28.

<sup>34</sup>American Tract Society, *Meetings of Colporteurs and Agents of the American Tract Society at Syracuse, Detroit, Cincinnati, Pittsburgh and New York* (New York: American Tract Society, 1845) 3-4.

Such efforts did not go unnoticed by the media. It was not uncommon for news papers (both secular and religious) to report on the labors of colporteurs. *The Zionist Herald* wrote that the colporteur who went from house to house “and then commend the people to God in prayer... cannot but result in the best consequences.”<sup>35</sup>

### Strengthening Existing Churches

Another activity of the colporteur was helping churches grow in spiritual and numerical strength. This was done in mainly three ways—pulpit supply, house to house visitation of church members and the founding of Sabbath day schools. This was not the primary task of the colporteur, but it was both good for ministry and good for business.

The ATS helped local churches by providing much needed pulpit supply. At one meeting the ATS discussed the reality that there were so many “newly gathered and feeble churches, of various denominations, scattered over the land, which are without pastors.” In this the ATS saw a great opportunity. It was declared a “blessed work for the Society” to install colporteurs into these vacant pulpits. This allowed the colporteur to labor “for the unevangelized” and help integrate them into a church. Even though this was not the primary focus of colportage, the records of this meeting stated:

Were there no other benefit from the Colporteur system than the facilities it affords of furnishing means of grace, and knowledge, and usefulness to professing Christians in their dispersion, it would still be one of the most important exercises in which the Society could engage.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup>“Colporteurage In The M. E. Church,” *Zionist Herald and Wesleyan Journal* (Vol. 18. no. 48. December 1, 1847). A small sample of other papers that routinely reported on colportage were the New York Times, the New York Herald, the Alton Weekly Courier, the Republican Compiler, the Weekly Standard, and the Christian Advocate and Journal.

<sup>36</sup>American Tract Society, *Proceedings of A Public Deliberative Meeting*, 143.

As colporteurs went from village to village they actively sought to help local churches. If the pastor furnished the names and addresses of his church membership, the colporteur would visit them all. He would then “let the poorest and most ignorant be sought and supplied freely with this denominational and other literature.” The colporteur explained to the pastor that if this were done every year “ a vast increase of intelligent and scripturally indoctrinated church membership may be expected as the result.”<sup>37</sup>

One colporteur testified that he always aided pastors and churches in any way he could. He would visit “every house, distributing tracts, and begging people to attend church; and praying with the people in their houses, fields, shops, on the roadside, and everywhere I can find them, and instructing their children and servants.”<sup>38</sup>

A third avenue utilized by the colporteur to help strengthen local churches was through the establishment of Sabbath schools. *In Toils and Triumphs of Twenty Five Years*, the ATS offered numerous examples of such activity.

One colporteur traveled seventy thousand miles and made fifty three thousand personal visits in six different states. During this period he organized one hundred and seventy six Sabbath schools with nearly five thousand eight hundred scholars.<sup>39</sup> Another traveled thirty five thousand miles, made fifty eight thousand personal visits, helped organize fourteen Sabbath schools and six churches.<sup>40</sup> The seeming indefatigable efforts of the colporteur was a welcomed aid to many frontier ministers.

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<sup>37</sup>American Tract Society, *Toils and Triumphs*, 36.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*, 96-7.

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*, 95-97.

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*, 98.

## Records of Colportage

This section will offer several reports on the number of visits in different areas of the country. The intent here is not to offer an exhaustive account, but to demonstrate the extensive sweep of colportage. When tallied together, the numbers are staggering.

In 1842 the ATS offered its seventeenth annual report in which it recorded that in seventeen years colporteurs visited 800,000 families with over 4,000,000 souls. This report also stated that “in nearly every city where these volumes have been extensively circulated, and in many smaller places, powerful revivals of religion have succeeded.”<sup>41</sup>

In 1853 the *Alton Weekly* offered a report detailing that colporteurs were also involved in ethnic works. It reported that of 642 colporteurs, 117 were “devoted chiefly to the German and other foreign population.” They spread throughout the country with “41 in New England, 195 in the Middle Stated, 395 in the Southern and Western, and 11 in Canada.” In one year they visited 530,758 families, had religious conversation and prayer with 26,248.<sup>42</sup>

In 1857, during one quarter, in the state of Pennsylvania, eighty six colporteurs visited 37,637 families. They had prayer and religious conversation with 21,038 families in Philadelphia.<sup>43</sup>

In North Carolina, in the year 1861, one colporteur alone visited 1,803 families in forty two counties. Of these he reported that 427 never had a religious visit and prayer

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<sup>41</sup>American Tract Society, *Seventeenth Annual Report*, 26.

<sup>42</sup>*The Alton Weekly* (Alton, Illinois, May, 27 1853).

<sup>43</sup>*The Christian Observer* vol 29, no 6 (January 29, 1857).

before, 390 habitually neglected church, 103 had no Bible and 322 had no other religious books. During this time, the colporteur also held 112 religious meetings. In all he gave over 1,279,000 pages of religious literature that year.<sup>44</sup>

In a report documenting twenty five years of ATS colportage, the society was able to offer these numbers.<sup>45</sup>

Summary View of Colportage For Twenty Five Years	
Time employed, months	48,499
Number of volumes sold	8,233,620
Number of volumes granted	2,264,356
Number of public meetings addressed, and prayer meetings held	222,015
Number of families destitute of all religious books except the Bible	793,743
Number of families destitute of the Bible	489,013
Number of Roman catholics	817,637
Number of families habitually neglecting evangelical preaching	1,261,285
Number of families conversed with on personal religion, or prayed with	4,874,256
Number of family visits	9,354,485

It is little wonder that in 1859 the *New York Times* offered an article defending the need for colportage. The article was circulated on May 30, 1859 and was titled “The

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<sup>44</sup>*Weekly Standard* (Raleigh, N.C., March 13, 1861).

<sup>45</sup>American Tract Society, *Toils and Triumphs*, 101.



Question Stated.” The question was, “So of Colportage, is it necessary, wise and Christian?” The article then reported that in eighteen years colporteurs found nearly a million unchurched families. The article claimed that colporteurs embraced more souls “than are reached directly by all the foreign missionaries in the world.” The *Times* then stated that “On these [facts] it is safe to rest the whole argument for Colportage with any Christian patriotic mind.” It then offered these astounding statistics as further proof of the need for colportage:

*The Question Stated:* So of Colportage, is it necessary, wise, and Christian? That is the previous question.. Let the stupendous memorial of evangelical zeal and self denial, built of the statistics which record seven millions of Christian visits (7,185,665) on the errand of salvation; which show that in three millions habitation (3,392,703) prayer has been offered by the colporteur, often, often for the first time; that six hundred thousand (669,228) of these families were Roman Catholics; that 172,255 prayer meetings have been held.<sup>46</sup>

#### Colportage in Other Societies

Were the ATS the only Bible and tract society in the United States one could still easily argue that the impact of their colporteurs on America’s spiritual, geographical and social landscape was irrefutable. However, they were not alone. Virtually every denomination had its own Bible and tract distribution agency. Also, most cities, especially in the East, had their own agencies.

For example, in May of 1856 the Tract Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church celebrated its accomplishments. In just three years it distributed 33,000,000 pages of tracts across the United States. They reported the “authentic information of the conversion of 1,200 souls through direct instrumentality.” By its colporteurs “346,732

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<sup>46</sup>*New York Times* (New York, April 30, 1859).

families have been visited that were in need of religious instruction.”<sup>47</sup>

On July 17, 1856, the *Christian Advocate and Journal* issued a report of The Tract Society of the New York Conference. This conference sent out nine colporteurs. These colporteurs visited 24,323 families. 591 children were brought into Sunday school, and 279 were converted.<sup>48</sup> This was in New York City alone.

December 10, 1856 the *Zionist Herald and Wesleyan Journal* published an article celebrating the anniversary of the New York Bible Society, which was an auxiliary to the American Bible Society. During the year, this society visited 15,214 families and gave 17,000 Testaments to emigrants.

This section made no effort to supply an exhaustive record of colportage in the United States. Its only objective was to illustrate that colportage was extensively used in the early nineteenth-century. During this period the efforts of colportage culminated in the distribution of countless millions of pieces of religious literature. Through this ministry, tens of millions of residents in the United States were exposed to religious literature and the gospel. These colporteurs accomplished the majority of this work during the period that most contemporary historians declared to be a time of religious decline.

*The Y.M.C.A. and its Organizing Role in the Daily Prayer Meetings*

When the Prayer Revival broke out, tract societies and colportage were already well established and effective institutions. The Y.M.C.A. however, was still an infant organization that was just finding its moorings in the United States. Its genesis lay in

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<sup>47</sup>*Christian Advocate and Journal* Vol. 31, no. 22. (New York. May 29, 1856).

<sup>48</sup>*Ibid.*, Vol 31. No. 29 (New York. July 17, 1856).

1841 in England. It crossed the Atlantic and took residence in the United States in 1851. However, by 1856 the organization had associations in fifty-six cities with 11,684 members.<sup>49</sup>

By 1857 the Y.M.C.A. started several prayer meetings in the City of New York. It also hosted a library in its office. In April of that year it advertised the library and its meeting rooms through the “issue and careful dissemination throughout the business houses of the city of several thousands of cards and circular.” This attempt to bring notice to the ministry of the association “has not been without its good effect.”<sup>50</sup> In an effort to reach the Brooklyn area, the Brooklyn association canvassed the entire community and distributed tracts. These tracts were not only given to individuals, but to every boarding house, and merchant in the city. The Brooklyn association claimed that the Prayer Revival could be traced directly to the distribution of these tracts.<sup>51</sup>

Conant, in his *Narratives of Remarkable Conversions*, went into considerable detail regarding the activity of the Y.M.C.A. Before, and during the Prayer Revival, the organization was present in all of the major metropolitan areas. In Philadelphia, Conant reported that the Association worked in conjunction with pastors of different

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<sup>49</sup>*The Quarterly Reporter of the Young Men’s Christian Association in North America* (January, 1856) 8.

<sup>50</sup>*The Quarterly Reporter of the Young Men’s Christian Association in North America*, vol. 4, no. 2 (April, 1857) 42. The following chapter, titled “Agents of Outreach During the Prayer Revival of 1857-58,” will offer a very detailed survey on the extent of the Y.M.C.A.’s impact on the Prayer Revival.

<sup>51</sup>“Journal of Proceedings of the Sixth Annual Convention of Young Men’s Christian Association, 142.

denominations.<sup>52</sup> In other cities, the Y.M.C.A. printed and distributed tracts advertising the daily prayer meetings. The purpose, according to Conant was to “accomplish silent but widespread good. Now is a precious seed time, a genial season.”<sup>53</sup>

The role of the Y.M.C.A. in the Prayer Revival of 1857-58 cannot be overstated. It organized more of the prayer meetings during the revival than any other group. Its involvement with prayer meetings dated back to the earliest days of the Y.M.C.A.’s existence. Its involvement with the Prayer Revival started with the prayer meeting at the North Dutch Reformed Church on Fulton Street. One source wrote that the member of the association who brought the prayer meetings to Philadelphia was present during the very first prayer meeting held by Jeremiah Lanphier.<sup>54</sup>

#### Prayer Meetings in New York

What is even more significant is the roll the Y.M.C.A. actually played in the origin of Lanphier’s prayer meeting. It is very possible that the Y.M.C.A. prayer meetings served as a templet for Lanphier. In his *History of the Y.M.C.A. in North America*, C. Howard Hopkins wrote that in September of 1856 the Y.M.C.A., under the “impetus of Richard C. McCormick... started a noon prayer meeting in the consistory rooms of the Dutch Reformed Church”<sup>55</sup> on Fulton Street. The April 1857 issue of the *Quarterly*

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<sup>52</sup>Connant, 359-60.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., 359-60.

<sup>54</sup>*America’s Great Revivals* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Bethany House Publishers. Reprinted from Christian Life Magazine) 63.

<sup>55</sup>C. Howard Hopkins, *A History of the Y.M.C.A. in North America* (New York: Association Press, 1951) 81.

*Reporter of the Y.M.C.A.*—which was circulated at least four months before Lanphier started his prayer meeting—reported the following:

Our meetings have been well sustained and marked by many happy results. At the Wednesday evening and Sabbath afternoon devotional gatherings, the attendance has, for the most part, been larger than ever before, and the spirit of devotion more earnest and humble... Within a few months past several of our most active members have established a noon prayer-meeting for half an hour, on Monday, Thursday, and Saturday of each week, in the consistory room of the North Dutch Church, on the corner of Fulton and William Streets. This “down town” effort, though yet an experiment, has awakened a lively interest in the hearts of a number of young men, doing business and boarding in that section, and promises to effect no little good. We hope it may lead to the formation of a branch of our organization, long needed in the lower part of the city.<sup>56</sup>

The following year, in the April 1858 issue of the *Quarterly Reporter*, is an article that stated the Y.M.C.A. was very “blessed of late” by the successes and attendance of the “devotional meetings held under its auspices, in different parts of the city.” The article then celebrated the fact that the “chief of these, established at the Fulton Street church nearly twelve months since, has attained a fame throughout the land, and been the means of great good.”<sup>57</sup> According to these reports, the Y.M.C.A. was holding noon prayer meetings in the North Dutch Church—in the consistory room—a full year before Lanphier did so.

The *Christian Advocate and Journal* also recorded that the Y.M.C.A. engaged in prayer meetings before the Prayer Revival, but suspended them, “due to lack of patronage.”<sup>58</sup> Earlier in this work, it was documented that before Lanphier started his

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<sup>56</sup>*The Quarterly Reporter of the Young Men’s Christian Association*, 42.

<sup>57</sup>*Ibid.*, vol. 3, no. 2 (April, 1858) 42.

<sup>58</sup>“The Revival,” *Christian Advocate and Journal* (April 1, 1858).

prayer meeting he consulted with Edward Colgate, the local leader of the Y.M.C.A.<sup>59</sup>

From this consultation “with Colgate’s committee, there evolved the idea of the joint-sponsorship of a meeting that would be shared by members of all evangelical churches.”<sup>60</sup> This suggests that the Y.M.C.A. played an active role in the very first prayer meeting. If these sources are accurate then Hopkins’ bold assertion that “the prayer-meeting revivals that swept the country in 1857 and 1858 were originated by the New York City Y.M.C.A.” must be considered a credible, and even probable assertion.<sup>61</sup>

The activity of the Y.M.C.A. did not cease with the North Dutch Church. It also opened prayer meetings throughout the city of New York.<sup>62</sup> Henry Fish, in his *Handbook of Revivals* noted that after the consistory room in the North Dutch Church filled beyond capacity two other rooms were appropriated. When those were filled, hundreds “who daily went away disappointed of admission, created a visible demand for more room.”<sup>63</sup>

It was at this point that “the John Street Methodist Church and lecture-room were both opened for daily noon prayer-meetings, by a committee of the Young Men’s

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<sup>59</sup>Russell E. Francis, “Pentecost: 1858, A Study in Religious Revivalism” (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1948) 51.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., 51.

<sup>61</sup>Hopkins, *A History of the Y.M.C.A.*, 81. The consensual perception regarding the origins of the prayer meeting at the North Dutch Church is that it was started by Lanphier. Any role played by the Y.M.C.A. was omitted. The only sources to credit the Y.M.C.A. with any role were primary source documents which were produced by the Y.M.C.A. When Hopkins credited the Y.M.C.A. with starting the prayer meeting, he, in return, omitted any reference to Jeremiah Lanphier. This was probably not intentional, but it is interesting.

<sup>62</sup>“Journal of Proceedings of the Sixth Annual Convention of Young Men’s Christian Association, 142.

<sup>63</sup>Henry Fish, 67.

Christian Association.”<sup>64</sup> Soon after, *The New York Times* reported, the Y.M.C.A. “leased Burton’s Theatre for a limited time to be used daily for a prayer meeting, between the hours of 12 and 1.”<sup>65</sup> As early as February of 1858, the Y.M.C.A. was establishing prayer meetings in other cities in the State of New York.<sup>66</sup>

Conant illustrated the manner in which the prayer meetings in New York were conducted by offering this example: “The following card is posted in a conspicuous manner at the John street, and other meetings of the kind.” He then listed for his readers the many rules and regulations that were posted on this flyer. The final sentence on this flier stated: “By order of the Committee on Devotional Meetings of the New York Young Men’s Christian Association.” The flier concluded by conveying the methods that would be used to ensure the rules would be observed:

These rules are strictly enforced. A person who overruns his time, either in prayer or remark, is promptly called to order by the stroke of the bell, and he is expected to consider this reminder as no discourtesy, and immediately to obey it by taking his seat.<sup>67</sup>

#### Prayer Meetings in Philadelphia

One of the men who attended the first prayer meeting in New York was a twenty one year old Philadelphian resident. After seeing the positive impact it had, he thought to

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<sup>64</sup>Conant, 358. This event was also reported by Henry C. Fish. *Handbook of Revivals: For the use of Winners of Souls*. (Boston: James H. Earle, 1874), 67., and Frank Grenville Beardsley. *The History of Christianity in America*. (New York: American Tract Society, 1938) 180-1.

<sup>65</sup>“Prayer Meeting At Burton’s Old Theatre,” *New York Times* (March 18, 1858) 5.

<sup>66</sup>“Home Department,” *Young Men’s Christian Journal* (April, 1859) 83.

<sup>67</sup>Conant, 381-2.

himself, “As good had resulted from these meetings in one city, why might not equal good be done by them in another?”<sup>68</sup> After returning to Philadelphia he was instrumental in starting the first prayer meeting in the city.<sup>69</sup> “He requested, and was granted permission to hold his prayer meeting in the Union Methodist Episcopal Church on November 23, 1857.”<sup>70</sup>

Unlike the prayer meeting at the North Dutch Church in New York, the start in Philadelphia was much less impressive. One source declared it to be dismal. Only about forty showed up for the first meeting. The meeting was soon moved to a small meeting room in Dr. Jayne’s Hall, but the attendance still only hovered around sixty. However, by March 8, the meeting suddenly grew to over 300 people. On Wednesday, March 10, 2,500 people showed up and filled the larger auditorium of Jayne’s Hall. After this, over 3,000 people attended the meeting daily.<sup>71</sup>

Other meetings were then opened at Hayden and Handel Hall and in other places throughout the city. In early May of 1858 a huge tent was purchased by the Y.M.C.A. and used for a prayer meeting. The tent was capable of holding about two thousand persons and was filled each night by people eager to listen to the preaching of the Word of God. One writer stated that “although the tent is so capacious, we have sometimes to organize

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<sup>68</sup>*An Account of the Great Awakening in Philadelphia, by the Young Men’s Christian Association* (Philadelphia, October 30, 1858). Recorded in *The Great Awakening of 1857 and 1858. A Dissertation by Carl Lloyd Spicer*. Ohio State University, 1935, Appendix F, 302.

<sup>69</sup>Beardsley, 180-1.

<sup>70</sup>Orr, *The Light of the Nations*, 115: Siting Noble, W. F. 420.

<sup>71</sup>*America’s Great Revivals*, 63.



meetings on the outside, and as many as five thousand people have been gathered in and around it on the Sabbath day.<sup>72</sup>

In the following months the meetings held there drew over one hundred and fifty thousand persons.<sup>73</sup> In conjunction with the use of the halls, almost all of the churches were increasing in their attendance. Many of the churches posted notices of daily prayer meetings. Prayer meetings were also held in Universities, public schools, and about twenty five Engine houses.<sup>74</sup>

The religious revival was sweeping the city of New York months before it started to impact Philadelphia. However, once the momentum started, the members of the Y.M.C.A. of Philadelphia perceived the movement as “the providence of God” in “our beloved Association.”<sup>75</sup> Though the revival was accepted as God’s providential favor, the agency utilized to bring about the prayer meetings in Philadelphia was the Y.M.C.A. In an article of the *Journal of Proceedings of the Sixth Annual Convention*, one writer declared the following:

As far as the Revival in our city [Philadelphia] is concerned, the Young Men’s Christian Association has been its father and support. From this body its first meeting was projected and carried out-upon us has rested the burden of carrying the whole movement on, and to us all look for its further support.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>72</sup>*Journal of Proceedings of the Sixth Annual Convention of Young Men’s Christian Association*, 141.

<sup>73</sup>Beardsley, 180-1.

<sup>74</sup>*Journal of Proceedings*, 143-4. An engine house is a nineteenth century fire station.

<sup>75</sup>*Ibid.*, 143.

<sup>76</sup>*Ibid.*, 144.

### Prayer Meetings in Other Cities

New York and Philadelphia are the most noted and reported examples of urban revival, but the extent of the movement spread far beyond these two cities. At the height of the fervor—in the spring of 1858—wrote a contemporary, “the public interest in religion was unprecedented. The entire nation seemed to be the scene of one vast revival.”<sup>77</sup> The Y.M.C.A. was particularly involved in spreading these prayer meetings from city to city. C. Howard Hopkins, in his *History of the Y.M.C.A.* made this statement:

In the midst of all this were the Y.M.C.A.s. On the crest of the wave the Chicago Association was launched a second time... Y.M.C.A. Associations in cities such as Cleveland, San Francisco, Charleston, Milwaukee, Springfield, Cincinnati, Baltimore, and Andover organized daily prayer meetings throughout the respective cities.<sup>78</sup>

The Y.M.C.A. was instrumental in organizing prayer meetings in both Maryland and Washington D.C.<sup>79</sup> In Boston, the *New York Times* wrote, “some of the strongest and most influential men in the city have been converted.” And, “The Young Men’s Christian Association of Boston has taken an active part in organizing the plan of operations for these meetings.” These plans involved “hiring rooms, detailing leaders for each day’s services, and bearing the expense. Great interest is awakened among young men. In many of the meetings, this class conduct nearly all the exercises.”<sup>80</sup>

Over two thousand people attended the daily meetings of the Cleveland Y.M.C.A.

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<sup>77</sup>*Circular letters over the signatures of George H. Stuart and John Wanamaker* (Bowne Historical Library January 12, 1859).

<sup>78</sup>Hopkins, 83.

<sup>79</sup>Orr, *The Light of the Nations*, 116.

<sup>80</sup>*The New York Times*, 1858

There were reports of extensive conversions via the Y.M.C.A. in San Francisco. Only a very large hall could hold the people who attended the Y.M.C.A. prayer meeting in Charleston.<sup>81</sup> There was not a major city in the North whose prayer meetings were not in some way affected by the Y.M.C.A.

### Commitment to Evangelism

What set the Prayer Revival apart from other revivals was not necessarily the impact on the church, but the vessels used to bring in the harvest. In this respect, the Y.M.C.A. played an indispensable role. It was an evangelistic arm that reached across the nation and touched millions with the gospel. During the Sixth Annual Convention of the Y.M.C.A., one member is recorded when he publicly thanked the Lord “that he has poured out his spirit upon us.” He rejoiced that God “has so signally used the Association as an instrument in carrying forward the great work of bringing souls to Christ.” Through the Y.M.C.A. God, “in his providence has permitted us to bear in the glorious Awakening with which our nation has been blessed.”<sup>82</sup>

In 1858 the Rev. Octavius Winslow circulated a pamphlet titled, *Is The Spirit of the Lord Straightened*. In this pamphlet, he recorded one of the methods of evangelism employed by the Y.M.C.A. Below is an excerpt detailing this method:

The Committee on Devotional Meetings of the New York Young Men’s Christian Association, have issued a circular, addressed to parents in various parts of the country, who have children in business in this city. The object of the circular is to gain from the parents the address of young men who are not connected with the Christian Association, or with any of the Churches in the city, and who would be profited by a friendly call from some member of the Committee, for the purpose

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<sup>81</sup>Hopkins, 83.

<sup>82</sup>*Journal of Proceedings*, 143.

of religious conversation. If any father or mother will send a letter addressed E., Box No. 3841, giving the necessary directions, the person designated will receive a personal invitation to attend the daily noon prayer meetings, and similar meetings held at other hours of the day in various parts of the city.<sup>83</sup>

According to Hopkins, the purpose of prayer meetings and Bible studies were to provide religious activities that generated interest and were of “permanent value” to the people the Y.M.C.A. was attempting to reach. These “activities” were “parallel to their evangelistic programs.” Prayer and Bible study, to the Y.M.C.A. was a means to an end. The end was evangelism and as long as prayer meetings produced conversions, they would conduct them.<sup>84</sup>

Timothy Smith wrote that evangelism in the 1850s was institutionalized in two national organizations. The first was the Y.M.C.A. and the second was the United States Christian Commission. He did not assert that churches were not involved in evangelism. What he believed was that, unlike today, the Y.M.C.A. of the mid-nineteenth century was “fervently religious” and had an “intimate bond with the churches.” Smith stressed that the connection of the Y.M.C.A. to the local church was such that:

The organizations’ union prayer meetings, visitation evangelism directed toward unchurched young men, or the annual tent-meeting revival efforts which it sponsored in Boston, Philadelphia, and many other cities (was nothing more) than a united expression of the soul-winning fervor of evangelical Protestantism.<sup>85</sup>

The Y.M.C.A. did not consider itself to be in competition, or conflict with the church. It was an agency through which their Lord would reach the young men of the cities and bring them into the local church. The first prayer meetings sponsored by the

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<sup>83</sup>Winslow. *Is The Spirit of the Lord Straightened*, 46-7.

<sup>84</sup>Hopkins, 182.

<sup>85</sup>Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform*, 45-7.

Y.M.C.A. were usually in local churches. As the revival progressed the meetings grew—at times exponentially. The meetings moved to halls and theaters when the churches were no longer large enough to accommodate the masses. The Y.M.C.A. stood apart from the local church in that it was able to effectively touch the masses.

Kathryn Teresa Long proposed that the people who were caught up in the “spiritual fervor” of the revival were influenced by “mutually reinforcing webs of relationships.” These centered around “the institutions of family, church, and the newly formed Young Men’s Christian Association.” She further noted that “evangelicalism had long depended on such relational networks in fostering conversion.” The Prayer Revival of 1857-58 was no different. According to Long, it “demonstrated their continuing effectiveness and adaptability in undergirding what was characterized as a mass urban movement.”<sup>86</sup> The reason why the Y.M.C.A. was so effective in this revival was that their target was young men—many of whom lived in the city and were separated from family, church and any other social network. Hence, the Y.M.C.A. was able to provide a social network for millions of young men. It was a needed niche in urban America. The Y.M.C.A. masterfully filled a need for social and spiritual intercourse through which it was instrumental in the conversion of hundreds of thousands of individuals.

The Y.M.C.A. was willing to be both traditional and innovative in their zeal to reach the masses. Prayer meetings and religious tract distribution was traditional. Intentionally targeting a certain segment of society was quite innovative for the day. It would be another century before Donald McGavarn’s *Bridges of God* revealed to the missionaries of the world the importance of identifying people groups. It would be

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<sup>86</sup>Long, *The Revival of 1857-58*, 49. Look in footnotes.

another generation beyond that before the local churches within the United States learned the importance of targeted ministries. By targeting young men who were often isolated in cities, the Y.M.C.A. quickly became an incredibly effective organization that was able to touch millions of lives with the gospel.

#### The Y.M.C.A. As They Perceived Their Role During the Revival

The first and most obvious role of the Y.M.C.A. was in its leadership in organizing prayer meetings. Samuel Irenaeus Prime's *Power of Prayer* left the reader to assume that prayer meetings spontaneously and without any human planning, or intervention, suddenly developed all across the nation. This assumption was not remotely accurate. He mentioned dozens of prayer meetings that were started by the Y.M.C.A., but never once acknowledged the existence of the institution. In truth, there were prayer meetings that started spontaneously and independently, however, the majority of the large and well attended meetings, and the prayer meetings held in the Engine houses, theaters, and halls, were organized, financed, and conducted by the Y.M.C.A. The *Journal of Proceedings of the Sixth Annual Convention of the Y.M.C.A.* recorded the leadership of the Y.M.C.A.:

In many places, as in New York, Baltimore, and Louisville, our Associations were the first to hold union meetings, the example of which was soon followed by the churches. In other localities simultaneously our societies and the churches opened union meetings, and in almost every place where a young Men's Christian Association existed, it has directly or indirectly maintained or largely aided in maintaining union meetings, and in promoting the wonderful work of grace.<sup>87</sup>

Winthrop S. Hudson and John Corrigan, in *Religion in America*, credited the Y.M.C.A. as being the institution through which the Prayer Revival grew. It was they

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<sup>87</sup>*Journal of Proceedings*, 139-40.

who sponsored the New York prayer meetings and it was they who carried the meetings “throughout the country.”<sup>88</sup> Bacon in his *History of American Christianity* made this same connection. He wrote that it was the Y.M.C.A. that “furnished a natural center in each considerable town for mutual consultation and mutual incitement among young men of various sects.”<sup>89</sup>

Another area of work was in tract and pamphlet distribution. In conjunction with organizing prayer meetings, the Y.M.C.A. printed and distributed hundreds of thousands of tracts. During the Prayer Revival the Brooklyn association printed a tract entitled *To One of the 150,000 Young Men*. Over 100,000 copies were circulated. The entire section of the city below Chambers Street was canvassed. It was believed by contemporaries that the distribution of these tracts helped the spirit of the revival. One article made this comment:

Not a store, office or boarding-house was neglected. A circular was also issued to the merchant, and circulated at the same time. We have no doubt but that much of the spirit of this great awakening has been, or may be traced directly to the wide spread dissemination of these Tracts.<sup>90</sup>

After the immense success of the Jayne’s Hall prayer meeting in Philadelphia, the association there published an eighty page account of the Prayer Revival. Over ten thousand copies were printed in the first edition. They anticipated over 100,000 would eventually be distributed. The purpose of this pamphlet was to “stimulate our brethren in

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<sup>88</sup>Hudson and Corrigan, *Religion in America* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1999) 179.

<sup>89</sup>Bacon, *A History of American Christianity*, 343.

<sup>90</sup>*Journal of Proceedings*, 142.

Christ everywhere to more fervent prayer and increased zeal”<sup>91</sup>

Finally, the Y.M.C.A. realized that during the Prayer Revival, Christians of different denominations set aside their ecclesiology and theology. They sought rather to “cultivate” personal holiness and religious conversation. It was the “conversion of men” which was the “primary force and cardinal virtue which has sustained and advanced the awakening.” The question then was posited; “Where did the principle and practice so averse to all system of worship, sanctioned and fortified by the habits and prejudices of ages, originate and find embodiment?” The answer was the Y.M.C.A. For this reason, the nation needed the “agency for the great work (that) was at hand.”<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>91</sup>Hopkins, 83.

<sup>92</sup>*Journal of Proceedings*, 137-9.



## CHAPTER 6

A CONTRAST OF THE THREE INTERPRETATIONS OF THE  
PRAYER REVIVAL OF 1857-1858

R. G. Collingwood, in his book *The Idea of History*, wrote that when human thought was dominated by a certain special interest, that interest would not be passively submitted to. People would naturally and actively attempt to understand it. It would be placed “in the focus of philosophical inquiry.”<sup>1</sup> When that interest was religious, people would attempt to understand it in light of their own personal theological proclivities.

When applying Collingwood’s understanding regarding special interest, common sense dictates that a theological Calvinist and a theological Arminian will interpret the same event through two very different lenses. Also, if the event is religious, the religious community and the secular community will thus interpret the same event through two very different lenses. This is exactly what happened in the wake of the Prayer Revival of 1857-1858. The Calvinists, the Arminians, and the secular media all actively engaged the revival and offered their own interpretations and definitions of the event.

When the primary source documents recounting the Prayer Revival were forged, interpretive agendas often fueled the zeal for publication. As the revival was in progress, eager authors published no less than five books, numerous tracts and pamphlets, and hundreds of news paper articles. The generation that experienced the Prayer Revival was not going to wait for future generations to offer an analysis of the event. They provided

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<sup>1</sup>Collingwood, 232.

one for their posterity. This was unprecedented.

It was unprecedented in that no other previous religious revival in American history was defined by those who experienced it while the revival was still in progress. The closest one comes is Jonathan Edwards during the First Great Awakening. The difference being that Edwards was not attempting to define the revival. He was defending it against those who rejected it.<sup>2</sup> Unlike the First Awakening, the Prayer Revival had very few opponents. There was therefore no need to defend anything. However, as this chapter will explore, most of the primary sources—and subsequently the secondary sources—went to great lengths to define it.

Why was it so important to produce with such haste histories that often proved to be more anecdotal than historical? The grandiose rhetoric often employed spoke as if the Prayer Revival would never end. Since this was not the case, it becomes painfully obvious that even the witnesses of this great revival did not completely understand its impact and scope. History proved their interpretations to be very premature.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Robert R. Mathisen. *The Role of Religion in American Life: An Interpretive Historical Anthology*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., rev. (Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company, 2002) 19-29. This anthology offers a good example of Edwards as he defended the legitimacy of the awakening against the criticisms of Charles Chauncy.

<sup>3</sup>On page 20 of *The Power of Prayer*, Samuel Irenaeus Prime made this statement: “This revival is to be the precursor of greater and more wonderful things, which are yet to be revealed in the redeeming providence of God. What these are we cannot tell. But coming events cast their shadows before. As this is a law in the kingdoms of nature, providence, and grace, so we may unhesitatingly conclude that however eventful may be the interests of the present times, we shall see greater things than these.” Also, on pages 247-8, of *The Noon Prayer Meeting of the North Dutch Church*, Chambers made this assertion: “Shall this revival continue? I think it may continue and it ought to continue. It depends upon the fidelity of the people of God whether it will or not. If the professors of religion fix their minds upon the mark of holiness of heart, of life, and of conversation, the Lord Jesus certainly will not forsake His church, but will continue to pour out his spirit more and more abundantly.”

This chapter will look into the forces that compelled different men to offer their varying interpretive analyses of the Prayer Revival. Three interpretive trends will be addressed here. They are the Calvinistic, the Arminian and the Journalistic interpretation. Though there was considerable overlapping, these trends offered divergent interpretations. It is important to first realize that they existed, and second to pool them together. In this manner, today's historians can confidently and legitimately build a holistic interpretation of the Prayer Revival that encompasses more than one interpretive facet of the event.

### *A Calvinist Interpretation*

#### Consensual Characteristics of a Calvinistic Interpretation of Revival

In 1858, five primary source books about the Prayer Revival were published. Four were published by Calvinists. There was a broad spectrum of Protestants involved in the Revival. The geographic region of the movement extended from Main to Florida, and from the Atlantic coast to the Pacific coast. However, as Dr. Long noted, the people who wrote the historical accounts of the Revival were “almost exclusively northern Calvinist clergy<sup>4</sup>. According to Robert Ellis Thompson’s *A History of the Presbyterian Churches in the United States of America*, the nineteenth century may have been the “Methodist century in terms of religious activity and numerical success, but when it came to revivals, Calvinists told the story.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Long, 11.

<sup>5</sup>Robert Ellis Thompson, *A History of the Presbyterian Churches in the United States of America*, American Church History Series, vol. 6 (New York: Scribner’s, 1907 [1895]) 34.

When looking at the sources produced by Calvinist clergy a picture quickly emerges which depicted what they considered to be the most important elements of the revival. First and foremost was the consensus that the revival originated in the mind of God. It was a supernatural movement that defied human description and decried human agency. It was considered very appropriate that the prayer meetings began on the third floor, and “upper room.” This helped to frame the revival as a nineteenth century Pentecost. Chambers very eloquently captured this mode of thinking:

[it] may be emphatically called the event of the century; which has been more like a literal reproduction of the scenes of Pentecost than any other which has taken place since the tongues of fire sat upon the heads of the Apostles; that movement can justly be traced to no human or earthly source. Look at it as we will, in its commencement, its progress or its results, the conclusion is still the same. THIS IS THE FINGER OF GOD. The contact of the Divine author with his work was so direct and close as scarcely to allow the human instrument to appear, much less to become prominent.<sup>6</sup>

Another example of this tendency to equate the Prayer Revival with the day of Pentecost was John Jenkins’ *Plain Thoughts on the Present Great Awakening*. Regarding the affinities between the Prayer Revival and Pentecost, Jenkins had this to say:

Preaching, a few weeks ago, on the Holy Spirit’s outpouring on the day of Pentecost and the scenes which then took place, the writer observed that the gracious effusion of saving power is to be regarded by Christians in the present day as a pledge of a yet more plentiful outpouring of grace upon the Church and the world. Little did we then think that this view of that great event was so soon to be established by a work of reviving power which even already has assumed dimensions—a breadth, a length, a depth—unparalleled in the entire history of Christian progress.<sup>7</sup>

This understanding of revival was typical in the nineteenth century Calvinist tradition. In 1834 the *Princeton Review* published an article titled “Revivals of Religion.”

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<sup>6</sup>Chambers, *The Noon Prayer Meeting*, 285.

<sup>7</sup>Jenkins, *Plain Thoughts on The Present Great Awakening*, 25-6.

This article declared a revival to be produced “by the Holy Spirit through the instrumentality of divine truth.” Before a revival occurred it was “very commonly preceded by a prevailing and affecting coldness on the subject of personal religion.” However, this coldness lead Christians to “feel the necessity of extraordinary prayer for themselves as well as others.” Through this sovereign “progress,” the lost fell under conviction of sin which lead them to inquire about salvation. As they were saved they “joined themselves to the people of God; and in important respects pursued a new course of life.”<sup>8</sup> One can note the careful selection of terms. The writer here was very cautious and wrote in such a way as to infer that human agency played no role in revival.

A second element of the revival was its catholicity.<sup>9</sup> All of the primary sources championed the unity of the prayer meetings. It was hardly considered an accident that God led one Presbyterian, one Baptist, one Congregationalist, one Dutch Reformed, and no Methodists to the first Fulton Street prayer meeting.<sup>10</sup> Theology and social issues were almost never addressed during these prayer meetings. Prime considered the catholicity of the Prayer Revival to be “one of the most deeply interesting characteristics.”<sup>11</sup> Who else but God could bring so many different denominations under one roof and keep the focus away from sectarian issues?

A third important element of the Prayer Revival was the involvement of laity.

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 109.

<sup>9</sup>This was one revival that was catholic, but without any Catholics. Roman Catholics are seldom mentioned in conjunction with the Prayer Revival-except as being converted through it. It was a thoroughly Protestant movement.

<sup>10</sup>Long, 15.

<sup>11</sup>Prime, *Power of Prayer*, 31-2.

This aspect was addressed at some length earlier in this dissertation. The level of lay involvement was for the Calvinist, another aspect that offered the revival credulity. According to Prime the conduct of the laity during the union prayer meetings was “very conducive to its catholic spirit.”<sup>12</sup> He then wrote that the lay involvement was evidence of “a wisdom above measure.”<sup>13</sup>

### The Importance of Embracing Revivals as Cyclical Events

A fourth characteristic—although it was not the dominant motif of these early accounts—was that most Calvinistic primary sources placed the Revival of 1857–58 in the broader context of an understanding of history shaped by a cyclical view of revivalism. This cyclical view is now called the Awakening-construct. In an article entitled *Great Awakenings*, R. C. Gordon-McCutchan defined this construct as the belief that “revivalism in the United States has passed through periods of stagnation and renewal.”<sup>14</sup>

McCutchan argued that though there are challenges to this theory, it does still have considerable supportive evidence. John Hammond in *The Politics of Benevolence* used church membership data during the Second Awakening to show that “the church in the United States has experienced cycles of stagnation and renewal.”<sup>15</sup> This is by no means a new theory. The concept of cycle is old, but the understanding of cause and effect has changed. Whereas many of today’s Awakening-Construct proponents attempt

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<sup>12</sup>Prime, *Power of Prayer*, 33.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 33.

<sup>14</sup>“Great Awakenings” *Sociological Analysis* 44 (Summer 1983), 83.

<sup>15</sup>John Hammond, *The Politics of Benevolence: Revival Religion and Voting Behavior* (Norwood, N.J.: Ablex Publishing Corporation), 1-2.

to understand and define revivalism in sociological terms, the nineteenth century proponents wrote from a purely theological perspective.

As stated earlier, four of the five primary source books were written by Calvinist ministers. They were not historians, they did not write like historians and they did not document their sources like historians. The sources written by Prime, Talbot and Alexander sound more like sermons than histories. Collingworth addressed the inevitable result of what happens when theologians attempt to be historians:

The work of providence in history is recognized, but recognized in a way which leaves nothing for man to do. One result of this is that historians, as we have seen, fell into the error of thinking that they could forecast the future. Another result is that in their anxiety to detect the general plan of history, and their belief that this plan was God's and not man's, they tended to look for the essence of history outside history itself, by looking away from man's actions in order to detect the plan of God; and consequently the actual detail of human actions became for them relatively unimportant, and they neglected that prime duty of the historian, as willingness to bestow infinite pains on discovering what actually happened."<sup>16</sup>

Collingwood made this statement regarding the Catholic theologians who attempted historiography during medieval times. However, this is the exact same presupposition that was attached to histories written by nineteenth century Calvinist theologians who attempted to interpret revivals as cyclical events. Such histories relied so heavily on the providence of God that the agency of man went beyond neglect. It was often repudiated. Here it is important to note that 19<sup>th</sup> century Arminian theologians also fell prey to presupposition as they viewed revivals as a way of life. Therefore, Arminians wrote histories that focused more attention on human agency.

One example of this is found in an article published in the *New York Times* on May 11, 1858. John McLean an Associate Justice of the United States Supreme Court

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<sup>16</sup>Collingwood, 55.

wrote that the Prayer Revival was “unlike any that have preceded it.” He stated that both in its beginning and progress “it seems to be connected less with the ordinary instrumentalities of the gospel and to depend more directly on the operations of the Holy Spirit.” The result of such providential and sovereign means was that whether “on the land and on the sea extraordinary conversions have been witnessed with little or no human agency.” What was instead seen was “the hand of Providence which was so often indisposed to guide our destiny.”<sup>17</sup>

If Mclean was correct, then the Prayer Revival was certainly the only event in human history when God’s kingdom was promoted without the “instrumentalities of the gospel.” He used the principle of providential guidance in the destiny of the United States to tie the Prayer Revival with other great events of American History. It was all part of God’s “manifest destiny” that revivals would periodically sweep the fruited planes without the help of human agency. The inference here was that “Providence” was steadily shaping America into a microcosm of the Kingdom of God.

Prime also exalted the character of the Prayer Revival. His lofty description elevated the event to something that could only be defined as other-worldly. He reported that the character of the work of the revival was remarkable. Its features were peculiar as well as powerful. There were no revivalists, or revival “machinery” utilized. It looked nothing like the revivals of old. There was neither any need, nor attempt to promote the religious excitement and anticipation of the hour. All attempts to oppose it were disarmed without effort. Those who did question the revival did so to their own shame. In one great movement of God’s power, the religious conscience of America was awakened, the

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<sup>17</sup>*New York Times* (May 11, 1858).



worldliness, vanity and vice was checked and the national decay was arrested. What was felt in the nation was a “deep all pervading earnest piety.”<sup>18</sup>

Interpreting all history in the light of God’s providence and decrying any religious movement that appeared to embrace human agency did not start with mid-nineteenth century Calvinism and it did not end there. The tendency to stress God’s providence during times of revival, to the extent of repudiating human agency, was a traditional position for both eighteenth and nineteenth century Calvinists. They believed deeply in revivals and often stressed the need for them. However, they obstinately opposed any movement with which human agency could claim credit.<sup>19</sup> This was one reason why it was so important for Calvinist ministers to frame the Prayer Revival in providential terms.

This dissertation already established that a revival of religion was sweeping the country at least eight months before the city-wide, noon-day prayer meetings commenced. Also, for two years prior to the Prayer Revival, there was a considerable amount of work being done in an effort to promote revival. Systematic evangelistic visitation was occurring throughout New York and Brooklyn. The Y.M.C.A was busy passing out tracts, recruiting volunteers, expanding their associations, initiating prayer meetings and Bible studies. Societies such as the American Tract Society and the American Bible Society were canvassing the city of New York distributing Bibles, tracts and performing door to door evangelism. Churches throughout the city engaged in intentional and pro-active Sunday school recruitment and with considerable success.

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<sup>18</sup>Prime, *Power of Prayer*, 30-31.

<sup>19</sup>Long, 12.

Yet, when reading the primary source accounts of Alexander, Prime and Chambers, one is left with the impression that the revival started with the October 1857 prayer meeting initiated by Jeremiah Lanphier. These prior activities were addressed, but the focus was on Lanphier. Rather, the focus was on how God, with his “Providence,” through Lanphier, started a great revival.<sup>20</sup> The exhaustive human agency during the Prayer Revival—which this dissertation already established—was treated as an ancillary element.

Men prayed in an upper room, God descended and revival canvassed the nation. The recipients of the revival were the men and women who were swept away by the currents of an awakening that originated, was promulgated, and proceeded by no means other than God’s sovereign providence and grace. Chambers offered an excellent synopsis of this perception:

It is easy to trace the hand of Providence in every step of the course we have narrated. The appointment of the Missionary just at the period when it was made, the upspringing in his mind of the conception of a business men’s prayer meeting, its peculiar features, the state of the times prompting men to pray, the absence of any unusual attractions, the extraordinary rapidity with which the mid-day meetings for prayer were multiplied; all these indicate the immediate agency of the Most High. The Lord alone was exalted in that day. There is no room for human merit to insinuate itself.<sup>21</sup>

One must realize the importance of the cyclical view of revivalism to the mid nineteenth century Calvinist. In a world that was completely determined by the providence of God, nothing could be interpreted as being of chance. To say that revival could be initiated by certain means or measures was to challenge the very sovereignty of

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<sup>20</sup>It was not uncommon for theologians and ministers to capitalize the word providence and treat it as a proper noun.

<sup>21</sup>Chambers, 281.

God. Therefore, much of the Calvinist literature during the first half of the nineteenth century decried, detested, and denounced any new measures utilized by revivalists such as Finney.<sup>22</sup>

There was a problem, however. As time progressed, the Old School Calvinists were losing ground to the Baptists, Methodists and New School Presbyterians who embraced the new measures of nineteenth century revivalism. Also, fewer Christians were willing to embrace their form of Calvinism. Either they were wrong, or they were simply in the low ebb of a cycle that would eventually propel them back into prominence. To interpret revivals in a cyclical format allowed Old School Calvinists to maintain their theology and justify their lack of influence, or impact over the religious landscape of America.

Calvinists were committed to their theology. They embraced a cyclical understanding for revivals. What they now needed was a movement which they could

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<sup>22</sup>In July and October of 1835, the *Princeton Review* published lengthy articles denouncing Finney's *Lectures on the Revivals of Religion*. In the concluding remarks of the October article it is stated "the elements of fanaticism exist in the breast of every community, and may be easily called into action by causes which we might be disposed to overlook as contemptible. We conclude this article, as we did our former, by pointing out to Mr. Finney his duty to leave our church... In this position we leave him before the public. Nor will we withdraw our charges against him, until he goes out from among us, for he is not of us." ("Lectures on Revivals of Religion. By Charles G. Finney" vo. 7, (New York, October 1835, 626-674), 674. Lyman Beecher almost ten years earlier also denounced Finney and his revival measures. In his *Letters of the Rev. Dr. Beecher and Rev. Mr. Nettleton, on the "New Measures" in Conducting Revivals of Religion with a Review of a Sermon by Nov Anglus*, (New York: G. And C. Carvill, Broadway, 1828), 29, Beecher offered these words about Finney: "The standard to which Brother Finney has erected by which to judge of the propriety of measures, is that saying of Edwards, to "do what he thought proper in his best frames." Before he can plead the examples of Edwards, Brother Finney must make the same distinction which Edwards has done, between true and false zeal, lest himself and his hearers should make a fatal mistake by selecting the worst frames of the Christian or hypocrite as their example. This mistake has often been made."

endorse, and which they could frame and interpret as their own. Such a movement would allow them to keep their theology and accept modern revivalism. The Prayer Revival of 1857-58 gave them the perfect opportunity to do this very thing.

At first glance, it is peculiar that the very Calvinists who historically analyzed and scrutinized any religious movement with great care and caution almost universally, and with absolute deference, embraced the Prayer Revival. The same Calvinists who condemned prior movements for their lack of proper theology lavished praise upon prayer meetings because they presented no theology. Calvinists who normally split hairs with any and every nuance of theology exalted the catholicity of the union prayer meetings. Chambers offered this boast regarding the catholicity of the union prayer meetings:

They came with remarkable unanimity and cordiality. Arminians and Calvinists, Baptists and Pedo-Baptists, Episcopalians and Presbyterians, and Congregationalists and Friends, sat side by side on the same benches.<sup>23</sup>

According to Long, this Prayer Revival of 1857 caused the attitude of scrutiny and caution among Calvinists to shift. She wrote that at last there was a “nation wide awakening that vindicated the theology and style of the conservative formalists.”<sup>24</sup> To support her argument, she produced the following quote from Archibald Alexander. It offers a nineteenth century description of a true or pure revival:

Nothing occurs with which any pious man can find fault... The convictions of sin are deep and humbling... The love of God is shed abroad... A spirit of devotion is enkindled... Prayer is the exercise in which the soul seems to be in its proper element.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>Chambers, 288.

<sup>24</sup>Long, 16.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 16.

After citing this quote, Long wrote that “as the conservatives experienced it, the 1857-58 Revival fit Alexander’s criteria perfectly.”<sup>26</sup> “Experienced” is the operative word. This writer agrees in part with Long. In experience, the Prayer Revival was perfect. In this respect, it indeed vindicated the style of the conservative formalists. However, in theology, one can argue that was not the case.

For over a century, leading Old School Calvinist theologians and pastors fought with various and sundry movements. During the First Awakening there were battles with the enthusiasts, the Arminians and the New Lights. During the course of the Second Awakening there were the battles with the enthusiasts, the Arminians and the New Divinity. Throughout the years, as these battles waged, the opponents of the staunch Old School Calvinists swept the nation with their theologies, methodologies and churches.

During this same period, many of the mainline traditional Calvinist denominations either plateaued, or consistently dwindled in numbers and influence. They were losing the battle for the minds of the people. On the advent of the Prayer Revival, the Old School Calvinist clergy and intellectuals were still academically and theologically formidable. However, in practice, impact and theology, it was the Arminians who ruled the day.

So why was it that the Layman’s prayer revival was so embraced by the Old School Calvinists while every other nineteenth century revival movement (that was tainted with Arminianism) and preceded this event was rejected? This writer believes that Old School Calvinists of the early and mid nineteenth century had a very clear understanding of what they thought a revival should look like. They would therefore reject any movement that did not fit their criteria of how a revival should look. As Long

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 16.

stated, the Prayer Revival of 1857-58 finally offered them a revival that fit their criteria.

At last they found what they were looking for. Calvinists looked at the revival of 1857-58 and saw three important elements—prayer, God’s providential power, and considerable church growth within Calvinist denominations. Regardless of any theological undercurrents, their churches benefitted from the revival. This could not always be said during the first half of the nineteenth century.

The Prayer Revival looked right, felt right and brought fresh growth. Therefore, the Calvinists were willing to overlook the same theological issues that sparked such voracious rebuttals and criticisms in earlier years. As for controversial methodologies and human agency; they just looked the other way.

Another reason why the Old School Calvinists were able to accept a revival that had Arminian tendencies was because for the past one hundred years Methodism had grown from a fringe sect to an established denomination. During this period of growth, the success of their new methods could not be denied. The progress of eighteenth century Arminianism which according to Joseph Tracy “had become so manifest as to cause alarm,” became in the nineteenth century a mainstream faith.<sup>27</sup> The fear that Arminianism would “prepare the way for popery,” and cause God to “withdraw from the land” proved to be baseless.<sup>28</sup>

The predictions that enthusiasm would destroy the fabric of America’s Christian soul were speculative and inaccurate. The new methods of revivalism were now standing

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<sup>27</sup>Tracy, 8.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 9.

despite the test of time.<sup>29</sup> The Methodist Church, with their new methods, outstripped all other denominations in impact and growth. This growth was a growth that endured.<sup>30</sup> It was a growth that could no longer be either ignored, or marginalized.

Timothy Smith stated that by the 1830s, virtually all New School colleges focused on turning out revival preachers. By the late 1840s, this new emphasis on evangelism was making noticeable inroads among Old School Presbyterians. Smith asserted that by 1858 “Old School men heartily approved the anxious bench, the inquiry room, and emotionally powerful preaching.” These methods were embraced so long as “they were not accompanied by the doctrinal heresies current among their more liberal brethren.”<sup>31</sup> By the advent of the Prayer Revival, Old School Calvinists either willingly, or unknowingly, embraced many of the new measures of revival.

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<sup>29</sup>Lyman Beecher. *Letters of the Rev. Dr. Beecher and Rev. Mr. Nettleton, on the “New Measures” in Conducting Revivals of Religion with a Review of a Sermon by Nov Anglus* (New York: G. And C. Carvill, Broadway, 1828) v. In this work, Beecher echoed Tracy’s concern that Methodism and their “measures of disorder” were tantamount to popery and fraud: “To seek the advancement of religion by the measures of disorder, is to misunderstand its nature; to exercise zeal at the expense of godliness; and to frustrate the end by the means we adopt to promote it. Unless we would justify the policy of the Jesuit, and imitate the “pious frauds” of the Romish propaganda, and so forego our claim to the honor of protestant Christianity, let us remember that the end cannot sanctify or change the moral nature of the means; and that all our measures in religion are first to be sustained in the court of conscience.”

<sup>30</sup>O. E. Goddard, *Handbook on Revivals* (Nashville, TN: Methodist Episcopal Church South, 1921) 60. Goddard wrote: “Our policy had made revivals respectable and respected. When first we began revivals they were belittled, ridiculed, and looked upon with contempt by the gainsaying world. But they outlived this. Neither the fires of opposition nor the frosts of irony could suppress the Methodist revivals. Finally, other churches, noting that revivals were powerful recruiting agencies, adopted the Methodist plan. What is more honorable now than revival? Where is the church that is not proud to have one?”

<sup>31</sup>Smith, 54-5.

*An Arminian Interpretation*

Consensual Characteristics of an Arminian Interpretation of Revival

It was earlier written that in 1858 five primary source books about the Prayer Revival were published. Four of them were written by Calvinists. The theory that the victors write the histories does not apply to the Prayer Revival of 1857. Though the Methodists gained the largest portion of the converts, it was the Calvinists who produced most of the primary source accounts. This makes it more difficult for today's historians to study and interpret the prayer revival in a holistic manner.

This lacuna of a Methodist interpretation was picked up in 1858 by the *Christian Advocate and Journal* of New York. In the September 30 issue the following plea was offered:

Will not someone of our literary laborers take up the subject, and give us a book worth having about it?.. I would not have the least blight of sectarian prejudice in the book, but glowing like fire from beginning to end with "Glory to God in the highest; on earth peace, and good will to men.".. And is it not the duty of the M. E. Church, through some of her sons, to furnish the public and posterity a standard work of this subject? We have had a prominent share of labors and fruits of this revival; and we owe it to God, his general Church, and the world to render our tribute of history in this matter.<sup>32</sup>

This plea was answered with one book. The single primary source book written by a Methodist was William C. Conant's *Narratives of Conversions and Revival Incidents*. Of the five books, Conant's was the most extensive and detailed. It also spent more time covering the role and impact of the Y.M.C.A. and the systematic visitation of New York City. In the four Calvinist books, these agencies were marginalized. However, Conant

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<sup>32</sup>"The Revival of 1857-8," *Christian Advocate and Journal* Vol. 33. No. 39 (September 30, 1858).



invested a considerable portion of his book detailing their exploits and successes.<sup>33</sup>

Before launching into his narratives of conversions, Conant first built his case for the biblical and historical foundation of revivals. He opened his book by writing, “The History of the gospel is the real record of the Supernatural in this world.”<sup>34</sup> It is thus through the proclamation of the gospel that power of the Holy Spirit was manifested. As long as the gospel was preached, the Holy Spirit was able to act and “Revival was prolonged and extended.”<sup>35</sup> In time, persecution forced large numbers of Christians to leave Jerusalem and disperse throughout the Roman Empire. Conant interpreted this as the “wisdom of Divine Providence.” Why? Because, as the Christians dispersed, they brought the gospel with them. The proclamation, of the gospel, and hence revival, followed the paths of the dispersed Christians. As a result, the Word of God “mightily grew and prevailed.”<sup>36</sup> Because Christians who settled throughout the Empire brought the gospel with them, the Apostles were able to follow in their footsteps, proclaim the gospel once again and plant churches “throughout Asia Minor and the islands and shores of the Mediterranean, embracing the whole world.”<sup>37</sup>

The gospel was evidence of God’s supernatural power. The power of the Holy

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<sup>33</sup>Most secondary sources quote Conant almost as often as the other primary sources. However, they only quote the sections of his book where he offers various narratives of conversions. To date, after surveying hundreds of secondary sources, this research has not found a single secondary source that quotes Conant’s detailed documentation of the involvement of the Y.M.C.A., the New York Sunday School Union, or the systematic visitation of the unchurched.

<sup>34</sup>Conant, 1.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., 3.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 3.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 1-5.

Spirit was demonstrated through the preaching of the gospel. When the ancient Christians preached the gospel at Pentecost, revival swept Jerusalem. When the ancient Christians fled Jerusalem, revival followed them. It followed them because as they traveled, they preached the gospel. As long as the gospel was preached, the Church grew. However, when the gospel was silenced, then came the Dark Ages.

When Conant surveyed the Reformation he considered it significant because through it the gospel was preached for the first time in over a thousand years. He wrote that God raised a “host of zealous and able coadjutors, both in church and state—preachers, scholars, princes, and nobles” who set out, bravely “proclaiming free salvation by Christ crucified.” The result of this was “the mysterious spirit and providence of God, filled Europe with their doctrine, and triumphantly established the truth of the Gospel in the countries.”<sup>38</sup> This occurred despite the many problems with the reformers themselves. Regardless of the “extremely dubious” measures often employed to “Protestantize churches,” Conant rejoiced that, as a “veritable, unambiguous substance, here is the revived power of the doctrine of the Cross of Christ.” Finally after a millennium, “here is once more a supernatural wonder, an operation of the Holy Ghost, in common language a revival, a restoration of life, a spiritual resurrection, of the most amazing and glorious character.”<sup>39</sup>

These opening pages of Conant’s *Narratives* offered a peek into the Methodist’s understanding of revival. Old School Calvinists understood revival to be originated in the mind of God, initiated through the Providence of God and displayed via the arbitrary will

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 6.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., 7.

of God. Man's only real responsibility was to pray earnestly and wait. Methodists, understood revival very differently. As Conant's opening words expressed, they did not interpret the coming of revival in conjunction with God's providence, but with the proclamation of the gospel. This was extremely significant. This was the reason Methodists, from their very beginning, argued for the promotion of revival. If revival was wrought through the medium of the gospel, and man was commissioned to proclaim the gospel, then revival would come only after the gospel was preached. Therefore, man had within his power, the ability to initiate revival. More accurately, man had the responsibility to proclaim the gospel.

The central key to revival was the proclamation of the gospel. However, according to Finney, the gospel could not stand alone. For revival to occur, there were other corollary elements which must exist in tandem with the gospel. He argued that there were at least four characteristics to a true revival of religion:

Revival of religion always includes conviction of sin on the part of the Church... Backslidden Christians will be brought to repentance... Revival breaks the power of the world and of sin over Christians... When the Churches are awakened and reformed, the reformation and salvation of sinners will follow."<sup>40</sup>

In his book, *Handbook on Revivals*, O. E. Goddard offered a much more simplistic understanding of revival. According to him, the secret of the success of the nineteenth century Methodist church was its evangelistic spirit.<sup>41</sup> It was this spirit that drove Methodists to travel across the nation proclaiming the gospel. It was the "evangelistic spirit" that motivated ministers to employ new creative measures and not

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<sup>40</sup>Finney, *Revivals of Religion*, 7-8.

<sup>41</sup>Goddard, *Handbook on Revivals*, 55.

“make a fetish out of any particular form of revivalism.”<sup>42</sup> Whereas the Old School Calvinist churches were driven by doctrine, the Methodist, Arminian church was driven by relevance. Goddard wrote, “The evangelistic spirit in Methodism has been to seek and to save the lost outside the Churches... it is in keeping with our history to adopt the method that is best adapted to the times in which we live.”<sup>43</sup>

Nineteenth century Methodists did not dismiss the providence of God. They did not argue against the belief that revival was born in the mind of God. Where they stood apart from the Calvinists was that they believed the promise of revival was already issued. Therefore, it could, at any time, be seized. For this reason, two critical characteristics of revival emerge within the Methodist ranks. First, revival was employed and promoted through human agents and second, there was nothing miraculous about it.

Human agency was deemed essential not because God could not, but because God would not bring revival without it. The key to revival was “proclaiming free salvation.” The sphere through which God ordained the proclamation was human agency. William W. Newell in his *Revivals: How and When?*, wrote that “when heartily convinced that a revival is valuable, a pastor and his church will often deviate from their ordinary course of Christian work to obtain it.”<sup>44</sup> Goddard declared that a good Methodist would expect all churches to be evangelistic. Though all churches “emphasize soul-winning,” no other

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<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 60.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 59, 62.

<sup>44</sup>William W. Newell, *Revivals: How and When?* (New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son, 1882) 16-17.

denomination did so “zealously and persistently as Methodists do.”<sup>45</sup>

Finney remarked that the “agency of men is commonly employed.” He distinguished between agency and instrumentality. “Truth is the instrument.” man was the agent. As an agent “he acts; he is not a mere passive instrument; he is voluntary in promoting the conversion of sinners.”<sup>46</sup> Finney was so passionate about the involvement of human agency in revival that during a lecture series on the Revivals of Religion, he made this admonishment:

Will you spend the time in learning about revivals, and do nothing for them? I want you as fast as you learn anything on the subject of revivals, to put it in practice, and go to work and see if you cannot promote a revival among sinners here. If you will not do this, I wish you to let me know at the beginning, so that I need not waste my strength.<sup>47</sup>

Finney had no desire to preach about revival unless his listeners were willing to do what was necessary to promote a revival of religion.

Regarding the nature of revival, Arminians insisted that it contained no miraculous element. Conant argued that “there is something in it for common sense to apprehend.” Revival was as plain to see as any other visible object in the world. It was “the natural and beautiful operation of the appointed human instrumentalities in the awakening of sinners.” Conant declared that to witness “a church in earnest” was to awaken one “on the subject of religion.” An unconverted man would not be able to long tolerate church attendance. Why? Because “the Gospel, ‘the power of God and the wisdom of God unto salvation,’ is actually preached, set forth and testified by living

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<sup>45</sup>Goddard, 58-9.

<sup>46</sup>Finney, *Revivals of Religion*, 10.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., 16.

witnesses.”<sup>48</sup> The gospel was preached, the power of the Holy Spirit was unleashed and the sinner was convicted.

Finney also argued against the notion that a revival of religion was a miraculous event. He stated that if someone who held to this view would only “think, they would see their absurdity.” Finney then offered these words to those who held that revivals were miraculous:

For a long time it was supposed by the Church that a revival was a miracle, an interposition of Divine power, with which they had nothing to do, and which they had no more agency in producing than they had in producing thunder, or a storm of hail, or an earthquake. It is only within a few years that ministers generally have supposed revivals were to be promoted, by the use of means designed and adapted specially to that object. It has been supposed that revivals came just as showers do, sometimes in one town, and sometimes in another, and that ministers and Churches could do nothing more to produce them than they could to make showers of rain... God has overthrown, generally, the theory that revivals are miracles.<sup>49</sup>

To the Arminian, it was not presumptuous to assert that a revival of religion could be fostered, promoted and perpetuated by human agents. In truth, they believed that a revival of religion must be promoted and perpetuated by human agents. God offered no other avenue than human agency. Arminians did not believe that this diminished the power of God. Nor did they believe human agency affronted the Sovereignty of God. The reason why human agents were essential was because God ordained it so.

Since there was nothing mystical or miraculous about a revival, there was no need for a church to stress over whether or not it would ever see one. According to Newell, if a church wanted to experience a revival it must first believe it could happen. Second, it

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<sup>48</sup>Conant, 416.

<sup>49</sup>Finney, 12-13.

must desire for it to happen. Third, it must submit to the will of the Lord, and fourth, the church must prepare for it.<sup>50</sup> An Arminian believed that revival was in the grasp of any believer, and any church that desired it. If a church, or a denomination, or a nation never experienced revival, it could blame none, but itself.

Revivals did cycle in and out of human experience. However, this “cycle” did not operate beyond the sphere of human agency. A revival of religion was not an experience that just happened. Mankind was not a passive recipient. Revivals were not cyclical in the sense that they swept in and out of history without any regard to human agency.

Arminians counted a revival of religion as an established promise of God. It was up to the church to fulfill whatever obligations the Lord deemed necessary in order to experience the revival He already promised. To the Arminian, a revival of religion did not need to be a seasonal event. It could be, and should be a way of life.

#### The Importance of Embracing Revivals as a Way of Life

No other denomination in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century America benefitted more from revivalism than the Methodist Church. By 1857, revival meetings were embraced by all the major denominations. This was not always the case. From the 1790s to the mid 1800s, revivalism and the new measures associated with it were under constant scrutiny and criticism. Yet, when the Prayer Revival of 1857 and 1858 commenced, revivalism was respectable. Long noted that the Methodist Church “benefitted by association with this respectability.”<sup>51</sup> In 1858, the *Pittsburgh Christian*

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<sup>50</sup>Newell, 16, 40, 51.

<sup>51</sup>Long, 18.

*Advocate* reported they were “specially gratified to see less dread of revivals... than was formerly evinced by our ‘order’ loving friends.”<sup>52</sup> Goddard, in his *Handbook on Revivals*, wrote that “when first we began revivals they were belittled, ridiculed, and looked upon with contempt by a gainsaying world.” He thus seemed to relish in the realization that “our policy has made revivals respectable and respected.”<sup>53</sup>

Methodism benefitted from revivalism. However, this truth does not answer the question as to why Methodists historically gravitated towards revivals and revivalism. To answer this, it must be understood that early nineteenth century Methodists did not perceive themselves to be gravitating towards revivalism. To the Methodist, Methodism and revivalism were the same thing. From 1840 to 1855 the *Methodist Quarterly Review* never spoke of revivals. It instead wrote about Methodism.<sup>54</sup> Cardwine noted that “Methodism was wholeheartedly a revival movement.” He further wrote that “it had been born of a revival; its churches grew through revivals; its ministers preached revival; its success was talked of in terms of revival.”<sup>55</sup> Whereas reformed Calvinist churches looked forward to periods of revival, the nineteenth century Methodists considered themselves a revival in progress.

In 1780 the Methodist church had fewer than 10,000 members. By 1820 it boasted

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<sup>52</sup>“The Great Revival,” *Pittsburgh Christian Advocate* (March 23, 1858). Cited by Long, Footnote number 50, 159.

<sup>53</sup>Goddard, 60.

<sup>54</sup>This researcher surveyed every article published in the *Methodist Quarterly Review* from 1840 to 1855. Not one article was focused on Revivals. However, it spoke often of Methodism.

<sup>55</sup>Richard Cardwine, *Trans-Atlantic Revivalism*, 10.



over 250,000 members. Within the following decade, the Methodist church almost doubled in size.<sup>56</sup> This explosive growth was the product of revivalism. By 1850, the success of revival methods built the Methodist church into the largest Protestant denomination in the United States. The Methodist church owed its origins, its growth, even its very existence to revivalism.

The Reformed churches understood revival as an event that happened. The Methodists interpreted revival as an event that they promoted. Just like the Reformed churches, Methodists believed that revivals were part of a divine agency. Yet, they differed in that Calvinists “viewed periodic awakenings as evidence of a special work of God” while “Methodists understood their movement—Methodism itself—as providential.”<sup>57</sup>

God gave His church the Great Commission. His Commission was to proclaim the gospel to all the world. It was through the Church that His Commission was delivered. Therefore, if the Church was walking in obedience, then it would be in continual revival. Revival would be a way of life. It was for this reason that William Newell could write that “Ministers and Christians must watch and improve the providences of God. The providence as well as the Spirit of God has much to do with revivals.”<sup>58</sup> Cardwine wrote that “the Methodist’s understanding of their obligation as a church often seemed to go no

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<sup>56</sup>Ibid., 10.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., 10.

<sup>58</sup>Newell, *Revivals*, 83.

further than saving the largest number of souls.”<sup>59</sup>

The Methodist minister did not consider it arrogant, or presumptuous to believe that he had the ability to promote and produce a revival of religion. He saw it as his biblical obligation. Not promoting a revival of religion was seen as an act of disobedience. Even worse, one who did not promote revival was duped by Satan himself. Finney declared that “men cannot do the devil’s work more effectually than by preaching up the Sovereignty of God as a reason why we should not put forth efforts to produce a revival.”<sup>60</sup> Newell offered even more forceful words:

One of the most fiendish devices of the Adversary, for the ruin of souls, is pressed into these four words (getting up a revival). While all the world is crowding onward in one blaze of excited effort, the cry of Satan to the Christian is, “keep quiet, you are getting up a revival....” In getting up a revival we get upon our knees to bring one down from heaven. God loves to give this blessing. He moves his children to seek it. He commands them to have it. He indeed complains that none stirreth up himself to take hold of God... This royal road to success is within the reach of the most depressed or fastidious church. Unbelief, unfruitfulness, and self-gratification are colossal evils. Nothing must satisfy us until the Lamb of God is enthroned in the hearts of the people.<sup>61</sup>

When surveying the past success of the Methodist church, Goddard concluded that “Nothing but a fervent and aggressive, intensive and extensive, persistent and invincible type of evangelism could have achieved such glorious results.” He contended that the growth of the denomination could be traced to “the pioneer Methodist circuit rider, evangelist and colporteur, who... endured hardships... and planted the banner of

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<sup>59</sup>Richard J. Cardwine, *Evangelicals and Politics in Antebellum America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993) 125-26.

<sup>60</sup>Finney, *Revivals of Religion*, 14.

<sup>61</sup>Newell, 249-50.

Jesus Christ in every nook and corner of this vast domain.”<sup>62</sup> With these thoughts in mind, Goddard declared, “I do no violence to history when I claim that the secret of our success has been the evangelistic spirit.”<sup>63</sup>

Newel noted that “mere faith is insufficient.” Faith must be accompanied by works. He quoted from Galatians 5:6 where Jesus says, “My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.” He then quoted from John 5:17 where He says “Go work today in my vinyard.” Newel excused only the destitute and disabled from doing the physical work of God. The church could not expect a crop if it did not til and sow. It could not expect bread, unless it made an effort to obtain it. If the church cried out to save the perishing, it must then follow that cry with “Lord, what wilt thou have us do?” Newel wrote, “you will do your best; then trust Jesus to do the rest. Here is true faith, with wise and energetic action.”<sup>64</sup>

Nineteenth century Methodists did not embrace revival as a way of life simply because it was their heritage. They also embrace it because they believe revival to be not only an essential element of an obedient church, but an essential element that would invigorate the church.

For example, in 1847, the *Zionist Herald and Wesleyan Journal* published a series of articles crying out for the Methodist church to promote a revival of religion. One article proclaimed “We endeavored to show the importance of a revival, from the mournful fact, that there are thousands of impenitent sinners perishing around us, whom nothing but a revival can save.” This article praised the prosperity of the Methodist

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<sup>62</sup>Goddard, 54-5.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., 55.

<sup>64</sup>Newell, 82.

church, but lamented, that more needed to be done. There was no doubt to the writer that the Methodist church “is now as spiritual as she used to be.” However, he questioned whether or not “she is as holy as God requires her to be?” There was nothing that was more important “than a general and powerful revival among Methodist preachers... It would electrify the church, and bless the world.”<sup>65</sup>

In another article titled “The State of Religion,” the *Zionist Herald* reported “We are not given to despondency respecting the cause of God in our world, but confess our alarm at its present aspect in this country.” This writer bemoaned that “all sects seem to have fallen into a state of stagnancy, nay worse, of declension.” The remedy to this was revival. “God alone can help us. His promises are yea and amen in Christ Jesus—but he works by means.” The writer therefore called the pastors to renew and consecrate themselves to the Lord. They were urged to “weep over the desolation of the church.” In short, there needed to be “devoted a special season of prayer, however, short, daily, to this one object.”<sup>66</sup>

The following month a companion article titled “The State of Religion—Again” was published. Here the writer stated, “Let us do something,” and “rouse ourselves without delay.” He asked “Why cannot our membership be satisfied to let alone the thousand and one societies and attend to the more important business of saving souls by personal effort?” He then concluded that “If one third of our membership would work, we

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<sup>65</sup>“A Revival of Religion: Its Importance Farther Considered,” *Zionist Herald and Wesleyan Journal* (Vol. 18. no. 2. January 13, 1847).

<sup>66</sup>*Ibid.*, “State of Religion” (Vol. 18. no. 26. June 30, 1847).

should soon have a great harvest.”<sup>67</sup>

What these articles demonstrated was Methodists perceived that a holy and obedient church would enjoy a lifestyle of revival. Therefore, if the church was not enjoying revival, then the church was obviously not holy and obedient. If the church was not experiencing revival, then it was her responsibility to get right, get holy, go to work, proclaim the gospel and enjoy a harvest. When a church walked in obedience, it walked in revival. Revival, was to the nineteenth century Methodist church, a way of life.

### *A Journalistic Interpretation*

#### Revival as a Main Event

The Media has been an important and even indispensable element of the American religious experience since the beginning of the nineteenth century. During the 1820s America developed the technical basis for mass media.<sup>68</sup> During the 1830s the idea arose that news was not only an avenue to serve a paper’s readers with pertinent information, but was also a commodity to be sold.<sup>69</sup> Therefore, when the Prayer Revival of 1857 commenced, there could be little surprise that the secular media, which was constantly looking for news-worthy items to sell, was disposed to report, with much enthusiasm and even hyperbole, the personal testimonies and experiences surrounding the event.

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<sup>67</sup>Ibid., “The State of Religion”—Again” (Vol. 18. no. 29. July 21, 1847).

<sup>68</sup>David Paul Nord. *Faith in Reading: Religious Publishing and the Birth of Mass Media in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004) 18.

<sup>69</sup>Long, 29.

Though primary sources such as Prime, Conant, and Chambers offered little credit to the secular press for the promotion of the Prayer Revival, later secondary sources were more willing to give the media its due. Beardsley in his *Religious Progress* wrote that “the newspaper publicity given to the movement added to the general interest.” He noted how politics, crime and other secular interests were “overshadowed by the news of revival.” According to Beardsley’s account, because papers, such as the *New York Herald*, offered coverage of the Prayer Revival, there was awakened “the deepest interest on the part of the general public.” This led multitudes, including “great numbers of the unchurched” to seek out and visit the noon day prayer meetings.<sup>70</sup>

The *Washington Intelligencer* reported in its March 20, 1858 edition that “the Revivals, or Great Awakening, continue to be the leading topic of the day.” It wrote that “from Texas in the South to the extreme of our Western boundaries and our Eastern limits, their influence is felt by every denomination.”<sup>71</sup>

Bacon recorded in his *History of American Christianity* that “sensation headlines in enterprising journals proclaimed ‘Revival News,’ and smart reporters were detailed to the prayer meeting or the sermon.” The effect was to arouse much popular interest in the prayer meetings. He commented that “such papers as the Tribune and the Herald, laying on men’s breakfast tables and counting room desks [that offered] the latest pungent word from the noon prayer meeting or the evening sermon, did the work of many tract societies.”<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup>Beardsley, *Religious Progress*, 49.

<sup>71</sup>*Washington National Intelligencer*, (20<sup>th</sup> March 1858).

<sup>72</sup>Bacon, *A History of American Christianity*, 344.

The rhetoric employed by Orr likened the revival to a great deluge. The “showers” in New York, became a “flood which suddenly bursts” forth, “swept” New England, “engulfed” the cities and states of the Ohio valley, “rolled over” the western settlements, “lapped” the edges of the South and “covered” all of the United States and Canada with “divine favour.”<sup>73</sup> When one looks around Orr’s hyperbolic, providential rhetoric he will see that Orr credited the press for starting the cascade. He wrote that the national press carried the news of the Prayer Revival from coast to coast. As a result, “citizens everywhere were challenged by the movement.” Soon, the revival spread from New York and throughout the nation.

Further evidence of the influence of the media on the Prayer Revival could be seen with the growth of the prayer meeting at Jayne’s Hall in Philadelphia. This particular prayer meeting was started in the Union Methodist Episcopal Church on November 23, 1857.<sup>74</sup> After a very slow start, it was moved to a small meeting room in Dr. Jayne’s Hall. It then grew to about sixty in attendance. The primary, and secondary sources that record this event then report how the attendance of the prayer meeting miraculously exploded. From Mach 8, to March 10<sup>th</sup> the attendance swelled from 300 to over 2,500.<sup>75</sup> What is not recorded in these primary, and secondary sources is the impact of the media coverage on the Jayne’s Hall prayer meeting.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>73</sup>Orr, *The Light of the Nations*, 107.

<sup>74</sup>Orr, *The Light of the Nations*, 115: Siting Noble, W. F. 420.

<sup>75</sup>*America’s Great Revivals*, 63.

<sup>76</sup>The Jayne’s Hall prayer meeting was discussed earlier in this dissertation. The sources cited are *An Account of the Great Awakening in Philadelphia, by the Young Men’s Christian Association*. Philadelphia, October 30, 1858.; Beardsley, 180-1, Orr, The

On March 1, both the *Philadelphia Inquirer* and the *Philadelphia Evening Journal* reported on the religious excitement of the prayer meetings in New York. On March 6, the Philadelphia press offered front page coverage to the revival.<sup>77</sup> One week before the media reported on the Prayer Revival the attendance at the Jayne's Hall prayer meeting was about sixty. Two days after the Philadelphia press featured it on the front page 300 attended and two days later over 2,500 showed up. The prayer meeting at Jayne's Hall may have been extraordinary enough to keep the crowds, but it was the press that brought them.

Long wrote that "after the secular papers directed public attention to the revival, it quickly became a full-fledged media event." Reinforced by the religious press, the secular papers helped to foster the belief among their readers that they were participants of "a widespread, simultaneous religious event, the closest thing to a truly national revival in American history."<sup>78</sup>

By the end of March 1858, news of the noon day prayer meetings spread to major and minor news papers all over the country. By April and May of 1858 it was not uncommon for many of the Nation's secular and religious papers to submit stories in their columns with the simple title of *The Revival*, or *The Great Revival*. During this period, no other explanation was needed. The Nation's readers knew exactly what the story was about.

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Light of the Nations, 115; and America's Great Revivals, 63. None of these sources connected the press's coverage of the Revival with the sudden growth of the prayer meetings.

<sup>77</sup>Long, 36.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., 37.



### Fanning the Flames of Revival with Borrowed News

The two papers that led in the publication and promotion of the Prayer Revival both resided in New York City. The first paper to publish an article was James Gordon Bennett's *New York Herald*—the most successful daily paper in the United States. The second was Horace Greeley's *New York Tribune*. Though the *Herald* was the first to publish on the Prayer Revival, it was the *Tribune* that became the leading reporter on the event.<sup>79</sup>

According to Spicer, both these papers influenced virtually all reporting of the Prayer Revival. However, it was the *New York Tribune* that became “the most powerful organ of public opinion in America.”<sup>80</sup> Spicer wrote that in March and April the *Tribune* offered “a faithful account of the revival.” Other papers that were handicapped by either lack of money, or lack of reporters followed the lead of the *Tribune*:

other papers such as the the Cincinnati Daily Gazette, The Boston Herald, the New Orleans Picayune, The Cleveland Plain Dealer, The Louisville Democrat, The Washington Union, and others printed articles that had been clipped from the country's leading journals. The local county papers followed the practice of their more powerful brothers and quoted freely from other news papers. In these newspapers anything that had the slightest tendency to discredit evangelical religion was condemned. Quite frequently any subject matter that contained controverted points was cut from the article which was to be reproduced. The *Tribune* (however) discovered and printed in its columns the best and worst features of the revival.”<sup>81</sup>

Because of this form of coverage, it was common for the same story to circulate

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<sup>79</sup>Ibid., 26.

<sup>80</sup>Spicer, 113.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid., 113-115.

and resurface from time to time.<sup>82</sup> Also, this type of coverage led newspapers to publish conflicting stories. On November 5, 1857 the *Christian Advocate and Journal* published an article entitled “Revival Extraordinary.” Speaking of the prayer revival the writer stated: “We have witnessed, during the past twenty years, many signal displays of God’s wonder working power in saving souls, but never before have we witnessed a revival after this fashion.”<sup>83</sup> However, not two weeks later *the Christian Advocate and Journal* published an article titled “Decline of Religion in New England.” The writer of this article opened by writing: “We gave lately Congregational statistics, showing a declension of religion in Vermont, New Hampshire, and Massachusetts.”<sup>84</sup> Yet, the following week the *Christian Advocate* offered a very positive chart outlining the growth of Christianity in the United States:

	1832	1848	1854
Population	13,718,342	18,768,822	25,953,000
Ministers	9,537	17,073	25,427
Or one in	1,437	1,098	1,020
Communicants	1,342,461	2,544,763	3,337,322
Or one in	7.5	5	5.5

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<sup>82</sup>The omission of the famous “Awful Gardener” is not an accidental oversight. Every secondary source and virtually every primary source studied offered some detail on the conversion of the celebrity known as “Awful” Orville Gardner. After reading numerous accounts of his life, this writer could find nothing unique to offer. Long’s *The Revival of 1857-58* offers probably the best synopsis of this individual.

<sup>83</sup>*Christian Advocate and Journal*. Vol 32. No. 45 (New York. November 5, 1857).

<sup>84</sup>*Ibid.*, Vol 32. No. 47 (New York. November 19, 1857).

The above article concluded with the statement: “These figures show well for the American Churches and the “Voluntary Principle.”<sup>85</sup>

According to this one paper, on November 5, 1857 the nation was being swept by a revival. However, on November 19, 1857 there was religious declension in New England. Yet on November 26, 1857 the church was on the rise. The first article was addressing a nation wide movement. The Second article was focused on a smaller North East region and looked only at one denomination. The third once again had a national focus. All three articles were most probably correct. However, the sequential appearance of articles that detailed growth, decline and then growth could be confusing to readers.

Another example of this tendency could be seen in the *Christian Observer*. The Layman’s Prayer Revival started in mid October. However, even though this revival was sweeping the nation, the *Christian Observer* of Philadelphia did not offer a single article specifically covering any element of the revival until February of 1858. Nevertheless, in its December 31, 1857, in a column titled “Religious Interest,” it did offer the following nondescript statement: “We learn that in different sections of the Church and country, there are cheering indications of the work of the Spirit.”<sup>86</sup>

Yet, in the very next issue an article titled “Need of a Revival” was posted. Three months after the Prayer Revival started and one week after recording evidence of “cheering indications of the work of the Spirit,” the paper recorded, “Brethren, we are in pressing need of a revival.” It asked its readers, “are you sensible of this great urgent necessity for a revival of religion in your own midst?” It then urged the readers to

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<sup>85</sup>Ibid., Vol. 32. No. 48 (New York. November 26, 1857).

<sup>86</sup>“Religious Interest,”*Christian Observer* Vol 36 no 53 (Dec 31, 1857).

“Contemplate, we pray you, the awful consequences of continuing longer in this declining state?”<sup>87</sup>

One month later, the *Christian Observer* released its February 18, 1858 paper. Therein was a column titled “Noon-Day Prayer Meetings.” In this article it was reported that the prayer meetings “are continued in our city and seem to be growing interest and favor with many citizens.” The article further recorded that “as in New York the noon-day prayer meetings for prayer shall be anticipated with delightful expectation by thousands who will attend them.” It further delighted in that the influence of these prayer meetings “will be extended to every church and every circle of life in the city.”<sup>88</sup> This particular article represented the first record of the noon day prayer meetings by the *Christian Observer* of Philadelphia.

Here, according to the *Christian Observer* of Philadelphia, by the end of December 1857, churches throughout the nation were experiencing the work of the Spirit. One week later, the January 7 issue of the paper was crying out for the need of revival in Philadelphia. Yet, six weeks later, the February 18 issue offered a report on prayer meetings that were “continued in our city.” It did not report how long the meetings were in place, but it is assumed that they were meeting for some time. So, on December 31, there was a work of the Spirit. On January 7, there was need for a revival, and on February 18, the continuing prayer meetings were gaining momentum.

On March 17, 1858 the *New York Times* offered a very positive report that “The religious movement in this City is progressing with unabated vigor. New prayer meetings

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<sup>87</sup>Ibid., “Need of a Revival,” Vol 37. no 1 (January 7, 1858).

<sup>88</sup>Ibid., “Noon-Day Prayer Meetings,” Vol 37. no 7 (February 18, 1858).

open daily, and they are all largely attended.”<sup>89</sup> After this statement the article then advertised five different meetings that were being held that week. Yet, three days later, on March 20, the *Times* offered the critical assessment that many in the crowds who attended the prayer meetings were “attracted by mere curiosity in the first instance.” Some people walked in and then promptly walk out of the meetings “taking no pains to walk lightly, that others may not be disturbed in their devotion.” Nevertheless, some who did attend “only to look on” but then “come out wiser and better than they went in.”<sup>90</sup> On one day the attenders of the prayer meeting were part of a movement that was “progressing with unabated vigor” and therefore caused the prayer meetings to be “largely attended. Three days later these same attendants were primarily going out of “mere curiosity” and often took “no pains to walk lightly” in an effort to not disturb others.

In April of 1857, the *Quarterly Reporter* of the Y.M.C.A. wrote that “With one or two exceptions, the press has manifested an earnest regard for our prosperity, and we have many evidences of the good feeling of the citizens generally in our behalf.”<sup>91</sup> This was probably true. However, it would be naive to think that the primary motivation of the secular press was peace on earth and good will towards men! The media capitalized on the revival because it sold papers.<sup>92</sup> The reason it sold papers is because people were

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<sup>89</sup>“City Items,” *New York Times* (March 17, 1858. pg. 5).

<sup>90</sup>“The Great Awakening,” *New York Times* (March 20, 1858).

<sup>91</sup>*The Quarterly Reporter of the Young Men’s Christian Association*, 1857, 42.

<sup>92</sup>“The Revival in Troy,” *New York Daily Tribune* (March 24, 1858). Reported: “The elaborate accounts of the great National religious awakening, which are just now being published in the Tribune, has created a great demand for the paper in this vicinity. Hoyt’s news-room is thronged with applicants of all classes and conditions for your sheet.” (Source, from Long, 27.)

roused by the notion that God was sweeping the nation with a revival of religion. For the first time in American history, the public was able to read daily accounts of the progress of a religious revival. The public had an appetite for revival and the press was more than happy to feed it.

After surveying hundreds of articles covering the Prayer Revival, what this writer discovered in the print media of 1858 was that along side the many serious and thoughtful documentations of the revival were a plethora of editorials, sensational conversions, and anecdotal news events that were designed to grab attention, spark interest and sell papers. Nevertheless, for better or for worse, the media's part in the progress of the Prayer Revival of 1857-58 was indisputable. An article printed in 1848 by the American Tract Society titled "Home Evangelization" offered this excellent perspective on the media's role in promoting revival:

In the days of the Reformation, Luther was wise in seizing the trumpet tongued press whose hoarse blasts waked a slumbering world from the night of ages. Had he neglected this new born power, and restricted his exposures and anathemas of papal superstition, and his expositions of a saving faith to oral discussion, his reformation might have been drowned by the din of ecclesiastical denunciation, or smothered by inquisitorial fires, like those of Jerome of Prague, and Huss of Bohemia.<sup>93</sup>

Despite the prolific attention given to the Prayer Revival, the media's coverage on the event was almost completely overlooked by primary sources. However, today's historian cannot honestly do the same. The fact that the secular media played a significant role in the promotion of the Prayer Revival does not diminish its phenomenal qualities.

Sensationalism sold papers and the Prayer Revival of 1857-58 was a sensational event. One can argue that the primary motivation of the press was money. This may very

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<sup>93</sup>American Tract Society. *Home Evangelization*, 8-9.

well be the case. Irrespective of the motive, for almost a year, within the secular press, virtually all other news events took a back seat to the Prayer Revival. That in itself was extraordinary.

### The Telegraph and the Prayer Revival

Before leaving this section about the influence and impact of the media, it is important that the impact of the telegraph be at least briefly addressed. The telegraph was to the business world of 1858 what email and I-messaging are in today's business circles. The media of the 1850s was no different than today's in that it gravitated towards new technologies that allowed them to circulate news rapidly. The telegraph was the lightning post of the mid nineteenth century media.

On March 11, 1858 the *New York Times* published a lengthy front page article highlighting an anniversary meeting of the American Tract Society. In this article were reports from ATS agents from across the United States. One reported that accounts of the daily prayer meetings that were held in New York were telegraphed and circulated by the *New York Times* "throughout the entire West." The report stated that this effort "has conduced to awaken a religious feeling and effort never before witnessed, to the same extent in that country."<sup>94</sup> People in every corner of the country could gather in any place that had a telegraph station to hear up to date reports on the progress of the Prayer Revival in New York and the East Coast.

According to Beardsley, this communication was reciprocal. Not only were telegraphs sent out from New York and onto the fruited planes, but conversion and

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<sup>94</sup>*New York Times*, vol 7, no. 2072, (Tuesday, May 11, 1858).

revival stories were sent back to New York via telegraph from all sections of the country. Beardsley noted that the secular press took up the subject of revival. Thus, “column after column in the daily news papers,” were filled “with telegraphic reports and feature articles describing the progress of the work in various parts of the land.”<sup>95</sup>

Conant wrote that the electric telegraph was able to convey Christian sympathy “from multitudes to multitudes in every city simultaneously assembled, in effect almost bringing a nation together in one praying concourse.” The media may have used religion to sell papers. However, Conant saw it differently. According to him, the press “willing or unwilling” was “taken possession of by the Spirit to proclaim His wonders.” He was awed by the nation wide simultaneous presentation of the Prayer Revival noting that “these communications and means of grace and general awakening, on there present scale, are altogether of modern date—a new thing.” As spectacular as the printed press was, Conant saw the telegraph as the real vessel of grace:

The revival reports of the New York Tribune, while they continued, were the cause of much awakening among the millions which that immensely circulated paper reaches daily... But the telegraph, as a means of grace and awakening! Shortly after the noon day prayer meetings began to multiply, simultaneous correspondence by telegraph was commenced between those in different cities.”<sup>96</sup>

Octavius Winslow shared this affinity with Conant. He wrote that “the employment of the Electric Telegraph, as a sanctified agent for transmitting the glad tidings of the work of grace from one city and from one State to another, is not the least striking and interesting feature of this mighty movement.” He defended the use of the media, by the religious community. “Never was the electric spark converted to a more

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<sup>95</sup>Beardsley, *The History of Christianity in America*, 183.

<sup>96</sup>Connant, 394-5.



appropriate or sacred end. Why should not science be the handmaid and auxiliary of religion?”<sup>97</sup>

Today, historians can plough through thousands of pages of nineteenth century news papers. Online archives give the researcher instant access to millions of news paper articles spanning the entire history of the United States. The masses of written documents are readily available to be read and studied. For this reason, it is very difficult for today’s reader to understand the utter euphoria of a nineteenth century resident who went to sleep in a three mile an hour world, in a nation that had to endure coast to coast correspondence that took up to three months, and wake up to a new technology that allowed him or her to communicate from city to city and from state to state in real time. The invention of the telegraph gave the world its first encounter with world wide instant access. This access was used to promote the Prayer Revival of 1857-58.

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<sup>97</sup>Winslow, 39.

## CHAPTER 7

### CONCLUSION

If ten reporters are asked to walk through a room and then go to their offices and produce a report of the contents of the room, in all probability the ten reports will all be similar, but with slight variations. The main contents of the room will be recognized by all, but the smaller details may differ. If the room is destroyed, then the only evidence of the contents of the room will be in the accounts of these reporters.

Of the ten reporters, only the former military veteran may notice the small plaque on the wall commemorating service to a branch of the armed forces. Another, who is an art enthusiast, may be the only one to report on the artists whose paintings adorn the walls. Another who is an abashed reader may be the only one to report on the types of books that line the shelves. And yet another, who is a neat freak may criticize the piles of paper and pamphlets scattered in various places throughout the office. None of the accounts would be inaccurate. None incorrect. They differ, however, because each of the journalist's opinions and publications are influenced, or prejudiced by personal likes and dislikes.

Only by reading all ten articles can a researcher develop a true holistic account of the contents of the room. Even then he cannot be sure that he has the whole picture. Since he does not have access to the room, however, he must rely on what sources are available to him.

This is the exact scenario that confronts those who endeavor to write about the Prayer Revival of 1857-58. It was an event that occurred one hundred and fifty years ago. No witnesses of the event are alive. All that is left are the written documents. The historian can only sift through the documents and then piece his puzzle together. Each piece is incomplete. Some are marred. Some are incredible. But all are important.

Horace Greeley and James Bennett, for example, published accounts of the Prayer Revival in their papers, not necessarily because the event was news worthy, but because they knew it would sell papers.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, as Spicer noted, their papers often focused only on the aspects of the Prayer Revival that interested the public.<sup>2</sup> The selective nature of these news papers does not invalidate their information. However, it compels the historian to supplement research with other sources.

When Samuel Irenaeus Prime reported on the genesis of the prayer meetings he offered a biographical profile on Jeremiah Lanphier that left the reader thinking that God issued a revival in New York because there was finally a man in the city whose piety and holiness could be used. He, however, made no mention of the significant role of the Y.M.C.A. When Samuel Hopkins published his history of the Y.M.C.A., he reported that the prayer meeting initiated in the North Dutch Reformed Church was done so through the auspices of the Y.M.C.A. and made absolutely no mention of Jeremiah Lanphier. These two sources do not nullify each other. They are; however, incomplete without each other.

Such conflicts among the sources are common. It is therefore imperative that the

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<sup>1</sup>Long, 26-32.

<sup>2</sup>Spicer, 113-115.

modern day historian endeavor not to commit the sins of the past and rely on any one source with deference. Before a credible history of the Prayer Revival can be developed, the writer must realize that strong interpretive powers were at work when the primary sources were being produced. These interpretive powers led the primary source writers to produce discriminate histories that favored their own personal agendas. This is not to say that any of the primary sources are inaccurate. However, none can stand alone. Singularly, they are incomplete. Only together can a legitimate assessment of the Prayer Revival be developed.

Among historians, there is little disagreement over the fact that there was a revival from October 1857 through the year 1858. The debates center on the magnitude of its scope and impact. Nevertheless, something amazing did occur. Whether the revival was sparked by Jeremiah Lanphier's October prayer meeting in New York City, Phoebe Palmer's revival meeting in Hamilton, Canada, or the business revulsion in November does not challenge the fact that a revival started. Whether the prayer meetings were a result of a providential spontaneous urge by the masses to attend them, or by interest generated through the media and telegraph does not challenge the fact that prayer meetings swept across the nation. Irrespective of its origin, scope, impact, theology, or legacy, the Prayer Revival of 1857-58 was nothing short of a phenomenon.

This dissertation offered a threefold proposition. First, the Layman's Prayer Revival of 1857-58 was neither a Third Awakening, nor a distinct Awakening. It was the crescendo of the Second Awakening. Second, this work proposed and demonstrated that most, if not all of the primary source accounts were heavily influenced by the theological agendas of those who wrote the histories. Third, the Layman's Prayer Revival could,

therefore, only be properly understood when all the variant primary source documents were synthesized into one holistic interpretation.<sup>3</sup>

Before the Revival commenced, prayer meetings already dotted the landscape. The media—both secular and religious—reported on religious events of the day. Churches throughout the land were experiencing a season of revival. Home missions were in full thrust. Bible and Tract societies were canvassing the nation. Lay ministry involvement was already established. Most Protestant evangelistic denominations were experiencing nationwide growth. The Y.M.C.A., though in its infancy, already established chapters in many of the major metropolitan areas. Revivalism and its new measures was already well established and the democratization of American Christianity was already an historical reality. Also, the Prayer Revival did not introduce any fundamental changes in either the churches, the social landscape, or the tensions between the North and South.

In consideration of the above observations, this dissertation argued that the event known as the Prayer Revival of 1857-58 was indeed a revival. However, it was not a third awakening. It was not even an awakening. During this period over one million responded to the gospel and thousands of churches were strengthened. However, there was no unique fundamental impact on American culture, or society. There was no unique fundamental impact that was not already present before the commencement of the Prayer

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<sup>3</sup>Fish. *When Heaven Touched Earth*, 133-149. In his book Roy J. Fish includes a chapter titled “When He is Come: Characteristics of the Prayer Revival.” Some of the subheadings in this chapter includes “Lay Activity,” “The Primacy of Prayer,” “Lack of Emotional Excess,” and “Universal Approval.” When one looks at his footnotes it is immediately recognized that virtually all of his sources are either Calvinists or are periodicals that lean towards a Calvinistic interpretation. This was probably not intentional, nevertheless, it offers a good representation of a non holistic historical account of the Prayer Revival that is slanted towards one mode of interpretation.

Revival.

It is at best uncertain whether or not the business revulsion either created an opportunity for revival, or became the catalyst for revival. The majority of the sources gravitate towards the belief that it was a catalyst.

This dissertation demonstrated that the powers of revision did not escape the primary sources. Revisions such as the over emphasis of lay involvement were passed on to secondary and tertiary sources.<sup>4</sup> Though none of the primary sources built a case for a time of Spiritual declension between the years 1843 and 1856, nearly all tertiary accounts of the Prayer Revival deferentially quoted Beardsley's secondary account and uncritically parroted the notion that there was this period of decline. However, the statistics presented in this dissertation revealed that this supposed declension never occurred.

The second chapter in this dissertation offered a case study of Samuel Irenaeus Prime's *Power of Prayer*. The purpose of this section was not to discredit Prime. It was to

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<sup>4</sup>The notion of this revival being lay led was exalted, but the fact that the majority of these laymen were affiliated with the Y.M.C.A. and that through this association they plotted, planned and organized many of the prayer meetings is often ignored. Most sources do credit the Y.M.C.A. with regards to its organizational efforts, but they do not make the connection that many of the laity were part of the Association. Supporters of this revival relished in the fact that there was no effort on man's part to promote the revival, but they ignored the fact that Jeremiah Lanphier personally contacted both secular and religious news papers and offered them stories of the prayer meetings. They ignored the fact that business men who were impacted by the prayer meetings embraced a brand new technology called the telegraph. With the telegraph, business men sent instant messages across the nation to others businessmen in other cities offering reports of their experiences in the prayer meetings. This created much intrigue and led other businessmen in other cities across the United States to start their own prayer meetings. Supporters of the Prayer Revival advanced the notion that the passion for prayer enticed the media to report extensively on the prayer meetings, but it was never considered that the extensive reporting on the prayer meetings was a catalyst that helped to perpetuate the prayer meetings. It is quite possible that both are true.

illustrate that even with primary sources one must take great care when studying and sourcing. There are several reasons for this caution. First, many of these primary sources were written by clergy and not historians and were written more like sermons than historical accounts. The level of hyperbole, providential rhetoric, and anecdotal evidence forces the serious historian to read with a critical eye. Second, many of the primary sources were written in haste and have a considerable amount of internal conflicts. Third, often primary sources conflicted with other contemporary primary sources. Finally, the authors of these sources had personal agendas. None of these cautions make any particular primary source incredible. They do however offer challenges to the historian who attempts to offer a holistic and accurate picture.

Another recurring error was the notion that during the Prayer Revival there was no real organizational activity and that human agency played only an ancillary, or marginal role. Through primary source documentation, this dissertation demonstrated that there was prolific work both prior to and during the Prayer Revival. Bible and Tract societies systematically saturated the urban and rural regions of the country with religious literature, Bibles and the gospel. The Y.M.C.A. worked with great diligence and was responsible for organizing the vast majority of prayer meetings during the Revival. Two years prior to the Prayer Revival, churches throughout the cities of New York and Brooklyn embarked on systematic Sunday School visitation. In December of 1857 there was a convention in Pittsburgh where hundreds of ministers and laity gathered and planned how they may promote and continue the revival. All these activities demonstrated a very high degree of both organization and human agency.

At least three different interpretive forces were present during the Prayer Revival.

Those who embraced a Calvinist ideology tended to ignore and even castigate any notion of human agency. The revival was framed in providential other worldly terms. It started in the mind of God and its catholicity was seen as proof of God's hand. The lay involvement was also heralded as evidence of God's control. The whole event was couched with rhetoric which declared that the Prayer Revival was a demonstration of God's sovereign will. Nineteenth century Calvinists interpreted the Prayer Revival as part of a broader cyclical event. Humanity was nothing more than a passive recipient to God's supernatural powers. Those who were caught up in the Prayer Revival were simply fortunate enough to live during the precise period when God once again visited the country with revival.

Another interpretive force came from the Arminian camp. If Calvinists were considered "other worldly," then the Arminians were very much "this worldly." There was nothing cyclical about revivals. To the Arminian, there was no need to wait for a revival. One simply needed to get his life right and take the initiative and seize the moment. To the Arminian, revivalism was to be a way of life. To the Arminian, two fundamental characteristics of revival were human agency and that revivals were not miraculous. Arminians agreed that a revival started in the mind of God. Where they differed with Calvinists was that they believed revivals were already promised. If a Christian seized the promises of God then revival would naturally occur. God ordained man to be evangelistic, therefore revival would occur via human agency. This led to the second characteristic that there was nothing miraculous about revival. They were phenomenal events, but they were not miraculous.

A third interpretive force that was discussed was that of journalism. Unlike



Calvinism and Arminianism, journalism was not driven by theology. It was driven more by commerce. Though the likes of Horace Greeley considered it his responsibility to promote morality in his paper, he did not hesitate to sensationalize the revival in such a way that his circulation would increase. Through the medium of the printed press and the telegraph, the residents of the United States were able to receive daily intelligence on the progress of the Revival. Unlike any other time in history, the citizens of the United States were in the middle of a revival and they knew it. The press capitalized on this hunger for religious news by publishing and advertising vociferously. The media did not offer any definition of the event, but it did provide the legs to carry the event into every household of the nation.

The question remains, when all the variant sources are placed side by side, what kind of a picture emerges? What was the Prayer Revival of 1857-58? The following statement is a synopsis of the Prayer Revival as defined by the research of this dissertation: The Prayer Revival of 1857-58 was a phenomenal revival that was the crescendo of the Second Great Awakening. It was not a distinct awakening, but a continuation and culmination of an awakening that was already in progress. The systematic visitation of the churches, the indefatigable activities of colporteurs and Y.M.C.A. associations, the increased evangelistic activity and growth of churches across the nation (which started gaining much momentum around January of 1857), the passionate pleas for revival by ministers and the media, the use of the media and telegraph to transmit information across the nation at record speed, and the financial revulsion of October 1857 created a cauldron affect where evangelism, religious activity, pleas for revival, fear, frustration, anticipation, passion and panic all coalesced. Jeremiah

Lanphier's prayer meeting provided the spark needed to ignite all the elements already in the proverbial cauldron and propel the nation into the amazing event known as the Layman's Prayer Revival. It was sudden. It was unanticipated. It was awe inspiring. It was spiritually invigorating. With all of its grandeur and aggrandizement it was without question the event of the century!

## APPENDIX

*Historical Revision and the First Great Awakening*

## The Exaltation of Jonathan Edwards

It is impossible to read any contemporary account of the First Great Awakening without encountering Jonathan Edwards. He, along with George Whitefield, are portrayed as the towering personalities of the movement. Edwin Scott Gaustad declared in *A Religious History of America* that “among the many significant consequences of this movement was its bringing to the fore New England’s most brilliant theologian: Jonathan Edwards.”<sup>1</sup> Leonard Woolsey Bacon, in his *A History of American Christianity* proclaimed that “the authentic facts of the boyhood of Jonathan Edwards read like the myths that adorn the legendary lives of the Saints.”<sup>2</sup> In *Firefall: How God Has Shaped History Through Revivals*, authors Malcom McDow and Alvin L. Reid offered the exalted words that “Edwards’s place in early American Christianity is without peer.” and that “Edward’s Northampton pastorate became a lightening rod for the growing thunderclouds of awakening.”<sup>3</sup>

However, during the actual awakening he was only one of many leading personalities. In 1842, Joseph Tracy published a book titled *The Great Awakening: A History of the Revival of Religion in the Time of Edwards and Whitefield*. Tracy spent much more time elaborating on the toils of Whitefield than of Edwards. Of the twenty chapters, seven are addressed directly to Whitefield’s exploits while only three focus on Edwards.

In chapter thirteen, Tracy was quick to note that during the First Great Awakening, Edwards was not the leading personality in New England. He wrote “it cannot be said that, during all these transactions, Jonathan Edwards was the presiding mind of New England.”<sup>4</sup> Tracy credited Edwards as being “highly esteemed” during his life. He affirmed that Edwards “had done more than any other man to awaken the

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<sup>1</sup>Edwin Scott Gaustad, *A Religious History of America* (New York: Harper and Row, 1990) 57.

<sup>2</sup>Leonard Woolsey Bacon, *A History of American Christianity* (New York: Charles Schribner’s Sons, 1928) 156.

<sup>3</sup>Malcom McDow and Alvin L. Reid, *Firefall: How God Has Shaped History Through Revivals* (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1997) 210-11.

<sup>4</sup>Joseph Tracy, *The Great Awakening: A History of the Revival of Religion in the Time of Edwards and Whitefield*, reprint (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1876. First published in 1842) 213.

ministry of the churches,” But, “New England never... had a presiding mind.” No one man had the ability to “procure the adoption of his views without the aid of others.” Regarding the First Great Awakening in New England, Tracy declared “It was a movement of minds that thought for themselves.”<sup>5</sup>

John Butler in his article “The Great Awakening as Interpretive Fiction” argued that the actual impact of George Whitefield and Jonathan Edwards was overstressed and exaggerated. By as early as 1750 Whitefield’s influence faded considerably. Butler asserted that “he did little to organize and coordinate integrated colonial revivals” and he “failed to exercise significant authority over the ministers he inspired.”<sup>6</sup>

Butler also stressed that Edwards never “organized and coordinated revivals throughout the colonies or even throughout New England.”<sup>7</sup> It is a little known fact that most of Edwards’ major works were not printed in his life time. Those that were printed were usually contracted outside the United States. Since most of his major works that are known today were not printed until after 1790, one must conclude with Butler that “even his intellectual leadership in American theology occurred in the century after his death.”<sup>8</sup>

In 1740, Edwards invited Whitefield to Northampton. What is telling is that his name did not appear in Whitefield’s journal until this visit. When Whitefield did record the meeting he wrote in his journal that “the pastor’s name is Edwards, successor and grandson to the great Stoddard, whose memory will be always precious to my soul.”<sup>9</sup> Whitefield’s only impression of Edwards was that he was Solomon Stoddard’s grandson.

Edwards was pastor of the Northampton church. His grandfather pastored the church for fifty years until his death in 1729. One of the evangelistic methods used by Stoddard was open communion. He invited the unconverted to partake of the Lord’s supper and then preached the gospel to them. Upon the death of his grandfather, Edwards assumed the pastorate. During his pastorate the Northampton church experienced a time of revival. However, in 1748, Edwards determined that communion should only be for the converted and thus closed it to the unchurched. In response, the church forced him to resign.

Historians ascribe to Jonathan Edwards (and perhaps correctly so) a lofty and exalted position in American religious history. However, this position was not recognized by his contemporaries, book publishers, or even his own church where he pastored for nineteen years.

#### The Perception of National Cohesion

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 213.

<sup>6</sup>John Butler, “The Great Awakening as Interpretive Fiction,” *Journal of American History* 69 nos. 1-2 (1982) 311-12.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 312.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 308-12.

<sup>9</sup>*George Whitefield’s Journals* (London, 1960) 476.

Today, the term Great Awakening is synonymous with the period of Edwards and Whitefield. However, the term was not coined until a full century after the event. What is significant is that eighteenth century contemporaries, who lived during the period now known as the Great Awakening, never “homogenized” the colonial religious revivals. They never labeled them “The Great Awakening.”<sup>10</sup> Joseph Conforti, in his article “*The Invention of the Great Awakening, 1795–1842,*” directly challenged the contemporary notion that the Great Awakening was cohesive either nationally, or theologically:

Unlike modern historians, commentators on and participants in the mid-eighteenth-century revivals did not conceive of or describe them as a ‘great’ and ‘general’ awakening—and for good reason. In different corners of colonial America revivals began and reached a peak of religious intensity in a decidedly unsynchronized way, sometimes even decades apart... More than half the colonies experienced nothing more than occasional revivalism at any time during the era of the so-called ‘great’ awakening. In addition, where significant revivalism did occur, its religious sources varied from homegrown Calvinism in New England to German pietism and other international influences in the Middle Colonies. It was only in New England that revivals occurred in a timely, regionally connected and partially coordinated way that approximates the conception of a ‘great’ awakening... The historical reification of the colonial revivals and of New England’s religious experience into a great, general, and transformative historical episode was a product of the Second Great Awakening that was initiated by Jonathan Edwards’s New Divinity disciples.<sup>11</sup>

In 1842 Joseph Tracey published his book *The Great Awakening*. With this title comes the first time on record that the revivals of the eighteenth century all came under the umbrella of one unified movement, or term. Joseph Tracy was the first to coin the term “Great Awakening.” In his preface he wrote:

No history of that revival had ever been attempted. Its importance in itself, and in its influence on the subsequent state of the churches, was universally acknowledged. Yet opinions concerning it were various and discordant, even among evangelical ministers; some thinking it worthy of unmixed eulogy in

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<sup>10</sup>Butler, 307. John Butler rejected the term Great Awakening all together. In his article he concluded with four propositions. First, there was no single “Great Awakening,” and that the pre-revolutionary revivals “should be understood primarily as regional events that occurred in only half the colonies. Second, these revivals occurred in “the colonial backwaters of Western society where they were part of a long-term pattern of erratic movements for spiritual renewal that had long characterized Western Christianity and Protestantism since its birth two centuries earlier.” Third, these revivals had only “modest effects on colonial religion.” Fourth, “the link between the revivals and the American Revolution is virtually nonexistent.” (322-4).

<sup>11</sup>Joseph Conforti, “The Invention of the Great Awakening, 1795–1842,” *Early American Literature* 26 (1991) 100.

public celebrations, others speaking of it with only guarded and qualified condemnation, and others doubting whether it should not be mentioned rather with censure than otherwise. For the last ten years, too, the advocates of all kinds of “measures,” new and old, have been asserting that the events and results of that revival justified their several theories and practices. There was, therefore, evident need of a work, which should furnish the means of suitably appreciating both the good and the evil of that period of religious history.<sup>12</sup>

With this quote, Tracy revealed that in 1840 there was no unified consensus regarding the eighteenth century awakening. Universally, the Christian community knew that something happened, but there was no standard interpretation of the event. Even though Tracy entitled his book *The Great Awakening*, he seldom used the label in his text. In his preface, Tracy elaborated on the sources he utilized in his work. When one looks at the manner in which he qualified his elaborations it becomes evident that his sources almost universally interpreted the eighteenth century revivals as local, or denominational events, and not as national cohesive movements.<sup>13</sup>

In 1989, Mark A. Noll, Nathan O. Hatch, and George M. Marsden collaborated together and published the book titled *The Search for Christian America*<sup>14</sup> This work actually suggested that instead of offering cohesion, the Great Awakening attacked New England’s seventeenth century Puritan synthesis thus producing a very disjointed religious landscape:

First, the theological parties it [the Great Awakening] spawned made a mockery of the ideal of a unified Christian society. Some followers of the revival—the Separates or radical New Lights—went so far as to form entirely new churches, free, as they saw it, from the encrusted decadence of the New England Way. Other, more moderate New Lights, like Edwards himself, worked within the system for a purification of the established churches. A third group, the Old

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<sup>12</sup>Tracy. *The Great Awakening*, iii.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., iv-viii. Tracy wrote “Whitefields account of his own life, his journals... have been exclusively used; for, as the faults in the first editions produced important effects, it is necessary to know what they are... Backus’s “Ecclesiastical History of the Baptists in New England” is an important authority, though it furnishes little matter peculiar to itself.. Trumbull’s “History of Connecticut” gives a valuable account of the revival as it was in that colony, with incidental notices of it in other places... A biography of Edwards should contain almost a complete account of the revival; for in no other way can the influence of his mind on the country and on the world be fully shown. His biographers, however, seem not to have found the requisite materials... *The Constitutional History of the Presbyterian Church*, by Rev. Prof. Hodge, of Princeton has been a valuable assistant... Yet, on some points incidentally noticed, it has appeared necessary to dissent from his conclusions.”

<sup>14</sup>Mark A. Noll, Nathan O. Hatch and George M. Marsden, *The Search for Christian America* (Colorado Springs, CO: Helmers and Howard, 1989).

Calvinists, appreciated the gospel message of the Awakening but feared greatly that the stirrings of revival would destroy the Christian society that had been so lovingly maintained in New England. A final group, the Old Lights, had nothing good to say of the revival whatsoever.<sup>15</sup>

In truth, the end result of the First Great Awakening was anything but a purely cohesive religious society.

Charles Hodge's *Constitutional History of the Presbyterian Church*, a book that Tracy considered valuable, discussed the Presbyterian revivals of the eighteenth century and did not incorporate them into a universal Great Awakening.<sup>16</sup> Robert Baird who published his *Religion in America, or an Account of the Origins*, in 1844, offered a chronological profile of Religion in America. However, in this chronology he does not mention the eighteenth century revivals.<sup>17</sup> It was not until the late nineteenth century that the term "Great Awakening" became a familiar term used by historians and laity to designate the revivals of the eighteenth century.<sup>18</sup>

Jonathan Edwards was without doubt an important personality of the First Great Awakening. Unlike some of this contemporaries, such as the famous Charles Chauncy, he was cognizant that there was a unique movement of God during his lifetime and he wrote about it.<sup>19</sup> However, if Jonathan Edwards' contemporaries did not esteem him as the towering personality of the First Great Awakening—as he is today—then one must ask, why is he allotted such a lofty position in American history.

Also, there is no doubt among historians today that a series of revivals swept through the American colonies in the early 1740s. The question remains, can these

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 50-60.

<sup>16</sup>Charles Hodge, *Constitutional History of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia, 1851) II 2-122.

<sup>17</sup>Robert 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, 1844) 273-75.

<sup>18</sup>Butler, 308.

<sup>19</sup>This footnote was extracted from footnote number six in John Butler's "The Great Awakening as Interpretive Fiction," *Journal of American History*, 69 (vols. 1-2, 1982), 308. Edwards, in *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God*, used numerous phrases to describe the revivals in Northampton. Among those used are "general awakening," "great awakenings," "very general awakening," "great alteration," "revival of religion," "flourishing of religion," "a very great awakening," "awakenings," "legal awakenings," "first awakenings," "awakenings and encouragements," and "God's works." Jonathan Edwards, *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God*, in the *Great Awakening*, ed. C. C. Goen (New Haven, 1972), 145, 150, 153, 155, 156, 160, 162, 163, 164, 167, 168, 210. In none of these instances did Edwards use these phrases to describe religious revivals in all or most of the colonies.

revivals be recognized as a cohesive awakening? If the Great Awakening was not perceived by any contemporaries of the time as a unified and cohesive movement, then why is it portrayed in this manner today? The answer to both questions is simple—historic revision.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>For further reading on revision during the First Great Awakening the following works can be studied: Joseph Conforti. “The Invention of the Great Awakening, 1795–1842.” *Early American Literature* 26 (1991), Joseph Conforti. “Samuel Hopkins and the New Divinity: Theology, Ethics, and Social Reform in Eighteenth Century New England,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 34 (October 1977), 572-89., John Butler. “The Great Awakening as Interpretive Fiction,” *Journal of American History* 69 nos. 1-2 (1982), C. C. Goen. *Revivalism and Seperatism in New England, 1740-1800: Strict Congregationalist and Separate Baptists in the Great Awakening*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962).



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