

Six Former Revivals

The First Great Awakening of 1727 onwards

Commonly called "The Great Awakening" this was certainly not the greatest revival in numerical growth or geographical scope. Nevertheless, it well deserves the title because it was the first discernible occasion that God's Spirit was outpoured simultaneously across different nations.

Historically, the beginning of this awakening can be traced to the Moravian community called "Herrnhut" (the Lord's watch), where a visitation from God was experienced after a period of prayer, repentance and reconciliation in 1727. Nikolas Count Ludwig Von Zinzendorf, a German, was the leader of the movement that began a 24 hour-a-day prayer meeting, which lasted the next 100 years. In the next 65 years that small community sent out 300 radical missionaries. Their revived German Pietism was destined to influence two other harvest fields, which were on God's agenda for that time - England and America.

Griffith Jones, a young Anglican clergyman, often called the 'morning star of the revival,' was making a mark in Britain through his revival preaching for at least 10 years before Theodore Frelinghuysen, a Dutch reformed Pietist, began to see remarkable conversions in America. He preached in 1727 with revival signs following his ministry in New Jersey. The revival spread to the Scottish-Irish Presbyterians under the ministry of Gilbert Tennant, whose father, William, founded the famous "Log College", which later became the Princeton University. Revival then spread to the Baptists of Pennsylvania and Virginia before the extraordinary awakening that occurred on Northampton, Massachusetts, under the ministry of Jonathan Edwards in 1734. Edward's personal experience of revivals and his sharp mind, enabled him to produce a number of revival theologies and pastoral observations which have yet to be surpassed in their wisdom and insight. Thereafter, the revival spread to England and was further advanced in America by a visit of George Whitefield in 1739.

The effects of the revival were phenomenal. Statistics are hard to find, but we know that 150 new Congregational churches began in a 20-year period and 30,000 were added to the church between 1740 and 1742, probably doubling its size. Moral results were equably noticeable. Nine university colleges were established in the colonies. The wild frontier society was thoroughly Christianised. Early missionary desire began to emerge, most notably in the ministry of David Brainerd among the Indians. His journals are essential reading for all those seeking revival.

Back in Britain a massive movement of revival had begun and was bound up with the ministries of two young men, George Whitefield and John Wesley. Both had been members of the Holy Club in Oxford while they were students. Wesley went off, still unconverted, to America to preach to the Indians in 1736, returning in 1738. The only benefit of this venture was his contact with the Moravians, who he could not understand, but for whom he had a great respect. On Wesley's return, Whitefield had been converted and was already preaching with great effect. For 34 years he exercised a most amazing preaching ministry, with revival signs often following him. His eloquence was commanding and convincing, full of vivid pictures and graphic expressions. "His hearers were taken by surprise and carried by storm" (J C Ryle).

The height of Whitefield's ministry was at the famed Cambuslang Awakening in 1742, when 20,000 and 30,000 people gathered to hear him preach, followed by mass weeping and repentance one and a half hours.

During Whitefield's ministry he preached in almost every town of England, Scotland and Wales, crossing the Atlantic seven times; winning countless souls in Boston, New York and Philadelphia. He publicly preached an estimated 18,000 power-packed messages, although none of his 75 recorded sermons do justice to his style and delivery.

Whitefield's friend, John Wesley, must go down in history as the architect of the 18th century evangelical revival. Converted in 1738, at the well-known Aldersgate Street prayer meeting, he proceeded to preach whenever the opportunity afforded itself, usually in church. Then, in 1739, at Whitefield's request, he preached in the

open air at Bristol and followed Whitefield in his preaching places. There began those unusual manifestations which periodically attended his and Whitefield's ministry; falling, crying out, fainting, shrieking, convulsions etc.

Wesley wisely began small societies designed for mutual encouragement and support. These became forerunners of the class-meetings and then of the Methodist Church. They were surely used to conserve the fruits of his revivalistic work. Wesley was an itinerant preacher for 65 years. He traveled an estimated 250,000 miles on horseback to preach 40,000 sermons! He wrote 233 books, including his voluminous journals and a complete commentary on the whole bible. He left behind him 750 preachers in England, 350 in America; 76,968 Methodists in England and 57,621 in America. With Charles, his brother, he penned 9,000 hymns. Wesley's influence has far outrun his long life. His practices and theology has affected Holiness, Revivalist, Pentecostal and Charismatic groups right down to the present day.

Clearly, then this Awakening was truly 'Great' and had notable affect on the majority of countries where Evangelical Christians could be found. It affected the existing church, saw thousands converted and impacted social conditions. Historians usually refer to 1766, the year of the American revolution, as the year by which the revival had spent itself and had began to decline.

The Second Great Awakening of 1792 Onwards

This little-known 'Great Awakening' lasted about 30 years and its immediate effects were extraordinarily widespread. It also gave a remarkable impetus to world missions.

This awakening began as a prayer-movement in 1784, when John Erskine of Edinburgh re-published Jonathan Edward's earnest plea for revival prayer. It was entitled, 'An Humble Attempt to Promote Explicit Agreement and Visible Union of God's People in Extraordinary Prayer for the Revival of Religion and the

Advancement of Christ's Kingdom". Denomination after denomination devoted a monthly Monday evening to prayer, first in Britain, then in the US.

The barriers were great. There was moral decline following the war of independence in America. The French Revolution, infidelity and rationalism in Europe and dwindling congregations everywhere. The beginning of the revival can be traced to the industrial towns of Yorkshire in late 1791, spreading through all areas and denominations. The Methodists alone grew from around 72,000 at Wesley's death in 1791 to almost a quarter of a million within a generation.

At the same time, the churches in Wales became packed again and thousands gathered in the open air. The Haldanes (Robert and James) and Thomas Chalmers, with a few others, saw phenomenal awakenings in Scotland. Ireland too, saw local awakenings, especially among the Methodists.

A remarkable result of these UK revivals was the founding of the British and Foreign Bible Society, The Religious Tract Society, The Baptist Missionary Society, The London Missionary Society, The Church Missionary Society and a host of other evangelistic agencies. It also achieved considerable social reform; evangelical Anglicans successfully fought for the abolition of the slave trade, prisons were reformed, Sunday Schools began and a number of benevolent institutions were commenced.

In the rest of the world similar movements arose. Around 1800 Scandinavia was impacted and in Switzerland a visit of Robert Haldane sparked off revivals among the Reformed churches. Germany experienced revival and achieved lasting social reforms and missionary fervour.

In the US the concept of prayer was very widespread from 1794 and by 1798 the awakening had broken out everywhere. Every state and every evangelical denomination was affected. Timothy Dwight, grandson of Jonathan Edwards, took over Yale College in 1795 and saw over half the students converted in just one year. Other colleges enjoyed similar movements of the Spirit.

Orr reports that there were no emotional extravagances in the east coast revivals. This was far from the case in other areas. Francis Asbury was sent from England, with and other Methodist circuit-riding preachers, to preach in the Frontiers. James McGready and Barton Stone witnessed an astounding revival at Kentucky in 1800, with much trembling, shaking, tears, shouting and fainting. In 1801 Barton Stone was invited to minister at the Cambridge meeting house in Bourbon County. A second visit attracted 20,000 people to a 6-day camp-meeting, which witnessed astounding revival scenes, with hundreds falling at once, with shrieks and shouts and many conversions.

The Frontier camp meetings were often sabotaged by drunks and mockers, many of whom repented and turned to God. All denominations were blessed by this revival. An utterly lawless community was transformed into a God-fearing one. The American Bible Society, American Tract Society, American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Mission and innumerable other societies were founded at this time.

The revival of 1792 onwards lasted around 30 years until around the early 1820's, but was soon followed by the 1830's revival, which lasted about 12 years before a decade of decline.

The Third Great Awakening of 1830 onwards

Fast on the heels of the Second Great Awakening, the third wave of heavenly power crashed on the shores of the evangelical world, this time without the usual decline. Asahel Nettleton and Charles Finney are names which dominate the American scene, while another American, James Caughey was the most notable revival evangelist active in England.

Finney's well documented ministry began in 1830 and netted 100,000 souls within one year! The Methodist Episcopal church steadily increased in the 1830's, especially through camp-meetings. But their numbers doubled in 1840-1842. Other denominations flourished too.

The greatest effect of this revival was felt far beyond the borders of North America and for centuries to come. Finney's philosophy of revival, expressed in his autobiography and explained in his "Revivals of Religion", has subsequently affected thousands of Christians and precipitated revivals around the world.

In the UK revivals were widespread throughout the 1830's. Evangelists like Robert Aitkin and William Haslam held highly successful missions. Brethrenism began during this period, restoring the doctrine of the church and the doctrine of the return of Christ. Its noticeable personalities were J. N. Darby and George Müller who pioneered orphanage work, evangelism and missionary enterprise. Another restoration movement was led by Edward Irving, who strongly believed in the restoration of spiritual gifts and apostolic ministries to the church.

John Elias, Christmas Evans and William Williams stormed Wales with their powerful preaching. Scotland also boasted some great revivalists like John and Horatius Bonar, the revival veteran, Thomas Chalmers, Robert Murray McCheyne, W. H. Burns and his son, William Chalmers Burns.

On the wider international front, there were local revivals in various parts of the world, particularly in Scandinavia, central Europe, South Africa, the Pacific Islands, India, Malabar, and Ceylon.

This awakening, which began in 1830 only lasted about 12 years ending around 1842. It should be noted that this revival period is often seen as one with the former period. There were a constant stream of spasmodic revivals from 1800-1820 which petered out through the next few years and then exploded from about 1830 onwards.

Some of the evangelists, like Asahel Nettleton, played a major role in both periods and some scholars, particularly Orr, refer to this revival time as a 'resurgence.' Nevertheless, because of the 'new measures' and anti-Calvinistic Arminianism of Charles Finney and the astounding influence of this man's ministry it should be seen as quite a separate event.

The Fourth Great Awakening of 1857 Onwards

This Great Awakening (often called the 3rd) was the greatest to date in its extent, effects and lasting impact. It began slowly in Canada, when 21 were saved, and grew steadily until between 25 and forty were converted each day. Slowly reports of small awakenings began to emerge from various states in America. Then, in September 1857 Jeremiah Lanphier, a businessman and convert of Finney's (a decade before), began a noon day prayer meeting on Wednesdays in a New York church. The small but growing numbers decided to meet daily in early October. Within six months over 10,000 business men were meeting in similar meetings across America; confessing sins, being converted and praying for revival. It was a lay-led movement that harvested a million souls in two years. In 1858, from February to June, around 50,000 people a week were added to the church - in a nation whose population was only 30,000,000.

Across the Atlantic another million were won to Christ by 1865. This was in Britain's population of 27,000,000. Ulster saw 100,000 converted, Scotland 30,000, Wales 100,000 and England 500,000.

Evangelistic, missionary and philanthropic enterprises blossomed on every hand. Moody and Sankey enjoyed their greatest success. William and Catherine Booth, converted under the ministry of James Caughey, launched the Salvation Army and attracted great crowds to Christ. Walter and Phoebe Palmer, the American evangelists, saw a remarkable work of the Spirit attend their ministry. Charles Haddon Spurgeon preached to capacity crowds each week, filling the largest halls in London. Hudson Taylor began the China Inland Mission. Gawin Kirkham started the Open Air Mission. Lord Shaftsbury championed for the cause of the young, the poor and the oppressed. Barnardo founded his famous orphanages. David Livingstone and Mary Slessor propagated missionary work in Africa. Such was the impact of this fourth great awakening.

The revival also swept around the world. Rapid growth was reported in continental Europe, western Russia, Australia, The South Seas, South Africa and India.

The Fifth Great Awakening 1880 Onwards

It would be very easy to review this period, 1880 to 1903, as a period of unusual evangelistic effort and success, as most its documentation surrounds the ministry of Dwight L. Moody, together with a host of other ministries that were also born out of the 1857 revival. Orr regards this period also as a 'resurgence.' Certainly the fourth great awakening had produced some highly motivated and anointed ministries, but looking at the world situation, something more than evangelistic success was afoot. It was quite distinct in its character and effects.

It initially centred around the ministry of D L Moody, whose ministry may be described as "highly successful crusade evangelism interspersed with periodic revivalism". Moody began his ministry in Chicago and entered full-time Christian work in 1860, concentrating on his Sunday school and YMCA work. He was God's chosen vessel to take the sparks of the 1857-60 revival to ignite a fresh passion for God and for souls around the world. Moody traveled, with his singing evangelist companion, Ira Sankey, to England a number of times. Spurgeon spoke of the visit of 1873-1875 as "a gracious visitation" and a "very notable ingathering of converts", especially at Newcastle and Edinburgh. Andrew Bonar, too, refers, in his diary to "the tide of real revival in Edinburgh" comparing it with his own experience of revival 35 years earlier. Similar results followed Moody and Sankey as they traversed England, Ireland and Scotland, filling the largest halls in the land.

Moody returned to England in 1881-83 and had an astounding affect on a new breed of evangelists in the U.S., Britain and across the world. His mission in Cambridge, in 1882, marked the beginning of a worldwide interdenominational student missionary movement. Though the YMCA in the States and Christian Unions in the U.K. had their inception during the former revival (1857), Moody's influence transformed these works into powerful missionary movements. The 'Cambridge Seven', including C. T. Studd, were products of Moody's visit and they went to on evangelise China in 1885. By 1912 Studd founded W.E.C., a missionary movement

which had great success in parts of Africa. Wilfred Grenfell, the renowned missionary to Labrador was converted at a tent mission led by Moody in 1885.

Similar results occurred in the US. Thousands of young men volunteered for missionary work and the Anglo-American impetus spread around the world, producing the world's Student Christian Federation, which, in turn, provided a large proportion of the outstanding Christian leaders of the early 20th Century.

Moody founded the Moody Bible Institute in 1883, with an emphasis on missions. The Christian and Missionary Alliance was formed during this time by A. B. Sampson and the Christian Endeavour Movement was born out of a revival in Portland, Maine, in 1880-1881.

Other evangelists, spurred on by Moody, threw themselves into the harvest. Sam Jones, J. Wilber Chapman and Billy Sunday had extraordinary success in North America. Andrew Murray exercised a powerful ministry in South Africa, as did John McNeil in Australia.

Revival hit Japan in the early 1880's, increasing the adult membership from 4,000 to 30,000 in five years. The China Inland Mission experienced a large influx of new missionaries. New missions were planted in many unevangelised fields and revivals were reported in India, Africa, South Africa, Madagascar, Australia, Central and South America.

We may well describe this resurgence "a missionary revival" which took the flame of the 1859 revival even further around the world, ensuring a strong church base in all nations – just in time for the great 20th Century awakening.

The Sixth Great Awakening

The early years of the 20th century witnessed a number of revivals around the world.

It is impossible to understand these revivals apart from their roots in the Holiness Movement which had developed in the late 19th century. Of course, the issue of

'holiness' was not new. John Wesley advocated 'entire sanctification' and 'Christian perfectionism' in his 'Plain Account of Christian Perfection.' The idea that 'sanctification' could be instantaneously experienced subsequent to conversion was a Wesleyan norm. Testimonies to 'experiences of sanctification,' abounded during the 19th century. For example, James Caughey's book entitled 'Methodism in Earnest' is subtitled '...being the history of a great revival in Great Britain; in which 20,000 souls professed faith in Christ, and ten thousand professed sanctification, in about six years, in association with the labours of Rev. James Caughey....'

Phoebe Palmer regularly held meetings for the promotion of holiness and was the first to use the phrase 'baptism of the Holy Spirit' to describe the experience of 'entire sanctification.' Charles Finney also embraced the Wesleyan doctrine of sanctification and his Oberlin presidency successor, Asa Mahan, began to teach the baptism of the Holy Spirit as a baptism of holiness.

The Holiness Movement was nurtured and matured by a variety of ministries so that, by the turn of the century, America (especially) was awash with hundreds of holiness groups. During 1893 and 1900, twenty-three new denominations arose out of this movement. A passion for more power, more holiness, more evangelistic success and a greater outpouring of the Spirit took a hold of the church.

This was the background of the Evangelical and Pentecostal revival movements of the early 20th century.

In 1900 a revival broke out among South African Boer soldiers, who had been captured by the British and transported to various British colonies. At the conclusion of the war, in 1902, they returned to South Africa and the revival returned with them. Gypsy Smith reaped a great harvest there in 1904.

In Japan, during 1900, the church doubled in size as revival swept through many ailing churches.

In 1902, Torrey and Alexander conducted meetings in Melbourne, Australia, resulting in over 8,000 converts. This news spread like wild fire, igniting a passion for prayer and a fresh expectation for God to work in similar ways everywhere.

In 1904, Torrey and Alexandra were in Cardiff, Wales and, in the light of a minimal response to the Gospel, they called for a day of prayer and fasting. Suddenly things changed dramatically and thousands were converted during the next 12 months.

On the day of prayer and fasting (according to Torrey) Evan Roberts received an anointing of the Holy Spirit with great power, in a meeting conducted by Seth Joshua. Here the Welsh Revival began. It was Sept 22nd 1904.

However, the roots of the revival went back further. Young Evan Roberts had been praying for revival and an outpouring of the Holy Spirit for 11 years. Through a vision he received, Roberts believed that God was going to win 100,000 souls. In response to a further vision, he returned home in Loughor from Newcastle Emlyn where he had been enrolled in a Bible College.

During his first few meetings the heavens opened. God's presence seemed to fill the air. Many were prostrated with conviction, others cried for mercy and many were so filled with the Spirit they pleaded with the Lord to stay His hand.

Soon the revival spread to other places in South Wales. Teams of young people assisted preachers like Roberts, Sydney Evans, Seth Joshua, Joseph Jenkins and R. B. Jones. The revival then took hold in North Wales. Within six months 100,000 had come to Christ!

The Welsh Revival was soon the main topic of conversation throughout the Christian world. Wherever the news went it seemed to cause passionate prayer and began to ignite revival fires everywhere. Christians across Great Britain turned to prayer and church membership increased throughout the land.

In Scandinavia a current revival was fanned into a mighty blaze, as a result of the Welsh Revival. Germany was similarly affected as the flame spread across Europe. Austria, Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, the Balkans and Russia experienced awakenings.

The United States felt the after-shock of the Welsh Revival in almost every place. Prayer, conviction and conversion spontaneously occurred, resulting in unusual church growth.

In 1906 the modern Pentecostal Movement was born in Azusa Street, in Los Angeles, after a succession of local revivals through 1905. News of the Welsh Revival encouraged more prayer and suddenly the Holy Spirit descended. Daily meetings were held for the next three years. Visitors flocked there to catch the power of the Spirit and they were not disappointed. No one could have imagined that this was the beginning of the greatest and most effective missionary movement that the world had ever seen. It marked the birth of what was once called 'the third force in Christendom.' Some would argue that, 100 years later, it has grown into the largest and most powerful force.

Almost no country in the world was excluded from the effects of this incredible revival. Almost every nation, on each continent, received new power from heaven, a new passion for prayer and for the lost. Hundreds of thousands came to the Lord.

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