

Theological Equipping Class

The Second Great Awakening

September 19, 2021

What was the Second Great Awakening?

- Roughly between about 1790 and 1840
- So what's an awakening?
 - Conversion
 - Mass conversions = revival
 - Multiple revivals = awakening

Context for Revival

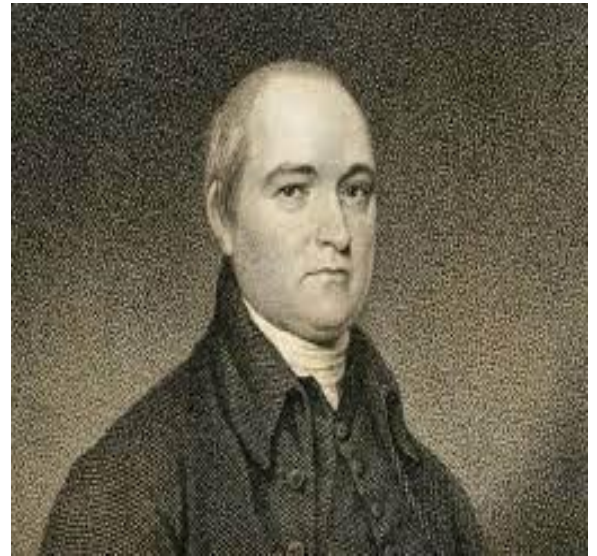
- Cultural changes
 - Revolution
 - Reconstruction
 - Inflation
 - Frontier expansion ("the land beyond the Sabbath")
- Church membership: 5-10%

3 Waves of Revival

1. New England
2. Frontier
3. Finney

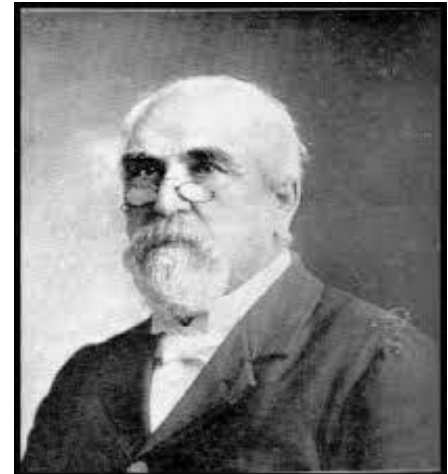
Phase 1: New England

- Timothy Dwight (grandson of Jonathan Edwards)
- In 1795, Dwight becomes president of Yale University
- Some 1/3 of the student body professes faith.



Phase 2:

- James McGready, a Presbyterian minister in Orange County, North Carolina.
- 1796 move to Logan County, KY
- "Communion seasons"
- Camp meetings in KY and TN
- Barton Stone and Cane Ridge, KY (1801)

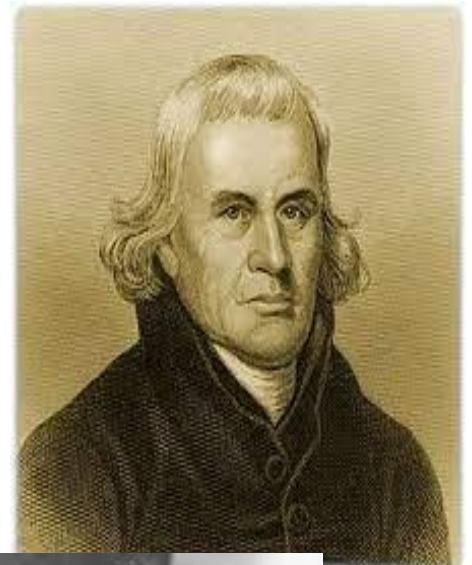




- Strange manifestations: laughter, trembling, falling down, barking
- Presbyterians out, Baptists and Methodists in!
- By the 1830s, Methodists and Baptists had replaced Congregationalists and Presbyterians as the largest denominations in the US.

Francis Asbury (1745-1816) and the Circuit Riders

- Born in Birmingham, England
- In 1771, Wesley asks for volunteers to go to colonial America
- Not originally smooth sailing
- Circuit riders: "there's nothing out today but crows and Methodists"
- Peter Cartwright
- Results



- 1771: 4 Methodist ministers caring for about 300 persons
- 1816: 2,000 Methodist ministers & over 200,000 Methodists in US with several thousand more in Canada
- 1840s: over 1 million Methodists and 4,000 ministers
- 1775: fewer than 1 out of every 800
- by 1812, 1 out of every 36

- "lowering the bar"

Phase 3: Charles Grandison Finney (1792-1865)

- Legal career
- "conversion" in October 1821
- ministry in the "burned over district" of NY
- New measures:
 - theatrical preaching, coarse language, attacking other ministers by name, calling out congregants by name
 - anxious bench
 - protracted meetings
- Why? Break down the hearer psychologically
- But why? "a revival is the result of the right use of the appropriate means." (Finney)
- "It is not a miracle, or dependent on a miracle, in any sense. It is a purely philosophical result of the right use of the constituted means..." (Finney)



The Theology of Charles Finney

- Original sin?
 - Augustine's view of the will vs. Pelagius

- Finney = Pelagian: sinners weren't prevented by nature from coming to Christ, the only obstacle is personal reluctance and indifference. Therefore, the goal of the preacher is to overcome these psychological inhibitions and persuade the will by piling on enticements.
- "Sinners Bound to Change Their Own Hearts" (Finney)
- What is conversion?
 - "It is not a change in substance of soul or body. If it were, sinners could not be required to affect it. Such a change would not constitute a change of moral character. No such change is needed, as the sinner has all the faculties and natural abilities requisite to render perfect obedience to God. All he needs is to be induced to use these powers and attributes as he ought." (Finney)
- What about Justification?
 - For sinners to be forensically pronounced just is impossible and absurd...there can be no justification in a legal or forensic sense, but upon the ground of universal, perfect, and uninterrupted obedience to law. (Finney)
 - The Christian, therefore, is justified no longer than he obeys, and must be condemned when he disobeys...In these respects, then, the sinning Christian and the unconverted sinner are upon precisely the same ground. (Finney)
 - But can he be pardoned and accepted, and justified, in the gospel sense, while sin, any degree of sin, remains in him? Certainly not. (Finney)
- What about the atonement?
 - If he [Christ] had obeyed the Law as our substitute, then why should our own return to personal obedience be insisted upon as a *sine qua non* of our salvation. (Finney)
 - "the atonement, of itself, does not secure the salvation of any one." (Finney)
- A governmental view of the atonement: Christ's death was a demonstration of God's willingness to forgive sins rather than a payment for sin.
- Hamartiology affects soteriology which affects philosophy and practice!
- Heretic not hero
 - Benjamin B. Warfield, the great Princeton professor best summed up Finney's views when he observed that you could remove God from it and it would not change much of anything.

- "Charles Finney, the revivalist of the last century, is a patron saint for most evangelicals. And yet, he denied original sin, the substitutionary atonement, justification, and the need for regeneration by the Holy Spirit. In short, Finney was Pelagian." (Michael Horton)
- Other weird stuff
 - He was a believer in the temperance movement to abolish alcohol.
 - He was a proponent of pacifism.
 - He was sabbatarian
 - He was into phrenology
 - And he was a believer in the Graham diet
 - Lastly, one positive about Finney is that he was an abolitionist!

Controversy and Criticism

- Asahel Nettleton advocated for a "machinery-less evangelism!"
- John Williamson Nevin
 - Spurious revivals are common, and as the fruit of them, false conversions lamentably abound. An anxious bench may be crowded, where no divine influence whatever is felt... Hundreds may be carried through the process of anxious bench conversion, and yet their last state may be worse than the first. (John Williamson Nevin)
- Presbyterian church split: old side and new side
- Response: IT WORKS!

What were the Results of the Awakening? (pros and cons)

1. Actual conversions
2. A whole lot of societies or what we would today call parachurch ministries are founded
3. The dumbing down of Christianity
4. The rise of revivalism
5. The spread of Arminian theology.
6. The Christianization of America
7. The democratization of Christianity

8. The split of denominations
9. The creation of new denominations
10. The rise of various cults
11. Preparation of the soil for liberal theology
12. The Benevolent Empire: a renewed interest in applying the gospel to social issues.