

OVERVIEW OF CHURCH HISTORY IN 36 ILLUSTRATED LECTURES

LECTURE 30 - NINETEENTH CENTURY EVANGELICAL REVIVALS

We'll start with a prayer from the years we're going to study:

O my Father, with my whole heart I praise you for this wondrous life, for prayer, for fellowship, and for experience of my oneness with Jesus. Keep me ever so dwelling and walking in the presence of your glory, that prayer may be the spontaneous expression of my life with you.

Blessed Saviour! with my whole heart I praise you, that you came from heaven to share with me in my needs and cries, and that I might share with you in intercession. And I thank you for taking me into the school of prayer, to teach me the blessedness and the power of a life that is all prayer, that through me your blessings may be dispensed to those around me

Holy Spirit! with deep reverence I thank you for your work in me. It is through you I am lifted up, to share in the fellowship between the Son and the Father, and enter into the life and love of the Holy Trinity. Spirit of God! perfect your work in me, and let my life become one that is unceasingly to the glory of the Father and to the blessing of those around me. Amen.

Andrew Murray (1828-1917) was born in South Africa, came to Aberdeen for seven years for his education, was influenced by the C19 Revivals in Scotland, was soundly converted at the age of 17, and entered into a devotional ministry that we would call a Life of Faith. He prayed for revival, and experienced it in his church when he was 32 years old, and it shaped his future ministry. He travelled extensively and his book *Abide in Christ* was widely read. For him, prayer was crucial and in many ways he captures the spirit of C19 evangelical devotional life:

The rest of this page and part of the next page is an outline of this lecture.

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In preparation, read Cairns, 398-401 (C19 Britain), 426-32 (C19 America); Lion, 544-6; Vos, 135-7 (Second Awakening); Lane, 187-90, (Finney); Great Christians, 259-63 (Moody).

1 INTRODUCTION TO NINETEENTH CENTURY REVIVALS

1.1 Definition of 'Nineteenth Century'

This lecture is the first of two on the C19, which you might reasonably assume means 1800-1899, but most historians treat 'the nineteenth century' as broader than these one hundred years. Two defining events in European history were the French Revolution and the First World War. In the French Revolution, which began in 1789, people rebelled against their rulers, stormed the Bastille, guillotined the gentry and formed a Republic, all of which sent shock-waves through the rest of Europe. The other defining event was the First World War, which began in 1914. These are the 'bookends' of what historians call the C19. Our text-book, Cairns, opens chapter 35, on the C19, with the words: 'Between 1789 and 1914 ...'

1.2 C19 Revivals were different from C18 revivals

On both sides of the Atlantic, C19 Revivals differed in several respects from the C18 Revivals, and we'll note three of these:

(a) Initially, most C19 Revivals were local-church based

Remember that the C18 Revivals were led (? can you 'lead' a Revival - 'headed up') by outstanding personalities - the Englishman George Whitefield, who crossed back and forward between the Old World and the New, and the American Jonathan Edwards and the English Wesley Brothers, John and Charles. The early C19 Revivals, by contrast, were led by pastors in local churches, not travelling evangelists like Whitefield. Some preached Revival in their own churches or they exchanged pulpits with nearby pastors, sometimes with pastors of other denominations. Revivalism sparked inter-denominational cooperation, but it was local-church based. So the first lesson is that God works in different ways in different generations, and you can't necessarily use the model of one generation to reach the next.

(b) The 'laypeoples' Revival' of 1858-9

There was nothing like this in the C18. There was no evangelist, no preacher, not even a local pastor - it was a laypersons' movement. It started in America in 1857, and spread to the British Isles, to many European countries, to South Africa, India, and to the East and West Indies. It swept over Scotland in 1859, reviving churches and promoting social reforms. It was enthusiastically supported by almost all Protestant denominations.

One example. The Moderator of the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland spoke in May 1860 about 'the pregnant cloud' sweeping over America and Ireland, and 'the same precious showers have been and are falling within the limits of our own beloved land. Whole congregations have been seen bending before it like a mighty, rushing wind.' It affected many denominations.

Two things were remarkable about this Revival: (1) it arose from prayer meetings arranged by lay people, who didn't focus on the preaching of evangelists; (2) favourable reports in the Press helped it spread.

It began in various places in America and Canada throughout 1857, initiated by concerned laypeople, concerned for the state of the Church and the Nation, then a business community in Chicago took it up and 2,000 met daily at noon in a theatre, then New York City, where a city missionary went round distributing handbills calling on all Christians, of all denominations, to come at noon to a hall in the city centre to pray, for five or ten minutes or to stay for the whole hour if they could, calling on God for revival. Soon it became necessary to schedule daily meetings at other churches, halls, and theatres, and the movement spread to other cities. There were at least a million conversions in America during 1858, then it spread to Britain, where another million made professions of faith and then to many European countries, and, as mentioned above, to South Africa, India, and East and West Indies, reviving churches and promoting social reforms.

(c) In the second half of the C19, well organized meetings on neutral premises

In the second half of C19, Dwight L. Moody (our Topic, in a moment) changed the nature of 'revival' meetings ('revival' in the American sense - Lecture 29, page 2). He pioneered evangelism in public halls, out-with church buildings, with a city-wide appeal, publicized with advertising techniques - a policy followed by many for the next century or more. Examples in Edinburgh which I have helped to organize include Billy Graham at the Tynecastle Football Stadium in 1954 and at the Murrayfield Rugby Ground in 1989, Stephen Olford for three weeks in the Usher Hall in 1965, Luis Palau in a tent in Meadows in the 1980s and many more. The style popularised by Moody was the format for many modern evangelistic Crusades; we'll see later why it lost its popularity toward the end of the twentieth century, and we will probably not see the like again in our day.

With these three background comments, we'll look first at C19 Revivals in America, and then come to Britain.

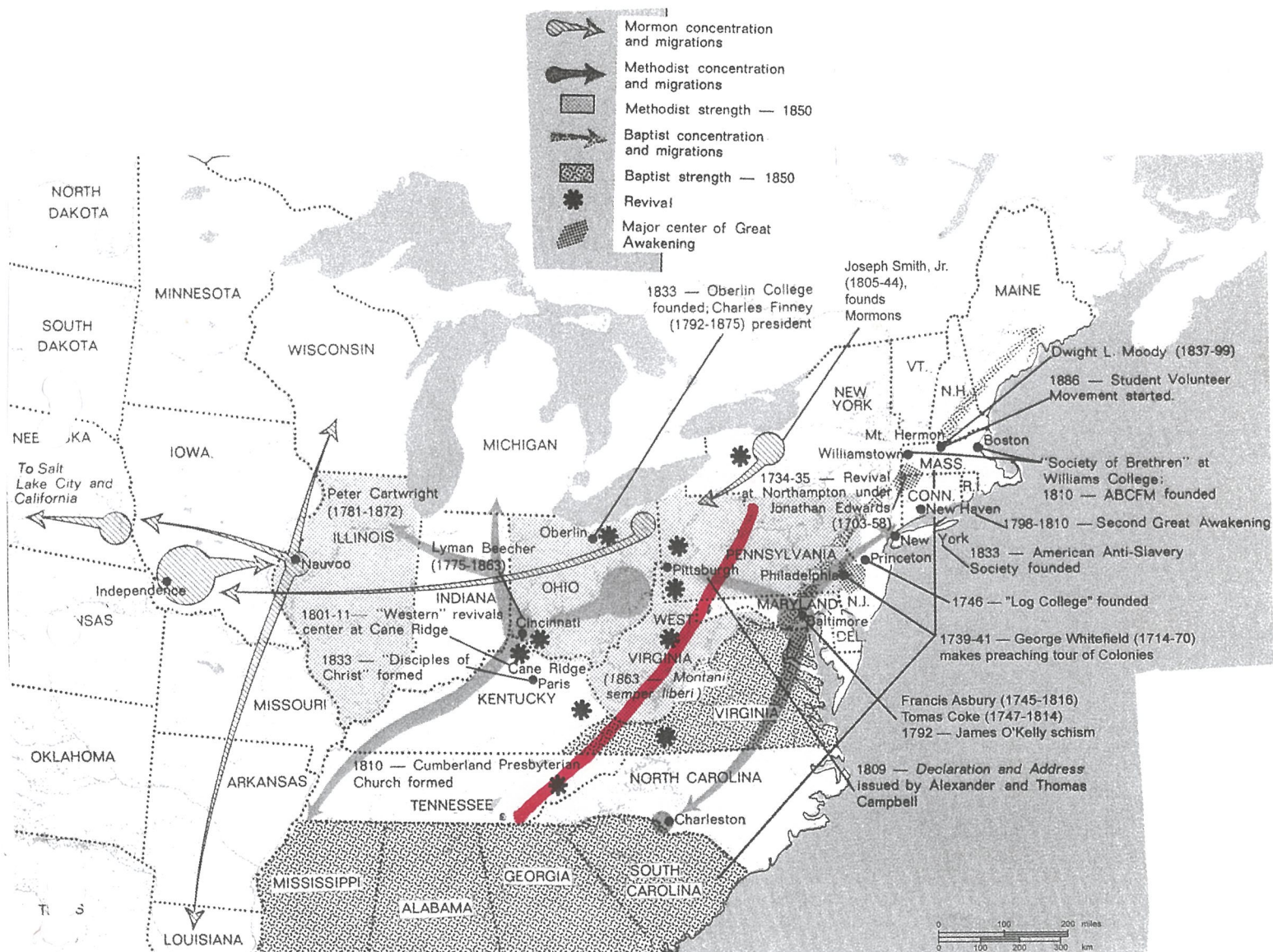
2 NINETEENTH CENTURY REVIVALS IN AMERICA

2.1 Introduction

The C18 Revival in America, which we looked in the last Lecture, was known as the Great Awakening, Sadly, its benefits were lost over the last decades of the C18. We saw some of the reasons for this. (a) Americans were preoccupied with their struggle for independence from Britain, achieved in 1783, (b) they were diverted by the rise of Deism

So, as the C19 dawned (remember, we defined that as 1789), American evangelicals faced two challenges:

- (1) to re-awaken the East of America from the dead hand of deism and Unitarianism and materialism and spiritual indifference, and
- (2) to evangelise, for the first time, the newly settled regions west of the Appellation mountain range. Until the 13 American colonies gained independence from Britain in 1783, European immigrants largely stayed between the sea and Appellation mountains, but after independence they pushed westward, through the mountains, into the vast, wooded, sparsely populated areas - see on the map.



AMERICAN REVIVALS OF RELIGION

map with 'revivals' marked *

"How the West was won" (as they say in films) was wild, boisterous, sometimes ruthless and violent, and certainly lonely; East coast Evangelicals saw the frontier as a mission field, and sent missionaries to follow the westward-moving population. We'll spend some time on that in a moment, but, first, the Second Awakening, revival on the East Coast.

2.2 C19 East Coast Revivals - the Second Awakening

During the first decades of the C19, Eastern America experienced various Revivals, which have been called the Second Awakening. They were largely unemotional, sober - head more than heart, to meet (and answer) the challenge of deism and Unitarianism; they reawakened and reaffirmed evangelical Christianity. For example, the grandson of Jonathan Edwards (last Lecture) became President of Yale University. By classroom lectures and sermons in chapel, he challenged Deism and materialism, and in 1802 one third of the student body were converted in a Revival. Other Colleges were similarly revived and missionary enterprise was awakened; local churches became involved; there was none of the fiery, dramatic preachers like George Whitefield in the mid C18, it was unemotional, but very real.

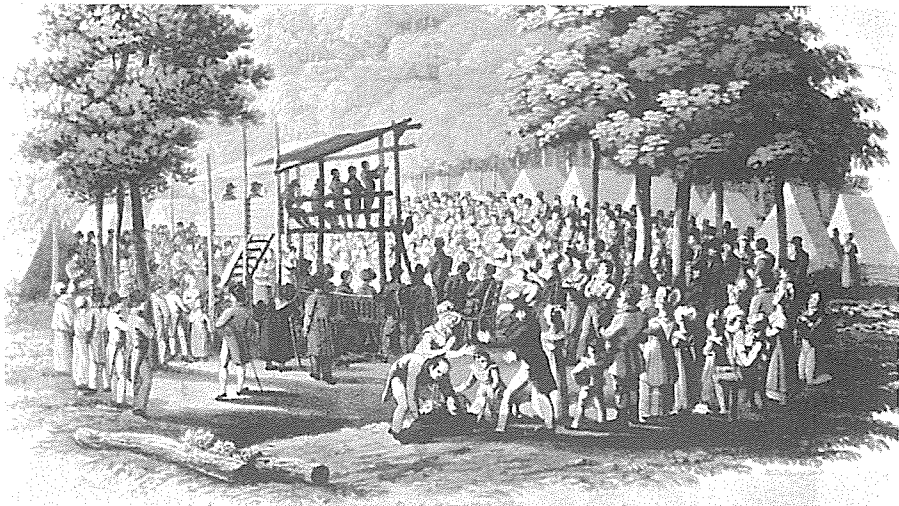
We'll leave the East Coast and turn to something completely new in the history of Revivals - the Camp Meetings on the Western Frontiers; they had a huge impact on Christianity worldwide as the ideas behind them took root in many countries.

2.3 C19 Frontier Revivals - Camp meetings

As mentioned, until the 13 American colonies gained independence from Britain in 1783, European immigrants stayed between sea and Appalachian mountain range, (see the map on the previous page) but after independence they pushed westward, through the mountains, into the vast, wooded, sparsely populated areas, an ever-moving Frontier. By the middle of the C19, half of the American population was west of the Appalachians. East coast Evangelicals saw the frontier as a mission field, and sent missionaries and teachers to follow the westward-moving population. They weren't concerned with deism or Calvinism or any of the other issues affecting the East-coast churches; they wanted a simple gospel and Camp meetings became centres of revival.

A preacher would arrive in an unchurched area and proclaim a 'revival meeting' (in the American sense of 'revival') at a certain time and place - usually at river crossings or intersections of roads. People came from miles around and camped for a week or so, hence the name, Camp meeting - see the tents in the background in this sketch.

It was not unusual for camp meetings to last night and day for many days. Several ministers from various denominations would address the listening thousands from different stands.



Preaching and singing were interspersed with eating and socialising, and these camp meetings were not only evangelistic occasions - they provided social contact and fun in the harsh frontier areas. If you were converted on the frontier, it was a life-transforming experience - you gave up drinking and swearing and gambling, and the legacy of these camp meetings explains the personal and emotional quality of some American evangelism to this day.

Evangelicals followed this up by sending schoolteachers, who were committed Christians, often women who taught the Christian faith along with educating the children. No one was unduly concerned about denominations, as long as a person had a conversion experience. If the only evangelist in the valley was a Baptist or a Methodist or a Presbyterian, those who were converted became Baptists or Methodists or Presbyterians - preaching from the heart, not the head, became the norm in 'the land of the free and the home of the brave'

Camp Meetings inspired a city-man called Charles Finney to shape evangelism /mission/ outreach/ for years to come, and we'll look at him now.

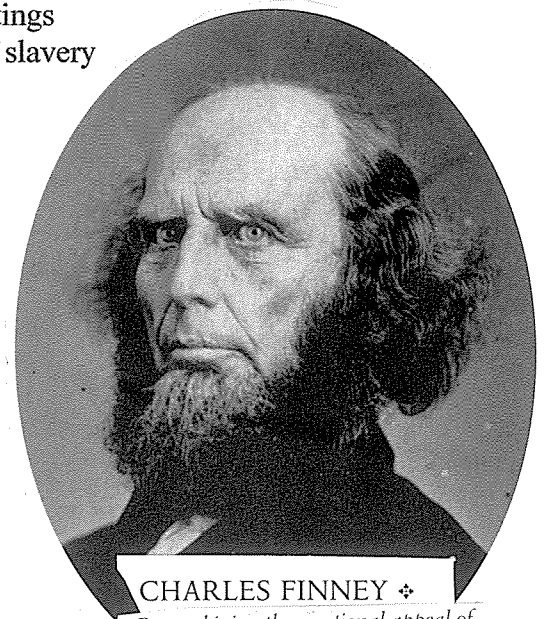
2.4 Charles Finney (1792-1875)

Charles Finney was born in Connecticut, he studied law and became a barrister. He heard people in Court quoting from the Bible, of which he knew nothing, so he was curious, bought and read a Bible and went to the local Presbyterian church. Unknown to him, a girl in the congregation, who later became his wife, organized church prayer meetings to pray for the conversion of this seeker after Christianity. In 1821 he was converted, from his earlier scepticism, and then felt the call to preach the gospel. In 1824 he was ordained into the Presbyterian ministry and began a new style of evangelistic campaigns. His methods were unconventional, and we'll pick up six of them.

- (a) Arminianism, in contrast to the prevailing Calvinism
- (b) support of all Protestant denominations, city-wide
- (c) inviting seekers to come to an 'anxious bench'
- (d) encouragement of midweek church prayer meetings
- (e) concern for social reform, vigorous opponent of slavery
- (f) *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*, 1835

First he saw the effectiveness of the Camp meetings of the frontier evangelists, so he applied their enthusiasm and their methods to the sedate Eastern churches. In particular, he preached that all have the ability to come to Christ, if they choose to - pure Arminianism, in contrast to the prevailing Calvinism, which said that people had to wait for God to draw them. Traditionally, revival had been seen as a sovereign act of God, for which we can pray, but which God sends only when it pleases him.

Finney stressed the freedom and power of the human will, and portrayed conversion as an act of our choosing, within our reach. He asked converts to stand, to signify their decision, and he invited seekers to come to an "anxious bench", which was a pew or a row of seats at the front of the meeting, in public view, where they were counselled while the meeting prayed for them to make a decision for Christ.



CHARLES FINNEY ✦

By combining the emotional appeal of the camp-meeting preachers with the cool logic of a theologian, Charles Grandison Finney (1792-1875) set the standard, in both style and intellectual content, for the evangelists who have since followed him.

At his campaign in the autumn and winter of 1830, one thousand of the ten thousand inhabitants of Rochester, New York, came forward and professed conversion. Forty of them entered the ministry. This dramatic news spread to adjoining towns and another 1,500 made profession of faith and joined their local churches. It was an amazing time.

Second, although Finney's revival meetings were located in one central church building, he sought, and got, the support of Presbyterians, Baptists, Methodists and Anglicans, city-wide - he was a transition figure between individual church-based revivals (the norm until then) and later evangelists like Moody (whom we're coming to), who held their meetings in public arenas rather than in churches;

Third, Finney's Anxious Bench developed into the concept of inviting seekers to go to an inquiry room, instead of a bench at the front. Moody did this, but Billy Sunday and Billy Graham (Lecture 36) reverted to the idea of inviting seekers to walk to the front to be counselled, to express a penitent heart, seeking pardon from Christ. We had an evangelistic Crusade in Edinburgh in 1965, with Stephen Olford as the guest evangelist; I asked him why he did this and he explained that after the Benediction, people naturally went to the doors, speaking to other people, so before the Benediction he asked everyone who wished to talk further about the message to come to the front - it was the best way to ensure that those who were 'seeking' were put in touch with a Counsellor, while the message was still fresh in their heart. It was also, secondarily, a 'witness' to those who knew them that they are making a profession of faith.

The **fourth** new feature was the encouragement of midweek church prayer meetings and these, together with Sunday schools, became the marks of evangelical church life. Is this a 'live' church or a 'dead church'? Answer - does it have a midweek prayer meeting and a Sunday School? The mid-week meetings prayed by name for individual non-believers to be converted. We'll look, later on in this lecture, at the Sunday School Movement.

Fifthly, Finney was concerned for social reform and was a vigorous opponent of slavery. Later encouraging his second wife, Lydia, to hold women's meetings and to pray and speak in public. Evangelical feminists trace their rise to Mrs Finney. To complete his biography, in 1835 Finney became a professor of theology but he remained an active evangelist all his life.

Sixth and last, Finney's book, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*, published in 1835 and rapidly a best seller, stressed the importance of preparation for revival meetings, for advance teams to go ahead and organize events; he implied that if proper preparations are carried out, conversions will follow - meticulous planning - a view that changed the approach to much of evangelism, not just in America but here. Joseph Kemp, who saw revival in Edinburgh in 1905 and 1907, said that he warmed his soul, before preaching, by reading the works of Finney.

Many years ago, I attended a lecture on Revival by Jim Packer, a highly-respected theologian in the Calvinist tradition, Professor of Theology at Regent College in Vancouver, British Columbia and. one of the most influential evangelicals of his generation.

He said something that has stuck in my memory; he said, 'If Finney was right, then we should be doing (x,y,z.); but was Finney right?' Packer was not convinced; well, Finney's methods may be debatable, but they were certainly influential. Finney is considered the father of modern urban mission; he changed the whole concept of mission, planning and organizing his missions but also bringing the spirit and enthusiasm of frontier Camp Meetings to the cities of America, and during two lengthy visits to Britain, in the 1850s and 60s, to this country as well.

The next two names we're going to look at, Dwight L. Moody and Ira D. Sankey, took the whole concept of evangelism a stage further.

TOPIC - DWIGHT L. MOODY (1837-99) - was taken at this point in the Lecture; here, it is printed at the end of the Notes for this Lecture.

Moody was an American, born in Massachusetts in 1837; he left school at 13, went to Boston at 17 and worked in a shoe shop. He was converted through the influence of his Sunday school teacher, moved to Chicago and was a successful salesman. He had a particular interest in the YMCA, and at a YMCA Convention, he met Ira D. Sankey, three years his junior, born in Pennsylvania and a talented singer. Moody persuaded Sankey to come to Chicago for a mission, and they worked together for 25 years.

Moody applied business and advertising techniques to religious revivalism and changed the nature of revival meetings, worldwide.

He pioneered evangelism in public halls or arenas, outwith church buildings, to bring in un-churched people, with a city-wide appeal and the support of many denominations - a policy followed throughout C20, as we'll see in Lecture 36 -

where many Crusades (as they became known in the C20) followed the style of evangelism popularised by Moody and Sankey - they built on his ideas.

We'll look at Moody's methods in a moment, illustrated by his first major British campaign, in Edinburgh in 1873. So:

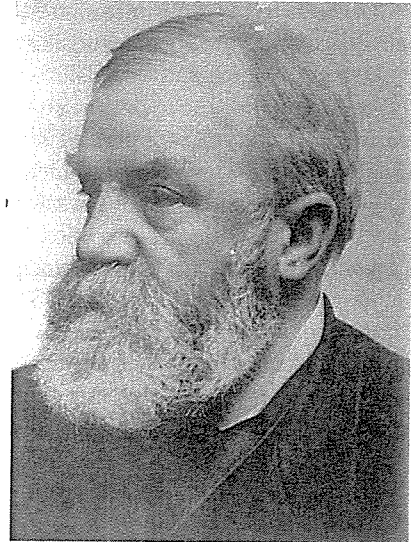
3. NINETEENTH CENTURY REVIVALS IN BRITAIN

3.1 A number of spiritual revivals

Britain didn't suffer the same religious decline that befell America in the late C18, but there was still scope for a number of spiritual revivals, throughout Britain and Europe, during the C19, independently of what was happening in America - we'll look at them in a moment. First, a look at:

3.2 The Haldane brothers, Robert and James

The Haldanes, Robert (1764-1842) and James (1768-1851) were taught the Scriptures by their godly mother, but both embarked on careers as officers in the British Navy as nominal members of the Church of Scotland. Separately, but at almost the same time in 1794, both had a conversion experience and devoted the rest of their lives, and their considerable wealth, to evangelism at home and abroad. Their work throughout Scotland was two-fold, first, itinerant evangelism, and, secondly, building huge non-conformist places of worship called Tabernacles. We'll take a few minutes to look at each of these.



Evangelist Dwight L. Moody. Although he was never ordained, Moody was regarded by many of his contemporaries as the most influential "clergyman" in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

The older brother, Robert, inherited a large estate, Airthrey, near Stirling. He landscaped the grounds and created a man-made loch, rolling lawns, several wooded plantations, a hermitage and a boundary wall which is nearly four miles in length. In 1790 he commissioned the building of Airthrey Castle, all of which, including the lake, is now the site of Stirling University.



Both brothers had been brought up as nominal members of the Church of Scotland, which, at the beginning of the C19, was largely insipid and led by ministers whom nowadays we would call Liberals - the word then was 'Moderatists'. As mentioned, both brothers served as officers in the British Navy, and, separately, but at about the same time in 1794, they were converted.

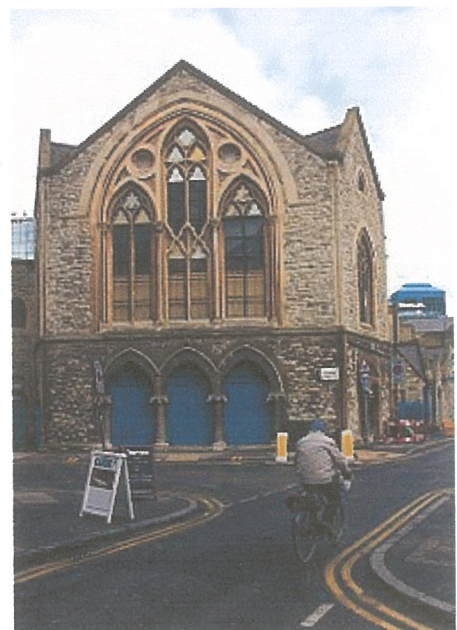
With the enthusiasm of new converts, they set out on evangelistic tours throughout Scotland, financed by Robert selling his estates at Stirling. They attended the morning service in the Parish Church and if the sermon smacked of Moderatism, they rang a handbell after the service and invited everyone to an open air meeting, at which they preached the gospel. They attracted crowds wherever they went, distributing tracts and starting Sunday Schools. There's a tablet on the wall of Lerwick Baptist Church, in Shetland: 'In memory of James Haldane who did much to spread the gospel in Shetland.' (Robert wasn't on that bit of the tour.) They started a Society for the Propagation of the Gospel at Home and also set up a college for training evangelists.

The Church of Scotland opposed them bitterly for two reasons (1) they were laymen, and parish ministers were very protective of their position and (2) they called for nominal Church members to be converted.

During the week, they held meetings in town halls, market places, wherever - as John Wesley had done, but he was an ordained minister. 'Moderatism' ruled in the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland at the time and the Moderator issued a pastoral letter, to be read from every pulpit in the land, deploring the activities of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel at Home, who 'without training or authorization set up schools and hold meetings at which they censure the doctrine and character of the ministers and endeavour to draw away the affections of the people from their pastors.'

That brings us to the second point. Because they were not welcome by the 'Moderates = Liberals' in the Church of Scotland, the Haldanes gathered their converts into Independent Churches, and built huge Tabernacles in the cities, and smaller halls in country districts. The Tabernacle at the top of Leith Walk in Edinburgh - now rebuilt as the Playhouse Theatre - seated 3,200 and, with James Haldane as its pastor - still a layman - it was crowded at every service.

There were two consequences. First, the Haldane revivals led to many non-conformist churches - that is not 'Church of Scotland' - coming into being, Congregational, Baptist (the Haldanes became Baptists in 1808) and others, and, secondly, there was an evangelical revival within the Church of Scotland, which produced some outstanding evangelicals,



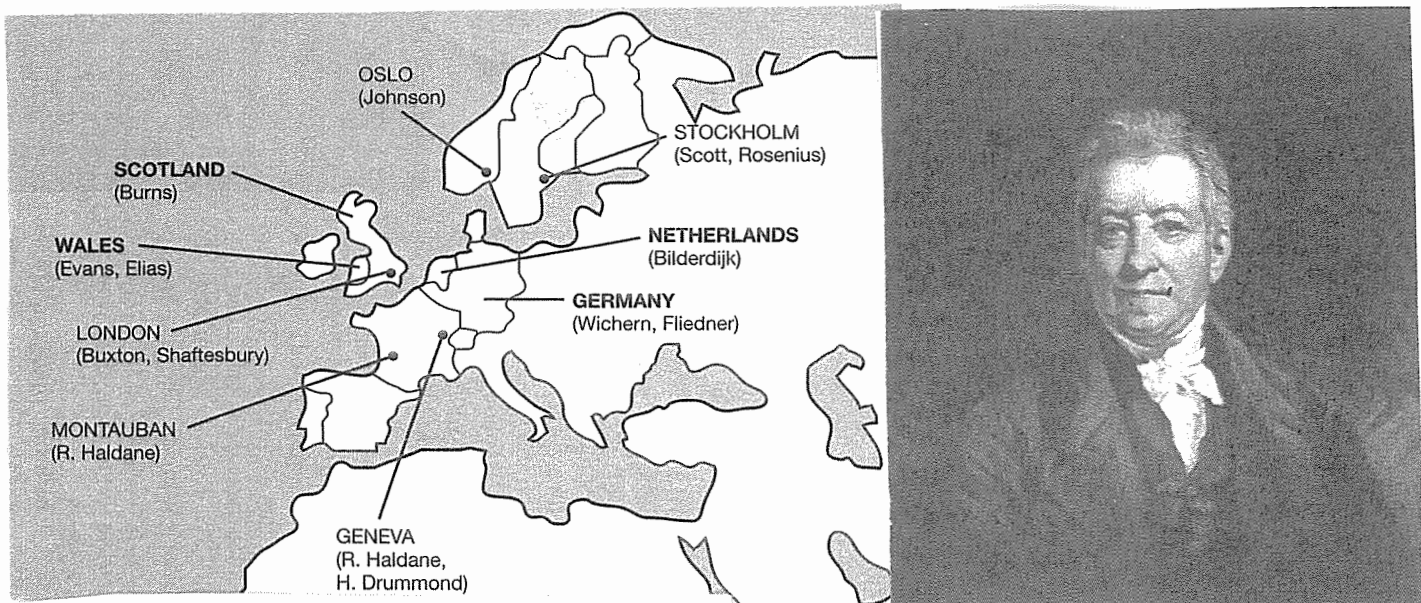
A typical 'Tabernacle' building, still in use today

including two of the names on the chart below - Thomas Chalmers, whom we'll meet when we consider the Disruption in the Church of Scotland in 1843 in Lecture 31, section 5, and Robert Murray McCheyne, a pupil of Chalmers who had an outstanding evangelistic ministry at St. Peter's Church of Scotland in Dundee.

LOCATION	TIME	LEADING REVIVALISTS	RESULTING ORGANIZATIONS
WALES	Mid-18th century	Howell Harris (1714-1773) Daniel Rowland (c.1713-1790) William Williams (1717-1791)	Calvinistic Methodist Church of Wales
	Early 19th century	Christmas Evans (1766-1838) John Elias (1774-1841)	
	Early 20th century	Evan Roberts (1878-1951)	
SCOTLAND	Early-mid-19th century	Robert Haldane (1764-1842) James Haldane (1768-1851) Thomas Chalmers (1780-1847) Robert Murray McCheyne (1814-1843)	Society for the Propagation of the Gospel at Home Free Church of Scotland
SWITZERLAND	Early-mid-19th century	Robert Haldane (1764-1842) Cesar Malan (1787-1864) François Gaussen (1790-1863) J. H. Merle D'Aubigné (1794-1872)	Evangelical Society of Geneva Evangelical Seminary in Geneva
FRANCE	Early-mid-19th century	Frederick Monod (1794-1863) Adolphe Monod (1802-1856)	Union of Evangelical Churches of France <i>Archives Du Christianisme</i>
NETHERLANDS	Late 19th century	Groen van Prinsterer (c.1800-1867) Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920)	Free Reformed Church of the Netherlands Free University of Amsterdam

3.3 Other European Revivals

The Haldane revival movement was not only in Scotland but also on the continent of Europe. This was particularly notable in the Revival in Switzerland in 1815 in which Robert Haldane was a leading figure. I'll not go into detail - the map shows the diversity of what was happening, (Some names/places are different from the chart.)



Map from Cairns, page 408 - Revivals, 1813-1846

See also the map at Cairns page 401

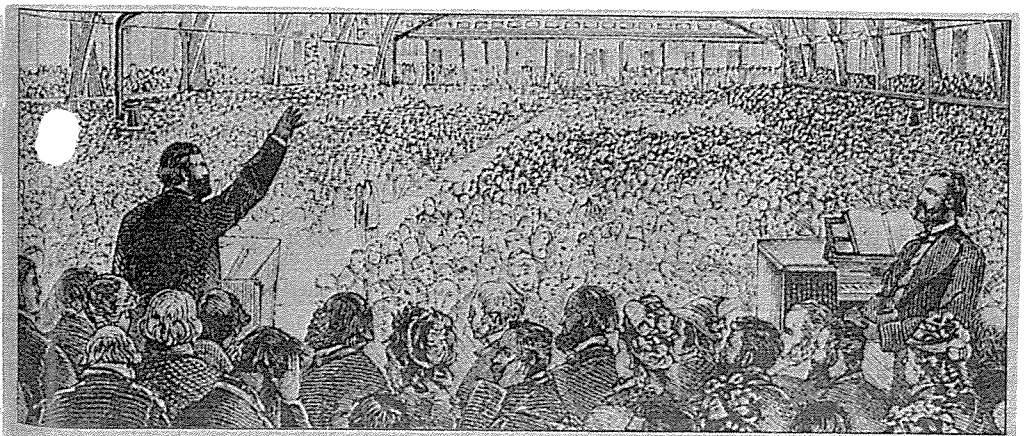
John Haldane

3.4 The Edinburgh Campaigns, 1873/4

A visit to Edinburgh in 1873 by the best-known C19 evangelists, Moody and Sankey, changed the face and concept of evangelism in Britain and Northern Ireland - probably the most significant event in British religious life in the second half of C19.

Dwight L. Moody and Ira D. Sankey landed at Liverpool in June 1873, practically unknown, and held some missions in the north of England. An evangelical Leith minister heard about them, went to see for himself, and invited the Americans to Edinburgh in November, six weeks away. Local ministers took the Assembly Hall on the Mound, then the largest public building in Edinburgh, and soon it was crowded nightly. The point is that until the Edinburgh campaign of 1873-4, these evangelists, and their distinctive methods, were practically unknown in either America or Britain – it was the Edinburgh mission that catapulted them and their methods into the Christian scene.

Moody and Sankey, the revival leaders, conduct a mass rally at Brooklyn, New York. Ira D. Sankey, the hymnwriter and musician, can be seen sitting at the harmonium on the right.



Cairns
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This sketch is of a meeting in Brooklyn, but it is typical of their meetings - Moody preaching and Sankey at the organ.

Four innovations

There were four innovations, which took Edinburgh by surprise. The first was the advertisement that 'Mr. Moody will preach the gospel, and Mr. Sankey will sing the gospel'; it was the first time that solo singing was an integral part of mission. He accompanied himself on a small organ, loaned from the local Carrubbers Close Mission, which locals called the "Kist o' Whistles"; it remained in Carrubbers after Sankey left, until the 1960s, when it was sold to an American, causing quite a fuss in Edinburgh. For one example of the impact of Sankey's singing, using the song 'Ninety and Nine', see <https://www.hymnal.net/en/hymn/h/1077>.

The second innovation was that Moody stressed the joys of heaven and the love of God, demonstrated at Calvary, rather than hell and judgement. This led to (quote) 'the end of the Calvinist ascendancy and the beginning of an era in which evangelical Arminianism would predominate'.

The third innovation was written requests for prayer, either by people themselves or by relatives and friends; the requests were read out by the preacher and people prayed. Those who were 'anxious' were invited to stand up and say so, and there was prayer for them.

The fourth novelty (to Edinburgh, that is) was the 'enquiry meeting' at the end of the service. Experienced Christians personally counselled enquirers and 'Decisions for Christ' became the watchword of the campaign. The permanent effect of this mission, apart from individual conversions, was that Sunday services in many churches became 'user-friendly' and lay-people realized that they, as well as the ordained ministry, had responsibility toward their neighbours.

Moody and Sankey returned to Edinburgh by invitation in 1881, for a campaign that lasted six weeks. This time it was in the Corn Exchange.

Moody was never ordained, but many of his contemporaries regarded him as the most influential "clergyman" in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

Incidentally, I believe that we have seen the end, for our lifetime, of huge city-wide evangelistic campaigns like this - I'll explain why I say that in our last Lecture, 36.

4. CONSEQUENCES OF NINETEENTH REVIVALS

We'll look at six of the many consequences, two now and then four more in Lectures 31 and 32. To give an overall picture, all six are listed here:

Growth of 'Low Church' in Church of England - 4.1 below

'Church' and 'Chapel' - 4.2 below

Creation of religious 'Societies' - Lecture 31

Inspired the modern missionary movement - Lecture 31

Many new denominations - Lecture 31

Evangelical social involvement - Lecture 32

The first two will be explored now:

4.1 'Low Church' and 'High Church' within the Established Church of England

The terms 'Low Church' and 'High Church' have been used in slightly different ways at four different periods in Church History, although the basic definition remains the same. The first was at the Reformation, and we'll not go back to that.

Secondly, during the C18/C19 Revivals in England, the traditionalists in the Church of England were horrified at this revivalist enthusiasm, and as guardians of traditional worship they claimed the high ground, said that they were the 'High Church', and disparagingly called the new styles of worship, with lay people taking part, 'Low Church'.

Thirdly, when Evangelicals became a strong and well-organized movement within the Church of England, revitalizing the Church from within, a position they retained until the latter part of the C19, 'High Churchmen' reacted in the 1830s by forming the 'Oxford Movement' (Lecture 32) and the term 'Low Church' came into wider use, for congregations that were evangelical, stressing the need for personal conversion.

Fourthly, in contemporary usage, today, a High Church (perhaps known as an Anglo-Catholic Church, to be explained in Lecture 32), often holds its services in an opulent building, follows a strict liturgy, and it is sometimes jocularly called 'smells and bells', because of the incense used and the handbells rung during the services. High Church priests have ornate garments, and call themselves 'priests', not ministers.

A Low Church today will have a simple worship service, probably not following any prescribed order, with the preaching more important than the performance of the sacraments, and the minister will not be wearing ornate vestments.

4.2 'Church' and 'Chapel'

In C19 England and Wales, 'Church' and 'Chapel' did not mean Protestant and Catholic - Church meant Church of England. During the C19, there was a deep and fundamental difference between English and Welsh people who worshipped in the Established Church - the Church of England - and those who worshipped in non-conformist churches, Congregational, Methodist, Baptist, etc.; the difference is summed up in the phrase 'Church and Chapel'.

If you had said to some Congregationalists or Methodists or Baptists in C19 England, and (even more) in Wales, 'I see that you are church-goers', they would have replied indignantly, 'no, we're not Church goers, we're Chapel people'. 'Church' and 'Chapel' were very different institutions in English and Welsh society - not in Scotland, for reasons we'll see in a moment.

'Church' meant Church of England, bishops, parishes, using the *Book of Common Prayer*, and being deferential to the Establishment; until 1828, only members of the Church of England could be Members of Parliament; until legislation changed the position in 1871, only students in communion with the Church of England could attend English universities. Until 1871, many Chapel people came to Scotland for their tertiary education.

Chapels by contrast had congregational government, not bishops, their members were drawn ('gathered') from across parish boundaries, their orders of service were their own, as were their public prayers, their hymnbooks were different, they received no State aid and they were not in the least deferential to the Establishment. As the C19 moved on, Chapel people resented being disadvantaged in politics and in higher education, and they became more and more vocal about it. A phrase was coined - 'The non-conformist conscience' meaning that if the Chapel middle and working classes were concerned at what politicians proposed to do, they could bring down the Government. There's a phrase you may have heard quoted, from someone who didn't approve of Chapels, Sir Max Beerbohm, one of the Oscar Wilde set in the late C19: 'The Non-Conformist Conscience makes cowards of us all.' It was powerful.

This was never the position in Scotland, because the Church of Scotland is not an 'established' Church. In Scotland, 'Church' meant all Protestant churches and 'Chapel' usually meant Roman Catholic churches (Charlotte Baptist Chapel in Edinburgh was an exception); the English pairing had no parallel here.

5. TWO RELIGIOUS CENSUS -1851 (England and Wales), 1836 (Scotland)

Every ten years since 1801 (except for 1941, when Britain was at war), there has been a Census of everyone living in the United Kingdom. In the 2001 census, there was a new question, 'What is your religion? Christian, Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Jewish, None.

5.1 England and Wales - 1851

2001 was the first time in the 200 years of census taking that such a question was asked in the Census itself, but in 1851 there was a separate Census in England and Wales, on the same day as the official Census, of Places of Worship and the numbers attending.

Local enumerators collected data about the attendance at every known place of worship on Sunday, 30 March. It was the first and only time, until 2001, that this was done by the United Kingdom government.

Denominational allegiance in England and Wales, 1851.

Denomination	England – congregations	England – estimated attendances	Wales – congregations	Wales – estimated attendances
Roman Catholic	558	288,305	12	3,725
Anglican	13,098	3,415,861	979	112,674
Presbyterian	160	58,762	–	–
Unitarian	202	34,110	27	2,901
Independent	2,604	655,935	640	132,629
Baptist	2,349	499,604	440	92,344
Quaker	363	16,783	8	115
Wesleyan	6,151	924,140	428	58,138
Other Arminian				
Methodist	4,323	565,054	105	8,352
Calvinistic Methodist	48	unknown	780	160,671
Mormon	(Eng + W) 222	19,792		3,368
Total attendances		6,618,538		580,109

There were two surprising findings:

(a) the high number of people attending Nonconformist services - Methodist, Congregationalist, Baptist and others - compared to those attending the Church of England. The Established Church was shocked at the strength of non-conformity in England - nearly half. There were two reasons for this:

(i) The population of England and Wales grew from 9 million in 1800 to 36 million by 1911 - that is 27 million in just over a hundred years. The Established Church wasn't geared to respond to rapid urbanization, to moving populations, but Nonconformist were and they planted churches where the people now were and the number of their congregations increased tenfold between 1772 and 1851.

(ii) The C18/19 Revivals, because the non-conformist churches had the vision for evangelism and most evangelism throughout the country was done by them; This was the C18/19 Revivals working through

(b) the high proportion of working-class people who didn't attend any place of worship, despite the eighteenth-century revivals, whose greatest impact had been among the poor.

The official report on the Census put working-class non-attendance down to:

(1) dislike of the maintenance of social distinctions in church by such means as the system of pew rents, which reinforced a working-class sense of inferiority (see also 1 below), (2) indifference of the churches to the needs of the working classes (see also 2

below), (3) perception of ministers and clergy as doing a job because they were paid to rather than out of conviction (not mentioned in Scotland, below), (4) inability to afford to dress appropriately for worship (see also 3 below), and a lifestyle which left little time for church attendance because of the need to work long hours to earn enough to survive (see also 4 below).

5.2 Scotland, 1836

There was no comparable 'second census' in Scotland, but for the reasons set out on the rest of this page, it seems that the picture in Scotland was very similar to the situation in England and for much the same reasons. It's a sombre picture.

In Scotland, a Parliamentary Commission in 1836 noted that in Edinburgh, out of 162,292 people surveyed, 76,630 belonged to the National Church, 71,271 belonged to dissenting churches (that is, other Presbyterians, Episcopalians, the Haldane churches, Methodists, Baptists, etc.) and 14,391 had no church connection. However, only 74,795 (less than half) attended church regularly. About 45,000 of those who 'rarely attended' were deemed by the Commission to be 'capable of attending but habitually absented themselves from public worship'.

Those who never attended or who were not even on a church roll were 'almost entirely confined to the poorer classes and chiefly to the very lowest'. The Commission recorded four reasons why the poor did not attend church, and they are almost identical with the findings of the 1851 census (facing page):

1. The best seats in church attracted high seat-rents, so the lower-rated seats, and those made available without charge for the poor, 'made those who occupy them marked and distinguished from the rest of the congregation'. Of the four reasons given by the poor for not attending church, this was the one about which they felt most passionately - the social distinction of where you had to sit reinforced a working-class sense of inferiority.

2. The principal reason, which even the poorest admitted frankly was the real one, was total indifference to what the churches stood for. They lived in grinding poverty and were 'so absorbed in their own sufferings that they have no thoughts to bestow on other subjects'.

3. Those who had no 'decent clothing' stayed away because of 'the importance attached by the poorer classes to being well dressed on suitable occasions'. They were embarrassed at their wardrobe and so 'stayed at home'.

4. The need to work long hours for six days a week to earn enough to survive meant they treated Sunday as a day on their own, but the principal reason, which even the poorest admitted frankly was the real one, was total indifference to what the churches stood for. They lived in grinding poverty and were 'so absorbed in their own sufferings that they have no thoughts to bestow on other subjects'.

OVERVIEW OF CHURCH HISTORY IN 36 ILLUSTRATED LECTURES

TOPIC FOR LECTURE 30 - DWIGHT L. MOODY (1837 - 1899)

Please tell us about this gifted American evangelist, something about his biography, his methods, and (if you wish) about the continuing Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, and anything else that you wish to mention about him.

His Edinburgh Campaign of 1853-4 will be covered in some detail in the lecture, after the Topic, but feel free to mention more about it as well.

There are various references to Moody in Cairns (see index, but, curiously, page 431 is not mentioned), Lion Handbook, 545 and several other places - see its index, Vos, 137, and Hanks, Great Christians, 259-263.



Dwight L. Moody