

# The Great Revival of Religion 1740-1745 (The Great Awakening)

*by*  
**Charles Hodge D.D.**

**A critical and historical analysis**

**Reprinted by from the “Trinity Review” of Sept.-Oct. 1991, itself being taken from Hodge’s book: “*The Constitutional History of the Presbyterian Church in the USA*” which was originally published in Philadelphia in 1851. Prof. Hodge was one of the premier Reformed theologians of his day, and taught Systematic Theology at Princeton Seminary.**

Part One.

The great revival, which about a hundred years ago visited so extensively the American churches, is so much implicated with the ecclesiastical history of our own denomination, that the latter cannot be understood without some knowledge of the former. The controversies connected with the revival are identical with the disputes which resulted in the schism which divided the Presbyterian Church in 1741. Before entering, therefore, upon the history of that event, it will be necessary to present the reader with a general survey of that great religious excitement, which arrayed in conflicting parties the friends of religion in every part of the country. This division of sentiment could hardly have occurred, had the revival been one of unmingled purity. Such a revival, however, the church has never seen. Every luminous body is sure to cause shadows in every direction and of every form. Where the Son of man sows wheat, the evil one is sure to sow tares. It must be so. For it needs be that offences come, though woe to those by whom they come.

The men who, either from their character or circumstances, are led to take the most prominent part, during such seasons of excitement, are themselves often carried to extremes, or are so connected with the extravagant, that they are sometimes the last to perceive and the slowest to oppose the evils which so frequently mar the work of God, and burn over the fields which he had just watered with his grace. Opposition to these evils commonly comes from a different quarter; from wise and good men who have been kept out of the focus of the excitement. And it is well that there are such opposers, else the church would soon be over-run with fanaticism.

The term ‘revival’ is commonly used in a very comprehensive sense. It includes all the

phenomena attending a general religious excitement; as well those which spring from God, as those which owe their origin to the infirmities of men. Hence those who favour the work, for what there is divine in it, are often injuriously regarded as the patrons of its concomitant irregularities, and those who oppose what is unreasonable about it, are as improperly denounced as the enemies of religion. It is, therefore, only one expression of that fanaticism which haunts the spirit of revivals, to make such a work a touchstone of character; to regard all as good who favour it, and all as bad who oppose it. That this should be done during the continuance of the excitement, is an evil to be expected and pardoned; but to commit the same error in the historical review of such a period, would admit of no excuse ....

**That the state of religion did rapidly decline after the revival, we have abundant and melancholy evidence.**

That the state of religion did rapidly decline after the revival, we have abundant and melancholy evidence. Even as early as [March] 1744, (Jonathan) Edwards says, “the present state of things in New England is, on many accounts, very melancholy. There is a vast alteration within two years.” God, he adds, was provoked at the spiritual pride and self confidence of the people, and withdrew from them, and “the enemy has come in like a flood in various respects, until the deluge has overwhelmed the whole land. There had been from the beginning a great mixture, especially in some places, of false experiences and false religion with true; but from this time the mixture became much greater, and many were led away into sad delusions.”

In another letter, dated May 23, 1749, (*a mere 4 years* after the “revivals” *Ed.*) he says, “as to the state of religion in these parts of the world, it is, in general, very dark and melancholy.” In the preceding October, when writing to Mr. Erskine of Edinburgh, he communicates to him an extract from a letter to himself, from Governor Belcher of New Jersey, who says,

“The accounts which I receive from time to time, give me too much reason to fear that Arminianism, Arianism, and even Socinianism, in destruction to the doctrines of grace, are daily propagated in the New England colleges.”

In 1750, he writes to Mr. McCulloch (leader of the Cambuslang Revival in Scotland *Ed.*) in the following melancholy strain: “It is indeed now a sorrowful time on this side of the ocean. Iniquity abounds, and the love of many waxes cold. Multitudes of fair and high professors, in one place or another, have sadly backslidden, sinners are desperately hardened; experimental religion is more than ever out of credit with far the greater part; and the doctrines of grace and those principles in religion which do chiefly concern

**Multitudes of fair and high professors, in one place or another, have sadly backslidden, sinners are desperately hardened; experimental religion is more than ever out of credit with far the greater part.....**

the power of godliness, are far more than ever discarded. Arminianism and Pelagianism have made a strange progress within a few years. The Church of England in New England, is, I suppose treble what it was seven years ago. Many professors are gone off to great lengths in enthusiasm and extravagance in their notions and practices. Great contentions, separations, and confusions in our religious state prevail in many parts of the land.”

**In 1752**, in a letter to Mr. Gillespie, relating to his difficulties with his congregation, he says, “It is to be considered that these things have happened when God is greatly withdrawn, and religion was very low, not only in Northampton, but all over New England.” The church in Stonington, Connecticut, was torn to pieces by fanaticism, and a separate congregation erected. The excellent pastor of that place, the Rev. Mr. Fish, a warm friend of the revival, exerted himself in vain to stem the torrent; “and other ministers,” he says, “that came

**“Arminianism and Pelagianism have made a strange progress within a few years.”  
(Jonathan Edwards)**

to our help carried on the same design of correcting the false notions which new converts had embraced about religion; particularly the late judicious and excellent Mr. David Brainerd, who, in this desk, exposed and remonstrated against the same errors, and told me that such false religion as prevailed among my people, had spread almost all the land over.”

That false doctrines increasingly prevailed after the revival is strongly asserted in the letter of Edwards already quoted.

Other proofs of the fact might easily be adduced.

The Rev. John Graham, **in a sermon preached in 1745**, complains that many had gone forth who preached not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, who denied the doctrines of personal election, of original sin, of justification by the perfect righteousness of Christ, imputed by an act of sovereign grace; instantaneous regeneration by the divine energy of special irresistible grace; and of the final perseverance of the saints. “The Pelagian and Arminian errors,” he adds, “cannot but be exceedingly pleasing to the devil; and such as preach them most successfully, are the greatest instruments of supporting his kingdom in the world, and his dominion in the hearts of men. What necessity is then laid upon ministers of the gospel, who see what danger precious souls are in by the spread and prevalence of such pernicious errors, which are like a fog or smoke, sent from the bottomless pit on purpose to prevent the shining of the gospel sun into the hearts of men, to be very close and strict in searching into the principles of such as are candidates for the sacred ministry.”

Somewhat later, **President Clap** (President of Yale College, *Ed.*) found it necessary, on account of the increasing prevalence of error, to write a formal defence of the doctrines of the New England churches. The leading features of the new divinity, of which he complained, were:

1. That the happiness of the creature is the great end of creation.
2. That self-love is the ultimate foundation of all moral obligation.
3. That God cannot control the acts of free agents.
4. That he cannot certainly foreknow, much less decree such acts.
5. That all sin consists in the voluntary transgression of known law; that Adam was not created in a state of holiness, but only had a power to act virtuously; and every man is now born into the world in as perfect a state of rectitude as that in which Adam was created.
6. The actions of moral agents are not free, and consequently have no moral character, unless such agents have plenary ability and full power to the contrary. Hence it is absurd to suppose that God should implant grace or holiness in any man, or keep him from sin.
7. Christ did not die to make satisfaction for sin, and hence there is no need to suppose him to be essentially God, but only a perfect and glorious creature. No great weight ought to be laid upon men's believing Christ's divinity, or any of those speculative points which have been generally received as the peculiar and fundamental doctrines of the gospel; but we ought to have charity for all men, let their speculative principles be what they may, provided they lead moral lives.

These doctrines were a great advance of the Arminian or even Pelagian errors over which President Edwards lamented, and show what might indeed be expected, that the churches had gone from bad to worse. This is certainly a gloomy picture of the state of religion so soon after a revival, regarded as the most extensive the country had ever known. It is drawn not by the enemies, but in a great measure by the best and wisest friends of religion.

This low state of religion, and extensive departure from the truth, in that part of the country where the revival had been most extensive, is certainly prima facie proof that there must have been something very wrong in the revival itself. It may, however, be said, that the decay of religion through the land generally, is perfectly consistent with the purity of the revival and the flourishing state of those particular churches which had experienced its influence. The facts of

**This is certainly a gloomy picture of the state of religion so soon after a revival, regarded as the most extensive the country had ever known. It is drawn not by the enemies, but in a great measure by the best and wisest friends of religion.**

the case, unfortunately, do not allow us the benefit of this assumption. It is no doubt true, that in some congregations . . . religion was in a very desirable state, in the midst of the

general decline; but it is no less certain, that in many instances, in the very places where the revival was the most remarkable, the declension was the most serious. Northampton itself may be taken as an illustration. “That church was pre-eminently a city set upon a hill. Mr. Stoddard, during a remarkably successful ministry, had drawn the attention of American Christians for fifty-seven years. He had also been advantageously known in the mother country.(England). Mr. Edwards had been their minister for twenty-three years. In the respect paid to him as a profound theological writer, he had no competitor from the first establishment of the colonies, and even then, could scarcely find one in England or Scotland. He had also as high a reputation for elevated and fervent piety as for superiority of talents. During the preceding eighty years, that church had been favoured with more numerous and powerful revivals than any church in Christendom.”

This account, though given in the characteristically large style of Edwards’s biographer, is no doubt in the main correct. Here then, if anywhere, we might look for the most favourable results of the revival. During the religious excitement **in the years 1734 and 1735, within six months, more than three hundred persons**, whom Edwards regarded as true converts, were received into the church. **In 1736**, the whole number of communicants was six hundred and twenty, including almost the whole adult population of the town. The **revival of 1740-2**, was considered still more pure and wonderful. What was the state of religion in this highly favoured place, soon after all these revivals? In the judgment of Edwards himself it was deplorably low, both as to Christian temper and adherence to sound doctrine. **In 1744**, when an attempt was made to administer discipline somewhat injudiciously, it is true, as to the manner of doing it, it was strenuously resisted. The whole town was thrown into a blaze. Some of the accused “refused to appear; others, who did appear, behaved with a great degree of insolence, and contempt for the authority of the church, and little or nothing could be done further in the affair.”

**What was the state of religion in this highly favoured place, soon after all these revivals? In the judgment of Edwards himself it was: DEPLORABLY LOW**

From 1744 to 1748, not a single application was made for admission to the church. In 1749, when it became known that Edwards had adopted the opinion that none ought to be admitted to the Lord’s Supper but such as gave satisfactory evidence of conversion, “the town was put into a great ferment; and before he was heard in his own defence, or it was known by many what his principles were, the general cry was to have him dismissed.” That diversity of opinion between a pastor and his people on such a practical point, should lead to a desire for a separation, might not be very discreditable to either party. But when it is known that on this occasion the church treated such a man as Edwards, who not only was an object of veneration to the Christian public, but who behaved in the most Christian manner through the whole controversy, with the greatest injustice and malignity, it must be regarded as proof positive of the low state of religion among them. They refused to allow him to preach on the subject in dispute; they pertinaciously resisted the calling of a fair council to decide the matter; they insisted on Edwards’s dismissal without making any provision for

his expensive family; and when his dismissal had taken place, they shut their pulpit against him, even when they had no one else to occupy it. On the unfounded suspicion that he intended to form a new church in the town, they presented a remonstrance containing direct, grievous, and criminal charges against him, which were really gross slanders. This was not the offence of a few individuals. Almost the whole church took part against Edwards. Such treatment of such a man certainly proves a lamentable state of religion, as far as Christian temper is concerned.

With regard to orthodoxy the case was not much better. **Edwards in a letter to Erskine, in 1750**, says, there seemed to be the utmost danger that the younger generation in Northampton would be carried away with Arminianism as with a flood; that it was not likely that the church would choose a Calvinist as his successor, and that the older people were never so indifferent to things of this nature.

*The explanation which has been proposed of these extraordinary facts, is altogether unsatisfactory.* It is said that the custom which had long prevailed in Northampton, of admitting those to the Lord's Supper who gave no sufficient evidence of conversion, sufficiently accounts for all this ill conduct on the part of the church. But where were the three hundred members whom Edwards regarded as "savingly brought home to Christ," within six months, during the revival of 1734-5? Where were all the fruits of the still more powerful revival of 1740-42? The vast majority of the members of the church had been brought in by Edwards himself, and of their conversion he considered himself

**.....there seemed to be the utmost danger that the younger generation in Northampton would be carried away with Arminianism as with a flood; that it was not likely that the church would choose a Calvinist as his successor, and that the older people were never so indifferent to things of this nature....**

as having sufficient evidence. The habit of free admission to the Lord's table, therefore, by no means accounts for the painful facts above referred to. After all that had been published to the world of the power of religion in Northampton, the Christian public were entitled to expect to see the people established in the truth, and an example in holiness to other churches. Instead of this, we find them resisting the administration of discipline in less than eighteen months after the revival; alienated from their pastor; indifferent to the truth, and soon driving from among them the first minister of his age, with every aggravating circumstance of ingratitude and injustice.

It is all in vain to talk of the religion of such a people. *This fact demonstrates that there must have been something wrong in these revivals, even under the eye and guidance of Edwards, from the beginning.* There must have been many spurious conversions, and much false religion which at the time were regarded as genuine. This assumption is noth-

ing more than the facts demand, nor more than Edwards himself frequently acknowledged. There is the most marked difference between those of his writings which were published during the revival, and those which appeared after the excitement had subsided. In the account which he wrote in 1736, of the revival of the two preceding years, there is scarcely an intimation of any dissatisfaction with its character. Yet, in 1743, he speaks of it as having been very far from pure; and in 1751, he lamented his not having had boldness to testify against some glaring false appearances, and counterfeits of religion, which became a dreadful source of spiritual pride, and of other things exceedingly contrary to true Christianity. In like manner, in the contemporaneous account of the revival of 1740-42, he complains of nothing but of some disorders introduced towards the close

**There is the most marked difference between those of his (Edwards') writings which were published *during* the revival, and those which appeared *after* the excitement had subsided.**

of the year 1742, from other congregations; whereas, in his letters written a few years later, he acknowledges that many things were wrong from the first. This is, indeed, very natural. While in the midst of the excitement, seeing and feeling much that he could not but regard as the result of divine influence, he was led to encourage many things which soon brought forth the bitter fruits of disorder and corruption. **His correspondence affords abundant evidence how fully sensible he became of the extent to which this revival was corrupted with false religion.**

When his Scottish friends had informed him of the religious excitement then prevailing in some parts of Holland, **he wrote to Mr. Erskine, June 28, 1751**, expressing his anxiety that the people might be led to “distinguish between true and false religion; between those experiences which are from the saving influence of the Spirit of God, and those which are from Satan transformed into an angel of light.” He wished that they had the experience of the church of God in America, on this subject, as they would need all the warning that could be given them. “The temptation,” he adds, “to religious people in such a state to countenance the glaring, shining counterfeits of religion, without distinguishing them from the reality,” is so strong that they can hardly be restrained from committing the mistake.

In reference to the wish of the Dutch ministers to have attestations of the permanently good effects of the revivals in Scotland and America, he says, “I think it fit they should know the very truth in the case, and that things should be represented neither better nor worse than they are. If they should be represented worse, it would give encouragement to unreasonable opposers; if better it might prevent a most necessary caution among the true friends of the awakening. There are, undoubtedly, very many instances in New England, in the whole, of the perseverance of such as were thought to have received the saving benefit of the late revivals of religion, and of their continuing to walk in newness of life as becometh saints; instances which are incontestable. But I believe the proportion here is not so great as in Scotland. I cannot say that the greater portion of the supposed converts give

reason to suppose, by their conversation, that they are true converts. The proportion may, perhaps, be more truly represented by the proportion of the blossoms on a tree which abide and come to mature fruit, to the whole number of blossoms in the spring.” . . . .

**These passages give a melancholy account of the results of the great religious excitement now under consideration.** In the preceding estimate, Edwards does not speak of those who were merely awakened, or who were for a time the subjects of serious impressions, but of those who were regarded as converts. It is of these, he says, that only a small portion proved to be genuine. If this be so, it certainly proves that, apart from the errors and disorders universally reprobated by the judicious friends of the revival, there were serious mistakes committed by those friends themselves. If it was difficult then, it must be much more so now, to detect the causes of the spurious excitement which then so extensively prevailed. Two of these causes, however, are so obvious that they can hardly fail to attract attention. These were laying too much stress on feelings excited through the imagination, and allowing, and indeed encouraging the free and loud manifestation of feeling during public or social worship.

It is one office of the imagination to recall and reconstruct conceptions of any object which affects the senses. It is by this faculty that we form mental images, or lively conceptions of the objects of sense. It is to this power that graphic descriptions of absent or imaginary scenes are addressed; and it is by the agency of this faculty that oratory, for the most part, exerts its power over the feelings. That a very large portion of the emotions so strongly felt, and so openly expressed during this revival, arose not from spiritual apprehensions of divine truth, but from mere imaginations or mental images, is evident from two sources; first, from the descriptions given of the exercises themselves; and, secondly, from the avowal of the propriety of this method of exciting feeling in connection with religious subjects. Had we no definite information as to this point, the general account of the effects of the preaching of Whitefield and others would satisfy us that, to a very great extent, the results were to be attributed to no supernatural influence, but to the natural powers of oratory. There is no subject so universally interesting as religion, and therefore there is none which can be made the cause of such general and powerful excitement; yet it cannot be doubted that had Whitefield selected any worthy object of benevolence or patriotism, he would have produced a great commotion in the public mind. When therefore he came to address men on a subject of infinite importance, of the deepest personal concern, we need not be surprised at the effects which he produced. **The man who could thaw the icy propriety of Bolingbroke; who could extort gold from Franklin, though armed with a determination to give only copper; or set Hopkinson, for the time being, beside himself, might be expected to control at**

**.....the preaching of Whitefield and others would satisfy us that, to a very great extent, the results were to be attributed to no supernatural influence, but to the natural powers of oratory.**

will the passions of the young, the ignorant, and the excitable. It was far from being denied questioned that his preaching was, to an extraordinary degree, attended by a divine influence. That influence needed to account for the repentance, faith, and holiness, which were in a multitude of cases the result of his ministrations. It is not needed, however, to account for the loud outcries, faintings, and bodily agitations which attended his course. These are sufficiently explained by his vivid descriptions of hell, of heaven, of Christ, and a future judgment, addressed to congregated thousands of excited and sympathizing hearers, accompanied by the most stirring appeals to the passions, and all delivered with consummate skill of voice and manner.

It was under such preaching, the people, as he tells us, soon began to melt, to weep, to cry out, and to faint. That a large part of these results was to be attributed to natural causes, can hardly be doubted; yet who could discriminate between what was the work of the orator, and what was the work of the Spirit of God? Who could tell whether the sorrow, the joy, and the love expressed and felt, were the result of lively imaginations, or of spiritual apprehensions of the truth? The two classes of exercises were confounded; both passed for genuine, until bitter experience disclosed the mistake. It is evident that Whitefield had no opportunity of making any such discrimination; and that for the time at least, he regarded all meltings, all sorrowing, and all joy following his fervid preaching, as evidence of the divine presence. It is not, however, these general accounts so much as the more particular detail of the exercises of the subjects of this revival, which shows how much of the feeling then prevalent was due to the imagination.

**That a large part of these results was to be attributed to natural causes, can hardly be doubted.....**

Thus Edwards speaks of those who had a lively picture in their minds of hell as a dreadful furnace, of Christ as one of glorious majesty, and of a sweet and gracious aspect, or as of one hanging on the cross, and blood running from his wounds. Great stress was often laid upon these views of “an outward Christ,” and upon the feeling resulting from such conceptions. Though Edwards was from the beginning fully aware that there was no true religion in such exercises; and though in his work on the Affections, written in 1746, he enters largely on the danger of delusion from this source, it is very evident that at this period he was not properly impressed with a sense of guarding against this evil. Just after stating how commonly such mental pictures were cherished by the people, he adds, “surely such things will not be wondered at by those who have observed, how any strong affections about temporal matters will excite lively ideas and pictures of different things in the mind.”

In his sermon on the distinguishing marks of a work of the Spirit of God, he goes much further. He there says, “Such is our nature, that we cannot think of things invisible without some degree of imagination. I dare appeal to any man of the greatest powers of mind, whether he is able to fix his thoughts on God, or Christ, or the things of another world without imaginary ideas attending his meditation.” By imaginary ideas, he means mental images, or pictures. In the same connection, he adds, “the more engaged the mind is, and

the more intense the contemplation and affection, still the more lively and strong will the imaginary idea ordinarily be." Hence, he insists, "that it is no argument that a work is not a work of the Spirit of God, that some who are the subjects of it, have been in a kind of ecstasy, wherein they have been carried beyond themselves, and have had their minds transported in a train of strong and pleasing imaginations, and a kind of visions, as though they were rapt up even to heaven, and there saw glorious sights."

It is not to be denied that there is a legitimate use of the imagination in religion. The Bible often addresses itself to this faculty. The descriptions which it gives of the future glory of the church, and of heaven itself, are little else than a series of images; not that we should conceive of the millennium as of a time when the lion and lamb shall feed together, or of heaven as a golden city, but that we may have a more lively impression of the absence of all destructive passions, when Christ shall reign on earth, and that we may learn to think of heaven as a state of surpassing glory.

In all such cases, it is the thought which the figure is meant to convey, and not the figure itself, that the mind rests upon in all truly religious exercises. When, on the other hand, the mind fixes on the image, and not upon the thought, and inflames itself with these imaginations, the result is mere curious excitement. So far then as the imagination is used to render the thoughts which the understanding forms of spiritual things distinct and vivid, so far may it minister to our religious improvement.

But when it is made a mere chamber of imagery, in which the soul alarms or delights itself with spectres, *it becomes the source of all manner of delusions.*

It may still further be admitted, that images borrowed from sensible objects often mix with and disturb the truly spiritual contemplations of the Christian, but this is very different from teaching that we cannot think of God, or Christ, or spiritual subjects, without some pictorial representations of them. If such is the constitution of our nature that we must have such imaginary ideas of God himself, then we ought to have and to cherish them. But by the definition, these ideas are nothing but the reproduction and varied combinations of past impressions on the senses. To say, therefore, that we must have such ideas of God, is to say that we must conceive of him and worship him under some corporeal form, which is nothing but refined idolatry, and is as much forbidden as the worship of stocks or stones. It certainly needs no argument to show that we cannot form any pictorial representation of a spirit, and least of all, of God; or that such representations of Christ or heaven cannot be the source of any truly religious affections. What have such mental images to do with the apprehension of the evil of sin, of the beauty of holiness, of the mercy of God, or the merits of Christ, or with any of those truths on which the mind acts when under the influence of the Spirit of God?

From the accounts of this revival already quoted, from the detail given of the experience of many of its subjects, and especially from the arguments and apologies just referred to, it is evident that one great source of the false religion, which it is admitted, then prevailed, was the countenance given to these impressions on the imagination and to the feelings thus

excited. It was in vain to tell the people they must distinguish between what was imaginary and what was spiritual; that there was no religion in these lively mental images, when they were at the same time told that it was necessary they should have them, and that the more intense the religious affection, the more vivid would these pictures be. Under such instruction they would strive to form such imaginations; they would dote on them, inflame themselves with them, and consider the vividness of the image, and the violence of the consequent emotion, as the measure of their religious attainment.

How deeply sensible Edwards became of the evil which actually arose from this source, may be learned from his work on the **Affections**. When an "affection arises from the imagination, and is built upon it, as its foundation, instead of a spiritual illumination or discovery, then is the affection, however elevated, worthless and vain." And in another place he says "When the Spirit of God is poured out, to begin a glorious work, then the old Serpent, as fast as possible, and by all means, introduces this bastard religion, and mingles it with the true; which has from time to time, brought all things into confusion. The pernicious consequence of it is not easily imagined or conceived of, until we see and are amazed with the awful effects of it, and the dismal desolation it has made. If the revival of true religion be very great in its beginning, yet if this bastard comes in, there is danger of its doing as Gideon's bastard, Abimelech, did, who never left until he had slain all his threescore and ten true-born sons, excepting one, that was forced to flee. The imagination or phantasy seems to be that wherein are formed all those delusions of Satan, which those are carried away with, who are under the influence of false religion, and counterfeit graces and affections. Here is the devil's grand lurking-place, the very nest of foul and delusive spirits."

If Edwards, who was facile princeps among the friends of this revival, could, during its early stages, fall into the error of countenancing the delusions which he afterwards so severely condemned, what could be expected of Whitefield and others, who at this time, (dates must not be neglected, a few years made a great difference both in persons and things) passed rapidly from place to place, neither making nor being able to make, the least distinction between the effects of an excited imagination, and the exercises of genuine religion? That they would test the experience of their converts by its fruits, is not denied; but that they considered all the commotions which attended their ministrations, as proofs of the Spirit's presence, is evident from their indiscriminate rejoicing over all such manifestations of feeling. These violent agitations produced through the medium of the imagination, though sufficiently prevalent, during the revival in this country, (the USA) were perhaps still more frequent in England, under the ministrations of Wesley, and, combined with certain peculiarities of his system, have given to the religion of the Methodists its peculiar, and, so far as it is peculiar, its undesirable characteristic.

Another serious evil was the encouragement given to loud outcries, faintings, and bodily agitations during the time of public worship. It is remarkable that these effects of the excitement prevailed generally, not only in this country, but also in Scotland and England. The fanatical portion of the friends of the revival not only encouraged these exhibitions, but regarded them as proofs of the presence and power of the Spirit of God. The more judicious never went to this extreme, though most of them regarded them with favour. This was the

case with Whitefield, Edwards, and Blair.

The manner in which Whitefield describes the scenes at Nottingham and Fagg's Manor, and others of a similar character, shows that he did not disapprove of these agitations. He says he never saw a more glorious sight, than when the people were fainting all round him, and crying out in such a manner as to drown his own voice. Edwards took them decidedly under his protection. He not only mentions, without the slightest indication of disapprobation, that his church was often filled with outcries, faintings, and convulsions, but takes great pains to vindicate the revival from all objection on that account. Though such effects were not, in his view, any decisive evidence of the kind of influence by which they were produced, he contended that it was easy to account for their being produced by a "right influence and a proper sense of things." He says, ministers are not to be blamed for speaking of these things "as probable tokens of God's presence, and arguments of the success of preaching, because I think they are so indeed. I confess that when I see a great outcry in a congregation, I rejoice in it much more than merely in an appearance of solemn attention, and a show of affection by weeping. To rejoice that the work of God is carried on calmly and without much ado, is in effect to rejoice that it is carried on with less power, or that there is not so much of the influence of God's Spirit." In the same connection he says, that when these outcries, faintings, and other bodily effects attended the preaching of the truth, he did not "scruple to speak of them, to rejoice in them, and bless God for them," as probable tokens of his presence.

The Boston ministers, on the other hand, appear to have disapproved of these things entirely, as they mention their satisfaction that there had been little or nothing of such "blemishes

of the work" among their churches. The same view was taken of them by President Dickinson, William Tennent of Freehold, and many others. That the fanatics, who regarded these bodily agitations and outcries as evidences of conversion, committed a great and dangerous mistake, need not be argued; and that Edwards and others, who rejoiced over and encouraged them, as probable tokens of the favour of God, fell into an error scarcely less injurious to religion, will, at the present day, (c.a. 1850), hardly be questioned. That such effects frequently attend religious excitements is no proof that they proceed from a good source. They may owe their origin to the corrupt or at least merely natural feelings, which always mingle, to a greater or less degree, with strong religious exercises. It is a matter of great practical importance to learn what is the true cause of these effects; to ascertain

**That the fanatics, who regarded these bodily agitations and outcries as evidences of conversion, committed a great and dangerous mistake, need not be argued; and that Edwards and others, who rejoiced over and encouraged them, as probable tokens of the favour of God, fell into an error scarcely less injurious to religion.....**

whether they proceed from those feelings which are produced by the Spirit of God, or from those which arise from other sources. If the former, we ought to rejoice over them; if the latter, they ought to be repressed and discountenanced.

That such bodily agitations owe their origin not to any divine influence, but to natural causes, may be inferred from the fact that these latter are adequate to their production. They are not confined to those persons whose subsequent conduct proves them to be the subjects of the grace of God; but, to say the least, are quite as frequently experienced by those who know nothing of true religion. Instead, therefore, of being referred to those feelings which are peculiar to the people of God, they may safely be referred to those which are common to them and to unrenewed men. Besides, such effects are not peculiar to what we call revivals of religion; they have prevailed, in seasons of general excitement, in all ages and in all parts of the world, among pagans, papists, and every sect of fanatics which has ever disgraced the Christian church. *We are, therefore, not called upon to regard such things with much favour, or to look upon them as probable tokens of the presence of God.*

**Such effects are not peculiar to what we call revivals of religion; they have prevailed, in seasons of general excitement, in all ages and in all parts of the world, among pagans, papists, and every sect of fanatics which has ever disgraced the Christian church.**

SEE CONTINUATION PART TWO FOLLOWING ON BRF WEB-SITE.

**The man who has had most experience of the terrible nature of indwelling corruption, is the one who, in fellowship with the Apostle, exclaims, “O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?”**

**It is as irrational, therefore, as it is unscriptural to say that such intense feeling for sin is produced as at once overwhelms body and mind, rendering the individual powerless and insensible.**

***From: “An Enquiry into the Scriptural Character of the Revival of 1859” by Rev. William Hamilton.***