The Great Revival of Religion 1740 - 1745 (The Great Awakeming)

Charles Hodge D.D.

A critical and historical analysis

Reprinted 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 Two.

Concluded from Page 22 in BRJ Issue No. 19 This part originally published in BRJ No. 20, Oct - Dec. 1997

That the bodily agitations attendant on revivals of religion are of the same nature, and **L** attributable to the same cause, as the convulsions of enthusiasts, is in the highest degree probable, because they arise under the same circumstances, are propagated by the same means, and cured by the same treatment. They arise in seasons of great, and especially of general excitement; they, in a great majority of cases, affect the ignorant rather than the enlightened, those in whom the imagination predominates over the reason, and especially those who are of a nervous temperament, rather than those of an opposite character. These affections all propagate themselves by a kind of infection. This circumstance is characteristic of this whole class of nervous diseases. Physicians enumerate among the causes of epilepsy "seeing a person in convulsions." This fact was so well known, that the Romans made a law, that if any one should be seized with epilepsy during the meeting of the comitia, the assembly should be immediately dissolved. This disease occurred so frequently in those exciting meetings, and was propagated so rapidly, that it was called the *morbus comi* tialis. Among the enthusiasts who frequented the tomb of the Abbe Paris, in the early part of the last century, convulsions were of frequent occurrence, and never failed to prove

infectious. During a religious celebration in the church of Saint Roch, at Paris, a young lady was seized with convulsions, and within half an hour between fifty and sixty were similarly affected. A multitude of facts of the same kind might be adduced. Sometimes such affections become epidemic, spreading over whole provinces. In the fifteenth century, a violent nervous disease, attended with convulsions, and other analogous symptoms, extended over a great part of Germany, especially affecting the inmates of the convents.

In the next century something of the same kind prevailed extensively in the south of France. These affections were then regarded as the result of demoniacal possessions and in some instances, multitudes of poor creatures were put to death as demoniacs.

The bodily agitations attending the revival, were in like manner propagated by infection. On their first appearance in Northampton, a few persons were seized at an evening meet-

ing, and while others looked on they soon became similarly affected; even those who appear to have come merely out of curiosity did not escape. The same thing was observable at Nottingham, Fagg's Manor, and other places, under the preaching of Whitefield. It was no less obvious in Scotland. It was exceedingly rare for any one to be thus affected in private; but in the public meetings, when one person was seized, others soon caught the infection. In England, where these affections were regarded at least at first, by Wesley, as coming from God, and proofs of his favour, they were very violent, and spread

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with great rapidity, seizing, at times, upon opposers as well as friends. Thus on one occasion, it is stated, that a Quaker who was present at one meeting, and inveighed against what he called the dissimulation of these creatures, caught the contagious emotion himself, and even while he was biting his lips and knitting his brows, dropt down as if he had been struck by lightning. "The agony he was in," says Wesley, "was even terrible to behold; we besought God not to lay folly to his charge, and he soon lifted up his head and cried aloud, 'Now I know thou art a prophet of the Lord.'"

On another occasion, under the preaching of the Rev. Mr. Berridge, a man who had been mocking and mimicking others in their convulsions, was himself seized. "He was," says the narrator, "the most horrible human figure I ever saw. His large wig and hair were coalblack, his face distorted beyond all description. He roared incessantly, throwing and clapping his hands together with his whole force. Some of his brother scoffers were calling for horsewhips, till they saw him extended on his back at full length; they then said he was dead; and indeed the only sign of life was the working of his breast, and the distortions of his face, while the veins of his neck were swelled as if ready to burst. His agonies lasted some hours; then his body and soul were eased." "At another meeting" he says, "a stranger

who stood facing me, fell backward to the wall, then forward on his knees, wringing his hands and roaring like a bull. His face at first turned quite red, then almost black. He rose and ran against the wall, till Mr. Keeling and another held him. He screamed out, 'Oh! what shall I do! what shall I do! oh, for one drop of the blood of Christ!' As he spoke, God set his soul at liberty; he knew his sins were blotted out; and the rapture he was in seemed too great for human nature to bear." "One woman tore up the ground with her hands, filling

them with dust and with the hard trodden grass, on which I saw her lie as one dead. Some continued long, as if they were dead, but with a calm sweetness in their looks. I saw one who lay two or three hours in the open air, and being then carried into the house, continued insensible another hour, as if with dust and with the actually dead. The first sign of life she showed, was a rapture of praise intermixed with a small joyous laughter."

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These accounts, however, must be read in detail,

in order to have any adequate conception of the nature and extent of these dreadful nervous affections. Wesley at one time regarded them as direct intimations of the approbation of God. Preaching at Newgate, he says, he was led insensibly, and without any previous design, to declare strongly and explicitly, that God willed all men to be saved, and to pray that, if this was not the truth of God, he would not suffer the blind to go out of the way; but if it was, he would bear witness to his word. "Immediately one and another sunk to the earth; they dropt on every side as thunderstruck. In the evening I was again pressed in spirit to declare that Christ gave himself a ransom for all. And almost before we called upon him to set to his seal, he answered. One was so wounded by the sword of the Spirit, that you would have imagined she could not live a moment. But immediately his abundant kindness was shown, and she loudly sang of his righteousness."

The various bodily exercises which attended the Western revivals in our own country, in

the early part of the present century, were of the same nature, and obeyed precisely the same laws. They began with what was called the falling exercise; that is, the person affected would fall on the ground helpless as an infant. This was soon succeeded, in many places, by a species of convulsions called "the jerks". Sometimes it would affect the whole body, jerking it violently from place to place, regardless of all obstacles;

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at others, a single limb would be thus agitated. When the neck was attacked, the head would be thrown backwards and forwards with the most fearful rapidity. There were various other forms in which this disease manifested itself, such as whirling, rolling, running, and jumping. These exercises were evidently involuntary. They were highly infectious, and spread rapidly from place to place; often seizing on mere spectators, and even upon those who abhorred and dreaded them.

Another characteristic of these affections, whether occurring among pagans, papists, or protestants, and which goes to prove their identity, is, that they all yield to the same treatment. As they arise from impressions on the nervous system through the imagination, the remedy is addressed to the imagination. It consists in removing the exciting causes, that is, withdrawing the patient from the scenes and contemplations which produced the disease; or in making a strong counter-impression, either through fear, shame, or sense of duty. The possessions, as they were called, in the south of France, were put a stop to by the wisdom and firmness of certain bishops, who insisted on the separation and seclusion of all the affected. On another occasion, a strange nervous agitation, which had for some time, to the great scandal of religion, seized periodically on all the members of a convent, was arrested by the magistrates bringing up a company of soldiers, and threatening with severe punishment the first who should manifest the least symptom of the affection. The same method has often been successfully resorted to.

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or at least continued, where they were not approved and encouraged. In Northampton, where **Edwards** rejoiced over them, they were abundant; in Boston, where they were regarded as "blemishes," they had nothing of them. In Sutton, Massachusetts, they were "cautiously guarded against," and consequently appeared, except among never strangers from other congregations. Only two or three cases occurred in Elizabethtown, under President Dickinson, who considered them as "irregular heats," and those few were

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speedily regulated. There was nothing of the kind at Freehold, where William Tennent set his face against all such manifestations of enthusiasm.

On the other hand, they followed Davenport and other fanatical preachers, almost wherever they went. In Scotland, they were less encouraged than they were here (in the USA) and consequently prevailed less. In England, where Wesley regarded them as certainly from God, they were fearful both as to frequency and violence. The same thing was observed with regard to the agitations attending the Western revivals. The physician already quoted, says: "Restraint often prevents a paroxysm. For example, persons always attacked by this

affection in churches where it is encouraged, will be perfectly calm in churches where it is discouraged, however affecting may be the service, and however great the mental excitement." It is also worthy of consideration that these bodily affections are of frequent occurrence at the present day, among those who continue to desire and encourage them.

It appears, then, that these nervous agitations are of frequent occurrence in all times of strong excitement. It matters little whether the excitement arise from superstition, fanaticism, or from the preaching of the truth. If the imagination be strongly affected, the nervous system is very apt to be deranged, and outcries, faintings, convulsions, and other hysterical symptoms, are the consequence. That these effects are of the same nature whatever may be the remote cause, is plain, because the phenomena are the same; the apparent circumstances of their origin the same; they all have the same infectious nature, and are all cured by the same means. They are, therefore, but different forms of the same disease; and, whether they occur in a convent or a camp-meeting they are no more a token of the divine favour than hysteria or epilepsy.

It may still be said, that, although they do sometimes arise from other causes, they may be produced by genuine religious feeling. This, however, never can be proved. The fact that undoubted Christians experience these effects, is no proof that they flow from a good

source; because there is always a corrupt mixture in the exercises of the most spiritual men. These affections may, therefore, flow from the concomitants from those feelings themselves. And that they do in fact flow from that source, may be assumed, because in other cases they certainly have that origin; and because all the known effects of true religious feelings are of a different character. Those apprehensions of truth which arise from divine illumination do not affect the imagination, but the moral emotions, which are very different in their nature and effects from the feelings produced by a heated fancy.

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This view of the subject is greatly confirmed by the consideration that there is nothing in the Bible to lead us to regard these bodily affections as the legitimate effects of religious feeling. No such results followed the preaching of Christ, or his apostles. We hear of no general outcries, faintings, convulsions, or ravings in the assemblies which they addressed.

The scriptural examples cited by the apologists of these exhibitions are so entirely inapplicable, as to be of themselves sufficient to show how little countenance is to be derived from the Bible for such irregularities. Reference is made, for example, to the case of the jailer at Philippi who fell down at the apostles' feet; to Acts ii. 37, ("Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said, Men and brethren, what shall we do?") and to the conversion of Paul. It is, however, too obvious to need remark, that in no one of these cases was either the effect produced, or the circumstances attending its production, analogous to the hysterical convulsions and outcries now under consideration.

The testimony of the Scriptures is not merely negative in this subject. Their authority is directly opposed to all such disorders. They direct that all things should be done decently and in order. They teach us that God is not the God of confusion, but of peace, in all the churches of the saints. These passages have particular reference to the manner of conducting public worship. They forbid every thing which is inconsistent with order, solemnity, and devout attention. It is evident that loud outcries and convulsions are inconsistent with these things, and therefore ought to be discouraged. They cannot come from God, for he is not the author of confusion. The apology made in Corinth for the disorders which Paul condemned was precisely the same as that urged in defence of these bodily agitations. We ought not to resist the Spirit of God, said the Corinthians; and so said all those who encouraged these convulsions.

Paul's answer was that no influence which comes from God destroys our self control. "The spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets."(1 Cor. 14: 32) Even in the case of direct inspiration and revelation, the mode of communication was in harmony our powers under the control of reason and the will. The man, therefore, who felt the divine

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afflatus had no right to give way to it, under circumstances which would produce noise and confusion. The prophets of God were not like the raving Pythoness of the heathen temples; nor are the saints of God converted into whirling dervishes by any influence of which He is the author. There can be little doubt that Paul would have severely reprobated such scenes as frequently occurred during the revival of which we are speaking. He would have said to the people substantially what he said to the Corinthians. If any unbeliever or ignorant man come to your assemblies, and hear one shouting in ecstacy, another howling in anguish; if he see some falling, some jumping, some lying in convulsions, others in trances, will he not say, Ye are mad? But if your exercises are free from confusion, and your discourses addressed to the reason, so as to convince and reprove, he will confess that God is among you of a truth.

Experience, no less than Scripture, has set the seal of reprobation upon these bodily agitations. If they are of the nature of an infectious nervous disease, it is as much an act of infatuation to encourage them, as to endeavour to spread epilepsy over the land. It is easy to excite such things, but when excited, it is very difficult to suppress them, or to arrest their

progress; and they have never prevailed without the most serious mischief. They bring discredit upon religion, they give great advantage to infidels and gainsayers, and they facilitate the progress of fanaticism. When sanctioned, the people delight in them, as they do in

all strong excitement. The multitude of spurious conversions, the prevalence of false religion, the rapid progress of fanaticism, and the consequent permanent declension of religion immediately after the great revival, are probably to be attributed to the favour shown to itself in the regard paid to these bodily agitations, as much as to any one cause.

Besides the errors above specified, which were sanctioned by many of the best friends of the revival, there were others which, though reprobated by the more judicious,

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became, through the patronage of the more ardent, prolific sources of evil. There was from the first a strong leaven of enthusiasm, manifesting itself in the regard paid to impulses, inspirations, visions, and the pretended power of discerning spirits. This was decidedly opposed by Edwards, by the Boston clergy, by Tennent, and many others. Whitefield, on the contrary, was, especially in the early part of his career, deeply infected with this leaven. When he visited Northampton, in 1740, Edwards endeavoured to convince him of the dangerous tendency of this enthusiastic spirit, but without much success. He had such an idea of what the Scriptures mean by the guidance of the Spirit, as to suppose that by suggestions, impressions, or sudden recollection of texts of the Bible, the Christian's duty was divinely revealed, even as to the minutest circumstance, and that at times even future events were thus made known. On the strength of such an impression he did not hesitate publicly to declare that his unborn child would prove to be a son. "An unaccountable but very strong impression," that he should preach the gospel, was regarded as a revelation of the purpose of God respecting him. The question whether he should return to England was settled to his satisfaction by the occurrence to his mind of the passage, "When Jesus was returned, the people gladly received him." These few examples are enough to illustrate the point in hand.

In Whitefield there was much to counteract the operation of this spirit, which in others produced its legitimate effects. When Davenport was asked by the Boston ministers the reason of any of his acts, his common reply was, God commanded me. When asked whether he was inspired, he answered, they might call it inspiration, or what they pleased. The man who attended him he called his armour-bearer, because he was led to take him as a follower, by opening on the story of Jonathan and his armour-bearer. He considered it also as revealed that he should convert as many persons at a certain place as Jonathan and his This was the only one of the forms in which this armour-bearer slew of the Philistines. spirit manifested itself. Those under its influence pretended to a power of discerning spirits, of deciding at once who was and who was not converted; they professed a perfect assurance of the favour of God, founded not upon scriptural evidence, but inward suggestion.

It is plain that when men thus give them selves up to the guidance of secret impressions, and attribute divine authority to suggestions, impulses, and casual occurrences, there is no extreme of error or folly to which they may not be led. They are beyond the control of reason or the word of God. They have a more direct and authoritative communication of the

divine will than can be made by any external and general revelation. They of course act as if inspired and infallible. They are commonly filled with spiritual pride, and with a bitter denunciatory spirit. All these results were soon manifested to a lamentable extent during this revival. If an honest man doubted his conversion, he was declared unconverted. If any one was child of God.

These enthusiasts paid great regard to visions and trances, and would pretend in them to have seen heaven or hell, and particular persons in the one or the other. They paid more attention to inward impressions than to the word of God. They

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laid great stress on views of an outward Christ, as on a throne, or upon the cross. If they did not feel a minister's preaching, they maintained he was unconverted, or legal. They made light of all meetings in which there was no external commotion. They had a remarkable haughtiness and self-sufficiency, and a fierce and bitter spirit of zeal and censorious-The origin and progress of this fanatical spirit is one of the most instructive porness. tions of the history of this period.

In 1726, a religious excitement commenced in New Milford, Connecticut, which was at first of a promising character, but was soon perverted. Its subjects opened a communication with the enthusiasts of Rhode Island, and began to speak slightly of the Bible, especially of the Psalms of David, and to condemn the ministers of the gospel and civil magistrates. They organized themselves into a separate society, and appointed officers not only to conduct their meetings, but to regulate their dress. They made assurance essential to faith; they undervalued human learning and despised the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's supper. They laid claim to sinless perfection, and claimed that the standing ministers were unfit to preach, and that the people ought to leave them. One of the leaders of this company was a man named Ferris, who entered Yale College in 1729. A contemporary writer says of this gentleman, He told me he was certain not one in ten of the communicants in the church in New Haven could be saved; that he should have a higher seat in heaven than Moses; that he knew the will of God in all things, and had not committed any sin for six years. He had a proud and haughty spirit, and appeared greatly desirous of applause. He obtained a great ascendency over certain of the students, especially Davenport, Wheelock and Pomeroy, who lived with him most familiarly. He remained in college until 1732, and then returned

to New Milford. He ultimately became a Quaker preacher.

Such was the origin of that enthusiastical and fanatical spirit, which swept over the New England churches. Messrs. Wheelock and Pomeroy seem soon to have escaped from its influence; but Davenport remained long under its power, and was the cause of incalculable mischief. He was settled as pastor of the church in Southhold, Long Island. In March, 1740,

he became satisfied that God had revealed to him that his kingdom was coming with great power, and that he had an extraordinary call to labour for its advancement. He assembled his people on one occasion, and addressed them, continuously, for nearly twentyfour hours; until he became quite wild. After continuing for some time his exciting labours in his own neighbourhood, he passed over into Connecticut. The best and most favourable account of his erratic course is given by the Rev. Mr. Fish, who knew him intimately. The substance of this account, given nearly in the language of its author, is as follows. The good things about him, says this writer, were, that he was a fast friend of the doctrines of grace; fully declaring the total depravity, the deplorable wretchedness and danger, and utter inability of men by the fall.

It was thus, in the strong language of Edwards, the devil prevailed against the revival. "It is by this means that the daughter of Zion in this land, now lies in such piteous circumstances, with her garments rent, her face disfigured, her nakedness exposed, her limbs broken, and weltering in the blood of her own wounds, and in nowise able to rise, and this so soon after her late great joys and hopes."

He preached with great earnestness the doctrines of man's dependence on the sovereign mercy of God; of regeneration; of justification by faith, &c. The things that were evidently and dreadfully wrong about him were, that he not only gave full liberty to noise and outcries, but promoted them with all his power. When these things prevailed among the people, accompanied with bodily agitations, the good man pronounced them tokens of the presence of God. Those who passed immediately from great distress to great joy, he declared, after asking them a few questions, to be converts; though numbers of such converts, in a short time, returned to their old way of living, and were as carnal, wicked, and void of experience, as ever they were. He was a great favourer of visions, trances, imaginations, and powerful impressions in others, and made such inward feelings the rule of his own conduct in many respects.... This is a formidable array of evils. Yet as the friends of the revival testify to their existence, no conscientious historian dare either conceal or extenuate them. There was too little discrimination between true and false religious feeling. There was too much encouragement given to outcries, faintings, and bodily agitations, as probable evidence of the presence and power of God. There was, in many, too much reliance on impulses, visions, and the pretended power of discerning spirits. There was a great deal of censoriousness, and of a sinful disregard of ecclesiastical order. The disastrous

effects of these evils, the rapid spread of false religion, the dishonour and decline of true piety, the prevalence of erroneous doctrines, the division of congregations, the alienation of Christians, and the long period of subsequent deadness in the church, stand up as a solemn warning to Christians, and especially to Christian ministers in all times to come. It was thus, in the strong language of Edwards, the devil prevailed against the revival. "It is by this means that the daughter of Zion in this land, now lies in such piteous circumstances, with her garments rent, her face disfigured, her nakedness exposed, her limbs broken, and weltering in the blood of her own wounds, and in nowise able to rise, and this so soon after her late great joys and hopes."

CONCLUDED.

Further Recommended Reading on "Revivals"

1. Prof. Herman Hanko: "Ought the Church to Pray for Revival"?

23 page booklet. Succinct and pertinent. Excellent for an introduction to this matter, or for distribution. Asks awkward questions about the "revival" traditions, and points to Romanist "mysticism" as being a powerful factor in the development of revivalism, as also was a false view of the Covenant.

2. Rev. William Hamilton: "An enquiry into the Scriptural Character of the Revival of 1859".

A penetrating 296 page critique by a faithful Reformed and Presbyterian minister who lived through the Irish Revivals of 1859. Hamilton "takes the lid off" and shows us how far from the Scriptures this nation-wide orgy of emotional frenzy actually was, and what deleterious effects it had on the Reformed church life in Ireland. The book would have been better if formatted into shorter chapters, but it is an eye-opener! A strong feature of the book is its propounding of the true Scriptural standards in contrast to the false theology of revivalism. The volume is founded firmly on Scripture.

Both the above are available from: Mr. Sean Courtney, Covenant Reformed Bookstore, c/o 78 Millfield, Grove Road, Ballymena, County Antrim BT43 6PD, NORTHERN IRELAND. Telephone: O28 2564 1200

3. Prof. Harry S. Stout: "The Divine Dramatist" George Whitefield and the Rise of Modern Evangelicalism. (Publ. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, USA 1994 reprint ISBN 0-8028-0154-4 Paperback 301 + XXIV pages). Master of Berkeley

College and Professor of American Religious History at Yale University, Prof. Stout certainly knows what he is talking about. The Bibliographical lists entered at the end of this volume indicate parameters of reference that most other, if not all other, Whitefield biographers and Great Awakening propagandists have either missed, or deliberately ignored. Private correspondence, extensive press reports from eye-witnesses of the Great Awakening, scholarly articles, all provide a firm basis for this scientific account of Whitefield's ministry and the Great Awakening. Modern Calvinists have not liked this book! Stout's analysis is illuminating, even to the point of being shocking! He reveals how Whitefield's success is traceable to his dramatic art in the pulpit, how Whitefield had the press of his day "in the palm of his hand" so to speak. Notable too, for anyone who has studied Finney, are the remarkably similar techniques to Finney's found in Whitefield's ministry.

4. Keith J. Hardman: "Charles Grandison Finney" Revivalist and Reformer.

(Publ. Baker, USA 1990, ISBN 0-8010-4348-4 Large Paperback 521 +XVII pages)

Excellent and objective portrayal of Finney in all his sheer gory Pelagianism! Reveals how Finney's legal studies of Blackstone's law commentaries imprinted a Pelagian notion of free will on his soul, which he later superimposed on his interpretations of the Bible, to produce a theology upside down to Calvin's, with which he yet, amazingly, hoodwinked masses of the Calvinist preachers of his day, in that these placed a higher premium on "revival" than on Biblical Orthodoxy. Effects of Finney's revivals clearly described, with remarkable similarities to Whitefield as to techniques, effects, and the deleterious end results on the churches.

5. British Reformed Journal (BRJ)

The following issues contain important articles on the topic of Revival:

BRJ No. 19 July- Sept. 1997 SAY SHIBOLETH - SAY REVIVAL! Special Issue on Revival. Includes Part One of Hodge's article, plus a devastating review of Iain Murray's "*Revival and Revivalism*", plus critical articles on Jonathan Edwards and Dr. Martyn Lloyd Jones.

BRJ No. 20 Oct - Dec 1997 WALES - LAND OF REVIVALS Includes part two of Hodge's article as printed herewith, and a critical analysis of Welsh traditions concerning revivals and their effects.

BRJ No. 21 Jan - Mar 1998 ARTICLE: Revivalist Propaganda and the Cause of Truth in Wales Part 1 by Rev. Alan Spencer.

BRJ No. 22 April - June 1998 ARTICLE: Revivalist Propaganda and the Cause of Truth in Wales Part 2: PSYCHOLOGY & METHODOLOGY by Rev. Alan Spencer.