

## **Nathaniel W. Taylor, Charles G. Finney, and the Second Great Awakening: The Theological Basis for Finney's New Measures**

By Matthew Crawford  
Union University  
Jackson, TN

Slowly the preacher walks to the pulpit as the crowd anxiously awaits his message, fixated on his every move and glance. They have looked forward with eager expectation to the visitation from this revivalist. The imposing preacher stares out at the crowd with his hawk-like eyes, seemingly piercing through to the very soul of those upon whom his gaze falls. Suddenly he speaks, beginning with a volume no louder than a whisper, yet steadily increasing, and finally reaching a crescendo as he impels the people to come to God by making for themselves a new heart. After explicating the love of God for sinners and the ability of sinners to repent and believe the gospel, the evangelist gives an altar call for individuals to respond outwardly to the gospel. This man's preaching compels, his piercing eyes stir the emotions, and sinners begin to make their way to the front to be "born again."

The scene just described, although common today in many evangelical churches, was once novel. It was popularized in large measure through the ministry of the great nineteenth century revivalist Charles G. Finney. Finney is a polarizing individual, but all agree that he was pivotal in shifting the course of American Evangelicalism. Much has been written in regard to the "new measures" that Finney introduced, but not as much attention has been given to their origins. In fact, his methods have roots in New Haven theology, formulated by Nathaniel W. Taylor in response to the challenges of the Enlightenment and as the culmination of a long process of theological development in New England. Taylor and Finney had similar views on depravity and regeneration that led to a markedly different kind of revival experience than practiced by their contemporaries and rivals.

### **Nathaniel W. Taylor (1786-1858)**

Nathaniel Taylor's "New Haven theology" has been called America's "one great contribution to the theological thinking of Christendom" (Bainton 23), but it has roots in the work of Jonathan Edwards, the principal theologian in the minds of Taylor and other contemporary religious thinkers. For the most part, Edwards' theology was in line with traditional Calvinistic theology. He adhered to a Reformed understanding of original sin and of the sovereign, free, and efficacious grace of God. Edwards' innovation was in his understanding of the will. His thought, especially as expressed in his seminal work *On the Freedom of the Will*, led to the conclusion that man's depravity is moral in nature and not physical or mental (Thornbury 45). Nevertheless, according to Edwards, man was morally unable to fulfill the requirements of the gospel but was still held responsible for failing to do so.

Disciples of Edwards began to push his theology to its logical conclusion and in the process created what became known as New England Theology or the New Divinity School, which led to the formation of Taylor's New Haven Theology. The New Divinity School men were opposed in these matters by the so-called "Old School" theologians at

Princeton College, which more strictly followed the canons of Dort (Thornbury 45). These two groups became known as Consistent or Edwardsean Calvinists and Old Calvinists, respectively. The goal of the former group was to “reconcile Calvinism with personal moral accountability” (Sutton 24). Edwardsean Calvinists like Samuel Hopkins rejected the notion that all men are in possession of a depraved *nature*, since things such as natures cannot be considered as sin (Thornbury 190).

For another influential Edwardsean, Timothy Dwight, sin was universal but not innate. He “viewed men as sinners because they sin, but not because of their connection with Adam” (Hannah 246). By this time it was clear that these men had departed from Edwards in fundamental ways. However, neither they nor Taylor seemed to be fully aware of this. Frank Foster has noted that their highest objective was still to agree with Edwards, and when they did consciously disagree with him, they thought they were simply better expressing Edwards’ true meaning (369).

Trying to reconcile religion with Enlightenment, the New Divinity School, as John Hannah points out, sought to make Calvinism appear consistent with reason and Scripture (244). It was particularly influenced by Scottish Common Sense Realism, which asserted that common perceptions, including moral ones, can be trusted as rational (Sutton 26). Thus, reason was a way to settle theological and philosophical problems and was even elevated to the same level of authority as Scripture (Marsden 47-8). This view is very clear in Taylor’s writings. For example, Taylor states that a “decision of common sense is as infallible as a decision of God! and this is not rash! for if it be not so we know nothing! not even that there is a God; or what kind of a being he is” (“Lectures on the Will” 30).

Although his views were influenced by Yale mentors, Taylor and others eventually felt compelled to establish their own divinity school. A chair of Didactic Theology was created and Taylor was elected to it (Baird 187-8). For the next thirty-six years Taylor served in this capacity and developed his New Haven theology while training “an army of revivalists to carry forth his brand of modernized Calvinism” (Sutton 27).

Influenced by Timothy Dwight, Taylor viewed depravity as an individual matter. In a key 1828 sermon called “*Concio ad Clerum*” (“Advice to the Clergy”), he held that human moral depravity does not consist of a sinful nature “which they have corrupted by being *one* with Adam, and by *ac-ing in his act*. . . . [T]o believe this, I must renounce the reason which my Maker has given me” (“*Concio ad Clerum*” 215). This statement shows that Taylor is re-lying at least as much, if not more, on reason than on Scripture as a source of authority in deciding these matters.

This rejection of a sinful nature flows from Taylor’s presupposition that all sin consists only in voluntary acts. According to this definition, things such as inherited natures are excluded from being sinful. Ian Murray has summed up Taylor’s theology on this point by noting that he essentially was denying that man is governed by a moral nature in any sense at all (260). This was in stark contrast to the traditional orthodox position that depravity did indeed consist in a disposition or tendency to sin. For Taylor, true freedom exists only if men have the ability to act to the contrary (Marsden 49; Foster 370). This emphasis was one of his major innovations. He concedes to man’s will an absolute sovereignty that even God could not violate. Furthermore, he concludes that if there is a sinful nature as the source of all sinful acts, there is a sin behind every other sin. This would make the cause of sin be sin itself, a conclusion he labels as nonsense (“*Concio ad Clerum*” 216).

How then does Taylor define moral depravity? According to him, moral depravity is “man’s own act, consisting in a free choice of some object rather than God, as his chief good – or a free preference of the world and of worldly good, to the will and glory of God” (“*Concio ad Clerum*” 217). After making this point, Taylor goes on in his sermon to attempt to answer the question of what it means that man’s depravity is by nature as the text says. His answer is “*That such is their nature, that they will sin and only sin in all the appropriate circumstances of their being [sic]*” (222). Here he carefully says that human nature is not itself sinful, simply that no matter in what circumstances men are placed, they will inevitably sin. As a result, moral depravity becomes something which occurs inevitably but not necessarily (Sutton 34).

For Taylor, this view of sin not only made for better doctrine but it also provided a better basis for evangelism and revival. Marsden points out that one of the problems being debated at Yale at this time was how to reconcile Calvinism with effective evangelistic methods (46). Taylor firmly believed that his formulation of depravity better served these purposes than the Old School beliefs, which, in his view, actually prostrated the pulpit. In “*Concio ad Clerum*,” he is quite vehement on this point:

Does God charge on men, as that which deserves his endless indignation, what [He] Himself does? Does God summon men to repentance with commands and entreaties, and at the same time tell them, that all efforts that compliance are as useless, as the muscular motions of a corpse to get life again? . . . If so, preach it out – preach it consistently – preach nothing to contradict it – dwell on your message, that God creates men sinners and damns them for being so. (240)

Taylor’s caricature of Old School theologians drives home the implications of his essentially new anthropology. He seems to think that too much emphasis was placed on man’s inability and that this was detrimental to revival. Since this is the very point made later by Finney, and since it raises the question of how God works in history, it will be revisited later.

Nathaniel Taylor’s doctrine of regeneration was a result of his doctrine of depravity, both of which are echoed in Finney’s theology as well. For Taylor, regeneration is “that act of the will or heart, in which God is preferred to every other object” (Taylor, qtd. in Baird 196). This makes perfect sense if one understands how Taylor defines moral depravity. If depravity is the preference of some object other than God, then it follows that regeneration is the preference of God above all other objects. Taylor asserts that regeneration is a universal necessity and even says that this regeneration is by the Holy Spirit without whose action we remain dead men for eternity (“*Concio ad Clerum*” 227).

This might sound like orthodoxy at first, but in fact Taylor is departing from the traditional Calvinistic understanding of regeneration. In order to see this, one must first comprehend how Taylor elevates the human role in the process. There exists within man a so-called “self-love” which is nothing more than the creature’s natural desire for happiness. According to Taylor, this self-love is neutral, not sinful in nature. However, it becomes sinful as soon as the individual takes his or her first moral act. In this instant self-love becomes selfishness because it is directed to objects of preference other than God. In order for salvation to take place, the sinner must stop and think and thereby suspend the selfish principle. At this moment he considers the way in which God would satisfy his natural self-love, and, choosing God, he is regenerated (Foster 384-85). In

effect, the sinner's willingness to adopt God's point of view allows him to satisfy his desire for happiness and becomes the "means of regeneration." If this is the case, the preacher can exhort the sinner to make use of these means in order to bring his self-love to prefer God above all other objects. He is, in effect, telling men that they can act with their will to regenerate themselves.

The role of the Holy Spirit is reduced to one of influence on the mind, not sovereign life-giver (Marsden 50). Once again, this makes sense if one accepts Taylor's doctrine of depravity. For if, as he puts forth, men are not in possession of a depraved nature, all that needs to be changed in him is his will, not his nature (Murray, *Revivalism* 260-61). This change still required the influence of the Holy Spirit, but more as persuasion than inexorable force. Taylor compares the divine influence in regeneration to the "solicitations of a friend" ("Application" 31). The possibility of change inheres in the power of man. The New Haven theology, therefore, "emphasized the necessity of an active human role in re-generation" (Pope 31). As Marsden points out, the practical influence of this doctrine is that the evangelist can tell the sinner that he must choose this day (52).

At the heart of Taylor's view of regeneration is a rejection of what he felt was the older Calvinist position. As a like-minded contemporary of Taylor's put it, the Calvinists were wrong to insist that regeneration was a "change in the essence or essential properties of the souls" (qtd. in Hodge 6). Charles Hodge, however, asserts that this misrepresents the historic Calvinistic position. He then proceeds to quote at length many of the old Calvinistic divines (Dort, Owen, Charnock, Westminster, etc.) to illustrate the point that "they hold to no change in the substance of the soul nor in any of its essential properties, but uniformly teach that the change is a moral one and takes place in a manner perfectly congruous to the nature of a rational and active being" (6). Hodge points out that the premise of this revisionist theology of regeneration is "that there is nothing in the soul but its substance, with its essential attributes and its acts. Therefore, if regeneration be not a change in its acts, it must be a change in the substance (Hodge 24).

Hodge's solution to this problem is to assert that there exists within men something other than his essential properties and his acts. This he calls "habits" and notes that Edwards called this concept "disposition" (24). It is, then, these "habits" or "dispositions" which are the subject of the sovereign regenerating power of the Holy Spirit in salvation. Hodge's summary of Edwards' position on this issue is illuminating, for it reveals the departure of these later theologians like Taylor from the theology of Edwards:

The great fundamental principle of his work on the affections is this: All gracious or spiritual affections presuppose and arise from spiritual views of divine truth. These views the natural man neither has, nor can have, while he remains such. Hence arises the necessity of such a change being wrought in the state of the soul that it can perceive the real beauty and excellence of divine things. This change consists in imparting to the soul what he calls "a new sense", or a new taste, or relish, or principle, adapted to the perception and love of spiritual excellence. (20)

In Edwards' soteriology the work of regeneration is not one in which man is active. Instead, regeneration is confined to the act of God within the individual whose will is passive. God imparts to the soul a new taste or sense which causes the person now to love that which he once hated and see as beautiful that which was once repulsive to

him. After this has been done, the individual is then active in exercising repentance and faith, but these are not considered part of regeneration. Taylor confuses regeneration proper and conversion, writing as if they were a single act in which the human individual under the influence of the Holy Spirit changes the ruling preference of his life to God (Marsden 50). Echoes of this will be seen in Finney's theology of regeneration.

Taken together, Taylor's views on depravity and regeneration shifted the emphasis from God's power to human freedom and paved the way for the "new measures" of Charles G. Finney.

### **Charles G. Finney (1792-1875)**

Admittedly, it is difficult to maintain that Charles G. Finney knowingly drew from Taylor's work. Nonetheless, some authors contend this very thing. Frank Foster, for example, a noted historian of New England theology, labels Finney as Taylor's "true successor." His evidence for stating this is that "various underground currents" went from New Haven westward, some into the region where Finney resided, with the result that Finney adopted most of Taylor's positions (453). Foster does not give much hard data to support this conclusion. Undoubtedly, the theology of Finney bears a remarkable resemblance to that of Taylor's, but similarity does not necessitate influence. The issue is complicated by the fact that Finney was "a maverick who seldom acknowledged intellectual debts" (Sweeney 150).

Finney's connection with Taylor was, however, apparent to contemporaries of both men. After Finney preached two definitive sermons on changing one's heart, Asa Rand published a review of the sermon titled "The New Divinity Tried," indicating that he was aware of the link between the two men. Furthermore, Baird, writing only several decades after these events, says that Finney was the first to "employ the theology of New Haven, in its practical relations" and that "the practical system of Finney . . . was deduced from the theology of New Haven, by a logic, which no ingenuity can evade" (Baird 217, 234). The assertion by writers of the Second Great Awakening of a link between the two men is evidence that this theory of influence has merit. Douglas Sweeney sums up the best view of Taylor's influence: "[T]hough Finney was not a disciple of Taylor, his revivalistic emphases on natural ability and immediate repentance served to ingrain the potent dye of Taylor's theology indelibly into the fiber of the evangelical mind" (151).

How then did Finney's theology resemble that of Taylor's? It is this question which will now be addressed.

The clearest statement of Finney's presuppositions is found at the beginning of his *Lectures on Systematic Theology*. In his preface Finney puts forth two basic premises: that the will is free and that all sin and holiness consist in voluntary actions (2). Finney presents basically the same ideas in a sermon he preached in the autumn of 1831 on the subject of individuals making themselves new hearts. He says that "all holiness, in God, angels, or men, must be voluntary, or it is not holiness" ("Sinners"). These two assumptions echo the words of Taylor in his "*Concio*." Men must be created free in order to be responsible for their actions, and the only things on which sin can properly be predicated are acts, not such things as natures.

Like Taylor, Finney rejects the old Calvinist view of "natural depravity." Sin is the result of voluntary moral depravity, not of a condition that man inherits from birth. So-called physical depravity is involuntary; it has no moral character, for only voluntary

actions possess moral character (*Finney's Systematic Theology* 243). Even more bluntly, he writes, "Moral depravity, as I use the term, does not consist in, nor imply a sinful nature, in the sense that the substance of the human soul is sinful in itself. It is not a constitutional sinfulness. It is not an involuntary sinfulness" (*Finney's Systematic Theology* 245).

If, as Finney has proposed, men and women do not inherit a depraved nature from Adam, why then do all people sin? For him, man's primary enemy is his flesh, which he defines as the "sensibility," that is, man's outward physical senses. These draw one into self-indulgence which is sin. Thus, the actual enemy of an individual is the human body (Lucas 264). From birth the feelings in children (i.e., sensibilities) develop faster than the moral reason so that by the time they reach the age at which they should be exercising moral reason, self-gratification has become the rule of action, the habit in which the children continue (Smith 76). They are taught by their sensibilities to choose what these sensibilities desire before they know any better, and inevitably become enslaved to them.

Finney does not refer extensively to Romans 5:12ff, the classic text on original sin, in his *Lectures on Systematic Theology*. He mentions it only to say that Paul does not clarify how exactly Adam's posterity is influenced by his sin (*Systematic* 264). He rejects the traditional orthodox view that Adam sinned in such a way as to bring condemnation and an inability to obey God upon all his descendants. Rather, for Finney the extent of Adam's effect on his posterity is merely that he makes temptations much stronger. That is, Adam's sin started a pattern of physical depravity, bringing death and disease which heighten the degree of temptation. How then can people be truly free if they inevitably sin? Finney does not answer this question (Lucas 211).

In summary, it can be said that both Nathaniel Taylor and Charles Finney rejected the notion that Adam's sin is transferable and penal to his descendants. Taylor and Finney defined physical depravity in slightly different ways, but both understood moral depravity as preferring something other than God, in a word, selfishness. That is, they both dismissed the notion of moral depravity as being something inherent within the nature of fallen man.

Any doctrine of regeneration is logically linked with an understanding of depravity. If, as the historic Reformed tradition confessed, man is dead in his sins and wholly unable to please God, it follows that a supernatural work of divine power is necessary prior to any response of man. If, however, as Taylor and Finney held, men are merely guilty of preferring the wrong object, and depravity resides ultimately in man's will, a drastically different view of regeneration naturally follows. In his *Lectures on Systematic Theology*, Finney says that regeneration is the same concept as the traditional formulation of having a new heart or being born again. However, Finney makes clear that regeneration is not "a change in the substance of soul or body. . . . No such change is needed, as the sinner has all the faculties and natural abilities requisite to render perfect obedience to God. All he needs is to be induced to use these powers and attributes as he ought" (271-72).

Finney's definition of the heart is also important in this discussion. According to him, the heart is not the seat of the affections or desires, as the Old School theologians would have said. Finney avoids that conclusion because it would imply that the heart was an involuntary state of mind that cannot bear moral character. In contrast, he proclaims, "The very idea of moral character implies, and suggests the idea of, a free action or intention. To deny this, were to deny a first truth (*Systematic Theology* 272). For

Finney, then, the heart is “a fountain . . . out of which flows good or evil, according as the heart is good or evil. This heart is represented, not only as the source or fountain of good and evil, but as being either good or evil in itself, as constituting the character of man, and not merely as being capable of moral character” (*Systematic Theology* 273). Having defined his terms thus, Finney arrives at the following concept of regeneration: “Regeneration then is a radical change of the ultimate intention, and, of course, of the end or object of life” (*Systematic Theology* 273). This is, of course, something which the human individual is perfectly capable of doing. For Finney, the individual is active in regeneration, that is, active in changing his or her ultimate intention (*Systematic Theology* 274). This is in contrast with the Old School theologians who held that man is passive in regeneration and active in conversion.

Finney’s sermons on Ezekiel 18:31 are especially useful in revealing his thoughts on regeneration. The text reads, “Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have committed, and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel?” (English Standard Version). Finney’s logic works thus in the sermon: God commands His chosen people to make themselves a new heart. To make a new heart is the same thing as to regenerate. God cannot command something which Israel does not have the ability to do. Therefore, Israel, and all mankind, must have the ability to regenerate themselves. According to this logic, such things as affections or emotions have no moral character. Even emotions of love or hatred toward God “which are not directly or indirectly produced by the will, have no moral character” (“How to Change” 4). Furthermore, this proposition makes repentance simply a change of mind and does not necessarily include the idea of sorrow. It is nothing more than an act of the will (“How to Change” 4). Charles Hodge, in a review of Finney’s sermon, notes this point: “It is evident that the change of purpose does not imply nor necessarily involve a change in the affections” (“The New Divinity Tried” 161). This is a great problem for Finney’s system, for it implies that one can be regenerated while still hating God. Indeed, to change the affections is not easy. But Finney taught that regeneration is a very easy thing for men to do. Hodge recognizes this and says that “transferring the affections from one object to another of an opposite character; to love what we have been accustomed to hate, and to hate what we have been in the habit of loving, is a difficult work” (“New Divinity Tried” 162).

How then, according to Finney, are men to change their hearts? Echoing Taylor, he says that they do so simply by ridding themselves of selfishness and choosing to prefer God. The bulk of his sermon “How to Change Your Heart” is given to a description of the heinousness of sin and the moral government of God in order to induce the sinner to change his or her heart. He concludes by saying, “[I]ndeed you have the promise, that on condition of submission to his will, you shall have eternal life . . . But one thing is requisite, that is a willing mind. Your consent is all that is needed. Be willing to do your duty, and the work is done” (“How to Change” 13).

The role of the Holy Spirit in Finney’s view of regeneration, as in Taylor’s, is merely one of influence or persuasion. Finney says “the Spirit’s agency is not needed to give [the sinner] power, but to overcome his voluntary obstinacy” (“Sinners Bound to Change” 12). Instead of actually regenerating people, the Spirit of God gives the conscience the requisite information to exert its utmost power so that the conscience will respond in a positive way (“How to Change” 13). It is clear that the Spirit is therefore not

sovereign in regeneration as the Old School theologians and the historic Reformed tradition confessed. An illustration that Finney used in one of his sermons is illuminating on this point. Finney describes a man lost in deep thought while approaching the edge of Niagara Falls. As he lifts his foot to take the final step over the edge, someone cries out “Stop.” The man hears the voice and heeds its warning. Certainly the man would attribute his salvation from death to the one who cried out, but, nevertheless, he is still the one who heeded the call and turned himself. In Finney’s scheme, the one who cries out is both the preacher and the Spirit. The only difference is the power with which each one speaks. The Spirit’s work upon the sinner is no more than a heightened form of that which the preacher engages in when he exhorts men to change the ruling preference of their heart (“Sinners Bound to Change” 10). Finney and Taylor agree that regeneration is ultimately to change one’s purpose, one’s highest intention. Because depravity resides in the will, all that men must do is change their will in order to be regenerated. Both systems seek to make regeneration as easy as possible, and the practical ramifications of these views can be seen in the movement called the Second Great Awakening.

### **The Second Great Awakening**

The Second Great Awakening refers to a period roughly between 1795 and the 1830s or 1840s. After the First Great Awakening and the Revolutionary War, religious interest waned in America because of, among other things, the increasing move into the Western frontier and the influence of European Enlightenment skepticism in universities (Lescelius 14). However, sometime later in the eighteenth century, local revivals began springing up in various places. This was accompanied by a renewed interest in Christianity in many universities, including Yale, where Timothy Dwight led in a revival that saw eighty of the one hundred and sixty students converted (Lescelius 17). This awakening far surpassed the first in terms of duration and geographical extent (Murray, *Revival and Revivalism* 119).

The course of this second awakening and subsequently American evangelicalism was drastically altered by Charles G. Finney, so much so that the period might be said to consist of two awakenings. The first arose from the “Old School” theology opposed by Taylor and Finney. Its leaders held a concept of revival that seems almost foreign to modern sensibilities. As Robert Lescelius points out, “The prevailing view of the participants in these revivals was that revival was God’s means of advancing His church. They believed prayer and the sound and faithful preaching of the Gospel were instruments used of the Spirit in His sovereign operations” (Lescelius 18). They did not hold to any special or greater means other than these two which would secure supposedly great results. Instead, they thought that the Spirit “makes the same means more effective at some seasons than at others” (Murray, *Revival and Revivalism* 127).

This old school evangelism was in stark contrast to the “new measures” practiced by Finney, and the career of Asahel Nettleton illustrates the contrast. Nettleton, a contemporary of Nathaniel Taylor who actually knew him, having been at Yale during the same period, was a member of the Old Calvinists, or Old School Presbyterians. According to Lescelius, “[Nettleton’s] method was to stay with a church until revival came” (18). He held that a revival was God’s sovereign outpouring of the Spirit, something could not be brought about by human manipulation. Charles Beecher notes that Nettleton’s preaching was “highly intellectual . . . discriminatingly doctrinal . . .

powerful beyond measure in stating and demolishing objections, and at times terrible and overwhelming in close, pungent, and direct application to the particular circumstances of sinners” (Qtd. in Murray, *Revival and Revivalism* 199).

Such preaching was typical of the majority of revival preachers of the day. Another preacher during this time was Aaron W. Leland. He wrote that preaching must consist of “a full disclosure of *the entire depravity and helplessness of our fallen nature*. . . . The preaching of the cross, therefore, must include an unwavering declaration, that *the working of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost* are indispensable to salvation” (100). The important point to note here is that these evangelists preached that man was both helpless and yet responsible when it came to obeying the gospel.

The Old School evangelists such as Nettleton handled those who desired to be converted by giving them guidance, but in the end pointed them to God, the only one in whom they could ultimately find peace. In *Revival and Revivalism* Murray recounts a story that illustrates this fact. During a revival in Savannah, a young man approached pastor B. M. Palmer and confronted him as being contradictory in his preaching by telling men that they must repent and believe even though they are unable to. Palmer responded by saying, “[T]here is no use in our quarreling over this matter; either you can or you cannot. If you can, all I have to say is that I hope you will just go and do it.” Palmer did not raise his eyes from his work and so did not see the effect his words had on the individual. After a few moments of silence the young man chokingly confessed, “I have been trying my best for three whole days and cannot.” Palmer records his response in his journal:

“Ah,” responded Palmer, raising his eyes and putting down his pen, “that puts a different face upon it; we will go then and tell the difficulty straight to God.”

We knelt down and I prayed as though this was the first time in human history that this trouble had ever arisen; that here was a soul in the most desperate extremity, which must believe or perish, and hopelessly unable of itself, to do it; that, consequently it was just the case for divine interposition; and pleading most earnestly for the fulfillment of the divine promise. Upon rising I offered not one single word of comfort or advice . . . So I left my friend in his powerlessness in the hands of God, as the only helper. In a short time he came through the struggle, rejoicing in the hope of eternal life. (373-74)

This anecdote suggests the power of the old way of evangelism to get results. It has been estimated by modern historians (Old School evangelists typically did not count conversions) that there were between twenty-five to thirty thousand converts under Nettleton’s ministry (Lescelius 18). Furthermore, the vast majority of these converts were thoroughly changed and remained faithful to the end. False converts were the exception, not the rule. Relying as it did on God’s sovereignty and power, the method of Nettleton and Palmer did work, but it was exactly what Charles Finney sought to overturn.

Finney was converted in 1821 and licensed to preach shortly thereafter. He was involved in successful evangelism in Upstate New York, a series of meetings which were later to be called the Western revivals. It was during this period from 1825 on that Finney began using what became known as the new measures (Lescelius 22). These new measures were a direct result of Finney’s theology. Unlike Nettleton, Finney opposed the

thought of diverting the sinner's attention away to the necessity of divine influence in order to secure regeneration and conversion. This made perfect sense if one accepted his premise that regeneration consists in a change of man's will. If this is all that is necessary for conversion, then it would be decidedly cruel for the evangelist to do anything other than try to convince the individual to make a decision for God. Finney himself makes this point quite well at the end of "How to Change Your Heart." He says, "[Y]ou see the philosophy of special efforts to promote revivals of religion. Why it is that protracted meetings, and other measures which are new, are calculated to promote the conversion of sinners. Their novelty excites and fixes attention. Their being continued from day to day, serves to enlighten the mind, and has a philosophical tendency to issue in conversion" ("How to Change" 16). Thus, Finney also denied that a revival was a sovereign outpouring of the Spirit of God, a miracle as the Old School had held. Murray writes, "People had formerly believed that revivals were like the rain; they could not be produced or organised by any human arrangements. But here was a teacher who believed that it was the church's duty to obtain revivals" (*Pentecost Today* 37). As Finney himself puts it, "[revival] is a purely philosophical result of the right use of the constituted means—as much as any other effect produced by the application of means" (*Revivals of Religion* 4). In Finney's estimation, a revival is something which can be guaranteed by using the proper means.

The means that Finney employed were designed to "break down the sinner's will, and induce him to 'submit to God'" (Baird 223). This included "a rude and vulgar dialect" accompanied by "grimaces and theatrical gestures" in addition to "irreverence and profanity." A new style of prayer was also used. The same phrase would be repeated over and over for an hour while the one praying would writhe in agony. Individuals would be prayed for by name from the pulpit, even having their sins enumerated in front of the congregation. Ten or twelve of these prayers would be linked together, often with several going on at the same time while others exhorted the sinners to "submit to God." Furthermore, a "holy band" of revivalistic experts who were filled with the Holy Spirit would help the evangelist in his duties. Preaching was intended to excite the hearers by using shocking themes and startling imagery. Finally, the "anxious seat" was used. This was a special location at the front of the meeting place to which individuals were invited to come and choose for God while others prayed over them. All those who came forward were immediately counted as converts. Once they had come forward, the process started over again, often long into the night (Baird 226-32).

Old School evangelists strongly opposed such methods, with Nettleton taking the lead in decrying the shallowness of the results. Finney's tactics supposedly produced five hundred thousand converts, although a much smaller number proved in the end to have truly experienced the grace of God. Finney himself acknowledged this later in his life. This was one, but not the only reason that the Old School opposed Finney. In his book, *Pentecost Today?* Murray lists several other reasons, including Finney's confusion of an outward act with a new birth. An individual can perform the outward acts as directed by the preacher and yet not experience true regeneration. Furthermore, this confusion led to a dangerous view of assurance. Compliance with the evangelist's directions began to be viewed as a grounds for assurance before God, much as praying the sinner's prayer or walking the aisle are viewed today. As a result, the requirements of church membership were lowered and the church became filled with false professors (Murray, *Pentecost* 49-

52). Others, who after awakening from their emotional excitement realized that there was no true change wrought in their hearts, became embittered and more hardened in their unregenerate state (Baird 233). Such were the results of the New Measures that grew out of the new theology developed at New Haven.

Contemporary evangelicalism is in large measure a result of the controversies that were prevalent in the early to mid-nineteenth century. Unfortunately, however, the church at large does not seem to be aware of these historical developments. Thus, modern evangelistic methods such as the altar call, sinner's prayer, immediate assurance, and planned revivals are commonly accepted as if the church has always used such measures. On the contrary, their origin in a specific time, place, and interpretation of scripture leaves them open to reexamination. The goal of believers should be a theologically informed evangelism and understanding of revival. This means, among other things, taking another look at the Old School idea that unregenerate sinners are wholly unable to obey the gospel, an emphasis that has largely been lost. Furthermore, in light of biblical teaching about the role of the Holy Spirit in regeneration, the church must beware of preachers who guarantee revival. With the Old School as its model, modern evangelicalism needs to be more open to the assured means of simply preaching the gospel and praying for revival.

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