

CH506: American Church History Lecture 6

THE SECOND GREAT AWAKENING AND THE NEW MEASURES

I. The Making of an Evangelist

A. Comments for Calvinists on Charles G. Finney

Perhaps the single most influential person associated with the Second Great Awakening was Charles G. Finney (1792-1875) who organized mass evangelistic campaigns on the assumption that revivals are humanly contrived and are not simply sovereign works of God's grace.

B. Life and Conversion

Finney was brought up in upstate New York. He had a profound conversion experience in 1821. Said Finney:

The Holy Spirit descended upon me in a manner that seemed to go through me, body and soul. I could feel the impression, like a wave of electricity, going through and through me. Indeed it seemed to come in waves of liquid love, for I could not express it in any other way. It seemed like the very breath of God. I can remember distinctly that it seemed to fan me, like immense wings. No words can express the wonderful love that was spread abroad in my heart.¹

Not long after his conversion, Finney began preaching along the Eastern Seaboard. He was often emulated, although Lyman Beecher expressed concerns over Finney's revivalistic techniques around 1827. In the late 1820s, Finney developed an appreciation for the reform emphasis of volunteer societies. In 1835 he became professor of theology at a new college in Oberlin, Ohio. That year, he published his *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*. At Oberlin, Finney led the students and faculty in acts of civil disobedience against slavery. He also encouraged students to participate in the Underground Railroad. Finney also admitted women students to ministerial courses of study.

C. The Theology of Finney

Finney was more Arminian than John Wesley. He also was influenced by the New Haven Theology of Nathaniel Taylor. He taught a form of perfectionism.

¹ Finney, *Autobiography* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1876. Reprint 1977), 21, 22.

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II. The Creation of a Tradition

A. The New Measures

Finney studied how to get a revival going and made full use of what he called “new measures.” Examples of these include: the anxious meeting, the protracted meeting, the anxious bench, advertising, music, etc.

B. The Legacy of Finney and the New Measures

Finney’s “new measures revivalism” established a methodological pattern for future Christian revivalism. His system was also a great engine for social change (e.g., abolition, temperance, social welfare, etc.)

III. The Rise of “Outsiders”: an Introduction

The revivalistic impulse created many new movements. Some like the Disciples of Christ went in an evangelical direction. Others like the Millerites went in other directions. The Disciples of Christ are associated with the names Barton Stone (1772-1844) and Alexander Campbell (1788-1866). William Miller (1782-1849) set the stage for several Adventist groups. The Seventh-Day Adventists were established upon the visions of Ellen White (1827-1915).

IV. A Comparison of the First and Second Great Awakenings

	First Great Awakening	Second Great Awakening
Time Frame	Early to mid 18 th century	Early to mid 19 th century
Formative Environment	Failure of Puritan theocracy	Frontier expansion
Major Figures	Theodore Frelinghuysen William Tennent Gilbert Tennent Jonathan Edwards George Whitefield	Francis Asbury James McGready Barton Stone Peter Cartwright Charles Finney
Most Active Denominations	Dutch Reformed Presbyterian Congregational	Methodist Baptist
Characteristic Methods	Doctrinal preaching in churches	Circuit riding Camp meetings Revivals in churches
Theological Orientation	Calvinist	Arminian
Characteristic Emphasis	Doctrine	Experience
Negative Side Effects	Unitarianism	American Sects