

Models of Conversion in American Evangelicalism: Jonathan Edwards, Charles Hodge and Old Princeton, and Charles Finney

Mark B. Chapman
Marquette University

Recommended Citation

Chapman, Mark B., "Models of Conversion in American Evangelicalism: Jonathan Edwards, Charles Hodge and Old Princeton, and Charles Finney" (2015). *Dissertations (2009 -)*. Paper 553.
http://epublications.marquette.edu/dissertations_mu/553

MODELS OF CONVERSION IN AMERICAN EVANGELICALISM:
JONATHAN EDWARDS, CHARLES HODGE AND OLD
PRINCETON, AND CHARLES FINNEY

by

Mark B. Chapman, B.A., M.Div., M.Th.

A Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School,
Marquette University,
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Milwaukee, Wisconsin

August 2015

ABSTRACT
MODELS OF CONVERSION IN AMERICAN EVANGELICALISM:
JONATHAN EDWARDS, CHARLES HODGE AND OLD
PRINCETON, AND CHARLES FINNEY

Mark B. Chapman, B.A., M.Div., M.Th.

Marquette University, 2015

The most commonly referenced definition of evangelicalism, David Bebbington's 'quadrilateral,' includes conversionism as one of four key definitive features, and most other definitions also reference conversion as characteristic of evangelicalism. This dissertation examines the adequacy of the use of conversion in such a defining role through a careful consideration of a variety of dimensions of conversion among three key representatives of evangelicalism: Jonathan Edwards, Charles Finney, and Old Princeton Seminary (as represented by its first professor, Archibald Alexander, and especially by his protégé Charles Hodge).

One cannot talk about conversion as a key to evangelicalism without understanding what is meant by conversion, and what has been meant by it historically. How one views conversion both reflects and affects significant features of one's theology and assumptions. If conversion is indeed linked in vital ways to so many other central theological concerns, would not divergent views of conversion indicate fundamental divergences in any resulting forms of Christian belief that would make such a union of divergent figures or movements under the one banner of evangelicalism untenable? How can conversion be used to define evangelicalism if conceptions of conversion have varied considerably over evangelicalism's history?

The primary work of this dissertation is the identification and analysis of models of conversion among these representatives. What key elements are involved in these various perspectives on conversion and how might they give insight into assorted theological perspectives and alignments within evangelicalism? This study concludes that the use of conversion to define evangelicalism is overly simplistic and inaccurate. Not only does conversion fail to define evangelicalism, at times it even appears to divide it. When one reflects theologically and historically on the notion of conversion, one realizes that the answers one gives to the meaning of conversion represent varying interpretations of the gospel message itself. Thus the variations among the figures of this study, all of whom are commonly placed within the bounds of what is termed evangelicalism, reveal a classification that is in many respects incoherent as a theological classification, and thus reveal the inadequacies of conversion in defining evangelicalism.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Mark B. Chapman, B.A., M.Div., M.Th.

In a project of this duration there are so many who have played a part, directly and indirectly, in its completion. The seeds of this project were planted while studying Jonathan Edwards with George Marsden in 2004, and in studies at Luther Seminary under the direction of Walter (Skip) Sundberg. George Marsden's decades of productive and excellent scholarship have been for me, as for so many others, a pathway into my studies of evangelicalism in general and Edwards in particular for which I am ever appreciative. Skip was my guide and friend in my long path back to academia from other pursuits. His keen mind and sharp wit were the source of much insight in my seminars under him, and I thank him for all that he has done for me and for others as well. Going back further, I am compelled to thank Garth Rosell for first lighting the candle of my love for church history back at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. As it turns out, his scholarship also contributed greatly to this dissertation.

A number of other scholars and individuals played some part in the research and completion of this project. Though they are too many to list, special mention goes to Kenneth Minkema and Mark Noll. My thanks are also extended to the staffs of the archives at Moody Bible Institute, Billy Graham Center, Oberlin College, Princeton University, and especially to Princeton Theological Seminary and Kenneth Henke.

There have been several individuals who have been alongside me at various points in my educational path who have also played a role (perhaps unknown to them) in this project. To Mark Stenberg, Bob Craigmile, Rikk Watts, Dwight Peterson, Doug Erickson,

Chris Ganski, Pam Shellberg, Abe Fisher, Jeffrey Wilcox, Megan DeFranza, Bill Oliverio, and Lee Sytsma: their friendship, encouragement, and dialogue have played an important part in my life and my work on this dissertation. Doug, we finally did it!

My thanks are extended to the theology department at Marquette University for its financial support of my studies. Special thanks are extended to Deirdre Dempsey and David Schultenover, S. J., who have both supported my efforts in various ways. My thanks also to Gale Prusinski, for shepherding me and so many others through the program, and for her ever open door and friendship. Ralph Del Colle was an early participant in this project. I am sorry he could not be here at its completion to provide his thoughtful and ever-insightful critiques. Ralph left us too soon and is missed. I also express my sincere appreciation to the members of my dissertation board: Stephen Long, Mickey Mattox, Douglas Sweeney, and Patrick Carey. They have been generous with their time, and kind enough to allow for a June defense. I deeply value their input on this project, and their friendship. A very special thanks must be extended to Patrick Carey, my dissertation director. Pat is why I came to Marquette University, and he did not disappoint. Now that he is rid of his last doctoral student, he can enjoy his retirement!

My love and thanks to my parents, Austin and Nadine, who raised me in the faith, and have likely wondered if they would live to see this project ever completed. Too many nights I have missed my two sons, Samuel and Zachary, while working on this project. You are my joy, and each very special. My wish is that you may know true conversion to Christ in your own lives. Finally, I cannot fail to mention my dearest friend and wife, without whose patience, love, and support this project would not have been possible. Pamela, I dedicate this to you.

May, 2015 *Soli Deo gloria*

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	i
Abbreviations	vi
Introduction	1
Chapter 1 – Jonathan Edwards	8
<i>Edwards and Revivalism</i>	14
<i>Conversion as Supernatural</i>	17
<i>The Role of the Human and the Holy Spirit in Conversion</i>	20
<i>The Nature of the Change of Conversion</i>	24
<i>The Role of Knowledge and the Intellect in Conversion</i>	34
<i>The Role of Emotions in Conversion</i>	44
<i>The Role of the Will in Conversion</i>	48
<i>Voluntarism vs. Intellectualism</i>	57
<i>Will, Understanding, and Conversion</i>	64
<i>The Essential Unity of the Self</i>	65
<i>The Means of Conversion</i>	68
<i>The Relation of Conversion to Baptism</i>	71
<i>The Timeframe of Conversion</i>	73
<i>The Authentication of Conversion</i>	76
<i>No Certainty in the Authentication of True Conversion</i>	78
<i>Negative Signs of Conversion</i>	80
<i>Positive Signs of Conversion and the Single Best Indicator</i>	82
<i>The Permanence of Conversion</i>	86
<i>A Morphology of Conversion and the Ordo Salutis</i>	89
<i>Preparationism and a “Morphology of Conversion”</i>	89
<i>The Order of Salvation</i>	99
<i>The Location of Conversion</i>	109
<i>A Corporate, Churchly Location for Conversion</i>	110
<i>The Great Awakening and a Shift in Location</i>	112
<i>Conclusions</i>	114
Chapter 2 – Charles Finney	119
<i>Finney and Revivalism</i>	127
<i>Conversion as Supernatural</i>	132
<i>The Role of the Human and the Holy Spirit in Conversion</i>	134
<i>The Nature of the Change of Conversion</i>	145
<i>The Role of Knowledge and the Intellect in Conversion</i>	151

<i>Types of Knowledge</i>	152
<i>Finney’s Faculty Psychology</i>	153
<i>Role of Knowledge in Conversion</i>	156
<i>Intellect not Fallen?</i>	157
<i>Limits of Knowledge</i>	158
<i>Results of Knowledge</i>	159
<i>The Role of Emotions in Conversion</i>	160
<i>The Role of the Will in Conversion</i>	167
<i>Relation to God’s Sovereignty and Election</i>	173
<i>Finney and Edwards/Reformed Thought</i>	176
<i>Voluntarism vs. Intellectualism</i>	180
<i>Conversion and the (Dis)Unity of the Self</i>	187
<i>The Means of Conversion</i>	190
<i>Finney’s “New Measures”</i>	194
<i>The Relation of Conversion to Baptism</i>	200
<i>The Timeframe of Conversion</i>	201
<i>The Authentication of Conversion</i>	206
<i>Authentication, Sanctification, and Perfectionism (Entire Sanctification)</i>	217
<i>The Permanence of Conversion</i>	222
<i>The Possibility of Permanence</i>	222
<i>Finney’s Argument for Perseverance</i>	229
<i>Assessment</i>	231
<i>A Morphology of Conversion and the Ordo Salutis</i>	234
<i>The Location of Conversion</i>	241
<i>Conclusions</i>	253

Chapter 3 – Archibald Alexander and Princeton Seminary ... 264

<i>Princeton and Revivalism</i>	270
<i>Archibald Alexander</i>	273
<i>Conversion as Supernatural</i>	274
<i>The Role of the Human and the Holy Spirit in Conversion</i>	276
<i>The Nature of the Change of Conversion</i>	278
<i>The Role of Knowledge and the Intellect in Conversion</i>	280
<i>The Role of Emotions in Conversion</i>	284
<i>The Role of the Will in Conversion</i>	287
<i>The Means of Conversion</i>	290
<i>The Relation of Conversion to Baptism</i>	292
<i>The Timeframe of Conversion</i>	293
<i>The Authentication of Conversion</i>	297
<i>The Permanence of Conversion</i>	301
<i>A Morphology of Conversion and the Ordo Salutis</i>	302
<i>Prominence of Conversion in Theological Viewpoint</i>	304

Chapter 4 – Charles Hodge 306

<i>Conversion as Supernatural</i>	317
<i>The Role of the Human and the Holy Spirit in Conversion</i>	320
<i>The Nature of the Change of Conversion</i>	324

<i>The Role of Knowledge and the Intellect in Conversion</i>	328
<i>Princeton's Supposed Rationalism and Philosophical Dependencies</i>	329
<i>Intellect, Knowledge, and Conversion</i>	337
<i>Emotions and the Subjective</i>	346
<i>The Role of the Will in Conversion</i>	356
<i>The Unity of the Self</i>	366
<i>The Means of Conversion</i>	371
<i>The Relation of Conversion to Baptism</i>	375
<i>The Timeframe of Conversion</i>	377
<i>The Authentication of Conversion</i>	382
<i>The Permanence of Conversion</i>	388
<i>A Morphology of Conversion and the Ordo Salutis</i>	393
<i>The Location of Conversion</i>	397
<i>Conclusions</i>	405
Conclusion	411
<i>Defining Evangelicalism</i>	427
Appendix I	438
<i>Future Research</i>	
Appendix II	440
<i>Edwards, Finney, and Princeton Conversion Categories Summary</i>	
Bibliography	446

Abbreviations

Jonathan Edwards

WJE Works of Jonathan Edwards, 26 volumes. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1957-2008

Charles Finney

Charles Finney Charles E. Hambrick-Stowe, *Charles G. Finney and the Spirit of American Evangelicalism*, Library of Religious Biography (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996)

Finney Keith J. Hardman, *Charles Grandison Finney 1792-1875: Revivalist and Reformer* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1987)

LOR *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*

LST Charles G. Finney, *Finney's Systematic Theology: New and Expanded 1878 Edition*, ed. Dennis Carroll, Bill Nicely, and L. G. Parkhurst, Jr., Introduction by Rev. L. G. Parkhurst, Jr. (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1994)

Memoirs Charles G. Finney, *The Memoirs of Charles G. Finney: The Complete Restored Text*, eds. Garth M. Rosell and Richard A. G. DuPuis (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1989)

Sermons *Sermons on Important Subjects*, 3rd Ed. (New York: John S. Taylor, 1836)

Princeton Seminary

BRPR *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review*

BRTR *Biblical Repertory and Theological Review*

CHMC Charles Hodge Manuscript Collection, Princeton Theological Seminary Archives

CHP Charles Hodge Papers, Princeton University Archives

LCH A. A. Hodge, *Life of Charles Hodge* (1881; rpt. New York: Arno Press, 1969)

ST *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (1871-1872; rpt. London: James Clarke & Co., 1960)

CP *Conference Papers* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1879)

Introduction

Conversion marks the beginning of the life of a Christian in the Anglo-American evangelical Protestant tradition. As such, conversion itself can become definitive of what it means to be a Christian, of what is at the very core of the New Testament gospel. How one understands conversion is related to most, if not all, other major categories of systematic theological reflection, from soteriology to the doctrine of God to pneumatology to ecclesiology.

If conversion is central to a number of primary theological conceptions in Christianity, it has also been considered a key, defining feature of American evangelicalism. Although there are no agreed upon definitions of evangelicalism, most common definitions emphasize its stress on conversion. The definition cited more than any other is provided by David Bebbington in his now classic book on evangelicalism, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*.¹ In it Bebbington suggests four central defining features. One of these is what he terms conversionism (centrality of conversion, along with biblicism (priority of/attention to the Bible), crucicentrism (centrality of Christ's work on the cross), and activism (involvement in various movements for change). A multitude of scholars have adopted this to some degree in defining evangelicalism, among them prominent evangelical historian Mark Noll.²

¹ David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (1989; rpt. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1992), 2-17.

² See Mark A. Noll, *America's God* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 5. Also see Noll's *American Evangelical Christianity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 185. Among others also endorsing the quadrilateral, see

However, this leads to a troublesome point. How can conversion be used as a defining feature of evangelicalism if conceptions of conversion have varied considerably over evangelicalism's history? One cannot talk about conversion as a key to evangelicalism without understanding what is meant by conversion, and what has been meant by it historically. How one views the process of conversion both reflects and affects significant features of one's theology and assumptions. If conversion is indeed linked in vital ways to so many other central theological concerns, would not divergent views of conversion indicate fundamental divergences in any resulting forms of Christian belief that would make such a union of divergent figures or movements under the one banner of evangelicalism untenable? These are the questions that will be considered as we explore the views of some representative figures in evangelical history on conversion. And the answer that will be discovered is that the use of conversion to define evangelicalism is overly simplistic and inaccurate. It is a much too complex web of theological conceptions to be used this way, a web that has been weaved in significantly different ways by various historical figures considered to be within evangelicalism. Conversion fails to define evangelicalism and at times even appears to divide it.

The primary work of this dissertation is the identification and analysis of models or understandings of conversion that have been present in various segments of American evangelicalism over its history. What key elements are involved in conversion in these various perspectives and how might they give insight into assorted theological

Barry Hankins. *American Evangelicalism: A Contemporary History of a Mainstream Religious Movement* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2008), 1-3. Timothy Larsen notes that "it would be tedious to list all of the works that have used Bebbington's definition to explain their own use of the term 'evangelical' – not to mention the fact that any boast that such a list was exhaustive would in all likelihood quickly be disproved by other scholars who identified additional titles." "The Reception Given *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain* since its Publication in 1989," in *The Advent of Evangelicalism*, Michael A. G. Haykin and Kenneth J. Stewart, eds. (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2008), 27. He adds that "Bebbington has developed a near monopoly position" among those needing a definition to limit the scope of their work. 26.

perspectives and alignments within evangelicalism? What strengths and weaknesses do they offer and can they shed light on the directions and difficulties in contemporary evangelicalism? When one reflects theologically and historically on the notion of conversion, one realizes that the answers one gives to the meaning of conversion represent varying interpretations of the gospel message itself.

The perspective of three vital sources in the history of American evangelicalism will be examined in the pages that follow: Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758), Charles Finney (1792-1875), and the Princeton School of Archibald Alexander (1772-1851) and Charles Hodge (1797-1878). They each represent a significant influence on American evangelicalism by virtue of their theological acumen, representation of a significant evangelical tradition, and/or influence on evangelicalism through their popularity and success as revivalists. Jonathan Edwards is at the fount of American evangelicalism, and the greatest theological mind this continent has produced. Through him are channeled into evangelical thought aspects of Puritanism, Calvinism, the Enlightenment, and other philosophical and theological streams present during Edwards' lifetime. Charles Finney represents a later revival tradition that was of enormous significance in the early to mid-nineteenth century. He exemplified at least some forms of the Second Great Awakening and Edwardsean adaptations that continued to be influential for later revival traditions, and he continues to be a model for many evangelical groups today. Princeton Seminary was the bastion of orthodox scholastic Reformed thought in nineteenth century America and represents many strains of evangelicalism that have also continued to the present.

By surveying their views on several aspects of conversion, this study is sensitive to several different ways in which views on conversion among these figures display both continuities and contrasts, some of them expected and some of them unexpected. All of

their views share certain commonalities, and all of them have distinctive differences. And all of them, in both varied and common ways, contribute to the forms in which evangelicalism is found today.

Depending on what one sees as critical to the process or event of conversion, one will employ different strategies to bring it about. Views on conversion often reveal deeper differences in theological and philosophical assumptions. For example, Edwards' view of revival as a surprising work of God reflects significant differences from Finney's view of revival as a rather unsurprising and predictable work of humanity. These differences lead evangelicalism down quite different paths. And since often those converted are imbued with the views and assumptions of those who have evangelized them, these are passed down and modified through generations of converts.

Edwards offered an integrated view of the will and the understanding, and their interaction with God's gracious activity in bringing about the conversion of the believer. Though Edwards wrote against Arminians he raised the ire of some Calvinists as well, since his conception of God's free grace undermined some of the authority of the Old Calvinist covenantal, societal church. By the time of Charles Finney in the early to mid-nineteenth century, Edwards' conception of the will had been rejected for a will that allowed the convert a greater role in his or her own conversion.

The erosion of the dominance of Calvinism in the nineteenth century and toward Arminian notions, especially the priority of human freedom, is a relatively well known story in the world of church history. Finney's and others' modifications of Edwards' views in this area won the day, in spite of any rear-guard Calvinist defense coming from Old Princeton. However, is this paradigm adequate in assessing the various changes and continuities in conceptions of conversion over this period? Can changing views of

conversion be explained (1) merely in terms of a move from Calvinist to Arminian theological leanings, (2) as a result of ongoing interactions between Calvinist and Arminian views, or (3) are there other significant elements of change at work within the history of evangelicalism that must be understood? If so, what do these other elements demonstrate about the direction of evangelicalism, and about its faithfulness to the historic gospel and to its biblical and Reformation roots? What is there that might be recovered in older views of conversion as a corrective to current evangelical trajectories or weaknesses? And is it finally meaningful to speak of evangelicalism at all? At the close of the dissertation some of these questions will be explored further, and especially the problems that seem inherent in any adequate definition of evangelicalism.

In his book, *The Change of Conversion*, Alan Kreider argues that changing notions of conversion tell a story of changing theology in the early church.³ I am attempting a similar strategy in exploring models of conversion in evangelicalism. I will explore and define models of conversion used in evangelicalism and evaluate their strengths and weaknesses. I seek to frame models in ways that might perhaps supersede typical theological boundaries or historical classifications, e.g. Arminian vs. Calvinist. I seek to approach the models of conversion in such a way as to expand and rewrite some of the relationships, the unities and diversities, within it. Examining these models may show the limitations of some common classificatory schemes for evangelicalism, and show unexpected diversity among groups considered similar, and commonalities across groups considered diverse, as in, for example, Hodge's openness to Horace Bushnell's views on raising children in the faith.

³ Alan Kreider, *The Change of Conversion and the Origin of Christendom* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1999).

Out of the views of our three major figures come three models of conversion. These models are named for the key emphases found in each view. The first, *supernatural affective vision*, represents Jonathan Edwards' understanding of conversion. The second, *immediate, ongoing human decisionism*, is representative of Charles Finney. The last, *transformative spiritual knowledge*, represents the views of Old Princeton Seminary as found in Charles Hodge, and in his mentor Archibald Alexander.

This dissertation suggests that a Calvinist to Arminian shift fails to account fully for many different dimensions of conversion that have varied over time. Therefore it peers at conversion through several different lenses, examining conversion through a consideration of various factors or categories. In doing so, the dissertation uncovers a rich and varied theological landscape for conversion, a landscape that includes a movement away from Calvinist thought that is dramatic in its effects on conversion and view of the gospel, but also a number of other changes and trajectories in other aspects of conversion – some of which work across any Calvinist/Arminian theological divide. After considering their relation to revivalism (which typically is revealing of how they understand conversion), the study examines each major figure's views on conversion as a supernatural event, the role of the human and the Holy Spirit in conversion, the nature of the change that occurs at conversion, the respective roles of the intellect and knowledge, the emotions, and the will in conversion and the degree to which these are seen to be unified or distinct in the self, the means of conversion, its relation to baptism, the timeframe of conversion (immediate or gradual), the authentication of conversion, the permanence of conversion (perseverance of the saints), how the process of conversion and salvation is ordered, and finally the location of conversion (to what extent, for example, is

the church a necessary context for conversion). The consideration of these various factors creates a fuller description of conversion than a Calvinist/Arminian paradigm.

There have been a variety of studies of conversion, for example, in the early Church (by Alan Kreider), in Puritanism (by Bruce Hindmarsh), and in contemporary systematics and biblical scholarship (by Walter Conn, Ronald Witherup, and Beverly Gaventa).⁴ Conversion has also been examined more recently from a sociological viewpoint, of which Louis Rambo's book is most important.⁵ No significant studies exist, however, which address the varied theological conceptions of conversion in the history of American evangelicalism, or provide a comparative analysis of those different conceptions. This project seeks to fill that gap.

The methodology to be used will be one of comparative historical and theological analysis. The primary concern will be to understand the differing theological conceptions of conversion represented by several representative figures in their historical contexts, and the interrelationships of these models with the figure's understanding of the gospel and its theological framework. As a work of *historical theology*, the focus of this work will not be on social or contextual history, but on the history of the theological ideas that have accompanied notions of conversion. While an examination of conversion through sociological or other lenses certainly has value, my lens is overtly theological, and I leave this other valuable work for others.

⁴ Kreider, *Change of Conversion*; Bruce D. Hindmarsh, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative: Spiritual Autobiography in Early Modern England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Walter E. Conn, ed., *Conversion: Perspectives on Personal and Social Transformation* (Staten Island, NY: Society of St. Paul, 1978); Ronald D. Witherup, *Conversion in the New Testament* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1984); Beverly R. Gaventa, *From Darkness to Light: Aspects of Conversion in the New Testament* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1986). Also worthy of note is another book released after most of this dissertation was already written. See Lewis R. Rambo and Charles E. Farhadian, eds., *Oxford Handbook of Religious Conversion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

⁵ Lewis R. Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993). See also Rambo, "Theories of Conversion," *Social Compass* 46 (1999), 259-271.

Chapter One – Jonathan Edwards

In the history of American evangelicalism, Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) towers over the landscape. Thus appropriately it is here that this dissertation begins.¹ What we will come to see in examining Edwards is that conversion represents a central core of his theology, and is of primal importance to his understanding of Christian theology and Christian life. I am employing the phrase, *supernatural affective vision*, to classify his model of conversion. Although any model name is inadequate as a description of the breadth of Edwards' thoughts on conversion, this captures some of his key and distinctive emphases. It describes the way in which conversion, for Edwards, involves a kind of vision of God – an opening of the heart to the true sight of God and divine things that transform those granted such a sight. To see and taste truly the utter goodness, the loveliness, even the sweetness of God overwhelms one's being and gives one a passion for God. It is because the unconverted do not see God as God truly is that they are not transformed by God. To see God truly is also to love and follow God. This vision is affective, which is to say it is not merely some form of intellectual knowledge gained about God, but a kind of unified spiritual understanding that is both known and felt in all of one's being – and is not to be parsed out to one or another supposed faculties of a human person. Rather one's passions, will, emotions, and intellect are all engaged in this vision. Edwards' word for this unity is the 'heart.' It is the seat of one's being, one's disposition or orientation toward or against a

¹ Portions of this chapter are taken or modified from a Master of Theology thesis written for Luther Seminary in St. Paul, MN, "Affective Knowledge: Jonathan Edwards on the Will, the Understanding, and Their Place in Conversion," completed in 2008.

given object or person. In conversion one comes to know God with “a sense of the heart,” to use Edwards’ phrase. In such an encounter, if it truly takes place, one is overwhelmed and enraptured by God – like a jeweler might be enraptured with a most glorious diamond, or better, as a lover is enraptured by the beauty of her beloved. Such a vision cannot be brought about by human effort, but instead is the result of God’s *supernatural* activity. When God opens the human heart and his divine and supernatural light shines in, then and only then can one see truly God’s true character, and it is this that results in one’s conversion. At the same time, such an encounter reveals the sinfulness of one’s own heart in contrast to God, and the need for repentance, which drives one to Christ as both the revelation of God and one’s deliverer from sin.

Edwards represents, in many respects, the seminal figure in American evangelicalism. “No American theologian of the era,” writes Brooks Holifield, “matched Edwards in either the breadth of his undertakings or the subtlety of his arguments.”² One could argue that the roots of American evangelicalism lay even further back, and one would not be wrong. History is a never-ending succession of what came before and what followed after. For every stage one examines one can always go back yet another step to that which preceded it. There are few, if any, real beginnings or endings. Even the starkest historical shifts maintain extensive threads with the periods preceding them.³

² Brooks E. Holifield, *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 101.

³ There is considerable debate about when to date the origins of evangelicalism. Bebbington has argued provocatively that evangelicalism was a creation of the eighteenth century in response to and in concert with Enlightenment concerns. This assertion has provoked a fair amount of debate. Largely on this point alone a whole book of essays has recently appeared, with a mixture of viewpoints on the adequacy of Bebbington’s contention. See Michael Haykin and Kenneth Stewart, eds., *The Advent of Evangelicalism* (Nashville, TN: B&K Academic, 2008). This is an Americanized edition (with slight alterations and different pagination) of an edition previously published in Britain titled *The Emergence of Evangelicalism* (Nottingham, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2008). Some, like Tim Larsen, agree with Bebbington. “Bebbington regards the 1730s as the decade that launched the evangelical movement, and his judgment is accepted here.” Timothy Larsen, ed., *Biographical Dictionary of Evangelicals* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 1.

Nevertheless Edwards represents, more than any other figure, the most significant contributor to early American evangelicalism – through his historical significance and role in the Great Awakening, through his gifted and creative intellect, through his extensive writings, and through his abiding influence on so much of the American Protestantism that followed, in all its forms – but especially in its evangelical expressions. Douglas Sweeney goes so far as to suggest that “since the eighteenth century, Jonathan Edwards’s legacy and the fate of evangelicals in America have been symbiotically linked. As Edwards’s reputation has fared, so has the evangelical movement.”⁴ Michael McClymond and Gerald McDermott consider evangelicalism to be the “sizable legacy” left by Edwards as the “leading theological interpreter” of the Great Awakening.⁵ This legacy is such that, not only is Edwards a key influence on evangelicalism, but evangelicals today have become key contemporary interpreters of Edwards.⁶

W. R. Ward, on the other hand, finds evangelicalism rooted more fundamentally in the previous century’s German pietism. See W. Reginald Ward, *Early Evangelicalism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006). Others look further back to the Puritans, to the Reformation, and beyond – even to the early church. See, for example, Joel R. Beeke, *What is Evangelicalism?* (Darlington, England: EP Books, 2012), and his essay, “Evangelicalism and the Dutch Further Reformation,” in *Advent of Evangelicalism*. 146-68. At times this debate on the emergence of evangelicalism hinges on debates over its definition. Depending on how one defines evangelicalism one will encounter those defining features at various times in the history of Christianity.

⁴ Douglas A. Sweeney, “Evangelical Tradition in America,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Stephen J. Stein (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 217-38, 217.

⁵ “From a retrospect of three centuries, the transatlantic revivals of the 1730s and 1740s—with Edwards as their leading theological interpreter—left a sizable legacy. It is called evangelicalism.” Michael J. McClymond and Gerald R. McDermott, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 447. A dissenting view that emphasizes Edwards’ discontinuity with later American religious history can be found in an essay by Henry May, who writes, “Edwards is not really ancestral to any of the major kinds of nineteenth or twentieth century American religion.” Henry F. May, “Jonathan Edwards and America,” in *Jonathan Edwards and the American Experience*, ed. Nathan O. Hatch and Harry S. Stout (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 19-33, 30. In an earlier book, *The Enlightenment in America*, May suggests that Edwards was not “a founder of the American religious way of life” because “American society needed a religion which would control behavior as well as belief. Edwards’s inscrutable God could not be drafted into the task of social control, and no society could have based its existence on his idealist metaphysics and absolutist ethics.” His intellectual empire “proved transitory.” Henry F. May, *The Enlightenment in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 49-50.

⁶ McClymond and McDermott note that “an important dimension of the Edwards renaissance has been the involvement of evangelical scholars. Kenneth Minkema has shown that evangelicals now produce the bulk of scholarship on Edwards’s theology.” 647. See Kenneth P. Minkema, “Jonathan Edwards in the

This has not always been the case among evangelicals in particular or among academic scholarship generally. Edwards' star has risen, fallen, and risen again in influence since his own day. Although in the first half of the nineteenth century Edwards' influence perhaps reached its peak in America, late in that century and into the twentieth views on Edwards sank to new lows among many in the academy and culture.⁷ One interpreter "charged Edwards with believing in the worst God, preaching the worst sermons, and having the worst religion 'of any human being who ever lived on this continent.'"⁸

Among evangelicals Edwards' legacy as expressed in the form of the 'New England Theology' movement was in the nineteenth century embraced by some, and bitterly reviled by others. But later in the twentieth century Edwards returned as a formidable force among evangelicals, and also as a key player among the scholars of the

Twentieth Century," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 47, no. 4 (Dec 2004), 659-687, 677 n.55. Douglas Sweeney also observes, "more than any other thinker, Edwards has aided evangelicals in gaining credibility and in furthering their agenda in American public life. Not surprisingly, then, evangelicals have usually championed Edwards more wholeheartedly – less hesitantly, and often much less critically – than has any other group.... All have shared in Edwards's passionate pursuit of 'true religion,' the kind of vital Christian piety that stems from regeneration (spiritual rebirth) and sets its subjects apart from nominal Christianity." "Evangelical Tradition," in *Cambridge Companion to Edwards*, 217. Sweeney further describes the Edwards renaissance among evangelicals, especially since the 1990s, and describes some leading contemporary Edwardsean figures, such as R. C. Sproul, John Piper, Iain Murray, and a segment of the Southern Baptist Convention (Founders Movement). 229-232. Finally, David W. Bebbington considers the ebbs and flows of Edwards' reputation outside of America from his own lifetime into the end of the twentieth century in his chapter, "The Reputation of Edwards Abroad," in *Cambridge Companion to Edwards*, 239-61. The twentieth century is dealt with on 255f., where the Welch Presbyterian Martyn Lloyd-Jones proves instrumental in introducing Edwards to a number of individuals, such as J. I. Packer and Iain Murray, who will mediate his influence into contemporary evangelicalism.

⁷ Sweeney writes that "by the early 1830s, Edwards's legacy grew so large that he might well have been dubbed 'America's evangelical.'" "Evangelical Tradition," in *Cambridge Companion to Edwards*, 220. See also Philip F. Gura, *Jonathan Edwards: America's Evangelical* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2005), esp. 222-38. Of his declining influence, see McClymond and McDermott who note that "in the last third of the nineteenth century, most authors treated Edwards as an 'anachronism.' They cited him as an 'important' thinker, but few intellectuals paid serious attention to his work. Few seemed to notice when the New England Theology slipped away." *Theology of Edwards*, 634. They add that "in the first third of the twentieth century, American intellectuals continued to treat Jonathan Edwards with the contempt and disinterest he received at the end of the nineteenth century." 637.

⁸ See Marilla M. Ricker, *Jonathan Edwards: The Divine Who Filled the Air with Damnation and Proved the Total Depravity of God* (New York: American Freethought Tract Society, 1918), as quoted in McClymond and McDermott, *Theology of Edwards*, 637.

academy in their views on the religious and intellectual history of America. In the aftermath of Perry Miller's landmark book on Edwards, and into the twenty-first century, a small industry has grown around Edwards scholarship that has only mushroomed further with the release over the past few decades of the Yale series of works of Edwards.⁹

The extent of the primary and secondary material on Edwards is at this point daunting, such that no one but the most dedicated specialists can be familiar with all of it. While proving a rich resource for this study of Edwards' views on conversion, the abundance of resources makes it effectively impossible to review or incorporate all of the relevant material into a dissertation chapter. For the purposes of this chapter, the primary source material used will focus on major works of Edwards' including *Religious Affections*, *Freedom of the Will*, and to a lesser extent *The Nature of True Virtue* and portions of *The Great Awakening*.¹⁰ Other selections from Edwards' works will also be utilized, especially key sermons such as "A Divine and Supernatural Light," and his "Treatise on Grace" – which grew out of a sermon series, as well as a variety of selections from his *Miscellanies*,

⁹ Perry Miller, *Jonathan Edwards* (1949; rpt. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1973). How big is this industry? McClymond and McDermott record that "by 2010, more than four thousand secondary books, dissertations, and articles on Edwards had shot off the press, and most had been published since Miller's landmark monograph. As a result, Edwards has become one of the most studied thinkers in the history of Christian thought and by far the most deeply scrutinized American thinker before 1800." *Theology of Edwards*, 643. M. X. Lesser has provided an annotated bibliography materials on Edwards. See *Reading Jonathan Edwards: An Annotated Bibliography in Three Parts, 1729-2005* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008). Much of this work has been driven by the new Yale editions of Edwards' works (listed in citations as *WJE*), now in 26 volumes (1957-2008).

¹⁰ Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections*, Vol. 2 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, John Smith, ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1959); Jonathan Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, Vol. 1 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Paul Ramsey, ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1957); Jonathan Edwards, *The Nature of True Virtue* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1960); Jonathan Edwards, *The Great Awakening*, Vol. 4 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, C. C. Goen, ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1972); *The Great Awakening*, the fourth volume in the Yale series of Edwards' works includes much of Edwards' reflections prior to his book, *Religious Affections*, on the revivals of his time, including *A Faithful Narrative*, *The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God*, and *Some Thoughts Concerning the Present Revival of Religion in New England*. I have attended primarily to the former two of these.

and other works.¹¹ *Religious Affections* offers Edwards' most mature reflections on the events and aftermath of the First Great Awakening and the issue of true conversion. *Freedom of the Will* offers the most thorough look at the place of the will in Christian conversion and life, and is a major landmark of the American Protestant landscape.¹² "A Divine and Supernatural Light" is an excellent crystallization of Edwards' understanding of the process of transformation involved in conversion and the role of knowledge in such a process. Other works complement and/or clarify these key writings.

As we proceed in this chapter the meaning and substance of conversion will be examined from a number of angles, but perhaps in opening we might offer this description by Edwards himself. Conversion "is that great change by which we are brought from sin to Christ, and by which we become believers in him,... the sinful, alienated soul's closing with Christ."¹³

¹¹ The "Divine Light" sermon is found in Jonathan Edwards, *Sermons and Discourses 1730-1733*, Vol. 17 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Mark Valeri, ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999); "Treatise on Grace" is in Jonathan Edwards, *Writings on the Trinity, Grace, and Faith*, Vol. 21 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Sang Hyun Lee, ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003); the *Miscellanies* in Jonathan Edwards, *The "Miscellanies" a-500*, Vol. 13 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Thomas A. Schafer, ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994), Jonathan Edwards, *The "Miscellanies" 501-832*, Vol. 18 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Ava Chamberlain, ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), Jonathan Edwards, *The "Miscellanies" 833-1152*, Vol. 20 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Amy Plantinga Pauw, ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), Jonathan Edwards, *The "Miscellanies" 1153-1360*, Vol. 23 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Douglas A. Sweeney, ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004).

¹² The recognition of the place of *Freedom of the Will* in Edwards' canon is near universal. Paul Ramsey declares, "This book alone is sufficient to establish its author as the greatest philosopher-theologian yet to grace the American scene." Introduction, *WJE* 1:2. Writing in 1889, Alexander Allen's assessment was much the same; this is "the work on which, more than on any other of his writings, his world-wide reputation has rested." Alexander V. G. Allen, "The Freedom of the Will" (1889), repr., in William J. Scheick, ed., *Critical Essays on Jonathan Edwards* (Boston, MA: G. K. Hall & Co., 1980), 89-96, 89. Sweeney comments that the book "exerted the greatest force on evangelical theology." "Evangelical Tradition," in *Cambridge Companion to Edwards*, 218.

¹³ Jonathan Edwards, *Sermons and Discourses 1734-1738*, Vol. 19 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, M. X. Lesser, ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 224.

Edwards and Revivalism

Edwards will forever be associated with the revivals of the First Great Awakening, both for his active participation in it, and for the extensive writings he left reflecting on the revival phenomena. Michael McClymond and Gerald McDermott observe that “since the mid-1700s, no author has had a greater impact on the theology and practice of Protestant revival than Jonathan Edwards.”¹⁴ Engaging revival necessarily entails serious consideration of conversion’s definition, significance, operation, and authentication. Thus it is important for this study to understand Edwards’ focus on the revivals and their aftermath. Issues related to revival will arise throughout this chapter, so I will here only briefly review Edwards’ relation to the revivals and his views regarding them.

It should be noted first of all that the revivals of Edwards’ day were not an entirely new and unknown occurrence. Edwards’ revival context, even though termed the *First* Great Awakening, had precedents in Puritan New England. Thomas Kidd notes that “the clearest antecedents to the revivals of the 1720s to 1740s were the periodic covenant renewals in New England.”¹⁵ Kidd goes on to describe several examples of Puritan renewal covenant activity and preaching that anticipated later revivals, especially a covenant renewal in 1705 by Samuel Danforth, Jr. in Taunton, MA.¹⁶ “Taunton’s renewal was only one of many ‘revivals’ before the ‘First’ Great Awakening. In the 1710s and 1720s, these occurrences became more frequent in New England.” Kidd also

¹⁴ McClymond and McDermott, *Theology of Edwards*, 675. The authors write furthermore that “more than three centuries after his birth, Edwards has continued to be cited as an authority on revival and might be regarded as the most influential author of all time on this theme.” 424. Harry S. Stout suggests that “in a profound sense, revivals were in Jonathan Edwards’s genes.” “Edwards as Revivalist,” *Cambridge Companion to Edwards*, 125.

¹⁵ Thomas S. Kidd, “‘Prayer for a Saving Issue’: Evangelical Development in New England Before the Great Awakening,” in *Emergence of Evangelicalism*, 132.

¹⁶ Kidd, “‘Prayer for a Saving Issue,’” *Emergence of Evangelicalism*, 134f.

considers the impact of Edwards' grandfather, Solomon Stoddard (1643-1729), whose pulpit Edwards took upon Stoddard's death. Kidd asserts that "Stoddard developed the most extensive evangelical theology of conversion prior to Edwards," which could not have failed to influence his grandson.¹⁷ But Edwards was not to remain following the footsteps of his grandfather in lockstep, as we shall find below.

Kidd also observes that "compared to Puritanism, evangelicalism in New England carried a heightened emphasis on conversion as the *raison d'être* of the movement and the defining experience of a believer's life."¹⁸ This shift is noteworthy as it was to become a central feature of evangelicalism in America.

Edwards was attempting to find a path amidst the extremes of the revivals, both defending its legitimacy as a work of God against its detractors and critiquing harmful expressions of revival that denied key aspects of a proper view of faithful, biblical Christian life and practice.¹⁹ On the one hand, he sought to defend the key place of the affections – of the will, the heart, one's internal guiding disposition and passions – against those who believed reason alone to be an adequate guide to the Christian life.²⁰ On the

¹⁷ Kidd, "Prayer for a Saving Issue," *Emergence of Evangelicalism*, 136, 137. Kidd continues, "As an orthodox Calvinist, Stoddard firmly believed that the Spirit of God drew sinners to salvation, but he also believed that powerful preaching was often the means that God used to draw people. Thus Stoddard promoted a Calvinist view of evangelism by powerful preachers who warned of the threat of damnation on one hand and offered the hope of salvation through Christ's grace on the other. This view no doubt heavily influenced his grandson Edwards. Stoddard argued that the dread of damnation was the most, and perhaps the only, effective means to lead sinners to true 'humiliation', or a sense that their sin was grievous and awful in the light of God's holiness." 137. Kidd also discusses Jonathan Edwards' father, Timothy Edwards, and his role in revivalism, as well as other significant New Englanders of his generation. 141f.

¹⁸ Kidd, "Prayer for a Saving Issue," *Emergence of Evangelicalism*, 145. He also notes a greater emphasis on the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in revival activity in evangelicalism.

¹⁹ In his classic work, *The Enlightenment in America*, Henry May noted that "in his own day, though Edwards provided the most powerful defense of revivalism, the defense was a qualified and discriminating one." 50.

²⁰ This will be more apparent in discussions of the intellect, emotions, and will later in this chapter. But it is very clear that Edwards considers it a great error to discard all the religious affections in response to the extremes of the revivals. He acknowledges the extremes, and the temporary nature of the change in many of those who had been through revivals. "The high affections of many seem to be so soon come to nothing, and some who seemed to be mightily raised and swallowed with joy and zeal, for a while, seem to have returned like the dog to his vomit." *WJE* 2:119. While for a time such temporary extremes were too easily

other hand, he also sought to preserve a place for reason against those enthusiasts who laid it aside in favor of the direct leading or illumination of the Spirit, and denigrated the place of reason.²¹ In this way he often ended up, especially in his most mature reflections on revival, being attacked both by friends and opponents of revival.

Edwards' positions on revival issues were not entirely static. Clearly he was more inclined in his earlier assessments of the revivals to judge more generously as the actions of the Holy Spirit the emotional responses and exuberant, earnest embrace of gospel truths. But as the years passed and he saw the lack of lasting change among many of those thought to be truly converted, he became more skeptical and discerning in his assessment of a variety of phenomena that previously might have been seen as indicators of the activity of the Holy Spirit.²² However, he was fairly consistent in opposing those responding at the extremes of the continuum on revival. He consistently insisted, as will be seen, that there was in revival something of the work of God's Spirit, and that revival criticisms founded in a reduction of Christianity to a form of rationalism or moralism could not be tolerated.²³ But on the other extreme, enthusiasm, understood as the Spirit's direct communication or bringing to mind God's will to individuals, "Edwards always

accepted as of the Holy Spirit, the pendulum swung back to the other extreme such that Edwards is concerned about the tendency of many to reject out of hand all such occurrences as not of God.

²¹ Edwards is very much aware of the damage done to the reputation of revivals by some of their most vigorous supporters. He writes how the devil "brings in, even the friends of religion, insensibly to themselves, to do the work of enemies, by destroying religion, in a far more effectual manner, than open enemies can do, under a notion of advancing it. By this means the devil scatters the flock of Christ, and sets 'em one against another, and that with great heat of spirit, under a notion of zeal for God; and religion by degrees, degenerates into vain jangling; and during the strife, Satan leads both parties far out of the right way, driving each to great extremes, one on the right hand, and the other on the left, according as he finds they are most inclined, or most easily moved and swayed, till the right path in the middle, is almost wholly neglected." *WJE* 2:88.

²² The relevant major works in this progression include *A Faithful Narrative* (1737), *The Distinguishing Marks* (1741), *Some Thoughts Concerning the Revival* (1742), and *Religious Affections* (1746). The first three are all found in *WJE* 4, and the last is *WJE* 2.

²³ Edwards' general attitude toward the revivals can be seen in this comment from *Distinguishing Marks* in 1741. "Certainly we must throw by all the talk of conversion ad Christian experience; and not only so, but we must throw by our Bibles, and give up revealed religion, if this be not in general the work of God." *WJE* 4:268.

opposed... as strenuously as anyone.”²⁴ Edwards would never allow one’s personal experience to supersede or add to the content or authority of Holy Scripture.²⁵ One’s experience of the Holy Spirit might open one to deeper understanding of gospel truths, but never undermined them.²⁶

Conversion as Supernatural

Crucial to Edwards’ response to some revival criticisms is his insistence that true conversion is a supernatural act of God. He wastes no time moving to this point in *Religious Affections*; it is the first positive sign he provides for the authenticity of affections. “Affections that are truly spiritual and gracious, do arise from those influences and operations on the heart, which are *spiritual, supernatural* and *divine*.”²⁷ Scripture counterposes natural and spiritual man, and this term spiritual is meant to signify not some part of the person, but God’s supernatural act through the influx of the Holy Spirit upon him or her, and in saving and not common fashion.²⁸ The regenerative actions at the core of conversion are not natural actions or processes; “those gracious influences which the saints are subjects of, and the effects of God’s Spirit which they experience, are

²⁴ *WJE* 4:75 (Editor’s Introduction). See also Edwards’ criticisms against immediate revelations of the enthusiasts in *WJE* 2:285f.

²⁵ Thus he writes, “We see it to be common in enthusiasts, that they depreciate this written rule [Scripture], and set up the light within, or some other rule above it.” *WJE* 4:254. Later in the same treatise he writes, “Some of the true friends of the work of God’s Spirit have erred in giving too much heed to impulses and strong impressions of their minds, as though they were immediate significations from heaven to them of something that should come to pass, or something that it was the mind and will of God that they should do, which was not signified or revealed anywhere in the Bible without those impulses.” 278.

²⁶ In answering the question of how to distinguish true from counterfeit works of God, Edwards makes clear the position of authority that Scripture holds. “We are to take the Scriptures as our guide in such cases: this is the great and standing rule which God has given to his church, to guide them in all things relating to the great concerns of their souls; and ‘tis an infallible and sufficient rule.” *WJE* 4:227. See also 234. One can find similar appeals to biblical authority throughout Edwards’ writings.

²⁷ *WJE* 2:197.

²⁸ See, for example, *WJE* 2:198-99.

entirely above nature, altogether of a different kind from anything that men find within themselves by nature, or only in the exercise of natural principles.”²⁹ Thus, as will become even more clear in the following two subsections, conversion is never the result of the elevation or enhancement of natural human qualities or of human effort or decision.

Although God may work in natural man in enhancing natural capabilities, assisting in political affairs, clarifying reason on secular or religious things, etc., God does not do this in a redemptive, spiritual sense. Edwards writes that although the Arminians speak of supernatural assistance, “the Calvinists suppose otherwise. They suppose that divine influence and operation, by which saving virtue is attained, is entirely different from and above common assistance, or that which is given in a course of ordinary providence, according to universally established laws of nature.” In the salvific act of regeneration Calvinists “suppose a principle of saving virtue is immediately imparted and implanted by that operation which is sovereign and efficacious in that respect, that *its effect is not from any established laws of nature.*”³⁰ God’s action at the heart of conversion stands entirely on its own as a supernatural act. Thus “special or saving grace in this sense is not only different from common grace in degree, but entirely diverse in nature and kind.”³¹

Why this must be so becomes more apparent when one understands how Edwards sees the workings of the conversion process. This, too, will become clearer in the subsection below considering the role of the intellect and knowledge, but suffice it to say at this point that there is a close relation of spiritual light to faith for Edwards.³² It is in the reception of spiritual light that one has the capacity for faith. Human depravity leaves a

²⁹ *WJE* 2:205.

³⁰ *WJE* 21:301 (emphasis mine).

³¹ *WJE* 21:154.

³² In *Religious Affections* Edwards writes, “Men not only can’t exercise faith without some spiritual light, but they can exercise faith only just in such proportion as they have spiritual light.” *WJE* 2:176.

person lacking the capacity to receive this spiritual light. Unregenerate persons are blind to it. Apart from a supernatural act of God they will never receive it. But it is this very light that illuminates the knowledge of God in such a manner as to provide to the receiver transforming affective knowledge – that is, knowledge that, when truly received and understood, changes one’s feelings, one’s heart, one’s character as one is allowed to gain a glimpse of God’s true goodness and glory.

It is this divine light that is at the heart of the conversion process. It is a spiritual knowledge, that “God is the author of, and none else: he reveals it, and flesh and blood reveals it not. He imparts this knowledge immediately, not making use of any intermediate natural causes, as he does in other knowledge.”³³ And it is in giving an individual the eyes to see and the sense of the heart to taste that the Lord is good that one is transformed by this spiritual knowledge. Providing that capacity and spiritual light is the very act of regeneration, from which transformation necessarily follows. For to see God’s goodness and glory with a sense of the heart is to be so moved that one is reoriented toward God and divine things. Edwards makes clear that while common grace assists nature, the revelation and divine light of redemptive grace is above nature.³⁴

³³ WJE 17:409. In “A Divine and Supernatural Light,” from which this quote comes, Edwards puts forth the following as his statement of doctrine for the sermon: “Doctrine. *There is such a thing, as a spiritual and divine light, immediately imparted to the soul by God, of a different nature from any that is obtained by natural means.*” WJE 17:410.

³⁴ WJE 17:410. Against deist objections to God’s supernatural activity in creation, Edwards writes, “Upon what account should it seem unreasonable, that there should be any immediate communication between God and the creature? ‘Tis strange that men should make any matter of difficulty of it. Why should not he that made all things, still have something immediately to do with the things that he has made? Where lies the great difficulty, if we own the being of a God, and that he created all things out of nothing, of allowing some immediate influence of God on the creation still?” WJE 17:421.

The Role of the Human and the Holy Spirit in Conversion

If conversion is at its core a supernatural act of God, then what role, if any, does the human play and what role does the Holy Spirit play in conversion? It should be apparent that in such changes as are wrought in a person by this light, the Holy Spirit plays the key role, for if by grace alone one is saved then the initiative for this change must come from outside the person. “Regeneration is by the Spirit.”³⁵ Unregenerate persons cannot bring this conversion about, being inclined against God. Thus “what is done in conversion is nothing but conferring the Spirit of God, which dwells in the soul and becomes there a principle of life and action.”³⁶ It is only this that makes possible any subsequent role for an individual in conversion.³⁷

The Spirit is at work in the process of conversion, but Edwards does not limit the activity of the Spirit to the regenerate. Rather he argues that the type of the Spirit’s activity differs between the regenerate and unregenerate individual. The Spirit can on occasion raise the natural abilities or principles of unregenerate persons, sharpening their thought, or giving them a greater awareness of their sinfulness, but the Spirit does not dwell in the unregenerate. Rather it acts on them just as it might act upon an inanimate object, as it moved across the waters during creation.³⁸ By contrast, in the life of the

³⁵ *WJE* 21:176.

³⁶ *WJE* 13:462 (*Misc.* 397).

³⁷ In his “Treatise on Grace,” Edwards examines the Jn. 3:6 discussion of regeneration, in which what is born of the flesh is flesh, and of the Spirit is spirit. By this is indicated a great divide between flesh and spirit. “By flesh and spirit, Christ here intends two things entirely different in nature, which cannot be one from the other. A man cannot have anything of a nature superior to flesh that is not born again.” *WJE* 21:154.

³⁸ Edwards expresses his thoughts on this, for example, in his “Treatise on Grace,” where he writes, “The Spirit of God may operate and produce effects upon the minds of natural men that have no grace, as he does when he assists natural conscience and convictions of sin and danger. The Spirit of God may produce effects upon inanimate things, as of old he moved on the face of the waters [Gen. 1:2]. But he communicates holiness in his own proper nature only, in those holy effects in the hearts of the saints. And

regenerate person, the Spirit sets up house, as it were, “takes him for his temple” and becomes an “indwelling vital principle” that changes the individual in fundamental ways, and that provides light that could never have been arrived at through any natural means.³⁹ “The Holy Ghost influences the godly as dwelling in them as a vital principle, or as a new supernatural principle of life and action. But in unregenerate men, he operates only by assisting natural principles to do the same work which they do of themselves, to a greater degree.”⁴⁰

To put it differently, for Edwards common grace signifies actions or influences of the Holy Spirit and their fruits that are common to both saints and the unregenerate.

therefore, those holy effects only are called spiritual; and the saints only are called spiritual persons in sacred Scripture.” *WJE* 21:192.

³⁹ See *WJE* 17:410-11. William Breitenbach notes, “according to Edwards, the common grace available to all men can do no more than aid existing natural principles in the soul, whereas the Spirit’s gift of saving grace infuses entirely new supernatural principles or habits into the soul.” “Piety and Moralism: Edwards and the New Divinity,” in *American Experience*, 177-204, 180. Likewise Conrad Cherry comments, “the Holy Spirit in his saving operation or in his creation of saving faith does not move simply ‘upon’ or ‘toward’ the human faculties of intellect and will; he is united with them as their new principle of operation. Here lies the difference between ‘natural man’ and the recipient of grace.” *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards: A Reappraisal* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1966), 28.

⁴⁰ *WJE* 13:512-513 (*Misc.* 471). In *Religious Affections* Edwards also discusses the indwelling of the Spirit. “The Spirit of God is given to the true saints to dwell in them, as his proper lasting abode; and to influence their hearts, as a principle of new nature, or as a divine supernatural spring of life and action. The Scriptures represent the Holy Spirit, not only as moving, and occasionally influencing the saints, but as dwelling in them as his temple, his proper abode, and everlasting dwelling place.” *WJE* 2:200. The Spirit of God “becomes a principle of life... dwelling as a vital principle in their souls.” It may influence natural men, but not as “an indwelling principle.” *WJE* 2:201. “Not only the manner of the *relation* of the Spirit, who is the operator, to the subject of his operations, is different; as the Spirit operates in the saints, as dwelling in them, as an abiding principle of action, whereas he doth not so operate upon sinners; but the influence and *operation itself* is different, and the effect wrought exceeding different.” *WJE* 2:202. Edwards also addresses this issue in his “Divine and Supernatural Light” sermon. “He [the Spirit of God] may indeed act upon the mind of a natural man; but he acts in the mind of a saint as an indwelling vital principle. He acts upon the mind of an unregenerate person as an extrinsic occasional agent; for in acting upon them he doth not unite himself to them... they are still ‘sensual, having not the Spirit’ (Jude 19). But he unites himself with the mind of a saint, takes him for his temple, actuates and influences him as a new, supernatural principle of life and action... Holiness is the proper nature of the Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit operates in the minds of the godly, by uniting himself to them, and living in them, and exerting his own nature in the exercise of their faculties. The Spirit of God may act upon a creature, and yet not in acting communicate himself.” *WJE* 17:411.

Special or saving grace involves operations of the Holy Spirit on the godly in a salvific manner and the fruits of that activity.⁴¹

In the twelfth sermon of the series on “Charity and Its Fruits,” Edwards expands on this work of the Spirit in the regenerate individual. There is an essential unity in the work of the Spirit in the converted. “The graces of Christianity,” he writes, “are all from the Spirit of Christ sent forth into the heart, and dwelling there as an holy principle and divine nature. And therefore all graces are only the different ways of acting of the same divine nature, as there may be different reflections of the light of the sun.... They are all communicated in the same work of the Spirit, viz. the work of conversion.”⁴² One must not lose sight of the oneness of conversion amidst the diverse results effected from it.

The nature of the relationship of the Spirit to the regenerate person is a complex issue. Edwards is careful to distinguish this indwelling from a merging of the divine with the individual. The Spirit dwells within the regenerate individual but is still free and distinguished from that individual. Conrad Cherry argues that for Edwards “the Divine Light is not identical with the human faculties; it is not collapsed into human being. The Light or Spirit is rather a new foundation laid in the human being in which man participates and from which the human powers operate. Edwards insists that the saint is not ‘Godded with God’ or ‘Christed with Christ’ through the Spirit’s becoming in some

⁴¹ See *WJE* 21:153. McClymond and McDermott put it this way. “Edwards believed that grace is not just *from* the Spirit but *of* the Spirit.” Although natural men may be affected in their natural faculties by the Spirit, “the saints actually possess the Spirit, and the Spirit’s activity within the saints is what Edwards meant by special or saving grace.” *Theology of Edwards*, 360-61. See also *WJE* 21:194-97.

⁴² He continues, “there is not one conversion to bring the heart to faith, and another to infuse love to God, and another humility, and another repentance, and another love to men. But all are given in one work of the Spirit. All these things are infused by one conversion, one change of the heart; which argues that all the graces are united and linked together, as being contained in that one and the same new nature which is given in regeneration.” Jonathan Edwards, *Ethical Writings*, Vol. 8 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Paul Ramsey, ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 332.

way identical with the human agent.”⁴³ Upon this new foundation the regenerate individual can know with a sense of the heart the truth and excellence of divine things.⁴⁴

If this key work of the Holy Spirit is central to conversion, does this leave the individual passive in its wake? Certainly not according to Edwards. The regenerative work of the Spirit enables works by the regenerate individual, to the extent that even though works are not the cause of justification, they do become a condition of justification, in the sense that in some form they always accompany it in the lives of the regenerate.

Rhys Bezzant puts it incisively. Edwards “allowed no room for either salvation *through*

⁴³ Cherry, *Reappraisal*, 29. Cherry here uses the term light as analogous to the Spirit, but this is not always how it is used in Edwards or his interpreters. My sense of Edwards’ use of the term is that the light proceeds from and is given by the Spirit, but is not analogous to it. Michael McClymond comments, “if there is a mystical dimension to Edwards’s teaching on illumination, it lies in his insistence that the divine light not only gives knowledge but also becomes one with the knower and transforms him or her.” *Encounters With God: An Approach to the Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 19. See also 25, and 37f. It is a spiritual knowledge that illumines and works on the person as subject and perceiver. But Cherry’s point here, regardless of his use of the term *light*, is certainly right, as is indicated by his reference to Edwards in *Religious Affections*. “Not that the saints are made partakers of the essence of God, and so are ‘Godded’ with God, and ‘Christed’ with Christ, according to the abominable and blasphemous language and notions of some heretics.” *WJE* 2:203. There is a mystical union of humanity, not with the essence of God, but with the spiritual knowledge and light of him.

⁴⁴ There is some controversy regarding the nature of the Spirit’s work in the regenerate. Some suggest that Edwards, who at times uses the term “infusion” to describe the Spirit’s redemptive work in an individual, has in mind something similar to a Catholic notion of infused grace. McClymond and McDermott, for example, follow this line, suggesting that “infusion seemed to Edwards to be a fitting description of the Spirit’s pouring himself into the human soul and taking up residence there.” *Theology of Edwards*, 382. See also *WJE* 21:165; 13:246, 512-13. Anri Morimoto suggests a similar interpretation. See *Jonathan Edwards and the Catholic Vision of Salvation* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995). Josh Moody, on the other hand, argues that when Edwards uses the term, he has in mind not a Roman Catholic view, but rather regeneration. See his chapter, “Edwards and Justification Today,” in Josh Moody, ed., *Edwards and Justification* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 17-43, 21. He also considers it highly unlikely that in Edwards’ historical context he would in fact be attempting to move toward Roman Catholic theology. Instead he is attacking deists and others who suggest that reason alone, outside any action of the Holy Spirit on an individual in regeneration, is sufficient in allowing for God’s activity in one’s life. It is the infusion of the Holy Spirit in regeneration that brings about the change of conversion, and not any reasoned efforts, etc. 20-24. “When Edwards talks about infusion and the like, what he is referring to is not the infusion of righteousness that the Westminster divines spoke against, but rather the experience of the new creation, the experience of having Christ in us, and us being in him. This supernatural event takes place when someone becomes a Christian—that is what Edwards is describing—and it is what rescues justification from the dusty tomes of the law court exegesis to the living entity that is in biblical thought, and in the experience of millions.” 14. See *WJE* 13:171, 242; 20:328, 366. I believe Moody’s criticisms of a Catholic reading of the term infusion in Edwards are merited. It is difficult to see how Edwards would have arrived at such an understanding of infusion, given his context.

works or salvation *without* works.”⁴⁵ The gracious, unmerited work of the Spirit is that which empowers an individual to faith and good works. Conrad Cherry points out that although based solely on God’s grace, faith is “a leap into new manhood provided by the Holy Spirit who gives old human powers new or faithful exercises.”⁴⁶ To suggest that this view of the work of the Spirit results in passivity is to miscomprehend the nature of the Spirit’s work of renewal and recreation. This will be explored in more detail in the section below on the authentication of conversion.

As Samuel Logan puts it, for Edwards, in the tradition of Luther and Calvin, “there is only one *cause* of justification and that is the sovereign grace of God. But there are numerous *conditions* of justification, including faith and evangelical obedience.” For Edwards “it is faith alone by which the individual is united to Christ” but it is God alone who causes justification.⁴⁷

The Nature of the Change of Conversion

For Edwards, the crucial element in the nature of the change that takes place at conversion is the disposition, or the tendency of one’s central orientation and habits.

There is a fundamental change in the disposition of the individual. “Hence we learn that

⁴⁵ Bezzant’s words are worth quoting in their entire context. “If those dubbed ‘Arminian’ or ‘Latitudinarian’ were prone to collapse the transcendent into the immanent without remainder, and thereby to highlight natural capacity within human subjectivity and to marginalize the ability of divine grace to intrude upon an individual’s life, those known as ‘antinomian’ were more likely to fall into the opposite error of assuming that spiritual ends could never be achieved through physical or natural means, stressing the arbitrariness of divine initiative and consequent human passivity. Edwards railed against both movements and their theological underpinnings, and through his sermons, discourses, and miscellanies, promoted justification by grace, the righteousness of Christ, and the sovereign sanctifying work of the Spirit, which cumulatively allowed no room for either salvation *through* works or salvation *without* works, a summation of the Arminian and antinomian challenges respectively.” Rhys Bezzant, “The Gospel of Justification and Edwards’s Social Vision,” in *Edwards and Justification*, 81.

⁴⁶ Cherry, *Reappraisal*, 33.

⁴⁷ Samuel T. Logan, Jr., “Justification And Evangelical Obedience,” in *Edwards and Justification*, 95-127, 100.

the prime alteration that is made in conversion, that which is first and the foundation of all, is the alteration of the temper and disposition and spirit of the mind...the nature of the soul being thus changed, it admits divine light.”⁴⁸

As Gerald McDermott observes, “For Edwards, the essence of all being is disposition or habit.”⁴⁹ This dispositional change, then, is central.⁵⁰ It is not merely a matter of the understanding, but reflects the heart and will – the whole orientation of the person.⁵¹ In somewhat Augustinian fashion, Edwards sees the disposition as either oriented toward God or against God. As his treatise *The Freedom of the Will* illustrates, he sees every individual in the unregenerate state as being both free and inclined against God. Only grace can intervene in such a situation.

If one’s disposition is inclined against God, then it is only by God’s gracious activity that it can be turned toward him. It is only by God’s supernatural influence that one can gain what Edwards terms a “sense of the heart” and come to taste and know in a

⁴⁸ Jonathan Edwards, *WJE* 13:462.

⁴⁹ Gerald R. McDermott, *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 133.

⁵⁰ E. Brooks Holifield writes, “Like the Puritan Thomas Shepard, whom he often cited, Edwards thought of saving grace as the indwelling and activity of the Spirit issuing in the formation of a new habit or disposition.” “Edwards as Theologian,” in *Cambridge Companion*, 144-61, 151.

⁵¹ There is disagreement as to whether the disposition should be understood in ontological terms, as part of the very being of a person. Sang Hyun Lee argues that “habit or disposition, for Edwards, is not mere custom or regularity of events. Habit is an active and ontologically abiding power that possesses a mode of realness even when it is not in exercise. Habit, for Edwards, is also a relational principle—that is, a general law that governs the manner or character of actual actions and events.” *The Philosophical Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), 7. Lee asserts that this dispositional ontology replaces traditional metaphysics in Edwards, and provides the central unity of his thought. For a dissenting view, see Stephen R. Holmes, “Does Jonathan Edwards Use a Dispositional Ontology? A Response to Sang Hyun Lee,” in *Jonathan Edwards: Philosophical Theologian*, ed. Paul Helm and Oliver D. Crisp (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2003), 99-114. Holmes argues that Lee’s book “is simply wrong in its main thesis.” 99. He adds, “My fundamental problem with Lee’s position is that I find his account of God, or rather his account of Edwards’s doctrine of God, very difficult to believe in... for reasons of history: I cannot imagine Edwards, with the theological commitments he held to, coming up with anything like the doctrines that Lee tells us were at the heart of his system, and I believe that most if not all of the evidence Lee offers for his reconstruction can be explained as, or more, adequately by a less implausible account of what Edwards thought. Lee pays great attention to the Edwards’s text, but little to his context, and if the reconstruction he offers is adequate to the former, it is my contention that it is wholly inadequate to the latter.” 100. Both, however, would concur that the disposition involves more than simply the will, but some combination of elements that involve fundamental aspects of one’s being.

deeper, salvific way God's "excellencies." We are powerless to bring about this conversion of ourselves. For Edwards, the rationalists, the Arminians, and the enthusiasts are mistaken, as the rationalists look to their reason, the Arminians to their works, and the enthusiasts to their personal experiences, but none involve a change of the heart or disposition.⁵² Conversion is the change in the disposition from one oriented against God to one oriented toward God. In conversion one becomes "quite another man... born again, created over a second time,"⁵³ resulting in both humility and great joy.

A central metaphor used by Edwards to describe how this change in disposition is wrought is that of light.⁵⁴ "This light is such as effectually influences the inclination, and changes the nature of the soul... It will turn the heart to God as the fountain of good, and to choose him for the only portion."⁵⁵ This light is not derived through any natural means, but is "*of a different nature*" and "*immediately imparted to the soul by God.*"⁵⁶ It is not derived from the imagination, nor does it result in new truths outside of Scripture, but rather it deepens one's understanding of the Word of God.

⁵² See Edwards' 1752 sermon, "True Grace Distinguished from the Experience of Devils," in *Sermons and Discourses 1743-1758*, Vol. 25 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. William H. Kimnach (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), 608-40. William Breitenbach notes, "in it he continued his attempt to reduce Arminianism and Antinomianism to a common denominator by showing that all the attainments of legal and evangelical hypocrites fall short of true grace because they do not involve a change of heart." "Piety and Moralism," in *American Experience*, 184.

⁵³ Jonathan Edwards, *Sermons and Discourses 1723-1729*, vol. 14 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Kenneth P. Minkema (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994), 81. From the sermon "A Spiritual Understanding of Divine Things Denied to the Unregenerate."

⁵⁴ Edwards writes in his sermon "A Spiritual Understanding of Divine Things Denied to the Unregenerate" that "of all the similitudes that are made use of in Scripture to describe to us this spiritual understanding, light is that which doth most fully represent it and is oftenest used." *WJE* 14:77. George Marsden also notes, "the central theme for understanding Edwards... is encapsulated in his phrase, 'the divine and supernatural light.' The hub around which all his thought and action revolves is the question of whether people—himself and others—have been given the regenerating grace to see that light." Marsden, "The Quest for the Historical Edwards" in *Jonathan Edwards at Home and Abroad*, ed. David Kling and Douglas Sweeney (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), 3-15, 13.

⁵⁵ *WJE* 17:424. Mark Valeri also notes in his introduction to the "Divine Light" sermon, "This [divine] light is not only morally pleasing and joyful but the means of conversion and salvation." *WJE* 17:405. See also 40-44.

⁵⁶ *WJE* 17:410.

It is thus through the Spirit, and not through any natural capacity, that this change in disposition and new awareness occurs.⁵⁷ However, according to Conrad Cherry, for Edwards “new faculties are not given in illumination, but a new basis is given to the mind from which the natural faculties operate in a new way. The new operation of the faculties is none other than the affective knowledge characteristic of the ‘sense of the heart.’”⁵⁸ This is a point on which there is considerable range of opinion, from Perry Miller on the one extreme, to Cherry, to Paul Helm.⁵⁹

For Miller “conversion is a perception, a form of apprehension.”⁶⁰ “In Edwards’ ‘sense of the heart’ there is nothing transcendental; it is rather a sensuous apprehension of the total situation.”⁶¹ The spiritual sense is contiguous with and built upon everyday sensing and experience; it is a sensible grace of deepening awareness of the faculties common to all people, an extension of the natural.

Cherry was the first to take significant issue with Miller’s view, arguing that Edwards’ sense of the supernatural in divine illumination, and his doctrinal Calvinism, had been ignored in Miller’s interpretation. The spiritual sense cannot be arrived at *naturally*, but only given by the Holy Spirit. It is beyond natural abilities and not under natural powers. As Michael McClymond observes, “the divine light is always a gift of grace and never a simple human power or prerogative.”⁶² Others, like Paul Helm and James Hoopes, argue in even stronger terms than Cherry that this sense is not only *not* arrived at naturally, but requires other than our natural faculties or senses, a “sixth sense”

⁵⁷ “The same Spirit who supplies the divine truth to be known simultaneously provides the possibility for knowing it.” Cherry, *Reappraisal*, 29.

⁵⁸ Cherry, *Reappraisal*, 30.

⁵⁹ See McClymond, *Encounters*, 13-14 for more on this.

⁶⁰ Perry Miller, *Jonathan Edwards*, 139.

⁶¹ Perry Miller, “Jonathan Edwards on the Sense of the Heart,” *Harvard Theological Review* 41 (1948), 127-28, as quoted in McClymond, *Encounters*, 12.

⁶² *Encounters*, 13.

given by God resulting in a different type of knowledge.⁶³ The epistemological base of the believer is then fundamentally different than that of the unbeliever.

In analyzing the nature of this change Edwards can be difficult to parse. What is clear is that a view of this change as an extension of the natural understanding such as Miller undertakes does not adequately reflect Edwards' thought on the matter. The changes wrought by the Spirit in conversion "not only differ from what is natural, and from everything that natural men experience, in degree and circumstances; but also in kind; and are of a nature vastly more excellent."⁶⁴ Clearly for Edwards a supernatural change is occurring in the process of conversion. "The special work of the Spirit of God, or that which is peculiar to the saints, consists in giving the sensible knowledge of the things of religion, ... not by assisting natural principles, but by infusing something supernatural."⁶⁵

What is less clear is the precise nature of that change. At times Edwards can use very strong language regarding this change that seems to indicate the notion of a sixth sense or change of faculties. Edwards insists that a change of nature occurs, as can be seen in the seventh positive sign of *Religious Affections*.⁶⁶ In his "Treatise on Grace," he notes that in Scripture conversion is compared to resurrection, and is "represented as a work of creation. When God creates, he does not merely establish and perfect the things which

⁶³ Hoopes comments that "in Edwards's theory the new willful feeling or sense of the heart in conversion also constitutes new understanding, new intellectual knowledge." James Hoopes, "Jonathan Edwards's Religious Psychology," *Journal of American History* 69, no.4 (March 1983), 849-865, 857. Hoopes is careful, however, not to oversimplify the notion of a sixth sense. In Edwards support for this view can be seen in *Religious Affections* in a number of places where Edwards seems to see in conversion a supernatural experience that entails a kind of sixth sense. For examples see *WJE* 2:197f., 206, 210, 259f., 271.

⁶⁴ *WJE* 2:205.

⁶⁵ *WJE* 18:464 (*Misc.* 782). Elsewhere he writes, "it plainly appears, that God's implanting that spiritual supernatural sense which has been spoken of, makes a great change in a man." *WJE* 2:275.

⁶⁶ That sign reads, "Another thing, wherein gracious affections are distinguished from others, is, that they are attended with a change of nature." *WJE* 2:340. "They make an alteration in the very nature of the soul." 340. See also 2:395f.

were made before, but makes wholly and immediately something entirely new, either out of nothing, or out of that which was perfectly void of any such nature.”⁶⁷ In conversion “there is no medium between being dead and alive.” There is no continuum. It is a radical change. Conversion as “new birth” and as the restoration of sight to the blind points to the same biblical reality.⁶⁸ At one point in *Religious Affections* he even suggests directly that the change wrought by the Spirit “is often in Scripture compared to the giving a new sense.”⁶⁹

Perhaps the confusion comes from equating the notion of a new or sixth sense with that of a new faculty. Edwards distinguishes between these options, arguing for the former but not the latter. In spite of the strong language above, he says as much directly at one point in *Religious Affections*. “This new spiritual sense, and the new dispositions that attend it, are no new faculties, but are new principles of nature. I use the word ‘principles,’ for want of a word of a more determinate signification.”⁷⁰ Rather than a new faculty, he calls it “a new foundation laid in the nature of the soul” that provides for “a new kind of exercises” of the existing faculties.⁷¹ The change then involves more than the elevation of the natural faculties, as it allows them to be used in ways entirely unlike those of the unregenerate. But at the same time, the metaphysical or substantial structure of an individual is not superseded, but rather reoriented to divine things.

⁶⁷ *WJE* 21:159.

⁶⁸ *WJE* 21:160.

⁶⁹ “The spiritual perceptions which a sanctified and spiritual person has, are not only diverse from all that natural men have, after the manner that the ideas or perceptions of the same sense may differ one from another, but rather as the ideas and sensations of different senses do differ. Hence the work of the Spirit of God in regeneration is often in Scripture compared to the giving a new sense.” *WJE* 2:206. See also 210, 259f., 271.

⁷⁰ *WJE* 2:206.

⁷¹ *WJE* 2:206. The quotes in their contexts read as follows: “This new spiritual sense is not a new faculty of understanding, but it is a new foundation laid in the nature of the soul, for a new kind of exercises of the same faculty of understanding. So that new holy disposition of heart that attends this new sense, is not a new faculty of will, but a foundation laid in the nature of the soul, for a new kind of exercises of the same faculty of will.” 206.

Kyle Strobel suggests that this change should be understood primarily in relational rather than metaphysical terms. By conversion the individual is brought into communion with the divine life through the work of Christ by the Spirit. “This participation is not mediated in a metaphysical register, as if humanity were somehow to merge into the essence of God, but is fundamentally a relational notion.”⁷² This provides the context for Edwards’ language of *partaking* in the life of Christ and the Father that he uses in *Religious Affections* and elsewhere, such as when he writes that those outside of Christ are not “partakers in the divine nature” since “being partakers of the divine nature is spoken of, not only as peculiar to the saints, but as one of the highest privileges of the saints.”⁷³

If the change of conversion does not result in a new faculty in the regenerate individual, then does the change, as Helm and others contend, still result in a new epistemological basis for that individual? Edwards certainly seems to suggest this, for example, in *Religious Affections*. “There is a new inward perception or sensation of their minds, entirely different in its nature and kind, from anything that ever their minds were the subjects of before they were sanctified.”⁷⁴ Stephen Yarbrough and John Adams support this reading. They write, “What, to Edwards, was the difference between the regenerate and unregenerate?... For Edwards, the question was absolutely fundamental. Saints did not simply disagree with sinners: they *saw* differently, they *felt* differently, they *thought* differently. In short, they lived in a different world altogether.”⁷⁵ McClymond and McDermott arrive at the same conclusion, noting that “the experience of conversion is

⁷² Kyle C. Strobel, “By Word and Spirit: Jonathan Edwards on Redemption, Justification, and Regeneration,” in *Edwards and Justification*, 48.

⁷³ *WJE* 21:155-56.

⁷⁴ *WJE* 2:205.

⁷⁵ Stephen R. Yarbrough and John C. Adams, *Delightful Conviction: Jonathan Edwards and the Rhetoric of Conversion*, Great American Orators, No. 20 (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1993), xiii.

foundational to Edwards's religious epistemology. Believers are able to perceive a holy beauty in God that is invisible to nonbelievers, and in this sense believers and nonbelievers live in two different universes."⁷⁶

One can see an illustration of how this new epistemology works itself out in *Religious Affections*, where Edwards discusses how God's grace can appear lovely to a person in two ways, good for oneself, or good in itself. Only the saints perceive the latter. The spiritual sense of the heart discussed in the first sign is concerned particularly with the ability to detect God's holiness, whereas natural man only seems to comprehend God's natural attributes.⁷⁷ Furthermore, not everything experienced by a spiritual person is new and entirely different from the experiences of a natural man. For example, two persons might both love a fruit, but one lacks taste. While the one loves the fruit for its beauty, color, etc., the other can taste its sweetness as well. So there are aspects of their love that are common, but the person with taste has also a sort of experience and knowledge of the fruit entirely absent from the person without taste.⁷⁸ A natural man may have new and unusual experiences, even extraordinary ones, but these will still be influences based on natural principles, and quite different from those insights and experiences gained through a renewed, spiritual sense.⁷⁹

In my view of the best reading of Edwards, McClymond and McDermott probably get it right when writing, contra Helm, that "the mental breakthrough of grace, or 'divine and supernatural light,' operates in and through the natural sense faculties, and so grace does not destroy or bypass nature but perfects it."⁸⁰ The new epistemological

⁷⁶ *Theology of Edwards*, 317.

⁷⁷ *WJE* 2:262-63.

⁷⁸ *WJE* 2:208-209.

⁷⁹ *WJE* 2:209-10.

⁸⁰ *Theology of Edwards*, 318.

basis is built not on the replacement of or addition of faculties, but by their perfection. It is indeed a supernatural change, as fallen individuals lack any natural path to the regeneration of their fallen faculty. It could never come about without the work of the Holy Spirit. One might say that what is involved is the supernatural use of the natural senses by the activity of the Holy Spirit within regenerate individuals. “‘Tis the Spirit itself that is the only principle of true virtue in the heart. So that to be truly virtuous, is the same as to be spiritual.”⁸¹

It is important to note that the changes that result from conversion are not only initiated by the Holy Spirit, but also constantly maintained by the Spirit.⁸² The very essence of the change is in some respects only the addition of the life of the Spirit dwelling within the person, transforming the use of that person’s faculties to new ends and capacities. The Spirit does not make a change in a person and then it is done. The Spirit’s activity is ongoing, and the new sense of the heart is founded in the Spirit’s activity and dwelling within the regenerate individual’s heart. It is not a static condition or change; it is always and ever dependent on this Spirit. “All succeeding acts of grace, must be as immediately and to all intents and purposes, as much from the immediate acting of the Spirit of God on the soul as the first; and if God should take away his Spirit out of the soul, all habits and acts of grace would of themselves cease as immediately as light ceases in a room when a candle is carried out.”⁸³ This, too, is consistent with the notion that there is no actual change of substance or of faculties within the regenerate person. One’s changed

⁸¹ *WJE* 21:197. “There is no other principle of grace in the soul than the very Holy Ghost dwelling in the soul and acting there as a vital principle.” *WJE* 21:196.

⁸² “All grace and goodness in the hearts of the saints is entirely from God: and they are universally and immediately dependent on him for it.” *WJE* 2:342.

⁸³ *WJE* 21:196. He continues, “and no man has an habit of grace dwelling in him any otherwise than as he has the Holy Spirit dwelling in him as his temple, and acting in union with his natural faculties after the manner of a vital principle. So that when they act grace, ‘tis, in the language of the Apostle, ‘not they, but Christ living in them.’” *WJE* 21:196.

disposition in conversion is only the dynamic reality of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and not a new disposition in the sense of an ontological change in one's nature apart from the Spirit.⁸⁴ Through this indwelling the believer is brought to union with the living Christ and the divine life.⁸⁵

Finally, also noteworthy is that for Edwards this new, radical, vital spiritual principle brought by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit into the regenerate soul at conversion is “radically but one... but one in its root,” regardless of the various manifestations of it (repentance, humility, etc.). This holy principle “is the essence and sum of all grace... the grand Christian virtue.” The principle is that of “divine love.”⁸⁶ It is for Edwards the “essence of all Christianity.”⁸⁷ This principle is, as Peter Toon describes it, “the summary of all grace, holiness, and virtue, and a complete change from everything that is inherent in the soul.”⁸⁸ It fundamentally reorients one's disposition toward a “relish of the supreme excellency of the divine nature, inclining the heart to God as the chief good.”⁸⁹ It reflects the simplicity of God's very essence.

In sum, the nature of the change of conversion is, simply, the Holy Spirit living within the believer. I will let Edwards himself summarize in closing this section. The saints

are not only partakers of a nature that may in some sense be called divine, because 'tis conformed to the nature of God; but the very Deity does in some sense dwell in them. That holy and divine love

⁸⁴ “He gives his Spirit to be united to the faculties of the soul, and to dwell there after the manner of a principle of nature; so that the soul, in being induced [sic] with grace, is induced with a new nature.” *WJE* 2:342.

⁸⁵ “In the soul where Christ savingly is, there he lives. He don't only live without it, so as violently to actuate it; but he lives in it; so that that also is alive.” *WJE* 2:342.

⁸⁶ *WJE* 21:166.

⁸⁷ *WJE* 21:168.

⁸⁸ Peter Toon, *Born Again: A Biblical and Theological Study of Regeneration* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1987), 147.

⁸⁹ *WJE* 21:173.

dwells in their hearts, and is so united to human faculties that 'tis itself become a principle of new nature. That love, which is the very native temper and spirit of God, so dwells in their souls that it exerts itself in its own nature in the exercise of those faculties after the manner of a natural or vital principle in them.⁹⁰

The Role of Knowledge and the Intellect in Conversion

Edwards speaks to the subject of knowledge often and substantively. One can, in fact, be overwhelmed by the mass of references to knowledge spread throughout his corpus of writings. Clearly, the role of knowledge and the intellect are of special importance to Edwards. In general, while Edwards holds to conversion as a supernatural experience, and that in it there comes a sort of sixth sense providing perceptions of God's glory, and an actual change in one's nature, he also holds strongly to a necessary role for the understanding and knowledge in the process of conversion. In this section I explore the complex and at times ambiguous relation of knowledge and the understanding to conversion, together with some related themes, with particular reference to Edwards' sermon "A Divine and Supernatural Light."⁹¹ I also consider Edwards' views on the understanding and knowledge in relation to his Puritan predecessors.

⁹⁰ *WJE* 21:194-95.

⁹¹ Unlike the will, in approaching Edwards' view of the understanding no one great work of Edwards clarifies all his thought. A variety of primary works will be referenced in this section, but Edwards' sermon, "A Divine and Supernatural Light" (*WJE* 17:408-26) will have a prominent place as a summary of his thought in this area. Many acknowledge its representations of Edwards' central foci. On its importance, Harold Simonson writes, "No sermon contains more of the essential Edwards than does 'A Divine and Supernatural Light.' Perry Miller does not exaggerate in saying that within this sermon 'the whole of Edwards' system is contained in miniature.'" *Theologian of the Heart* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974), 37. Mark Valeri notes that "in *A Divine and Supernatural Light*, Edwards condensed much of a decade of preaching, rumination, and private writing on the nature of spiritual knowledge into a single, remarkable effort." *WJE* 17:405. He notes that themes from this 1733 sermon appear as early as 1723 in sermons, and also later in *Religious Affections*. "In sum, his expression of the nature of spiritual knowledge in this 1733 lecture became an integral part of his theology." 406.

First one must consider the range of meanings in Edwards' use of the term *understanding*. It is important to recognize that for Edwards there are two types of understanding or knowledge, "there is a twofold understanding or knowledge of good... merely speculative or notional" and "the sense of the heart."⁹² There is speculative or natural knowledge (he sometimes terms this ratiocination) and there is sensible or spiritual knowledge. "There is a distinction to be made between a mere notional understanding, wherein the mind only beholds things in the exercise of a speculative faculty; and the sense of the heart, wherein the mind don't only speculate and behold, but relishes and feels."⁹³ Knowledge that is merely propositional is of the former type. To know in the spiritual sense always involves the latter, affective type of knowledge. It is in this latter sense that we perceive beauty. Further consideration of this latter form of knowledge, or sense of the heart, will be taken up below. Here I will reflect more carefully on the place of this first, speculative form of knowledge.

For Edwards the role of the understanding in the speculative or notional sense in conversion is limited. The merely speculative reason of rationalism is inadequate as a source for divine knowledge. Edwards finds it important to stress this point against the

⁹² *WJE* 17:413. In the sermon "The Importance and Advantage of a Thorough Knowledge of Divine Truth," he writes, "There are two kinds of knowledge of the things of divinity, viz. *speculative* and *practical*, or in other terms, *natural* and *spiritual*. The former remains only in the head. No other faculty but the understanding is concerned in it." Jonathan Edwards, *Sermons and Discourses 1739-1742*, ed. Harry S. Stout and Nathan O. Hatch, with Kyle P. Farley, Vol. 22 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 87. "The latter rests not entirely in the head... but the heart is concerned in it: it principally consists in the sense of the heart. The mere intellect, without the heart, the will or the inclination, is not the seat of it." 87. See also 81. This twofold view is seen again in *Religious Affections*. "There is a distinction to be made between a mere notional understanding, wherein the mind only beholds things in the exercise of a speculative faculty; and the sense of the heart, wherein the mind don't only speculate and behold, but relishes and feels." *WJE* 2:272. Adding to the confusion in Edwards' use of the term *understanding* is that he uses it and other occasional synonyms in different ways at different times. In the above quote the word *knowledge* better represents what is meant by the broader category of understanding, and the word *understanding* is equivalent more to *ratiocination* (see below). Elsewhere the term *understanding* is used more broadly to reflect both a process of rational thought and a deeper, heartfelt understanding.

⁹³ *WJE* 2:272.

encroaching British deism of John Toland, Matthew Tindal, and others who argue that by natural reason alone we can discover how to do what God requires for this life (morality) and the next (salvation), as well as some New England clergy such as Charles Chauncy who elevate the role of reason to unjustified levels.⁹⁴

Edwards also, against the deists, claims reason independently fails to provide the knowledge of the true God based on the history of the world. Reason has never succeeded in reforming the world, even in periods such as ancient Greece when reason was lifted highest. Proof of this is also found in the religions and idols of the heathens, including the Greeks, who even at their highest points of reason failed to discover and worship the true God. Important as well is that reason never showed humanity how to be reconciled to their Creator. And reason has not demonstrated God's excellency or beauty, seen in Christ.⁹⁵ Even when reason obtains propositionally correct knowledge, it is a knowledge that lacks power and inwardness. It is, as Gerald McDermott comments, "too shallow."⁹⁶ He adds, "Edwards came to the conclusion that while fallen reason can prove religious

⁹⁴ George Marsden notes, "Underlying the differences between Edwards and Chauncy on the awakening was a crucial philosophical issue. 'The plain truth is,' wrote Chauncy, 'an *enlightened mind*, and not *raised affections*, ought always be the guide of those who call themselves men; and this, in the affairs of religion, as well as other things.'" George M. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 281. McDermott argues that deism is Edwards' central opponent. "I argue in these chapters that Edwards considered deism to be Christianity's most formidable opponent, and that the better part of his theological project was a direct or indirect response to it." *Edwards Confronts the Gods*, 7. He writes that deism "was *the* religion of the Enlightenment" (34), and for Edwards "a major, perhaps the principal, ideological enemy of Reformed Christianity in the eighteenth century." 51. Edwards "recognized, perhaps more acutely than any other American thinker in the eighteenth century, that if Christian thinking seriously entertained the most elemental deist presumptions, the Reformed faith would collapse. To him deism epitomized the most pernicious philosophical and theological trends of his day." 34. He also believed it to be a serious temptation for colonialists. So he set his entire career against it. But though his arguments were powerful and sophisticated, deism often set the agenda.

⁹⁵ "By this sight of the moral beauty of divine things, is seen the beauty of the way of salvation by Christ: for that consists in the beauty of the moral perfections of God." *WJE* 2:274.

⁹⁶ "While for deists knowledge was no more than a matter of the intellect, for Edwards it reached down to the most basic drives of the human self... it [the deist view of knowledge] was too shallow, he charged, because it too easily divorced head from heart, reason from the affections, and understanding from experience." *Edwards Confronts the Gods*, 56.

propositions to be *true*, it cannot make them seem *real*.”⁹⁷ Furthermore, reason fails even in arriving at propositionally correct knowledge of God, as such spiritual knowledge is, at its roots, a knowledge imparted as a free gift of God in revelation.”⁹⁸

Thus this speculative form of understanding is inadequate for two reasons. First, quantitatively it is inadequate because it cannot gather enough information critical to Christian life and divine realities. Divine truths rely on God’s self-disclosure. Mark Valeri writes in his introductory comments on the “Divine Light” sermon, “Because revelation comes only from God’s self-disclosure to the elect, natural reason or any other human means alone cannot be said to convey spiritual knowledge.”⁹⁹ Reason never truly comprehends the divine or gives true spiritual knowledge. So Edwards writes, “Christian divinity, properly so called, is not evident by the light of nature; it depends on revelation.”¹⁰⁰

Second, qualitatively reason or speculative understanding is inadequate because of the quality of the information that it does provide. Speculative reason fails when it works independently because it is always only a partial knowledge, as that of one on the outside looking in, and not an affectional, willful knowledge. “The light of nature teaches no truth as it is *in* Jesus.”¹⁰¹ Divine knowledge cannot be accessed from without. The study of Christian divinity is “*the doctrine of living to God by Christ*.”¹⁰² It is heart-felt, willful, and relational. One’s assent to orthodox Christian doctrines does not make one a Christian.

⁹⁷ McDermott, *Edwards Confronts the Gods*, 65. He later adds, “all knowledge of God short of regeneration, though that knowledge is propositionally correct, is nevertheless fundamentally distorted. For without a vision of Christ’s beauty, which comes in regeneration, nothing is seen truly.” 66.

⁹⁸ Simonson describes Edwards’ view this way. “Despite a finely-honed speculative faculty, natural man cannot ‘achieve’ spiritual knowledge for the profoundly simple reason that such knowledge, instead of being reached by man, is given, imparted, revealed by God.” *Theologian of the Heart*, 39.

⁹⁹ *WJE* 17:405.

¹⁰⁰ *WJE* 22:86.

¹⁰¹ *WJE* 22:86.

¹⁰² *WJE* 22:86.

Honey is not known fully by a description of its sweetness but must be tasted. Likewise describing the face of one's beloved does not compare with seeing one's beloved through loving eyes. One's relationship to truths critically affects one's ability to know them with a sense of the heart. One's involvement in these truths fundamentally affects one's understanding of them. The Christian life does not consist of the head alone. William Breitenbach notes that Jonathan Edwards "asserted [in *Distinguishing Marks*] that holiness has its seat in the heart or will rather than in the understanding, and that holy affections are therefore the substance of true religion... conversion is more than just the enlightenment of the reason by doctrinal truth."¹⁰³ Edwards argues that it is not the extent of one's speculative knowledge, but the *intensity* with which they are known that is critical. This intensity is only present as one experiences the truth.¹⁰⁴

The notional sense of reason, or what Edwards sometimes terms "ratiocination," cannot stand alone and do the necessary work of grace in changing the disposition of the heart. Assenting to the truth of doctrines is not analogous to a deeper, heart conviction of the truth of those doctrines. It is in that deeper sense of the heart that saving faith lies. Such a faith can only be wrought by God's supernatural activity in opening the heart to the divine light. The resulting knowledge is "entirely different in nature and kind" from speculative knowledge.¹⁰⁵ "Tis not a thing that belongs to reason, to see the beauty and

¹⁰³ Breitenbach, "Piety and Moralism," in *American Experience*, 181.

¹⁰⁴ In his sermon on I Cor. 2:14, "A Spiritual Understanding of Divine Things Denied to the Unregenerate, likely composed in the fall of 1723, Edwards writes, "The knowledge of a thing is not in proportion to the extensiveness of our notions, or number of circumstances known, only; but it consists chiefly in the intensiveness of the idea. Thus it is not he that has heard a long description of the sweetness of honey that can be said to have the greatest understanding of it, but he that has tasted." *WJE* 14:76. The editor of this volume, Kenneth Minkema, notes that this sermon "anticipates in nearly every aspect *A Divine and Supernatural Light*," originally given in 1733. 67. Edwards' thoughts regarding ideas are likely influenced by John Locke's *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, with which Edwards was familiar.

¹⁰⁵ *WJE* 17:417. "Though natural men may have considerable knowledge in divinity, yet it has not this effect upon them. They may read and study, for hours together, and leave off with the same heart as they had when they began, and carry the same temper and disposition." *WJE* 14:81. "The knowledge of the

loveliness of spiritual things; it is not a speculative thing, but depends on the sense of the heart.”¹⁰⁶ This deeper knowledge is a life-changing knowledge, “above all others sweet and joyful,” bringing about holiness in ways speculative knowledge never can.¹⁰⁷ “This spiritual knowledge transforms the heart, the other doth not.... The knowledge that he has is so substantial, so inward, and so affecting, that it has quite transformed the soul and put a new nature into the man.”¹⁰⁸

Given these limitations for the speculative form of reasoning one must be clear that for Edwards conversion is not a matter of persuasion. Speculative reasoning cannot of itself transform one’s heart or disposition, or open an individual to the power even of truths which it may describe accurately. Edwards resists any reduction of conversion to some kind of moral transformation via persuasive rational arguments. Rational persuasion is not in and of itself transformative in the manner previously described by which conversion changes an individual. The central thesis of Stephen Yarbrough’s and John Adams’ book, *Delightful Conviction and the Rhetoric of Conversion*, argues this very point. “Edwards never intended for his sermons to persuade their audiences, if persuasion means the process, described since antiquity, by which rhetors seek common ground with their audiences and then work from that base toward mutually affirmable goals, ideas,

natural man about spiritual things, is very much like the knowledge of those that are born blind have of colors from the descriptions of them, or one born deaf has of sounds: but the spiritual understanding, of those who have their eyes open and their ears unstopped. ‘Tis a sight of spiritual things.” *WJE* 14:77.

¹⁰⁶ *WJE* 17:422.

¹⁰⁷ “This light, and this only, has its fruit in an universal holiness of life. No merely notional or speculative understanding of the doctrines of religion, will ever bring to this,” which “reaches to the bottom of the heart.” *WJE* 17:424.

¹⁰⁸ *WJE* 14:81.

and attitudes. Edwards' primary assumption – that an absolute difference separated the regenerate from the unregenerate – prevented his seeking to persuade in this sense.”¹⁰⁹

Edwards' views on the two-fold role of the understanding were not novel. He was drawing on a Puritan heritage that had come before him. John Smith, in his introductory essay to *Religious Affections*, notes Edwards' extensive use of the writings of Thomas Shepard (1605-1649). Shepard held that ordinary understanding was not adequate for saving faith. Knowledge of the Bible and theology was contrasted to a living knowledge from the enlightenment of the Spirit.¹¹⁰ “The stress placed upon direct apprehension through the understanding by Edwards and Shepard places them in the company of Sibbes, Owen, Goodwin, and other seventeenth-century English Puritans. Shepard held that the decisive difference between the wise and foolish virgins lay in the nature of their understanding; the wise owe their wisdom to divine illumination.”¹¹¹

A further example of this distinction is seen in Thomas Hooker, whom Brooks Holifield paraphrases in noting that “to know God was not merely to entertain correct thoughts; the true knowledge of God was a passionate knowledge, a form of knowing that embraced the heart and will.”¹¹² Holifield goes on to note the role of the Spirit in Calvin

¹⁰⁹ *Delightful Conviction*, xiv-xv. A number of scholars make similar points. Norman S. Fiering notes that for Edwards “regeneration was not solely or even primarily a matter of intellectual persuasion.” “Will and Intellect in the New England Mind,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series 29, no. 4 (October 1972), 556. McClymond and McDermott write that the change of regeneration “was not a mere persuasion of the will. Instead, the self's alteration commenced with a change of nature.” *Theology of Edwards*, 270. E. Brooks Holifield argues that “Edwards aligned himself with Catholic Thomists and earlier Calvinists [e.g. Petrus van Mastricht] who contended that grace moved the will ‘physically,’ that is, immediately rather than through moral suasion directed at the intellect.” “Edwards as Theologian,” in *Cambridge Companion to Edwards*, 150.

¹¹⁰ Brooks Holifield expands on this further. “Thomas Shepard in Cambridge argued that a speculative knowledge alone—or a ‘notional’ or ‘discursive’ knowledge that satisfied the understanding without altering the will—remained insufficient. The aim of divinity required the enlightening of the understanding, but it served ‘chiefly’ as ‘the art and rule of the will.’ It taught how ‘to live to God.’” *Theology in America*, 26.

¹¹¹ John E. Smith in *WJE* 2:55.

¹¹² *Theology in America*, 34. For more see Hooker, *The Unbelievers Preparing for Christ* (London: John Mocock, 1654), 42.

in making the Scripture the Word, and John Cotton's distinguishing of two types of theological knowledge – believing that God exists compared to believing “on” God. The former was an act of the understanding, the latter the act of the will that required an altered disposition by the Spirit.

Early New England Puritan ministers “agreed that the deepest knowledge of God came only through the motions of the Spirit that elicited a true faith. A true knowledge of God was no simple matter of the understanding.”¹¹³ Though Edwards' views are often more nuanced and use these traditions critically, for Edwards, as for his predecessors, not reason nor even the Bible, in and of themselves, are sufficient for this deeper understanding.¹¹⁴

If reason is not adequate in its role in conversion, Edwards typically still argues that it plays a necessary and positive role. “Holy affections are not heat without light; but evermore arise from some information of the understanding, some spiritual instruction that the mind receives, some light or actual knowledge. The child of God is graciously affected, because he sees and understands something more of divine things than he did before, more of God or Christ and of the glorious things exhibited in the gospel.”¹¹⁵ One of Edwards' concerns is, of course, to preserve a role for reason in the face of the extremes of the revivals.¹¹⁶ Against the excesses of those who claimed direct revelations of God, casting reason and Scripture aside, Edwards says that God's revelation does not occur in

¹¹³ Holifield, *Theology in America*, 33-34.

¹¹⁴ “A person can't have spiritual light without the Word. But that don't argue, that the Word properly causes that light... That notion that there is a Christ, and that Christ is holy and gracious, is conveyed to the mind by the Word of God: but the sense of the excellency of Christ by reason of that holiness and grace, is nevertheless immediately the work of the Holy Spirit.” *WJE* 17:416-17. Without a sense of the heart Scripture becomes a dry, dead letter.

¹¹⁵ *WJE* 2:266.

¹¹⁶ Edwards was even critical of Whitfield in this regard, as Marsden demonstrates. “For Edwards these ecstatic experiences had to be disciplined by the rational mind, informed by Scripture. The point was crucial. If everyone who had intense spiritual experiences could claim special messages from God, there would be no way of checking all sorts of errors and delusions.” *Life*, 212.

a vacuum. “There can be no love without knowledge... The heart cannot be set upon an object of which there is no idea in the understanding.”¹¹⁷ For this reason not all affections are to be trusted. “Now there are many affections which don’t arise from any light in the understanding. And when it is thus, it is a sure evidence that these affections are not spiritual, let them be ever so high.”¹¹⁸

Even the unregenerate may benefit from the use of reason. For while there is no way to control the operation of grace, the use of reason in obtaining speculative knowledge of God can be a *means of grace*, “to give opportunity for grace to act, when God shall infuse it.”¹¹⁹ It provides content that may be illumined by the divine light into spiritual knowledge. It can prepare an individual for grace such that “when grace has removed prejudices and given eyes to see, they will see the connection and relation of the ideas, and the force of the arguments.”¹²⁰ Scripture and preaching can provide notions of God to the understanding, that God may later by grace in conversion give a sense of the heart of their excellency. Such knowledge can cause people to sin less, thus reducing God’s wrath against them. Conversely, having wrong notions of divine things can hinder grace.¹²¹ So while it is clear that rational arguments alone do not bring about conversion, it is also clear that for Edwards they may play a very positive role in preparing a person for grace.¹²²

¹¹⁷ From “Knowledge of Divine Truth,” *WJE* 22:88. In the *Affections* Edwards writes, “such is the nature of man, that it is impossible his mind should be affected, unless it be by something that he apprehends, or that his mind conceives of.” *WJE Vol. 2*, 267. See also *WJE* 18:83f. (*Misc.* 539).

¹¹⁸ *WJE* 2:266-67. Here Edwards notes Shepard approvingly.

¹¹⁹ *WJE* 18:85 (*Misc.* 539).

¹²⁰ *WJE* 18:87 (*Misc.* 539).

¹²¹ “A false notion gives no opportunity for grace to act, but on the contrary, will hinder its acting.” *WJE* 18:86 (*Misc.* 539).

¹²² Marsden terms learning a “handmaid to religion,” and notes that Edwards’ “passion for scholarship and his passion for awakening were of one piece.” *Life*, 200. The depth of his public preaching and writing was supported by this belief.

Here again Edwards draws on his predecessors. Holifield comments that for first generation New England preachers “regeneration usually began through an appeal to the understanding, since the will could ‘imbrace nothing but what the understanding presents to it.’ But the point of exhortation was to reach the will; the understanding was only the ‘underling of the will.’”¹²³

Clearly in this process of conversion the disposition and affections are essential for Edwards. What also seems clear, however, is that Edwards continues to hold to the necessity of rationality or understanding. The understanding and the will or heart are subsumed in a higher unity in Edwards’ conception of the individual.¹²⁴ So he can write, “Neither of these is intended in the doctrine exclusively of the other: but it is intended that we should seek the former in order to the latter.”¹²⁵

Finally, it is important to note that the spiritual knowledge gained in conversion specifically and in the sense of the heart generally is not new doctrinal knowledge. Rather it is a deepening, an intensification by the Holy Spirit of notional knowledge already obtained through reason and revelation of God and existing doctrine. As such, as Edwards understands it, this spiritual knowledge should never usurp the place of Scripture or add doctrinal content to it. Scripture remains the standard by which the regenerate must judge their experiences and any such spiritual knowledge. “The Word of God certainly should be our rule in matters so much above reason and our own notions.”¹²⁶

¹²³ Holifield, *Theology in America*, 38. Holifield continues to review more closely early New England views (especially Hooker and Norton) of the will and understanding, and the role of the inclination in the will, in ways that parallel quite closely how Edwards thought on such things (see 38-39).

¹²⁴ More discussion of this higher unity is found later in this chapter.

¹²⁵ *WJE* 22:87. Marsden notes, “Edwards’ exaltation of the affections was never at the expense of reason.” *Life*, 282.

¹²⁶ *WJE* 21:180.

The Role of Emotions in Conversion

In examining the second form of knowing, the sense of the heart, we are brought into something broader than the intellect, something that encompasses the emotions. In true conversion one's emotions are always impacted by this latter form of knowing. If people are not affected by the great truths of the Christian faith, it is because on some level they are still blind to them, but "if the great things of religion are rightly understood, they will affect the heart."¹²⁷ Thus Edwards states boldly in *Religious Affections* that "true religion, in great part, consists in the affections."¹²⁸ These authentic religious affections are a mark of the regenerate. They arise in the heart out of the transformation wrought by the vision of God and divine things. When one is no longer blinded to spiritual realities and sees with true vision the goodness and beauty of God, this spiritual knowledge transforms one's heart and emotions. One cannot not be moved by the sight of divine things. The sight of the beauty of the Lord overwhelms and captivates the seer. "It would be impossible, and utterly inconsistent with human nature, that their hearts should be otherwise, than strongly impressed, and greatly moved by such things."¹²⁹ Conversion is marked by changed and elevated emotions because one cannot have true sight of these things and have a passive response, any more than a lover encounters his beloved with passivity or some neutral affirmation.¹³⁰ These elevated emotions are not the basis or

¹²⁷ *WJE* 2:120.

¹²⁸ *WJE* 2:99.

¹²⁹ *WJE* 2:120-21. The imagery of conversion as that of being captivated by the sight of God's beauty and divine truths can be found throughout many of Edwards' writings, especially in *Religious Affections* (*WJE* 2:247, 250, 252-53, 300, 302). See also, for example, "Treatise on Grace," *WJE* 21:156, 173; "Divine and Supernatural Light," *WJE* 17:413-14, 422.

¹³⁰ "Who will deny that true religion consists, in a great measure, in vigorous and lively actings of the inclination and will of the soul, or the fervent exercises of the heart. That religion which God requires, and will accept, does not consist in weak, dull and lifeless wouldings, raising us but a little above a state of

substance of conversion, but rather the necessary response to an encounter with divine realities.

Thus the spiritual knowledge discussed in the previous section is the ground of religious affections, and the reason for the resulting love that fills the hearts of the regenerate as they see God for who God is. Edwards makes clear that such feelings are not groundless emotions; emotions that flow out of authentic conversion are not irrational, but based in evidence and actual knowledge. Truly gracious affections “arise from the mind’s being enlightened, rightly and spiritually to understand or apprehend divine things.”¹³¹ This enlightenment, this opening of the mind, is – as previously discussed – wrought by the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit. Through that work God’s divine glory is made known to the regenerate, especially through the gospel – its doctrines, words, acts, and works – in Christ, “full of grace and truth,” the sight of which ravishes our minds and overcomes any objections. But such evidence is only discerned by those whom God influences through his Spirit.¹³² All who are truly converted have at least some degree of this spiritual sight of divine truths, this heart knowledge.¹³³

For Edwards knowing in this way becomes affectional. The term “affections” is critical to an understanding of Edwards’ views of conversion and authentic faith, but

indifference: God, in his Word, greatly insists upon it, that we be in good earnest, fervent in spirit, and our hearts vigorously engaged in religion... “Tis such a fervent, vigorous engagedness of the heart in religion, that is the fruit of a real circumcision of the heart, or true regeneration, and that has the promises of life.” *WJE* 2:99.

¹³¹ *WJE* 2:266. They are “attended with a reasonable and spiritual conviction of the judgment, of the reality and certainty of divine things.” 291. “If the religious affections that persons have, do indeed arise from a strong persuasion of the truth of the Christian religion; their affections are not the better, unless their persuasion be a reasonable persuasion or conviction. By a reasonable conviction, I mean a conviction founded on real evidence, or upon that which is a good reason, or just ground of conviction. Men may have a strong persuasion that the Christian religion is true, when their persuasion is not at all built on evidence, but altogether on education, and the opinion of others; as many Mahometans are strongly persuaded of the truth of the Mahometan religion, because their fathers, and neighbors, and nation believe it.” 295.

¹³² Edwards references Jn. 1:14 in his discussion of this in *WJE* 2:300.

¹³³ See, for example, *WJE* 2:306-307.

these affections of which Edwards speaks are not a synonym for emotions. There is an emotional element to the affections, but affections are deeper and broader than emotions as typically understood. Edwards defines the affections as “no other, than the more vigorous and sensible exercises of the inclination and will of the soul.”¹³⁴ What he means by this is that the affections are those things that drive us, that direct our actions and engage our passions, as well as raise our emotions – those things at the center of our life’s desires. As Samuel Logan puts it, Edwards argues that “we identify a person solely by what she ‘seeks first’ (Matt. 6:28-33). And what that person ‘seeks first,’ Edwards calls that person’s ‘affections.’”¹³⁵

Therefore, although the affections have a significant emotional element, it would be wrong to equate them directly. In contrast to some emotions, authentic religious affections are never self-centered, but always focused outward. Rather than talking of one’s own experiences, “a true saint, when in the enjoyment of true discoveries of the sweet glory of God and Christ, has his mind too much captivated and engaged by what he views without himself, to stand at that time to view himself, and his own attainments: it would be a diversion and loss which he could not bear, to take his eye off from the ravishing object of his contemplation, to survey his own experience.”¹³⁶ The affections may even be in conflict with the emotions, such as when Christ faces great fear in the Garden of Gethsemane, and yet follows God’s will – the driving force in his life. Christian affections are also not rooted in self-interest, but in the inherent goodness of divine

¹³⁴ *WJE* 2:96.

¹³⁵ “Evangelical Obedience,” in *Edwards and Justification*, 111.

¹³⁶ *WJE* 2:252-53. They are also never self-satisfied. – “Another great and very distinguishing difference between gracious affections and others is, that gracious affections, the higher they are raised, the more is a spiritual appetite and longing of soul after spiritual attainments, increased. On the contrary, false affections rest satisfied in themselves.” 376.

realities themselves.¹³⁷ “A love to divine things for the beauty and sweetness of their moral excellency, is the first beginning and spring of all holy affections.”¹³⁸ It is this transformative love that is at the core of Christian affections; love is “the chief of the affections, and fountain of all other affections.”¹³⁹

The affections are in some respects more similar to one’s ‘passions’ than one’s ‘emotions,’ but even the passions cannot be equated with them. Edwards distinguishes between passions and affections, the former being more sudden and more overpowering of the mind and spirit, and the latter “more extensive than passion; being used for all vigorous lively actings of the will or inclination.”¹⁴⁰ The affections are those things that one feels so strongly as to drive a person to action and that determine in what directions those actions are taken. They at times encompass the emotions and greatly influence the emotions, but are not to be directly equated with them. They are at the center of a person’s motivations, and at the center of authentic Christian conversion and life. Edwards deems them so central as to write that “without holy affection there is no true religion: and no light in the understanding is good, which don’t produce holy affection in the heart; no habit or principle in the heart is good, which has no such exercise; and no external fruit is good, which don’t proceed from such exercises.”¹⁴¹ The affections flow

¹³⁷ “The first objective ground of gracious affections, is the transcendently excellent and amiable nature of divine things, as they are in themselves; and not any conceived relation they bear to self, or self-interest.” *WJE* 2:240.

¹³⁸ *WJE* 2:253-54.

¹³⁹ *WJE* 2:106. “It is doubtless true, and evident from these Scriptures, that the essence of all true religion lies in holy love; and that in this divine affection, and an habitual disposition to it, and that light which is the foundation of it, and those things which are the fruits of it, consists the whole of religion.” 107. The religion of heaven also consists “chiefly in holy love and joy, consists very much in affection: and therefore undoubtedly, true religion consists very much in affection.” 114. Edwards offers a definition of divine love in his “Treatise on Grace.” “Divine love, as it has God or its object, may be thus described: ‘tis the soul’s relish of the supreme excellency of the divine nature, inclining the heart to God as the chief good.” *WJE* 21:173.

¹⁴⁰ *WJE* 2:98.

¹⁴¹ *WJE* 2:119.

out of the basic reorientation of the regenerate as the Spirit opens their eyes to the beauty of divine things. The affections bring us to a transition to a discussion of the will, as they are in some respects not essentially distinct from, but exercises of, the will.¹⁴²

The Role of the Will in Conversion

Can one not will to be different, will to be converted, choose God and turn to his grace? In approaching Edwards' view of the will, we come to a centerpiece of his thought and legacy, and a subject of considerable importance to the conception of conversion. The role and nature of the will has been a central question for theology and philosophy since time immemorial. Among those major figures of the Christian tradition finding reason to delve into the subject are Augustine, Pelagius, Aquinas, Scotus, and Luther. Jonathan Edwards stands among them in the significance of his contribution to the discussion, and stands alone on the North American continent in the breadth and depth of his reflections on the will. Unlike many of the topics here being considered in relation to conversion, when one comes to a discussion of the will in Edwards, one must address a central text of Edwards dedicated to the issue, his 1754 treatise *Freedom of the Will*.

Because issues surrounding the will play such a pivotal role in Edwards' thought and his interactions with theological opponents of his time, in undertaking a consideration of the relation of will to conversion specifically, I will first describe the broader issues at stake for Edwards in the will as expressed in that work. Edwards does

¹⁴² In both *Religious Affections* and *Freedom of the Will* Edwards links affections to the will. In the latter he describes affections as being "only certain modes of the exercise of the will." *WJE* 1:309. In *Religious Affections* see, for example, *WJE* 2:96-100.

not deny freedom of the will but has a particular understanding of it that renders “Arminian” notions of that freedom illusory and impossible.

The significance of the will for Edwards’ broader theological project is difficult to overstate. McClymond and McDermott write that “Jonathan Edwards thought a misunderstanding of the human will was at the root of nearly all that had gone wrong in theology.”¹⁴³ In the conclusion of *Freedom of the Will*, Edwards shows how central the conception of freedom is to a number of key issues in the Arminian and Calvinist debate, including all five points of Dortian Calvinism.¹⁴⁴ “‘Tis easy to see how the decision of most of the points in controversy, between Calvinists and Arminians, depends on the determination of this grand article concerning *the freedom of the will requisite to moral agency*; and that by clearing and establishing the Calvinistic doctrine in this point, the chief arguments are obviated, by which Arminian doctrines in general are supported.”¹⁴⁵ The nature of the will is the key.

For Edwards, that nature is a determined one. One must pause here to clarify the definitions of several terms. Edwards defines the will as “that faculty or power or principle of mind by which it is capable of choosing: an act of the will is the same as an act of choosing or choice.”¹⁴⁶ Unlike Locke, who distinguished between the two, Edwards is quite content to collapse desire into will, insisting that they never run counter to one

¹⁴³ McClymond and McDermott, *Theology of Edwards*, 339. They note further, “at the end of his treatise on original sin, written in his last full year of life, he declared ‘there is no one thing more fundamental [then their view of the will] in [Pelagians’ and Arminians’] schemes of religion: on the determination of this one leading point depends the issue of almost all controversies we have with divines.’ The view of the will that he had set out in *Freedom of the Will* three years before was what makes the moral world go round.” 339, quoting from Jonathan Edwards, *Original Sin*, Vol. 3 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Clyde A. Holbrook (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1970), 375.

¹⁴⁴ Total depravity, unlimited election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, perseverance of the saints. See *WJE* 1:430-439.

¹⁴⁵ *WJE* 1:431.

¹⁴⁶ *WJE* 1:137. Edwards is quite happy to substitute “soul” for mind.

another.¹⁴⁷ To do as one wills is to do as one pleases. Throughout the treatise it is also important to bear in mind that Edwards' consideration of the will is of the will in its immediate act of willing, the very act of the will at the moment of willing, and not other factors removed from this decision. So he notes, "it must be carefully observed, to avoid confusion and needless objection, that I speak of the direct and immediate object of the act of volition; and not some object that the act of will has not an immediate, but only an indirect and remote respect to."¹⁴⁸ One's reflections on past or future acts and objects of the will are not his concern.

What Edwards means by a *determined* will is, "in consequence of some action, or influence, its choice is directed to, and fixed upon a particular object."¹⁴⁹ The various influences or actions that energize the mind's power of volition are termed *motives*. *Necessity* is a term commonly meaning what will occur despite any opposition, but used in Edwards' philosophical sense it means essentially "certainty," not as a subjective experience but as an objective reality. And so it is "in this sense I use the word 'necessity,' in the following discourse, when I endeavor to prove that necessity is not inconsistent with liberty."¹⁵⁰

Critical to a proper understanding of Edwards' thought is distinguishing between *moral* and *natural* necessity. Paul Ramsey writes that "there can be no distinction more crucial for understanding this treatise."¹⁵¹ Moral necessity refers to the certainty of acts from forces *internal* to the will, one's inclination or disposition and motives. Natural necessity refers to the certainty of acts due to forces *external* to the will, acts for which we

¹⁴⁷ "A man never, in any instance, wills anything contrary to his desires, or desires anything contrary to his will." *WJE* 1:139.

¹⁴⁸ *WJE* 1:143. And again, "the choice of the mind never departs from that which, at that time, and with respect to the direct and immediate objects of that decision of the mind, appears most agreeable and pleasing, all things considered." 147.

¹⁴⁹ *WJE* 1:141.

¹⁵⁰ *WJE* 1:152.

¹⁵¹ "Editor's Introduction," *WJE* 1:39-40.

have no choice. Moral and natural *inability* refers to the inverse of these.¹⁵² Acts denied or forced upon one against one's will are acts of *compulsion* (Edwards also here will use the term "coaction").¹⁵³ Though Edwards may speak of causes, by them in this context he means not some metaphysical assertion of force by the cause on the effect, but rather a clear and certain, "infallible connection" between subject and predicate. If A then B, regardless of how B is accomplished.¹⁵⁴

Liberty for Edwards means "that power and opportunity for one to do and conduct as he will, or according to his choice."¹⁵⁵ *Freedom of the Will* is in many respects less concerned with the nature of the will than the nature of true freedom or liberty. This is why Edwards is throughout the book responding to Arminian notions of liberty. For Edwards we are free in the sense that we are free to do what we want; the will in fact does carry out our inclinations. But to speak of the will itself as being free is to speak of the will as if it has its own will, that the will is free to choose or will whatever it wishes. This is nonsensical to Edwards. Nor are the influences that bring about one's will properly to be considered in a discussion of liberty, only that one can in fact carry out his or her will.

"Let the person come by his volition or choice how he will, yet, if he is able, and there is

¹⁵² Notice how careful Edwards is in his application of the term *inability*. One misuses the term inability when one uses it to refer to one who habitually does something as being unable to do otherwise. "In the strictest propriety of speech, a man has a thing in his power, if he has it in his choice, or at his election: and a man can't be truly said to be unable to do a thing, when he can do it if he will... And in this case, not only is it true, that it is easy for a man to do the thing if he will, but the very willing is the doing; when once he has willed, the thing is performed; and nothing else remains to be done. Therefore, in these things to ascribe a nonperformance to the want of power or ability, is not just; because the thing wanting is not a being *able*, but a being *willing*. There are faculties of mind, and capacity of nature, and everything else, sufficient, but a disposition; nothing is wanting but a will." *WJE* 1:162. Natural necessity involves inability; moral necessity does not. "No inability whatsoever which is merely moral, is properly called by the name of 'inability.'" *WJE* 1:308. This usage is in concert with Edwards' definition of liberty below. It is inability, and not necessity, that is the opposite of liberty for Edwards.

¹⁵³ Contrary to liberty is constraint, "the same is otherwise called force, compulsion, and coaction; which is a person's being necessitated to do a thing *contrary* to his will. The other is *restraint*; which is his being hindered, and not having power to do *according* to his will." *WJE* 1:164. Restraint is merely the inverse form of compulsion.

¹⁵⁴ See *WJE* 1:152, 180-185.

¹⁵⁵ *WJE* 1:164.

nothing in the way to hinder his pursuing and executing his will, the man is fully and perfectly free, according to the primary and common notion of freedom.”¹⁵⁶ This notion of liberty is founded in the nature of one’s ability to carry out choices, not in the causes of those choices. This is an important point that will come into play in Edwards’ dialogue with Arminian notions of liberty.

Edwards’ central thesis in the book is that the Arminian¹⁵⁷ notion of freedom of the will is not only unnecessary for moral agency, but also destructive of it as regards both humanity and God. Therefore it is also destructive of God’s sovereignty. Edwards is arguing for a form of freedom in the book, but not a freedom of the will. He does not deny the latter so much as insist that such a notion cannot exist by definition. Important to his argument is a correct notion of liberty as described above, as the freedom to do what one pleases or *wills*. How one comes to make choices is beside the point.

Edwards is responding to, among other things, certain notions of *indifference* as put forth by various Arminians. By indifference is meant a state of neutrality or equilibrium regarding one’s options at the time of an act, and many of his Arminian opponents have argued that this is necessary for a right conception of freedom. For Edwards the problem with such a view is that the requirement of indifference removes the very grounds on which one assesses acts as virtuous or vicious. The very way in which we acknowledge the virtue of others is not in their indifference to good or righteous decisions, but by their decided orientation toward and even passion for that which is right. The Arminian notion

¹⁵⁶ *WJE* 1:164. And again, “if a man is not restrained from acting as his will determines, or constrained to act otherwise; then he has liberty, according to common notions of liberty.” *WJE* 1:359.

¹⁵⁷ Edwards’ use of the term *Arminian* connotes not just those who, strictly speaking, follow the perspective of Jacob Arminius, but rather any parties that oppose Calvinist teachings. Undoubtedly Edwards has the Deist threat to Calvinism especially in mind in *Freedom of the Will*. He believes that the movement to an Arminian position on freedom establishes a trajectory that moves beyond it to Deism. “I suppose this notion to be a leading article in the Arminian scheme, that which, if pursued in its consequences, will truly infer, or naturally lead to all the rest [of a deist position like Thomas Chubb].” *WJE* 1:132.

operates precisely opposite the way that we would normally assess virtue. “To have a virtuous heart, is to have a heart that favors virtue, and is friendly to it, and not one perfectly cold and indifferent about it.”¹⁵⁸ As Edwards sees it, the further from indifference, the *greater* the possibility of virtue. Virtuous actions are “actions which proceed from a heart *well disposed* and *inclined*; and the *stronger*, and the more *fixed* and *determined* the good disposition of the heart, the greater the sincerity of virtue.”¹⁵⁹ A deeply honest woman may be unable, due to her orientation toward honesty, to lie her way out of a difficult situation, and for this she is thus commended. She is not faulted for lack of indifference.

Indifference is also not logically compatible with willing, which reflects preference in the very act. It is “to assert that the mind chooses without choosing.”¹⁶⁰ Or as he says, “choice and preference can no more be in a state of indifference, than motion can be in a state of rest.”¹⁶¹ Here again one must bear in mind that Edwards is speaking of the act itself, and not some advance reflection on an act, which is not itself willing.

One reason for these difficulties in the Arminian notion of indifference is that of the confusion (illustrated primarily by Daniel Whitby in the text) of natural and moral necessity. Whitby does not distinguish between moral and natural necessity relative to the question of agency and responsibility. In his view both make one free of responsibility for one’s actions. Edwards responds that, logically, if we are to excuse acts of moral necessity just as we do natural necessity, then we must also excuse in part those acts that are in part morally necessitated, just as we do in part those acts that are naturally necessitated.

¹⁵⁸ *WJE* 1:321.

¹⁵⁹ *WJE* 1:321.

¹⁶⁰ *WJE* 1:198.

¹⁶¹ *WJE* 1:207.

Virtually everyone accepts the limitations involved with natural necessity. One would not consider a lame man working in a field to be lazy because he does not accomplish the work of another who is whole. Natural necessity excuses some of his responsibility for productivity. But applied to moral necessity this brings us to the position of excusing one's sinful acts all the more as the person is more inclined to sin. And at the same time, it excuses the virtuous acts of a person oriented toward virtue. By such logic the more virtuous one's orientation, the less possible it is for that person to act virtuously. The more sinful the person, the less that person should be held accountable for his or her actions. Or as Edwards puts it, "then wickedness always carries that in it which excuses it."¹⁶² So for the Arminian, our habits and disposition excuse us, but for Edwards it is largely in these that our greatest responsibility lies and the need for God's gracious activity.

One of the most egregious examples of the problems inherent with the Arminian notion of indifference is its impact on one's doctrine of God. If this notion not only excuses one's responsibility for one's sin, but also for one's virtue, then there is no being more affected by such a concept than a being who by his very nature is perfectly virtuous. If God's character necessitates his acting in a virtuous manner, then such necessity eliminates the grounds for his virtuousness. God, above all, is by his character necessitated in doing what is right, good, and holy. By an Arminian view such necessity empties God of his holiness. In such an approach, virtue cannot flow out of necessity.

¹⁶² "If merely that inability will excuse disobedience, which is implied in the opposition or defect of inclination, remaining after the command is exhibited, then wickedness always carries that in it which excuses it. 'Tis evermore so, that by how much the more wickedness there is in a man's heart, by so much is his inclination to evil the stronger, and by so much the more therefore has he of moral inability to the good required. His moral inability, consisting in the strength of his evil inclination, is the very thing wherein his wickedness consists; and yet according to Arminian principles, it must be a thing inconsistent with wickedness; and by how much the more he has of it, by so much is he the further from wickedness." *WJE* 1:309. "From all [the Arminian confusion of moral and natural necessity] which it follows, that a strong bent and bias one way, and difficulty of going the contrary, never causes a person to be at all more exposed to sin, or anything blamable: because as the difficulty is increased, so much the less is required and expected." 298. See also 308.

Thus an Arminian notion of liberty denies the possibility of persons being virtuous or vicious by means of their character.

Indifference also destroys any purpose in God's laws or precepts, the teaching of the church, the influences and examples of those of upright character, or anything else meant to sway an individual. Indifference, then, is problematic in two ways. First, as regards the will it is illusory.¹⁶³ The will is never indifferent in the act of willing. Second, were it to be considered possible, it would be destructive of that very moral agency it seeks to establish.¹⁶⁴

Like indifference, the Arminian requirement of contingency in one's free choices is meant to preserve moral responsibility but is actually destructive of it. Contingency, the idea that acts must have "absolutely no previous ground or reason,"¹⁶⁵ eliminates moral agency and liberty because it makes for a will that cannot be influenced and is hence arbitrary. It removes from the will any sense of a willing self, separating the will from all motives, reason, or moral suasion, leaving the subject with randomness rather than intention. Such a will is not responsive to God's calling, promises, warnings, or commands, or the needs of others, etc. The very moral responsibility the Arminians seek to establish vanishes. On the contrary, Edwards says that our decisions are caused, but this, rather than reducing their significance as moral agents, enhances them.

¹⁶³ Edwards asserts that "no liberty which the soul is possessed of, or ever uses, in any of its acts of volition, consists in indifference; and that the opinion of such as suppose, that indifference belongs to the very essence of liberty, is to the highest degree absurd and contradictory." *WJE* 1:208.

¹⁶⁴ "If we pursue these principles, we shall find that virtue and vice are wholly excluded out of the world; and that there never was, nor ever can be any such thing as one or the other; either in God, angels or men. No propensity, disposition or habit can be virtuous or vicious, as has been shewn; because they, so far as they take place, destroy the freedom of the will, the foundation of all moral agency, and exclude all capacity of either virtue or vice." *WJE* 1:326.

¹⁶⁵ *WJE* 1:155. Contingency as used by Edwards in *Freedom of the Will* means that which is a *completely* undetermined choice.

Contingency also results in a denial of God's sovereignty and foreknowledge.

Edwards argues that any notion of God's foreknowledge demands necessity for future acts, and therefore denies contingency. If God has foreknowledge, as Edwards says even most Arminians admit, then future events are necessary.¹⁶⁶

Essentially, Edwards' argument is that we act in accordance with who we are and what we want. This is what is commonly understood as freedom and we have that freedom. The idea that one might act with an entirely indifferent will takes any notion of character or understanding out of the act of choosing.

How does all of this relate to conversion? In response one might say that, according to Edwards, unregenerate sinners are not denied the freedom to choose to follow God. It is not that the unregenerate are not free, but that they *are* free to do what they want, and thus they do so. The problem lies not in freedom but in desire, and in the affections. Sinners do not choose God because they do not *want* to follow God, but rather their own paths and desires, which are contrary to God's will. This is the fallen state that all are in naturally apart from a work of grace. That is our being, our will. It is not until God's supernatural action through the Holy Spirit opens our hearts to the divine light

¹⁶⁶ Edwards discusses extensively the necessity intrinsic in God's foreknowledge of future events in *WJE* 1:239-56. Paul Ramsey writes, "For Edwards as a theologian the issue is a simple one: either contingency and the liberty of self-determination must be run out of this world, or God will be shut out." *WJE* 1:9. Note that Edwards' concern here is also to defend Calvinism against the Arminian charge of fatalism. Edwards demonstrates that the Arminian position fares no better in the face of such a charge. "The doctrine of the Calvinists, concerning the absolute decrees of God, does not at all infer any more fatality in things, than will demonstrably follow from the doctrine of most Arminian divines, who acknowledge God's omniscience, and universal prescience." *WJE* 1:269. And this is the case because of the nature of the relationship between event and knowledge. Necessity means certainty. "Whether prescience be the thing that *makes* the event necessary or no, it alters not the case. Infallible foreknowledge may *prove* the necessity of the event foreknown, and yet not be the thing which *causes* the necessity. If the foreknowledge be absolute, this *proves* the event known to be necessary, or proves that 'tis impossible but that the event should be, by some means or other, either by a decree, or some other way, if there be any other way." 263. The last phrase hints at Edwards' view of the matter, though without his planned but never completed volume on predestination his full views on that matter may never be fully known.

that our being is transformed. In conversion one becomes a new person, with a different set of desires and affections. We then want to follow God and hence do so.

The choice of whether or not to repent and follow God in conversion is the choice of the most monumental consequence for any human being. The ramifications for choosing or denying God are eternal. But this is only the case if one can be held accountable, if one is free to choose God. From an Arminian perspective, if one's only choice from birth is to reject God, than one cannot be held accountable for that choice. The only way to gain responsibility and freedom to choose God for the Arminian view of the will is to deny total depravity, which has major implications both for one's theological anthropology, one's conception of sin, and one's conception of grace – and more particularly, that central tenet of Reformation faith, of salvation by grace alone. In fact, such a conception indeed undermines all five of the central tenets of Calvinism expressed in the Synod of Dort as popularly conceived by the TULIP acronym. They largely stand or fall together. The ramifications of one's view of the will are central to one's entire theological system, and the Arminian moves undermine the entire Calvinist theological enterprise.

Voluntarism vs. Intellectualism

We have seen thus far both the great importance of knowledge and the intellect, and of the will in Edwards' thought. But which of these takes priority for Edwards? Is Edwards an intellectualist or a voluntarist?

In Edwards' day the most popular sermons read in America were from the famous Anglican preacher and Archbishop of Canterbury, John Tillotson (1630-1694), who

reduced faith to assent to propositions.¹⁶⁷ Charles Chauncy and other rationalist-leaning Calvinists of Edwards' time also stressed intellectualist aspects. Certainly Edwards would have them in mind as he examined these issues, but he would likewise have the "enthusiasts" of the Great Awakening who at their extremes could hold to a faith seemingly devoid of any intellectual content. Thus when one reads Edwards one sees support for both views.

In support of the view of Edwards as intellectualist, it must be said that Edwards often certainly sounds like one. He clearly places much confidence, and perhaps even overconfidence, in the capacity of intellectual argument to bring about change. Consider his handling of his own congregation in Northampton in the midst of difficulties late in his pastorate. He seems to have thought that rational arguments might resolve the breakdown of his relationship with his parishioners. As Marsden observes, Edwards "believed that through observation and logic one should be able to settle almost any question. His own logical powers increased his sense that he could settle an issue by argument. Even after he had faced the force of his people's animosities, he still remained hopeful that he might convince them if only they would read his treatise."¹⁶⁸ He demonstrated in his own actions a confidence in rational arguments to persuade and change.

¹⁶⁷ Tillotson argued that nothing that clearly contradicts the principles of natural religion could be held in doctrine. The goal of religion was to provide divine sanction for morality, and revelation aided in this task. Faith consisted in rational assent to truth of religious propositions. Henry May notes that Tillotson, with Samuel Clarke and Philip Doddridge, were the most widely read divines in the colonies. *The Enlightenment in America*, 18-19. "Liberty, to these Enlightened readers of [Samuel] Clarke and Tillotson, was associated above all with rationality." 94.

¹⁶⁸ Marsden, *A Life*, 349. Marsden later adds, "For someone who is known for his analysis of the centrality of affections in religion, Edwards retained remarkably high confidence in the power of well-argued principle to prevail." 374.

Edwards also seems to indicate an intellectualist orientation in his demand for knowledge as a key part of faith. As we have seen above, knowledge plays a necessary role in conversion, and in the affections. Knowledge provides the object to which one might be oriented, the means or opportunity for God's grace to act. "If there could be a principle of grace in the heart without these notions or ideas there, yet it could not act, because it could have no matter to act upon."¹⁶⁹

In arguing in *Freedom of the Will* that "the will always follows the last dictate of the understanding," Edwards also clearly seems to be in the intellectualist camp, with the will only carrying out the instructions provided it by the intellect.¹⁷⁰ This statement of Edwards is strikingly similar to axiomatic statements of the intellectualist position that "the will is determined by the last judgment of the practical intellect," as found in numerous Harvard theses of the seventeenth century described by Norman Fiering.¹⁷¹ Some interpreters of Edwards have also argued that he takes an intellectualist position. James Carse, for example, writes that Edwards holds to the notion that "the *cause* of a man's action is the same as his *reason* for that action."¹⁷²

This apparent intellectualism, however, must be questioned. Edwards is best understood as a voluntarist in the Augustinian mold rather than an intellectualist. Closer examination of the seemingly axiomatic expression of intellectualism (on the will

¹⁶⁹ Edwards, *WJE* 18:85 (*Misc.* 539).

¹⁷⁰ *WJE* 1:148. Later in the book he writes, "The determinations of the will must evermore follow the illumination, conviction and notice of the understanding." 220. "For if the determination of the will, evermore, in this manner, follows the light, conviction and view of the understanding, concerning the greatest good and evil, and this be that alone which moves the will, and it be a contradiction to suppose otherwise; then it is *necessarily* so, the will necessarily follows this light or view of the understanding, not only in some of its acts, but in every act of choosing and refusing." 220.

¹⁷¹ "The commencement *theses* and *quaestiones* from early Harvard summarized the intellectualist theory in the form of a Latin axiom that was constantly repeated: '*Voluntas determinatur ab ultimo Intellectus practici Judicio*' (The will is determined by the last judgment of the practical intellect). These words appear in some form in 1666, 1671, 1678, 1686, and 1692, and we have only a remnant of what may have existed." Fiering, "Will and Intellect," 525.

¹⁷² James Carse, *Jonathan Edwards and the Visibility of God* (New York: Scribner, 1967), 60.

following the last dictate of the understanding) in Edwards' *Freedom of the Will* supports this contention. Edwards qualifies this statement and expands on it. He says the will follows the understanding "in some sense," and that by understanding one cannot mean merely reason or judgment, but understanding "in a large sense, as including the whole faculty of perception or apprehension." Furthermore, "if by the dictate of the understanding is meant what reason declares to be best or most for the person's happiness, taking in the whole of his duration, it is not true, that the will always follows the last dictate of the understanding." Finally, what reason contributes is in fact only "one thing that is put into the scales" by which one wills, only one of the pieces in "the compound influence which moves and induces the will." Edwards even admits forthrightly that an act of the will may be "determined in opposition to it."¹⁷³

One must remember too what is meant when Edwards refers to knowledge. Often references to knowledge in Edwards can be to a kind of affective heart knowledge that moves beyond the bounds of ratiocination or intellectual reasoning alone, and involves an orientation to and vision of the reality of that knowledge and not simply questions of truth or falsehood. The knowledge Edwards demands is a kind of *affective* knowledge. It is not a speculative knowledge that one can simply hold, but a knowledge that creates a change and activity in the person. It is a knowledge of God that implies a relationship, that involves a disposition toward God that creates a willing spirit. Finally for Edwards there seems to be a form of knowing that involves the will. One could even say that the will functions with a certain kind of apprehension itself. When Edwards distinguishes between a speculative knowledge and a sense of the heart, Fiering suggests that what he is talking about "is not a conative function of intellect so much as *a cognitive function of the will*

¹⁷³ *WJE* 1:148.

conceived of in the broadest possible sense, that is, where it verges into the meaning of ‘heart.’”¹⁷⁴ The capacity of the will only seems to expand upon conversion, since it is on the disposition and will that the Spirit works. Pauw notes that “the redemptive work of the Spirit is to indwell the soul and create a new habit of love and holiness. As a new active principle seated in the will, the Holy Spirit elicits holy love for God and acts of love toward others, culminating in the saint’s glorification.”¹⁷⁵ Thus one sees signs of conversion best not in agreement with doctrines, but in willing actions. Actions (or more precisely, acts of charity) are the surest sign of a regenerate person, as is indicated in the final and most important sign of conversion considered in Edwards treatise, *Religious Affections*.¹⁷⁶

Edwards also suggests that a regenerate person may undertake activity from a gracious disposition founded on errors of the intellect, which also indicates the priority of the will over the intellect. Edwards suggests that such activity may still be of the Holy Spirit. He illustrates this by considering Paul’s thoughts in Romans 14 on the weak in faith. Since some eat and some refrain, both cannot be right, but both are praiseworthy in doing it as to the Lord, i.e., with a right disposition. “By this it is exceeding evident that there may be true exercises of grace, a true respect to the Lord and particularly a true thankfulness that may be grounded on an error, that which is not agreeable to the truth, and that the erroneous practice founded on that error may be the occasion of those true

¹⁷⁴ Fiering, “Will and Intellect,” 553 (emphasis mine).

¹⁷⁵ Amy Plantinga Pauw, “*The Supreme Harmony of All*”: *The Trinitarian Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 155.

¹⁷⁶ The twelfth and final sign given by Edwards is as follows: “Gracious and holy affections have their exercise and fruit in Christian practice.” *WJE* 2:383. Of this sign, Edwards says, “Christian practice or a holy life is a great and distinguishing sign of true and saving grace. But I may go further, and assert, that it is the chief of all the signs of grace, both as an evidence of the sincerity of professors unto others, and also to their own consciences.” 406. For more on this, see the section on the authentication of conversion below.

and holy exercises which are from the Spirit of God.”¹⁷⁷ Regardless of the accuracy of Edwards’ interpretation of the passage, it does make clear his priority of will over intellect.

One can also see an indication of Edwards’ voluntarism in the language of “consent” he often uses in contrast to “assent”. The latter term is overtly rational, while the former is willful or dispositional. One makes knowledge basic, the other makes willing basic – or even something like love. As Terrence Erdt puts it, “Edwards used the word *consent* to designate the new relation the mind has to God and creation after regeneration enables it to sense and to love holiness.”¹⁷⁸ Thus when Edwards considers the nature of true virtue in his book of the same name, he finds it to be an activity rooted in the disposition and will, or “to use a general word I suppose commonly well understood, . . . the heart.”¹⁷⁹ One should always be cognizant when reading Edwards that “heart” language is primarily language of the will and disposition. Edwards defines true virtue as “*consent*, propensity and union of heart to being in general, which is immediately exercised in a general good will,” because the center of one’s being and decision-making does not occur in the intellect, but the will or heart.¹⁸⁰ One can see similar language at work in Edwards’ discussion of the covenant in his arguments over standards for church membership in Northampton. Assent was the way of the Half-Way Covenant, a method by which people could become partial church members and baptize their children without an indication of a changed disposition. In changing the membership requirements Edwards desires *consent* to the covenant, a movement at the center of the person involving their will and indicating a change of heart and a credible profession of

¹⁷⁷ Edwards, *WJE* 20:326 (*Misc.* 999).

¹⁷⁸ Terrence Erdt, *Jonathan Edwards, Art, and the Sense of the Heart* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980), 35. He adds, “ultimately, the sense of the heart is the perception of what Edwards called the consent to being in general; it is a glimpse of the harmony that binds the entire system of creation.” 36.

¹⁷⁹ *Nature of True Virtue*, 2.

¹⁸⁰ Edwards, *Nature of True Virtue*, 3.

faith. “To own this covenant, is to profess the consent of our *hearts* to it; and that is the sum and substance of true piety. ‘Tis not only a professing the assent of our understandings, that we understand there is such a covenant, or that we understand we are obliged to comply with it; but ‘tis to profess the consent of our wills, it is to manifest *that we do comply with it.*”¹⁸¹ His insistence on consent finally cost him his pastorate.

A variety of commentators concur in the assessment of Edwards as a voluntarist. Pauw writes, “Because the affections were for Edwards ‘the very life and soul of all true religion,’ he gave the will primacy over the intellect in conversion and sanctification.”¹⁸² Fiering adds, “Like St. Augustine and Ames, Edwards emphasized that our loves and hates, which are the basic actions of the will, are beyond rational control.”¹⁸³ Guelzo too locates Edwards in the camp of Augustinian voluntarism.¹⁸⁴ Breitenbach also agrees, as we have seen above.¹⁸⁵ Edwards himself seems to support this conclusion when he writes,

¹⁸¹ From *An Humble Inquiry*, in Jonathan Edwards, *Ecclesiastical Writings*, ed. David D. Hall, Vol. 12 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994), 205. Edwards expresses a similar thought in a letter regarding the church controversy in 1850 to fellow minister Peter Clark, a portion of which is found in the editor’s introduction to this volume. In it Edwards objects to those coming for church membership “publicly assenting to the form of words rehearsed on occasion of their admission to the communion, without pretending thereby to mean any such thing as an hearty consent to the terms of the gospel covenant, or to mean any such faith or repentance as belong to the covenant of grace.” 59.

¹⁸² *Supreme Harmony of All*, 155. Pauw is quoting from Edwards, *WJE* 4:297. She adds, “works traditionally ascribed to the Spirit, such as conversion and sanctification, would on the terms of Edwards’s Trinitarian logic be a matter of the will more than the intellect.” 155.

¹⁸³ “Will and Intellect,” 552.

¹⁸⁴ Allen C. Guelzo, *Edwards on the Will* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1989), 5. Guelzo in fact suggests that the entire notion of covenantal churches found in colonial New England is suggestive of the will’s importance. “The ‘covenant’ theology upon which so much of New England’s clergy was built was itself a will-oriented theory, as was the word *covenant* itself... The ‘covenant’ theology of the Puritans was simply another way of recognizing that to cross the gap separating the human being and God requires a voluntary, gracious transaction—an effort of will. Similarly, the ‘covenanted’ churches of the New England Puritans were also a recognition that sin divides people from people, as well as people from God. They testified that the comprehensive, parish-type organization of the Church of England was as ineffective in bridging the human gap as Thomism had been in bridging the divine gap. Accordingly, the ‘covenanted’ church embodied the same principle as the covenant theology, that true union could not be had on natural terms but only by a conscious consent—again, an effort of will. Thus, the Puritan Calvinism of New England found itself absorbed in the need to understand and control the activity and freedom of the will.” 14.

¹⁸⁵ William Breitenbach writes that “in response to the Old Lights’ allegation that new Light conversions were merely high transports of the passions, Edwards committed himself to a voluntaristic interpretation of the psychology of conversion. He asserted that holiness has its seat in the heart or will rather than in the

“the knowledge of ourselves consists chiefly in right apprehensions concerning those two chief faculties of our nature, the *understanding* and *will*. Both are very important: yet the science of the latter must be confessed to be of greatest moment; inasmuch as all virtue and religion have their seat more immediately in the will, consisting more especially in right acts and habits of this faculty.”¹⁸⁶

Will, Understanding, and Conversion

Why consider the question of Edwards’ intellectualism or voluntarism at all? What difference does it make for how one understands conversion? It seems, finally, that it makes quite a bit of difference. The priority of will may lead to a notion of conversion that involves one’s orientation toward God and submission to God, even while basing such an orientation on error or incomplete knowledge. The priority of intellect can lead to faith as assent to propositions, and to particular apologetic orientations that attempt to *convince* one of faith. Differing notions of conversion were at the center of many disputes stemming from the controversies of the Great Awakening, and past controversies over will and intellect help to explain at least some of the rancor that occurred in the midst of and following those disputes over the nature of conversion. Fiering argues that “all of the disputants in the Great Awakening debate were relying on well-established older arguments, some of which we have not exposed here; but of them the voluntarist/intellectualist debate of the seventeenth century was possibly the most central.”¹⁸⁷

Understanding some of the history of the debates over will and intellect clarifies the

understanding, and that holy affections are therefore the substance of true religion.” “Piety and Moralism,” in *American Experience*, 177-204, 181. Also see pages 37-38 above.

¹⁸⁶ *WJE* 1:133.

¹⁸⁷ Fiering, “Will and Intellect,” 556. “The Great Awakening issue was not one between old and new, but rather a recurrence of the perennial opposition of head and heart, both sides of which have found able supporters in every age.” 558.

positions of the participants in the Great Awakening controversies. “By extending these arguments a little it will be seen that the divisions in American thought during the Great Awakening of the 1740s between evangelicals, so-called ‘old Calvinists,’ and incipient liberal ‘Arminians’ were partly a carry-over from the debates of the seventeenth century and in some respects continuous with them.”¹⁸⁸ Though there were other developments such as those in a theory of passions that happened after the seventeenth century, “it is remarkable how close the correspondence is between the seventeenth-century Augustinian voluntarist position and the ideas of Jonathan Edwards, and the seventeenth-century intellectualist position and the ideas, for example, of Edwards’s opponent, Charles Chauncy.”¹⁸⁹

The Essential Unity of the Self

It should be apparent at this point what the nature of the will is in many respects, as well as a number of ramifications that follow from one’s conception of the will. Yet in this discussion, as well as in a work such as *Freedom of the Will* that considers the will in such an extended fashion, there is a temptation to think of the will as an entity unto itself. This would reflect a serious misunderstanding of Edwards’ view of the will.

Throughout much of his writings Edwards stresses the unity of the self. Edwards rejects a faculty psychology that sees the will and the intellect as two faculties of the mind, instead stressing the unity of the mind as will and intellect. A person is not made up of

¹⁸⁸ Fiering, “Will and Intellect,” 551. He adds, “this connection has not been observed before to my knowledge.” 551.

¹⁸⁹ Fiering, “Will and Intellect,” 552. “Edwards completely identified the will with the affections or passions, that is, treated the will as though it were itself simply a generalized name for the affections of the heart. This was also Ames’s position and that of a number of others in the seventeenth century and before.” 552.

distinct faculties somehow bonded together, but is a unified being. This can be seen in the relation of the will to the understanding. At times categories such as these may obfuscate rather than clarify Edwards' thought. There is always a sort of artificiality in speaking of a "will" over and against the "understanding" for Edwards. For Edwards these two faculties cannot ultimately be differentiated, and in this regard he moves beyond even Locke in his rejection of faculty psychology.¹⁹⁰

Previously we noted Edwards' comment that "the knowledge of ourselves consists chiefly in right apprehensions concerning those two chief faculties of our nature, the *understanding* and *will*."¹⁹¹ Edwards' use of the term faculty here does not imply faculty psychology, as the following discussion should make clear. Rather it means a power of the self. The will is that power of choosing, as we have seen above. "Every act of the will is some way connected with the understanding."¹⁹² Why? Because the will can only act on what the understanding perceives.¹⁹³ As we have seen previously, one must take care here not to view the understanding in too narrow a fashion.¹⁹⁴ The role of reason, strictly considered, is limited to one among many motives weighted for or against a particular object. Often the habits or inclination overrule the reason.

The integration of the will and the understanding is just one more reason for Edwards to deny an Arminian notion of the will that somehow *acts* independently. The will follows the broad perceptions of the understanding and the disposition of the individual. It is always determined, which is to say that it is moved by causes, and by

¹⁹⁰ See Paul Ramsey's comments in the introduction to *Freedom of the Will*, *WJE* 1:49-50.

¹⁹¹ *WJE* 1:133.

¹⁹² *WJE* 1:217.

¹⁹³ "The will always follows the last dictate of the understanding." *WJE* 1:148.

¹⁹⁴ "The understanding must be taken in a large sense, as including the whole faculty of perception or apprehension, and not merely what is called reason or judgment. If by the dictate of the understanding is meant what reason declares to be best or most for the person's happiness, taking in the whole of his duration, it is not true, that the will always follows the last dictate of the understanding." *WJE* 1:148.

definition is not indifferent.¹⁹⁵ Though one is tempted to offer a more distinct clarification of the operation of these faculties, this typically results in a return to a conception of the divided self. That Edwards resists such a view accounts for what appears to be blurriness at times in his differentiation of terms like heart, affections, inclinations, understanding, and will.

Edwards' dispositional approach in some respects illustrates this. The disposition is more than will, but certainly encompasses it. And it is oriented toward real content; an intellectual component cannot be denied. Will and intellect require one another and finally are one in the mind. Similarly, when Edwards describes understanding with a 'sense of the heart' this unity is also seen. In knowing with a sense of the heart "there is a sense of the beauty, amiableness, or sweetness of a thing; so that the heart is sensible of pleasure and delight in the presence of the idea of it" in a way that complements the knowledge of the speculative understanding. Such a two-fold knowing encompasses the speculative understanding as well as "the will, or inclination, or heart."¹⁹⁶ All of these elements combine into a heartfelt experience of truth with all of one's being.

Thus Edwards demands a unity of self. Guelzo is especially helpful in making this clear. "Edwards proposed to treat understanding, perceiving, and willing as aspects, or descriptions, of the mind's unitary operation, not as quarreling subdepartments within it. The mind's activity is a complex at any given moment of intellection, perception, and volition. Accordingly, the understanding is inseparable from the will, and the will from

¹⁹⁵ "If it be possible for the understanding to act in indifference, yet to be sure the will never does; because the will's beginning to act is the very same thing as its beginning to choose or prefer... So that this wholly destroys the thing supposed [the will choosing from state of indifference]." *WJE* 1:197.

¹⁹⁶ *WJE* 17:413-14.

the understanding.” Since Edwards “embraced a strikingly unified image of the mind and heart,” we must take care in how we choose to describe them distinctly.¹⁹⁷

The Means of Conversion

If God is sovereign, and the sole initiator of conversion through the supernatural activities of the Holy Spirit, then are all means of conversion, of grace, to be disparaged and rejected for a kind of quietism? While it may appear to some that such is the case, Edwards was certainly no quietist. Even a passing awareness of his life and writings makes this abundantly evident. He was neither passive nor encouraged passivity among those in his congregation or elsewhere. On what basis did he encourage the use of means by the clergy to promote conversion, or the active response of unregenerate listeners to such activities if they were powerless to bring about conversion?

¹⁹⁷ Guelzo, *Edwards on the Will*, 34. John Smith comes to the same conclusion in his introductory essay to the Yale Works volume of *Religious Affections*. “Edwards, for all his ability to draw clear distinctions, nevertheless struggled to preserve the unity and integrity of the self and to avoid compartmentalizing the human functions and powers. This means that despite his rather sharp distinction between understanding, affections, and will, we must not overlook the extent to which these initial distinctions are overridden in the course of the argument.” *WJE* 2:11. McClymond and McDermott also stress the theme of unity in their reflections on Edwards. “By ‘soul’ Edwards meant the confluence of two faculties—the ‘understanding’ that perceives and judges, and the ‘inclination or will’ that moves the human self toward or away from things in liking and disliking, loving and hating, approving and rejecting. This brief definition of the affections rooted in the faculties of the soul is often misunderstood in two related ways: commentators either ignore the intellectual component or reduce the affections to ‘emotions,’ thus missing Edwards’s insistence on the unity of the human person.” *Theology of Edwards*, 312. “If the soul is warmed toward God, it will be drawn to certain *understandings* of God. All inclination already involves perception of the mind because of the unity of the soul and self. Edwards rejected all dichotomies that set the mind against the heart—even while such dichotomies were common during the Great Awakening debates.” 313. They continue, “At the center of all Edwards’s thinking about affections and religious experience was his conviction of the unity of the human person. He rejected the three-fold distinction of mind, will, and emotions that was common in nineteenth- and twentieth-century discussions of human psychology and went back to Plato. Edwards declared that the will and affections ‘are not two faculties, but different expressions of the inclination that already has intellectual judgment contained within it.’” 314 (see *WJE* 2:97). Thus, it is “a basic mistake to interpret Edwards in terms of any dichotomy of intellect versus affect, or head versus heart—although some interpreters have wanted to claim him for one side of the other.” 314. See also Robert W. Jenson, *America’s Theologian* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 65-67; Holmes, “Dispositional Ontology?,” in *Edwards: Philosophical Theologian*, 103; McDermott, *Edwards Confronts the Gods*, 223.

The answer to these questions lies in a proper understanding of what constitutes means of grace and their proper purpose. Edwards makes very clear what the means of grace are not. They are not a sure path to salvation, or avenues by which grace can be controlled or dispensed. The supernatural grace which brings about conversion is wrought by God alone. Edwards' doctrinal statement in "A Divine and Supernatural Light" leaves little room for doubt on this point. "Doctrine. *There is such a thing, as a spiritual and divine light, immediately imparted to the soul by God, of a different nature from any that is obtained by natural means.*"¹⁹⁸ With this light comes the transformative spiritual knowledge which we have discussed previously, spiritual knowledge of which "God is the author of, and none else: he reveals it, and flesh and blood reveals it not. He imparts this knowledge immediately, not making use of any intermediate natural causes, as he does in other knowledge."¹⁹⁹ No human being can control this activity. Against deists and others who may object to this perspective, Edwards argues that this is not an unreasonable notion, but well within the bounds of reasonableness for a God who creates out of nothing to choose to communicate directly with that creation if he so chooses. "'Tis strange that men should make any matter of difficulty of it. Why should not he that made all things, still have something immediately to do with the things that he has made?"²⁰⁰

Nevertheless, Edwards still, with most all Puritans, believes that there are means of grace through which God might work. Robert Jenson describes these means. "The word 'means' had a very exact sense for Puritans: 'means' were the natural events ordained by God as the necessary but insufficient conditions of supernatural grace."²⁰¹ Just as we

¹⁹⁸ *WJE* 17:410.

¹⁹⁹ *WJE* 17:409.

²⁰⁰ He continues, "where lies the great difficulty, if we own the being of a God, and that he created all things out of nothing, of allowing some immediate influence of God on the creation still?" *WJE* 17:421.

²⁰¹ *America's Theologian*, 48.

determined that in conversion God makes supernatural use of natural faculties or functions within a person, so too God is able to make supernatural use of natural means of grace. Means of grace “have no influence to produce grace, either as causes or instruments, or any other way,” but may still be an “opportunity” for grace; they offer “matter” to the soul “for grace to act upon, when God shall be pleased to infuse it.”²⁰² Edwards suggests this use of means is akin to Elijah putting fuel on the altar, providing the opportunity for God to act when he chose to, even though such an act had no power to require God’s action. Edwards notes further that just as the fuel being placed must be flammable to be useful, so too the means of grace must reflect true notions of God and spiritual things to provide an opportunity for grace. Means of grace that use false notions will actually discourage the activities and effectiveness of grace.²⁰³

The means of grace includes such things as the hearing and reading the Word through preaching and study of Scripture, the sacraments, proper doctrinal knowledge, Sabbath-keeping, prayer, and parental guidance. Through such means one might wait upon God’s grace, and be better prepared for it through the reduction of sins and their harmful effects on one’s life. Later in this chapter we will examine this notion of preparation for grace more extensively, and some of the tensions inherent in it when held together with a Reformed notion of justification by grace alone.

²⁰² *WJE* 18:84, 85. Although Edwards says such means have “no influence to produce grace,” he is not always entirely consistent on this point. In his Misc. 538, the one just prior to that quoted above, he suggests that “there must be a *greater probability* of their conversion” for those “who seek—though not after a gracious manner, though they are not thorough and sufficiently resolved in seeking—than of others who wholly neglect their salvation.” *WJE* 18:83 (emphasis mine). Or he writes later in Misc. 542 that those who seek grace diligently through means “are the more prepared to concur with grace.” *WJE* 18:89.

²⁰³ *WJE* 18:85-86.

The Relation of Conversion to Baptism

Edwards does not write or preach about the theology of baptism extensively.²⁰⁴ Often when the issue of baptism does arise Edwards is not addressing the nature of baptism itself. Instead he is considering how to determine which children should be baptized amidst the controversies of standards for church membership and the Half-Way Covenant. In general, however, as with other Puritans of his day, Edwards supports a covenant theology that places infant baptism at the entrance to the covenantal community, a sign and seal to elect infants of the covenant of grace. It is an outward, material sign of an inward, spiritual reality, an accommodation of God to human capacities.

Baptism, as with the Lord's Supper, is seen as a means of grace. However, Edwards certainly disdains any notion of *ex opere operato* regarding the sacrament. Baptism no more brings about conversion than any other means. God's grace cannot be brought about by any secondary causes; it is for God alone to decide, in baptism as in other means.²⁰⁵ As with those other means, baptism is an "opportunity" for grace. Thus there is no direct link of baptism with regeneration, and Edwards comments that there are a variety of examples even in the New Testament of individuals who were baptized that were clearly found to be hypocrites, e.g. Simon Magus. Likewise, experience shows

²⁰⁴ Notable entries by Edwards on baptism are found in the "Miscellanies," nos. 539, 577, 595, 694, 911 (*WJE* 18:84-88, 114-16, 129-30, 276; 20:911).

²⁰⁵ McClymond and McDermott write that "Edwards protected the Reformed insistence on God's sovereignty in baptism by a kind of occasionalism: baptism is a sign and seal of regeneration only on those occasions when God calls a person by the Spirit. Therefore the church is not constituted by individualistic faith decisions but by the Father's mysterious election." *Theology of Edwards*, 492. They later point out that "Edwards taught more clearly than Calvin did that the baptismal rite does not by itself effect regeneration. Edwards followed the lead of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* and early Congregationalists in teaching that not all children of the covenant are elect, and therefore parents and the church should seek the regeneration and conversion of children by use of the means of grace." 667.

Edwards that the baptized children of godly parents are also often found later in their lives in an unregenerate state.²⁰⁶ Holifield writes that “although Edwards thought that God used outward means of grace, he had always been cautious about saying that the means functioned as causes of faith.”²⁰⁷

Edwards is not wholly unambiguous in his thoughts on baptism, however. The ambiguities arise primarily in his consideration of the state of baptized infants. He clearly denies that *all* baptized infants are saved.²⁰⁸ But he is less clear as to whether *some* may be saved, particularly those infants whose parents “do sincerely, believingly and entirely, with a thorough disposition, will and desire, dedicate their child to God.” For such a child as this, “if that child dies in infancy, the parents have good grounds to hope for its salvation.”²⁰⁹ Because, in the fashion of covenantal theology, the faith of the parents stand in for the faith of child, Edwards compares the baptism of a child of sincere believers acting in faith to that of a sincerely believing adult. “If the adult person does sincerely and believingly give up himself to God, baptism seals salvation to him: so if the parent sincerely and believingly dedicates the infant to God, baptism seals salvation to it.”²¹⁰ Even accepting this qualification does not demand that one find Edwards to intend that it is baptism that provides salvific grace, as Edwards himself never says as much directly. Indirectly also, Edwards tends to point to other factors as much as baptism itself that

²⁰⁶ See, for example, Misc. 577. *WJE* 18:114-16.

²⁰⁷ Holifield, “Edwards as Theologian,” in *Cambridge Companion to Edwards*, 157. Holifield goes on to quote Edwards: “There are not truly any secondary causes of it; but it is produced by God immediately.” 157, quoting from “Wisdom of God Displayed,” *Sermons on Various Important Subjects* (Boston: S. Kneeland, 1765), 246. See also Edwards, *Humble Inquiry*, *WJE* 12:196; *Divine Light*, *WJE* 17:417.

²⁰⁸ “Whether or no all the children of godly or believing parents, that are baptized, are regenerated? *Ans.* No. Because experience shows, that multitudes of such show no signs of grace at all, as they come to be capable of acting in the world; and prove wicked when they grow up.” *WJE* 18:115.

²⁰⁹ *WJE* 18:115. Furthermore the parents then “have also good grounds to hope, that if the child don’t die in infancy, that the blessings of God will attend their thorough care and pains to bring up their child in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. So that by that means they may be brought to salvation.” 115-16.

²¹⁰ *WJE* 18:129.

render such a conversion likely, such as the faith of the parents, and their consistent and thorough care in raising the child in the faith with constant prayer to God on their behalf. Even then, the result is not sure, but “ordinarily” such parents “shall obtain success.”²¹¹

Perhaps the most that can be claimed regarding these other statements is that Edwards suggests that children may be saved *at* baptism, though he never states that they will be saved *through* baptism. Baptism shares the same tension as other means of grace in Edwards’ theology as mentioned above, in that Edwards makes a place for it as an opportunity for grace which seems to affect the probability of regeneration even while also demanding that God’s salvific and gracious activity is completely free of any outside influence.²¹²

The Timeframe of Conversion

Is conversion an immediate event, a gradual process, or could there be elements of each? In considering the timeframe of conversion one must also take extra care, as confusion on this point can arise as to whether one is speaking of becoming a Christian, broadly speaking, or of regeneration specifically. Furthermore, one must differentiate between what is believed to be true theologically versus what can be known practically.

Speaking of regeneration specifically – that supernatural change wrought by the Spirit that moves one from being an unregenerate, condemned sinner to a regenerate, new creation and a redeemed child of God in a state of grace, and speaking in a strictly

²¹¹ *WJE* 18:129. Edwards suggests further that in the millennium the probability for infants to be regenerated will be much greater. In that time, “when parents will truly give up their children, and so fully, ...they shall generally be accepted, and their children will be sanctified in their infancy.” *WJE* 20:163.

²¹² As mentioned previously, this fundamental tension will be touched on again further below when the question of Puritan *preparation* for conversion arises.

theological sense – regarding regeneration as it is believed to be as revealed through Scripture by God – Edwards believes regeneration to be an instantaneous act, a specific moment in which God acts upon a sinner. There can be no *process* involved in such a change. One cannot be both dead and alive at the same moment. Like Lazarus being raised from the dead, “conversion is wrought at once.”²¹³ There is “a last moment of his being in a state of damnation and a first moment of his being in a state of salvation.”²¹⁴

This view of the instantaneous nature of regeneration is somewhat at odds with Edwards’ Arminian opponents, who have a tendency to view conversion as a more gradual process by which natural abilities are raised to bring about change. Edwards is completely opposed to such a view. “It is impossible for men to convert themselves by their own strength and industry, with only a concurring assistance helping in the exercise of their natural abilities and principles of the soul, and securing their improvement.”²¹⁵ Such a gradual process would require abilities not present in the unconverted individual.²¹⁶

Even though, theologically speaking, regeneration actually happens in an instant, practically speaking, the awareness of this change and the response of individuals to it is likely to *appear* more as a process. As an act of God upon the heart, there is a hiddenness to regeneration that can make identifying a particular *moment* in which a change occurs difficult. It is, as Edwards calls it, “a holy seed, a divine principle, . . . a small thing.” This seed of regeneration is only “a very small part of the plant, . . . its first principle.” Even

²¹³ *WJE* 21:161. Also *WJE* 13:173.

²¹⁴ *WJE* 13:168-69. In his “Treatise on Grace” Edwards is especially clear on this point. See especially *WJE* 21:161-64. “Almost all the miracles of Christ that he wrought when on earth were types of his great work of converting sinners; and the manner of his working those miracles holds forth the instantaneousness of the work of conversion.” 162.

²¹⁵ *WJE* 21:164.

²¹⁶ *WJE* 21:164-65.

though this “plant of true holiness cannot be in the heart of a sinner,” it is also nevertheless in its beginnings often hidden from the conscious view of a regenerate individual.²¹⁷ The grace implanted “does more gradually display itself in some than in others. Thus in “fixing on the precise time when they put forth the very first act of grace, there is a great deal of difference in different persons; in some it seems to be very discernible when the very time of this was; but others are more at a loss.”²¹⁸ The outward view of regeneration then may not mirror the inward reality of its immediacy.²¹⁹ Because of this Edwards does not insist that those professing faith provide a specific moment of their conversion.²²⁰

If Edwards stresses the immediacy of regeneration, at the same time he also stresses the broader, more gradual processes involved with conversion, both in preparing for conversion and especially in the sanctification that surely follows any true conversion. Although the change of regeneration is immediate, “that knowledge, that reformation and conviction that is preparatory to conversion may be gradual, and the work of grace

²¹⁷ *WJE* 21:159.

²¹⁸ *WJE* 4:177.

²¹⁹ Also see, for example, Misc. 241, where Edwards writes, “it may be in the new birth as it is in the first birth. The vivification of the fetus in the womb is exceeding gradual; the vital operations of it arise from the most imperfect to the more perfect by an insensible increase, so that there is no determining at what time it first begins to be [a] living creature and to have a rational soul. Yet there is a certain moment that an immortal spirit begins to exist in it by God’s appointment; so that if the fetus should be destroyed before that moment, there would be an end to its existence; but if at any time after, there would remain an immortal spirit, that would be translated into another world. I don’t see why it may not be sometimes so [in the new birth also], though at other times there is doubtless a remarkable and very sensible change made at once when the soul is newborn.” *WJE* 13:357. He continues later: “In the new birth there is certainly a very great change made in the soul: so in the first birth there is a very great change when the rational soul is first infused, for the fetus immediately upon it becomes a living creature and a man, that before had no life; yet the sensible change is very gradual. It likewise seems reasonable to me to suppose that the habit of grace in adults is always begun with an act of grace that shall imply faith in it, because a habit can be of no manner of use till there is occasion to exert it.” 358.

²²⁰ Edwards’ own conversion was itself outwardly more of a process than an event. Harold Simonson describes it not as “an instantaneous happening but rather a succession of deepening disturbances that relentlessly quickened in him both the sense of his natural weakness, even wretchedness, and the sense of divine grace.” *Theologian of the Heart*, 21.

after conversion may be gradually carried on.”²²¹ Other gradual processes of sanctification necessarily follow any authentic conversion.²²² God is active in the hearts of the truly regenerate, and this must finally become apparent in their maturation in the faith, in their changing character, and in their works. This leads us to the topic of our next section, the authentication of conversion.

The Authentication of Conversion

There is perhaps no more critical question for Edwards in the years during and following the Great Awakening than that of how one might differentiate between true and false conversion. The question of the authentication of conversion is at the heart of many of the controversies surrounding the revivals. How does one recognize true conversion? What signs are valid indicators? Are the extreme experiences of individuals in the revival context indicators of a salvific work of God in their hearts, or only of emotional excesses and self-deception? Questions about what constitutes proper evidence of regeneration are also central to other issues of Edwards’ time, such as controversies over standards for church membership and participation in sacraments. Therefore establishing the credibility of conversion is a difficulty that Edwards faced throughout his ministerial life.

It was necessary for Edwards to address these concerns not only due to practical concerns of church membership or ecclesiological controversies, but also out of deeply

²²¹ *WJE* 21:161.

²²² Kyle Strobel writes, “For Edwards, the Spirit’s presence is the primary vehicle for redemption, while the secondary focus is union, illumination, and infusion—union leading to justification, illumination to faith, and infusion to sanctification (sanctification depending on the other two). Edwards stresses the *one* action of conversion—but while there is a single moment of conversion, there is also a gradual work of grace postconversion in sanctification.” “By Word and Spirit,” in *Edwards and Justification*, 65-66.

pastoral concerns. His flock needed guidance on how to evaluate their own spiritual state. Therefore this is not only about determining the credibility of conversion in others, but also determining one's own spiritual state – a question of the greatest spiritual importance that was only magnified in this societal and revival context.²²³ It could be a great burden and source of angst for some of his listeners.

It is fairly clear in reading the works of Edwards that there is some progression and movement in his views on how true conversion is best authenticated. As mentioned previously, Edwards' views on revivals and their results change over time. As a variety of commentators have also noted, Edwards moves from a position that is more affirming of conversion experiences, especially as related to revival activity, to one that is considerably more discerning and skeptical of such experiences. He is more inclined earlier in his career to see the results of revival more generously as works of new birth wrought by God, but later becomes more skeptical of those results because of their lack of permanency. In his later extended reflections on revivalistic conversion experiences he is much more insistent that such experiences in any number of forms are not self-validating indicators of God's supernatural, salvific activity. C. C. Goen writes, "we know that on several occasions Edwards confessed that for all his caution he had been too hasty in pronouncing many conversions genuine. Such doubts found expression as early as May 1737, when he declared in a sermon: 'I do not know but I have trusted too much in men, and put too much confidence in the goodness and piety of the town.'"²²⁴

²²³ Goen writes that "one of the most vexing problems in the Great Awakening was the doctrine of personal assurance: how does a convert know he is truly saved, and how does he prove it to others?" *WJE* 4:47 (Editor Intro).

²²⁴ *WJE* 4:42 (Editor Intro), quoting an excerpt of an Edwards sermon on II Sam. 20:19 found in Perry Miller, "Jonathan Edwards' Sociology of the Great Awakening," *New England Quarterly*, 21 (1948), 61. Charles Hambrick-Stowe similarly comments that "over the course of the 1730s, as Ava Chamberlain has shown, Edwards moved only gradually to the position that the believer's 'new spiritual sense' by itself was

Edwards' most complete and mature reflections on these questions, and those most relevant to the question of the authentication of conversion, are to be found in *Religious Affections*, and thus it is this work that will be front and center in this section. Nowhere does Edwards consider the role of experience and other means in the authentication of one's faith more fully than in this lengthy volume. Nowhere does he cast more doubt on a variety of experiences commonly thought to indicate the validity of one's conversion and spiritual standing than in this book. Edwards spends as much time refuting many commonly asserted signs of conversion as he does describing positive or reliable signs of conversion. In the book he provides twelve negative signs of conversion – signs that are no indicator either way that one's conversion is authentic – followed by twelve positive signs or indicators of conversion.

No Certainty in the Authentication of True Conversion

At the outset it is important to note that both in this work and elsewhere Edwards points out that there can be no certainty in determining who is truly converted.²²⁵ “What an indecent, self-exaltation, and arrogance is it, in poor fallible dark mortals, to pretend that they can determine and know, who are really sincere and upright before God, and

an unreliable indicator of grace and that the spiritual fruits of sustained godly behavior were the best means of assurance.” “The ‘Inward, Sweet Sense’ of Christ in Jonathan Edwards,” in *The Legacy of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. D. G. Hart, Sean Michael Lucas, and Stephen J. Nichols (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 89. Likewise, Samuel Logan, Jr. considers Edwards' “mature” perspective on these questions, especially post-Great Awakening. He notes the progression of Edwards' thought from the earlier *Narrative of Surprising Conversions* through other books to his *Religious Affections*. In the earlier works he is much more affirming of external signs of grace as evidence of conversion than he is later, e.g. having Scriptures come to mind. He suggests that although Edwards never varies in his belief that God alone is the cause of justification, there is considerable movement in how Edwards believes conversion is best authenticated as he becomes more skeptical of external signs. “Evangelical Obedience,” in *Edwards and Justification*, 99-109.

²²⁵ Goen considers it Edwards' “settled conviction” that “no man can know with certainty the spiritual state of another.” WJE 4:43 (Intro).

who are not!”²²⁶ Edwards makes this point on numerous occasions. “No external manifestations and outward appearances whatsoever, that are visible to the world, are infallible evidences of grace.”²²⁷ External signs oblige us to treat such professors as brothers and sisters in Christ, and are good enough for use in this world, but are no certain sign of faith.²²⁸ “Nothing that appears to them in their neighbor, can be sufficient to beget an absolute certainty concerning the state of his soul: for they see not his heart, nor can they see all his external behavior.”²²⁹

One can be certain neither in ruling any person truly converted nor declaring any person unconverted. For Edwards one of the worst results of the enthusiasts and more radical revivalists is the declaration or judgment of particular church members (or clergy) as unconverted. As Goen describes it, “censorious judging is beyond the pale of *all* Christian propriety, and should not be allowed even against the revival’s worst enemies. God alone has the right and the ability to judge opposers.”²³⁰

If there are no certain signs of the conversion of others, nor are the signs Edwards provides adequate in declaring certainly one’s own status before God. “I am far from pretending to lay down any such rules, as shall be sufficient of themselves, without other means, to enable all true saints to see their good estate, or as supposing they should be the principal means of their satisfaction.”²³¹ The obstacles of self-interest and self-deception

²²⁶ *WJE* 2:183-84.

²²⁷ *WJE* 2:420.

²²⁸ For one discussion of the limitations of external signs of grace, see *WJE* 2:181f.

²²⁹ *WJE* 2:420.

²³⁰ *WJE* 4:76 (Editor’s Intro). “Inasmuch as a later controversy over discerning visible sainthood would mark a sharp turn in Edwards’ career, it is important to note that neither here nor ever did he advocate the practice of attempting to judge the inward spiritual state of another person.” *WJE* 4:76. Although the church indeed must make judgments as to the standing of individuals, “it was the visibility of discipleship that should be subject to charitable judgment by the church, he thought, not one’s interior spiritual condition.” *WJE* 4:76.

²³¹ *WJE* 2:196.

run so deep as to render such judgments unreliable. Whether in oneself or in others, signs of conversion can be difficult to ascertain – grace is mingled with corruption.²³²

Negative Signs of Conversion

Edwards proceeds to describe a variety of negative signs in *Religious Affections*, that is – signs that are no indicator either way that one’s heart is truly converted. They *could* be an indicator of the Spirit’s supernatural activity in the regenerate heart, but they are not *necessarily* so; they may be a non-spiritual phenomenon. Among these negative signs are affections that are highly raised, affections having great bodily effects, being inclined to much talk of spiritual things, having experiences of humiliation, comfort, and joy in a certain order, being inclined to praise God, spending much time in the external activities and duties of worship, having confidence through one’s affections that their experiences are of divine origin and leave them in good standing with God, or having texts of Scripture “remarkably brought to the mind.”²³³ In his time many of these signs were thought to indicate the activity of the Holy Spirit and God’s supernatural renewal of the heart, and still are in evangelicalism today. But Edwards produces counterexamples of each sign that indicate that it is not necessarily of the Spirit, and could just as easily be counterfeit.

²³² *WJE* 2:194-95. McClymond and McDermott observe, “Edwards believed that piety needed to be rationally scrutinized. This was for the purpose of discriminating true religion from hypocrisy and self-deception.” *Theology of Edwards*, 315. However, “during his later years, Edwards became skeptical about definitive judgments on one’s own or others’ spiritual condition. Hypocrites mimicked saints, and saints resembled hypocrites. The heart was deceptive both to others and to itself.” 316. Edwards acknowledged that “pastors and elders could never know with certainty whether someone was regenerate. It followed that all such judgments were based on probability rather than certainty.” 332.

²³³ *WJE* 2:142. The other signs here described, and some additional negative signs, are described in Part Two of *Religious Affections*, 125-90.

The sudden bringing to mind of scriptural passages is only one example for Edwards of experiences one might expect (especially in the evangelical tradition) to be indicators of God's saving activity.²³⁴ However, it is only one example of the exciting of the imagination, an occurrence that has no unique spiritual aspect, and one that can be used by Satan as well as God. One must be careful here to understand what Edwards has in mind. His point is that if we have affections on the basis of the way in which the Scripture is brought to mind, then these affections are not spiritual, but if we have affections based on a greater spiritual understanding or view of God and his glories then they are true religious affections. The difference is that the former is a trust in the manner of communication (a baseless trust in a common form that may give false assurance), while the latter is a spiritual sense coming from the content of those words and not the means of their transmission. For the former group "that the sudden and extraordinary way of the Scriptures coming to their mind, is plainly the first foundation of the whole; which is a clear evidence of the wretched delusion they are under."²³⁵ No new spiritual knowledge results from such an encounter.

Edwards applies the same mode of thinking to experiences of conversion in which one claims that a sudden voice or insight thought to be of God gives one a blessed promise or assurance of one's standing before God. Given the self-love and self-interest at stake in such experiences, any number of other causes may account for a person's interpretation of such events. For Edwards, it is the *content*, and not the *form*, of supposed spiritual experiences that is key to their evaluation as authentic.

²³⁴ *WJE* 2:218-22 and elsewhere.

²³⁵ *WJE* 2:221.

In all these areas Edwards demands that one reject the self-interpretation of experiences, and instead interpret experience through the lens of Scripture, thus also illustrating his view of the authority of Scripture.²³⁶ How does one distinguish true from counterfeit works of God? “We are to take the Scriptures as our guide in such cases: this is the great and standing rule which God has given to his church, to guide them in all things relating to the great concerns of their souls; and ‘tis an infallible and sufficient rule.”²³⁷

Edwards’ view of Scripture, for example, underlies his discussions of the place of personal revelations of Scripture.²³⁸ Edwards asks where in Scripture will one find such a rule as would show such experiences to indicate saving grace?²³⁹ Instead he sees counter-examples in Scripture where the devil can also use Scripture, and thus questions these experiences. His whole point rests in the role and authority of Scripture, over which a special trust in the *manner* in which a revelation comes to mind is only a diversion away from the truth of the Scripture itself. One can put faith in the form of transmission of a scriptural text instead of the content of Scripture, which is a mistake.²⁴⁰

Positive Signs of Conversion and the Single Best Indicator

In Part III of *Religious Affections* Edwards turns to a discussion of positive signs of conversion. He describes twelve positive signs, among them that true spiritual affections are brought about by supernatural, spiritual influences on the heart rather than natural

²³⁶ *WJE* 2:143-44.

²³⁷ *WJE* 4:227 (*Distinguishing Marks*).

²³⁸ See, for example, *WJE* 2:219-29.

²³⁹ *WJE* 2:143.

²⁴⁰ “If a sinner be once convinced of the veracity of God, and that the Scriptures are his Word, he’ll need no more to convince and satisfy him that he is invited; for the Scriptures are full of invitations to sinners, to the chief of sinners, to come and partake of the benefits of the gospel: he won’t want any new speaking of God to him, what he hath spoken already will be enough with him.” *WJE* 2:223. Even then, accurate knowledge brought to mind does not demonstrate conversion indubitably, unless such knowledge involves a spiritual understanding, a sense of the heart. *WJE* 2:220.

ones, that one's affections are grounded not in self-interest but in the nature of divine things themselves, in which one perceives their reality, beauty, and sweetness, and that this involves the spiritual enlightenment of the mind and actual knowledge – known with a sense of the heart, and brings about a true humility and awareness of one's position before God and a responsiveness to his will rather than one's own – producing a soft heart and spirit of love, mercy, and forgiveness, and a desire of the soul for greater spiritual attainments rather than self-satisfaction.²⁴¹

The best sign of conversion, however, the sign which much of the book (and other writings of Edwards) points to, and the twelfth and final sign upon which Edwards devotes considerable space, is that the authenticity of one's conversion is best seen in the fruit of one's life over time, or as Edwards puts it, “gracious and holy affections have their exercise and fruit in Christian practice.”²⁴² Edwards returns to this again and again. He terms it “the chief of all the signs of grace, both as an evidence of the sincerity of professors unto others, and also to their own consciences.”²⁴³ A person may have all manner of supposed spiritual experiences that may be difficult to discern as indicators of a salvific, transformative work of God in their hearts, but the one indicator that rarely leads one astray is the presence of gracious works or actions in the person's life over time.

Edwards believes this to be the case because he sees a necessary and close link between justification and sanctification. Although he most certainly affirms that justification is through faith alone, the transformation that is a part of such a process in

²⁴¹ *WJE* 2:191-383.

²⁴² *WJE* 2:383. Edwards spends almost eighty pages in closing *Religious Affections* discussing this twelfth sign. *WJE* 2:383-461.

²⁴³ *WJE* 2:406. He later writes more expansively, “Now from all that has been said, I think it to be abundantly manifest, that Christian practice is the most proper evidence of the gracious sincerity of professors, to themselves and others; and the chief of all the marks of grace, the sign of signs, and evidence of evidences, that which seals and crowns all other signs.”⁴⁴³ It is, in many respects, the summation and fruition of the other positive signs, as they all lead to it.

the converted individual must necessarily lead to works. If those works do not save, they are nevertheless the best indicator or evidence of such a transformation.²⁴⁴ Douglas Sweeney comments that Edwards “emphasized that true faith will always bear good fruit—that justification comes by faith alone but saving faith is never alone. He preached that genuine faith is always marked by acts of love. It always leads to good works.”²⁴⁵

Edwards also argues for his final sign on the basis of Scripture. He refers to Matt. 7:16, which explicitly states that individuals will be known by their fruits, and to Matt. 7:20, 12:33, Luke 6:44, and James 2:18 among others. All refer to the relevance of the fruit of one’s life as an indicator of one’s inner condition. He contrasts this with the insufficiency of this inner condition being known by one’s talk, or experiences, or expressiveness, or feelings.²⁴⁶ “The Scripture plainly teaches that practice is the best evidence of the sincerity of professing Christians.” He likewise appeals to reason, which “teaches the same thing.”²⁴⁷

Although emphasized strongly in *Religious Affections*, the importance of the fruit of one’s life as evidence of a regenerated heart is also a point made by Edwards throughout his writings. It can be found, for example, in his 1733 sermon, “Divine and Supernatural Light.” “This light, and this only, has its fruit in an universal holiness of life.”²⁴⁸ In

²⁴⁴ Logan suggests that the nature and the signs of the operation of the Holy Spirit are intertwined, and so for Edwards there is “an essential unity between justification and sanctification” that many both in Edwards’ time and our own have lost sight of. “Evangelical Obedience,” in *Edwards and Justification*, 109.

²⁴⁵ Sweeney, “Justification by Faith Alone? A Fuller Picture of Edwards’s Doctrine,” in *Edwards and Justification*, 140. He adds that Edwards “even went so far as to say that only holy people are saved, that *final* justification is granted only to those who persevere in the faith and love that they profess. For understandable reasons, some interpret these claims as echoes of Roman Catholic teaching—but Edwards never did.” Rather Edwards gave these views “in terms of traditional Calvinism.” 140.

²⁴⁶ *WJE* 2:407f. On scriptural arguments, see also 429f., 436f. Good works as portrayed in Scripture are not merely external acts, but indicate the involvement of the person’s understanding and will. 422f.

²⁴⁷ *WJE* 2:409. “Reason shows that men’s deeds are better and more faithful interpreters of their minds, than their words.” 409-410. On reason see also 426f.

²⁴⁸ *WJE* 17:424.

another sermon from 1751 he writes, “all whose hearts come to Christ will be good.”²⁴⁹ Sweeney suggests that one of Edwards’ best descriptions of the close relation of faith and works of love and holiness is to be found in his sermon series, *Charity and Its Fruits*, from 1738 – especially in the twelfth sermon of that series.²⁵⁰ Edwards is never content for his hearers to rest in some particular experience or point of supposed conversion while ignoring the necessity for the fruits of that conversion in one’s life. Those fruits confirm the reality of any given experience or belief of one’s converted state or those of others.²⁵¹

If works are a key evidence of conversion, one should not conclude that Edwards believes that the truly converted will focus on self-contemplation of them. “Although self-examination be a duty of great use and importance, and by no means to be neglected; yet it is not the principal means, by which the saints do get satisfaction of their good estate.

²⁴⁹ “He That Believeth Shall Be Saved,” in *The Sermons of Jonathan Edwards: A Reader*, ed. by Wilson H. Kimnach, Kenneth P. Minkema, and Douglas A. Sweeney (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), 115.

²⁵⁰ See *WJE* 8:326-38.

²⁵¹ Other examples of the presence of this important point are found throughout Edwards’ writings, and across the span of his life. See, for example, as an early example, *WJE* 21:471, 474, 476. These three references are to a previously unpublished notebook of Edwards called “Signs of Godliness” that probably dates back to around 1729, when he was an assistant to Stoddard. It represents an early attempt to discern signs of conversion. The focus is similar to later works, with an emphasis on the fruit that comes out of one’s life as a sign of godliness. True faith leads to actual works, not just intentions. “The fruits of grace in the life must needs be the proper evidences of it.” *WJE* 21:476. Sam Logan examines Edwards’ views here especially through the lens of his “Treatise on Justification by Faith Alone.” Here Edwards, in response to Arminian claims, “has no doubt that both faith and obedience are critically important in the lives of those whom God redeems, but he also has no doubt that neither of these *causes* justification.” “Evangelical Obedience,” in *Edwards and Justification*, 99. Misc. 412, “Justification,” (*WJE* 13:471-74) contains similar material to Edwards’ later treatise on “Justification by Faith Alone.” Although in one important sense justification has no basis or condition outside of faith in Christ, “in another sense, an universal and persevering obedience, and bringing forth the fruits of love to God and our neighbor, are conditions of salvation; as they may be put into a conditional proposition, and often are so in Scripture (if we have them, we shall have eternal life; and if we have them not, we shall not have eternal life), by reason of their necessary and immutable connection with faith, as immediately flowing from the nature of it.” *WJE* 13:472. In a sermon from August of 1740, “The Subjects of a First Work of Grace May Need a New Conversion” (*WJE* 22:183-202), one can again see the close bond between justification and sanctification. The development of the latter indicates true conversion. Here Edwards stresses that one must not stop with a first experience of grace or conversion; he asserts that a new or second conversion is needed, by which he means essentially sanctification, or the ongoing work of God in one’s life. This continuing, gradual change over time indicates that true conversion has taken place and grace is at work in one’s life, which also leads to greater assurance and comfort for the believer.

Assurance is not to be obtained so much by self-examination, as by action.”²⁵² Although one might find that the twelfth sign brings with it the appearance of a sort of self-centered project, that would be missing an important perspective of Edwards. When one actually comes to know God’s glory with a sense of the heart – when one tastes and sees that the Lord is good, one forgets about oneself, one’s experiences, the degree of one’s pride or humility, one’s works – even though this experience produces works. Rather than talking of one’s own experiences, “a true saint, when in the enjoyment of true discoveries of the sweet glory of God and Christ, has his mind too much captivated and engaged by what he views without himself, to stand at that time to view himself, and his own attainments: it would be a diversion and loss which he could not bear, to take his eye off from the ravishing object of his contemplation, to survey his own experience.”²⁵³ God’s beauty and holiness, once perceived, are overpowering.²⁵⁴

The Permanence of Conversion

One of the implications of the twelfth positive sign in *Religious Affections* is that a true saint demonstrates the fruit of Christian practice that is a result of true conversion and “persists in it to the end of life.”²⁵⁵ In fact, one could say that this perseverance is itself an evidence of true conversion – an indicator of the fruits of conversion over time.

²⁵² *WJE* 2:195.

²⁵³ *WJE* 2:252-53.

²⁵⁴ McClymond and McDermott provide a nice summary statement of the ideas of this section. Eschewing any reliance on inward feelings of assurance, Edwards “was convinced that faith is more important than feelings about faith. Like other Calvinist theologians, Edwards believed that the performance of good works was the most reliable path to finding assurance of one’s salvation. He affirmed that the Spirit works in the believer’s heart, but always to change the will and the inclination. Over time this change of will and of inclination would manifest itself in a life of holy practice.” *Theology of Edwards*, 371.

²⁵⁵ *WJE* 2:383.

Thus for Edwards true conversion is always permanent. Perseverance is indivisible from conversion; it is a necessary result of it. This Edwards makes clear on many occasions. In the *Miscellanies* he writes, “by their being already converted ‘tis certain they shall persevere.”²⁵⁶ Or again, “‘Tis evident that the saints shall persevere because they are already justified.”²⁵⁷ In his treatise, “Justification by Faith Alone,” he writes that perseverance is “virtually contained in that first act of faith; and ‘tis looked upon and taken by him that justifies, as being as it were a property in that faith that then is.”²⁵⁸ “True faith perseveres, he [Edwards] said: ‘The Love of true saints to J[esus Christ] is such that nothing can extinguish or overcome.”²⁵⁹ This being the case, perseverance can serve – in its way as an expression of Edwards’ final twelfth positive sign above – as a form of comfort and assurance to a believer.²⁶⁰

If perseverance in the faith is a necessary attribute of conversion, for Edwards the inverse is also the case. “The want of perseverance is as much an evidence of the want of true conversion, as the want of conversion is a sign of the want of election.”²⁶¹ If one falls away from the faith, this is evidence that one was never truly converted. “They that fall away, and cease visibly to do so, ‘tis a sign they never were risen with Christ. And especially when men’s opinion of their being converted, and so in a safe estate, is the very cause of their coming to this, it is a most evident sign of their hypocrisy.”²⁶² True saints

²⁵⁶ *WJE* 13:474 (Misc. 415).

²⁵⁷ *WJE* 18:340 (Misc. 711). He adds, “That a believer’s justification implies not only deliverance from the wrath of God, but a title to glory, is evident by Rom. 5:1-2, where the Apostle mentions both these as joint benefits implied in justification.” 340.

²⁵⁸ *WJE* 19:203. “It being by divine constitution connected with that first faith, as much as if it were a property in it, it is then considered as such, and so justification is not suspended; but were it not for this it would be needful that it should be suspended, till the sinner had actually persevered in faith.” 203.

²⁵⁹ Sweeney, “Justification by Faith Alone?,” in *Edwards and Justification*, 149, quoting Edwards from ms. Sermon on Cant. 8:7 (Dec 1746), L. 1r., box 4, f. 268, Beinecke Library.

²⁶⁰ *WJE* 19:205.

²⁶¹ *WJE* 13:475 (Misc. 415).

²⁶² *WJE* 2:391.

may evidence some forms of backsliding, but will not completely fall away.²⁶³ “They that are truly converted are new men, new creatures.... They walk in newness of life, and continue to do so to the end of life.”²⁶⁴

Such a change cannot be mimicked by the unregenerate. Just as a pig may be washed clean for a time but will return to the mire without a change in its nature, a natural man may fight against his nature and appear for a time to live a religious life, but the force of one’s nature is too strong and this cannot be maintained. Thus an unregenerate person may, like Pharaoh, before God’s strivings and in one’s own battles between desires and lusts and conscience, humble oneself, but it is not lasting. “Sinners are sometimes, by thunders and lightnings [sic], and great terrors of the law, brought to a seeming work of humiliation, and to appearance to part with their sins; but are no more thoroughly brought to a disposition to dismiss them, than Pharaoh was to let the people go.”²⁶⁵ Like Pharaoh, “so it oftentimes is with sinners: they are willing to part with some of their sins; but not all: they are brought to part with the more gross acts of sin; but not to part with their lusts, in lesser indulgences of ‘em.”²⁶⁶ Real change requires a change in one’s nature that can only be wrought by God.²⁶⁷ Left to human effort alone, “without the mortification of the inward principle of sin, they will not persevere in it: but will return as the dog to his vomit; and so bring on themselves dreadful and remediless

²⁶³ “True saints may be guilty of some kinds and degrees of backsliding, and may be soiled by particular temptations, and may fall into sin, yea great sins: but they can never fall away so, as to grow weary of religion, and the service of God, and habitually to dislike it and neglect it; either on its own account, or on account of the difficulties that attend it: as is evident by Gal. 6:9; Rom. 2:7; Heb. 10:36; Is. 43:22; Mal. 1:13.” *WJE* 2:390.

²⁶⁴ *WJE* 2:391.

²⁶⁵ *WJE* 2:404.

²⁶⁶ *WJE* 2:405.

²⁶⁷ *WJE* 2:395-96.

destruction.”²⁶⁸ Perseverance is then, like conversion itself, ultimately rooted in Christ’s work and sustained by the ongoing work of the Spirit.²⁶⁹

A Morphology of Conversion and the Ordo Salutis

Can one prepare for conversion? Are there any steps that may be taken to aid in bringing it about, and if so, are these the work of humans or of God? How does one’s view of preparation for conversion affect one’s understanding of the order of salvation, or *ordo salutis*? If there is some role for the human in preparing for conversion, does this put repentance and/or some form of sanctification before regeneration? How are the various theological aspects involved in conversion (election, regeneration, repentance, justification, sanctification) best ordered? In what order does the process of salvation occur? These are questions to be asked of Edwards in this section. First the idea of preparation for conversion will be examined, followed by a discussion of the order of salvation.

Preparationism and a “Morphology of Conversion”

A few decades back Edmund S. Morgan coined the phrase, “a morphology of conversion,” to describe the steps suggested by Puritans that take place in preparing for

²⁶⁸ *WJE* 2:405.

²⁶⁹ In addition to the above texts, see Misc. 695 on perseverance, in which the security/stability of perseverance is made clearly to rest in God’s work through Christ, the second Adam, who – unlike the first Adam – indeed persevered in his faith to the death. *WJE* 18:276-81. Sweeney writes, “Edwards taught that only those who persevere in faith and love will go to be with God in heaven. But he also said that faith alone unites such people to Christ, whose perfect righteousness alone can satisfy the law’s demands. Human righteousness is necessary, but only as a sign that one is savingly converted, united to the Savior—and only as the fruit of the Spirit’s presence in one’s life. All other righteousness, for Edwards, is counterfeit and vain.” Sweeney, “Justification by Faith Alone?,” in *Edwards and Justification*, 150.

conversion.²⁷⁰ His student, Norman Pettit, extended this study of “preparationism” in his book, *The Heart Prepared*.²⁷¹ Puritan preparationism, the teaching that one must prepare for grace by passing through various recognizable stages of contrition and humiliation before conversion, had played a part in New England religious life throughout its history. For most Puritans previous to Edwards preparation for conversion had been thought necessary, even if – given their other theological doctrines on conversion – it was also logically incoherent. Pettit writes, “if in theory there was nothing one could do to bring on, or even to anticipate, regeneration, piety in New England demanded that the heart be put in order for the coming of the Spirit.... It was possible and indeed necessary to prepare the heart for salvation.”²⁷²

The difficult relation of human agency to divine sovereignty found in the notion of preparation for a gracious conversion had often been a source of conflict within the Reformed tradition and beyond. As Norman Pettit noted, “the concept of a preparatory period before saving grace in which man is assigned a part to play of his own had long been a matter of dispute in orthodox Christianity.”²⁷³ Augustine argued against Pelagius and some early Fathers, and with Paul, that preparation was a work of grace and not of the will.²⁷⁴ However, the notion of preparation was especially prominent in the Puritan community, and not always expressed as a work of grace.²⁷⁵

²⁷⁰ See Morgan’s book, *Visible Saints: The History of a Puritan Idea* (1963; rpt. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1965).

²⁷¹ Norman Pettit, *The Heart Prepared* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1966).

²⁷² Pettit, *Heart Prepared*, 2.

²⁷³ Pettit, *Heart Prepared*, p.22.

²⁷⁴ Pettit, *Heart Prepared*, p.23.

²⁷⁵ More recently than Pettit these “preparationist” characteristics of the Puritans have been discussed in a work of Joel R. Beeke and Paul M. Smalley. See *Prepared by Grace, for Grace: The Puritans on God's Ordinary Way of Leading Sinners to Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2013). Although this book was not yet available when preparing this chapter, their basic position is that the Puritans “consistently opposed any notion of preparation based upon the exercise of human free will or any supposed merit in the actions of sinful men.” 4. “We authors believe that the doctrine of preparation generally received among the

Early Puritans often described several stages in conversion. William Perkins (1558-1602) suggested ten, of which the first four were preparatory.

1. Ministry of the word
2. Knowledge of the law, of good and evil
3. This led to awareness of one's own sinfulness, generally and particularly
4. Legal fear, or what was later termed conviction of sin or humiliation.

In the fourth “crucial stage the individual perceived his helpless and hopeless condition and despaired of salvation.”²⁷⁶ The later stages that followed were the result of a work of grace. As Morgan describes it, “This was the constant message of Puritan preachers: in order to be sure one must be unsure... The surest earthly sign of a saint was his uncertainty; and the surest sign of a damned soul was security.”²⁷⁷

Later Thomas Hooker (1586-1647) emphasized the preparatory stages even more than most other preachers of his day. Pettit suggests that “the preparatory phase was by far the most important single activity in Hooker’s conception of conversion. Rarely did he preach to his covenant community without exhorting the unconverted to prepare for grace. Seldom did he turn to the regenerative process without initial concern for the ‘heart prepared.’”²⁷⁸ Hooker held to “the absolute necessity of preparatory activity. ‘Nay, there is no faith can be infused into the soul before the heart be prepared,’ he says. ‘No preparation, no perfection. Never humbled, never exalted.’”²⁷⁹ Contrition and humiliation were necessary steps to conversion. Most of the New England preachers agreed that preparation was necessary, but Hooker thought perhaps a saving work could

Puritans is biblical, evangelical, and Reformed (though we will point out cases where some individual Puritans have carried certain aspects of this doctrine beyond biblical boundaries).” 7.

²⁷⁶ Morgan, *Visible Saints*, 68.

²⁷⁷ *Visible Saints*, 70.

²⁷⁸ Pettit, *Heart Prepared*, 100-101.

²⁷⁹ Pettit, *Heart Prepared*, 96.

even come through the preparatory stages before faith. Thomas Shepard (1605-1649), John Cotton (1584-1652), and most others did not follow him in this.²⁸⁰

John Cotton sought to counter the prevailing preparationist tendencies of his fellow Puritans. Rather than seeing any preparatory steps before conversion as pre-gracious human acts, Cotton believed them to be acts made possible only by God's previous gracious work within those individuals. As Pettit puts it, "In reasserting the doctrine of human helplessness, [John] Cotton refused to allow for preparation in the sense of a personal turning toward God. Man is brought to salvation, he insisted, only by divine constraint."²⁸¹ Cotton wrote, "I confess I do not discern that the Lord worketh and giveth any saving preparations in the heart till He give union with Christ. For if the Lord do give any saving qualifications before Christ, then the soul may be in the state of salvation before Christ; and that seemeth to be prejudicial unto the grace and truth of Jesus Christ."²⁸²

In moving closer to Edwards, one finds that his own father, Timothy Edwards (1668-1759) followed the mainstream of New England Puritanism in seeing three steps to conversion: conviction, humiliation, and receiving God's regenerating 'light.'²⁸³ The first two steps were merely steps of preparation, as salvation was God's gracious act alone, and

²⁸⁰ Holifield, *Theology in America*, 43.

²⁸¹ Pettit, *Heart Prepared*, 129. He notes further, "To strict predestinarians preparation was a veritable doctrine of works, elevating natural abilities and cheapening grace. Contrition and humiliation, they maintained, were not antecedents to conversion but consequents of the conversion experience." 19. In New England, Anne Hutchinson, John Wheelwright, and Rev. John Cotton argued that the teaching of preparation was a covenant of works. All but John Cotton were banished from the colony, though not merely for this teaching but for, in Anne Hutchinson's case at least, believing that this was revealed to her directly by the Holy Spirit, rather than relying on Scripture to interpret her experience. "The critical charge against the antinomians was not that they denied preparation as such, but that they denied it on the basis of immediate revelations. This meant that they scorned not only the necessity of the Word—the basis of Christianity, the foundation of the Christian community—but the necessity of the Law, by which man is made conscious of his sins." Pettit, *Heart Prepared*, 151.

²⁸² As quoted in Pettit, *Heart Prepared*, 139.

²⁸³ See Marsden, *Life*, 26-28.

not the result of works. Holifield writes that Edwards' grandfather and predecessor to his pulpit in Northampton, Solomon Stoddard, had as "cornerstones" to his theology "the doctrines of preparation and conversion, and his life task was to show that both were necessary and that human effort could accomplish neither."²⁸⁴

The revivals of the First Great Awakening only expanded debates over preparationism. Holifield writes that "no topic recurred more often in revivalist preaching and polemics."²⁸⁵ For most of the pro-revivalists, it was thought that the Spirit must prepare the heart for regeneration through awareness of sin and guilt, humiliation and conviction. "It became a New Light truism that conviction preceded regeneration."²⁸⁶ All of this formed the backdrop for Edwards' perspectives.

Edwards' relation to the preparationism of the earlier New England and English Puritans is an interesting and somewhat debated topic, and commentators are divided in their assessment. On the one hand one finds this position: "Edwards from his earliest days was intensely critical of the 'morphology of conversion.'" which "fits neither Edwards' experience nor his theology. He repeatedly denied that such an idea is to be found in the Bible."²⁸⁷ Josh Moody argues that Edwards does not "follow William Perkins or other full-blown 'preparationists,' nor even the concertinaed distinctions of his grandfather Solomon Stoddard."²⁸⁸ Rather Edwards insists that "any kind of preparation is supernatural or gracious in origin."²⁸⁹ Holifield goes further, suggesting that not only for

²⁸⁴ *Theology in America*, 66.

²⁸⁵ *Theology in America*, 97.

²⁸⁶ Holifield, *Theology in America*, 98.

²⁸⁷ From the "Editors' Introduction" in *A Jonathan Edwards Reader*, ed. John E. Smith, Harry S. Stout, and Kenneth P. Minkema (1995; rpt. New Haven, CT: Yale Nota Bene, 2003), xxi.

²⁸⁸ Moody, "Justification Today," in *Edwards and Justification*, 29. He argues this more fully in an earlier book, *Jonathan Edwards and the Enlightenment* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005), 32-33.

²⁸⁹ Moody, "Justification Today," in *Edwards and Justification*, 30.

Edwards, but for most Puritans preceding him, preparatory steps are always a reflection of God's grace rather than any human act.²⁹⁰

On the other hand Mark Valeri writes, "Edwards maintained that the performance (or, more properly, attempted performance) of religious and moral disciplines prepared people for regeneration by revealing to them the depth of their own iniquity, culpability, and need for grace. Here he appropriated and modified the standard Puritan paradigm of conversion, which located humiliation as a work of preparation."²⁹¹ Robert Jenson expresses his dismay over Edwards' preparationism, and the lack of "ontological weight" given for the gospel word spoken in the church.²⁹² McClymond and McDermott write that "Edwards maintained the preparationist perspective of his New England forbears."²⁹³ He "agreed with his Puritan predecessors' basic premise. Preparation comes before conversion 'except [in] very extraordinary cases.'"²⁹⁴ And further, "as John Gerstner showed, Edwards not only held to preparationism but made the concept integral to his homiletic, evangelistic, and pastoral practice. He clearly rejected a do-nothing, resigned, or fatalistic form of Calvinism. Instead he prodded the unconverted to intense efforts toward their own salvation and the converted to a continual quest for more grace."²⁹⁵

²⁹⁰ "Neither Hooker nor the other ministers ever meant to suggest that sinners could prepare their own hearts. The doctrine of preparation referred to divine activity, not to natural human effort." Holifield, *Theology in America*, 44. As Hooker commented, the saving preparations "are wrought in me, not by me." As quoted in Holifield, *Theology in America*, 44. Anything else would reflect Arminianism.

²⁹¹ *WJE* 17:37. Valeri refers to the 1730 sermon, "God Makes Men Sensible of Their Misery Before He Reveals His Mercy and Love," as an example.

²⁹² *America's Theologian*, 62.

²⁹³ *Theology of Edwards*, 679.

²⁹⁴ *Theology of Edwards*, 374. They also note, however, that it is the Holy Spirit that stimulates such a process.

²⁹⁵ *Theology of Edwards*, 679. See also John H. Gerstner, *Steps to Salvation* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), John H. Gerstner and Jonathan Neil Gerstner, "Edwardsean Preparation for Salvation," *Westminster Theological Journal* 42 (1979), 5-71. McClymond and McDermott waffle a bit on this issue in various parts of the book. Generally they stress the theme of preparationism, although they also at times qualify it, as in the previous footnote. Even then, however, it is not clear if the Spirit's work is that of common or special grace.

What accounts for this diversity of opinions. How have commentators failed to come to anything like a unified view of Edwards in this area? The blame most likely is best assigned to Edwards himself. In turning to his own thoughts and writings on preparationism there are times when one is prone to ask, “Will the real Jonathan Edwards please stand up?”

For example, consider the following statements that seem to affirm preparationism. “As to preparatory work before conversion, there is undoubtedly always, except [in] very extraordinary cases, such a thing.... Now who can believe that the Spirit of God takes a man in his career in sin, without any forethought, or foreconcern or any such thing, or any preparatory circumstances to introduce it? We have no instance of such a thing without something preparatory, either preparatory thought or circumstances which prepared in some measure his thoughts.”²⁹⁶ Or again, “that argument to prove that God’s usual method is to make sinners very sensible of their misery, and bring them to a despair of help from themselves or any other creature *before* he converts them,... has certainly some force in it. For it seems by the Scripture, that he does regard a disposition of the heart whereby it is prepared thus to receive his benefits before he bestows them.”²⁹⁷ At

They note that, “if the Puritan divines believed in preparatory steps, so did Edwards. God’s ‘method’ is to ‘first’ reveal ‘his dreadful majesty and justice before he reveals his grace.’” 374. For Edwards, “God’s usual manner in preparing people for grace is a three-fold process. A person sees her ‘danger of eternal misery,’ which is ‘conviction.’ Then she is given the ability ‘to see the absolute necessity of a savior’ (‘humiliation’), and only after that ‘see[s] the sufficiency and excellency of the Savior that is offered’ (‘conversion’).” 375-76. “Stripped down to its essentials, preparationism included two key points—that God is free and sovereign in dispensing grace, and that human beings may prepare themselves to receive grace.” 678. They add, however, that “Edwards was impatient with teachings about preparation that implied these steps were universal or always followed a prescribed order.” 376.

²⁹⁶ *WJE* 13:173 (Misc. r).

²⁹⁷ *WJE* 13:365 (Misc. 255, emphasis mine). Or consider also the following from Misc. 337. “This being the method God takes with the world, first to make a revelation of his dreadful majesty and justice before he reveals his grace, as in this instance—and so he first revealed the law with thunders and lightnings from Mount Sinai before the full revelation of his grace by Jesus Christ, to prepare the more for the reception of that grace... so ‘tis but reasonable to suppose that this is his common method with particular persons, first to awaken them to a sense of the dreadful justice of God and his displeasure against sin, and then to give them a sense of his grace.” *WJE* 13:412.

times Edwards clearly describes the commonly acknowledged preparatory steps. “There are these three things necessary: (1) to see our danger of eternal misery, (2) to see the absolute necessity of a savior, and (3) to see the sufficiency and excellency of the Savior that is offered. The first is given in conviction, the second in humiliation, the third in conversion.”²⁹⁸ Edwards’ own preaching often seems to reflect a desire to prepare his audience. For example, his most famous sermon, “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God,” demonstrates this notion of preparation for grace by preaching judgment and law.

Conversely, Edwards can be quite pointed in criticizing preparationist schemes. He writes, for example, that a person’s state should not “be judged of by any exactions of steps, and method of experiences, in what is supposed to be the first conversion.”²⁹⁹ In *Faithful Narrative*, Edwards even catalogs the enormous variety of processes, experiences, and steps by which individuals experience conviction and conversion.³⁰⁰ He there concludes that “there is an endless variety in the particular manner and circumstances in which persons are wrought on, and an opportunity of seeing so much of such a work of God will shew that God is further from confining himself to certain steps, and a particular method, in his work on souls, than it may be some do imagine.”³⁰¹ In *Religious Affections* he

²⁹⁸ *WJE* 13:400 (Misc. 317). In the next and final paragraph he writes, “it seems very congruous, that God should prepare the heart [of the sinner] for the receiving of Christ by a sense of his sin and misery, and a despair of help in himself and in all others.” 400. Other examples of Edwards’ endorsement of preparation in some form could also be cited. For example, “Earnestly seeking and taking pains for grace, prepares the heart highly to prize it, and make much of it when obtained; and their natural powers and principles are hereby already awakened, and got into such a way of acting, that they are the more prepared to concur with grace.” *WJE* 18:89 (Misc. 542).

²⁹⁹ *WJE* 4:556.

³⁰⁰ See *WJE* 4:160-90.

³⁰¹ *WJE* 4:185. Similarly he writes in *Distinguishing Marks* that “we ought not to limit God where he has not limited himself.” *WJE* 4:229.

warns that “no order or method of operations and experiences is any certain sign of their divinity.”³⁰²

A careful reading of the above, however, reveals that Edwards nowhere directly insists either that preparatory efforts toward conversion are human works, or that such preparatory steps must always be rejected as a part of the process of conversion. What he does insist on is that the requirement or strict use of preparatory steps to distinguish authentic from false conversion is illegitimate. “The thing that I speak of as unscriptural, is the insisting on a particular account of the distinct method and steps, wherein the Spirit of God did sensibly proceed, in first bringing the soul into a state of salvation, as a thing requisite in order to receiving a professor into full charity as a real Christian.”³⁰³

One can see clearly in the *Religious Affections* both Edwards’ use of the Puritan preparationist tradition and Edwards’ modification and critique of it. Edwards first defends a more typical Puritan pattern of conversion preceded by humiliation, etc., as a common method of God in dealing with sinners, but then notes that such a pattern is also not required, nor does its presence necessitate that grace is present. “Experience plainly shows, that God’s Spirit is unsearchable and untraceable, in some of the best of Christians, in the method of his operations, in their conversion. Nor does the Spirit of God proceed discernibly in the steps of a particular established scheme, one half so often as is imagined.”³⁰⁴

The appearance of steps commonly acknowledged to be preparatory to conversion do not in and of themselves prove anything either way about one’s spiritual

³⁰² *WJE* 2:159. His eighth negative sign reads, “Nothing can certainly be determined concerning the nature of the affections by this, that comforts and joys seem to follow awakenings and convections of conscience, in a *certain order*.” 151.

³⁰³ *WJE* 2:418.

³⁰⁴ *WJE* 2:162.

state or possible conversion. Such steps may or may not be part of a work of saving grace. Thus in discussing the preparatory step of humiliation Edwards suggests that there can be legal and evangelical humiliation, the former of which is a purely natural state stemming from increased knowledge of the things of religion and/or common grace influences by the Spirit. The legal form may give persons a sense of their smallness and insufficiency, but not a heartfelt responsiveness and deep moral sense of their odiousness. “They have not an answerable frame of heart, consisting in a disposition to abase themselves, and exalt God alone.... In a legal humiliation, the conscience is convinced; as the consciences of all will be most perfectly at the Day of Judgment: but because there is no spiritual understanding the will is not bowed, nor the inclination altered.”³⁰⁵ With evangelical humiliation comes, by contrast, “a sense that a Christian has of his own utter insufficiency, despicableness, and odiousness, with an answerable frame of heart.”³⁰⁶ The disposition is changed “by overcoming the heart, and changing its inclination, by a discovery of God’s holy beauty.”³⁰⁷

The discussion is similar to the earlier discussion of forms of knowing God. Natural man can see God’s natural attributes of greatness and respond in kind to them, but only spiritual man can see the excellencies of God’s moral attributes and hence one’s own sinfulness in its fullness. What is most essential to true religion is the bringing about of this true humility before God, such that one can live for and by God’s righteousness and glory rather than one’s own.

Whether or not a particular conversion experience mirrors the typical Puritan preparationist paradigm, Edwards – in spite of some ambiguous expressions at times –

³⁰⁵ *WJE* 2:312.

³⁰⁶ *WJE* 2:311.

³⁰⁷ *WJE* 2:312.

seems to point to all the activity being gracious activity, founded not on human effort but springing from divine initiative. “There is a vast difference, as has been observed, in the degree, and also in the particular manner of persons’ experiences, both at and after conversion; some have grace working more sensibly in one way, others in another.”³⁰⁸ Even though experiences vary, in all of them it is “grace working more sensibly” at their root. Even if not all preparatory signs are authentic, all that are authentic reflect the saving work of the Spirit.

Thus Norman Pettit seems to be accurate in his assessment that Edwards sees the preparatory steps not as *preparation for* but *signs of* conversion and election. “Religious sorrow and brokenness of heart were not, in his mind, preliminary steps to conversion but distinguishing marks in the character of a Saint. Where the earliest Puritan divines had looked to ‘conversion’ as the beginning of ‘hope,’ as the start of a process leading toward possible assurance of election, Edwards saw conversion as one of the many ‘signs’ of election.”³⁰⁹

The Order of Salvation

One’s view of preparationism can influence one’s understanding of an order of salvation. If there is a role for humans in preparing for saving grace through their own efforts, this then shifts attention toward the human condition. Ultimately it could have a

³⁰⁸ *WJE* 4:185.

³⁰⁹ *Heart Prepared*, 210. He continues, “In brief, he distinguished between the nature of true piety and the process whereby that piety is revealed. Only those to whom the sense of the heart already belonged could possibly exhibit the signs.” 210. This point is confirmed by James Moorhead, who notes that “although scholars used to emphasize that this oscillation between anxiety and hope characterized the Puritan understanding of conversion, we now know that it is a serious misunderstanding to confine the dialectic to a single period in the Puritan saint’s life. The drama of conversion, with its alternating rhythm of abasement and exaltation, was to be reenacted time and again as the saint moved toward holiness.” “The Quest for Holiness in American Protestantism,” *Interpretation* 53, no. 4 (October 1999), 365-379, 367.

significant impact on one's view of God's election, of justification, sanctification, and grace – a shift toward human works as a part of the basis for who is justified and who is not.

Some, in fact, have suggested that Edwards' views in some of these areas indeed bear greater resemblance to a Catholic soteriology than a Protestant one. McDermott, for example, argues that Edwards understands justification to be a gradual process in which sanctification is mixed, much like the Roman Catholic view. He suggests that “Martin Luther's salvation by faith *alone* becomes for Edwards salvation by faith *primarily*.”³¹⁰ He argues further that Edwards' “emphasis on disposition as primary and faith as secondary and the dispositional structure of his soteriology undermine the Reformation contention that salvation is the justification of the ungodly.”³¹¹ Bruce McCormack also suggests “that even Luther and Calvin were unable to escape a certain ‘Catholic’ focus on God's work in us because the priority they gave to faith (Luther) and union with Christ (Calvin) placed regeneration before justification in logical order, and so required attention to the religious condition of the believer.”³¹²

For these interpreters, this shift toward the believer's condition (as reflecting works, or love, or obedience) is believed necessary if regeneration is thought to be logically prior to justification. In such a reading, sanctification in some form or another would precede or be concurrent to justification in the order of salvation. In supporting such an ordering

³¹⁰ *Edwards Confronts the Gods*, 136.

³¹¹ *Edwards Confronts the Gods*, 136. See also Misc. 218, 793, 315, 412, 712, 847, and Morimoto, *Edwards and the Catholic Vision*. While McDermott notes that Edwards often qualifies these types of statements, he still argues forcefully that this is the correct understanding of Edwards. This perspective is in fact critical to McDermott's project.

³¹² As described in McClymond and McDermott, *Theology of Edwards*, 399-400. In his own words, McCormack writes, “where regeneration is made—even if only logically—to be the root of justification, there the work of God ‘in us’ is, once again (and now on the soil of the Reformation!) made to be the ground of the divine forgiveness of sins.” Bruce L. McCormack, “What's At Stake in Current Debates Over Justification?: The Crisis of Protestantism in the West,” in *Justification: What's At Stake in the Current Debates*, ed. Mark Husbands and Daniel J. Treier, InterVarsity, 2004, 102.

Edwards then is moving toward a soteriology more similar to Roman Catholicism that undermines the sharp distinctiveness of classic Reformation theology. McClymond and McDermott go so far as to suggest that for Edwards “the ground of justification is twofold.” Referring to a later work of Edwards, the “Book of Controversies,” they note that it is based primarily on Christ’s righteousness but “the believer’s inherent holiness is a secondary dependent and derivative worthiness.”³¹³ Thus they believe that “Edwards also blurred the sharp boundary that many of the Reformers had constructed between justification and sanctification,” as Edwards argues that “obedience is the most proper condition of the covenant of grace,” and that other conditions such as love, repentance, and perseverance are necessary.³¹⁴

A number of other scholars take issue with the above reading of Edwards. Josh Moody, for example, confronts it directly. Moody examines some specific passages used to support such a view, and insists that in their context this is not a proper reading. In discussing one of these passages, from “Justification by Faith Alone,” Moody asserts that “Edwards is *not* arguing that what is ‘real’ in the believer is their personal sanctification, either in a works righteous semi-Pelagian way or in a Roman Catholic sense (which, for many Reformed theologians, would be similar). Instead he is arguing that what is ‘real’ in the believer is the real person of Jesus Christ himself. It is his merits, his righteousness,

³¹³ *Theology of Edwards*, 400, quoting *WJE* 21:367. They continue, “In sum, Edwards truly believed that Christ’s righteousness was the primary ground for justification, but he also believed that what occurs in the believer is a secondary ground. With this assertion, he seems to have broken Reformation strictures against placing any dependence for justification— even ‘relatively or indirectly’—on faith and its related virtues.” 400. See *WJE* 19:154, 156, 199, 214-15; 21:367. They also refer to George Hunsinger, “Dispositional Soteriology: Jonathan Edwards on Justification by Faith Alone,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 66 (2004), 107-20, 110.

³¹⁴ *Theology of Edwards*, 401. “This means that all ‘the fruits of love to God and our neighbor’ are conditions as well. Edwards also included repentance, ‘the first closing with Christ,’ and lifelong perseverance as conditions of justification. Perseverance is particularly important because justification has a future dimension making it provisional until the full term of perseverance has been completed.” 401. See *WJE* 13:471, 396; 23:517; 13:472; 18:51-52, 150-51.

Christ himself that is ‘real’ and the ‘foundation of what is legal’ [the particular phrase here suggesting an alternate reading].”³¹⁵ In “Justification by Faith Alone,” for example, Edwards is simply trying to show “how obeying God comes out of a doctrine when you are justified by faith alone,” since that is the ever constant objection to justification by faith alone.³¹⁶

Moody argues that when Edwards uses the term ‘sanctification,’ he often intends “a more broadly defined word meaning ‘that which is holy,’ and certainly Christ in the soul (the ‘union,’ remember?), the regeneration, is holy in this sense.”³¹⁷ It is not being used in some narrowly defined, Reformation, order of salvation sense. Thus he believes that Edwards supports an order of regeneration-justification-sanctification.³¹⁸ Moody argues further that a view of justification rooted in Scripture, Luther, Calvin, and the Westminster Confession is foundational to Edwards and other New England Puritans, and that everything else Edwards says has this as its background.³¹⁹ He points to Edwards’ discussion of Romans 4.5 in “Justification by Faith Alone,” where Edwards calls it “absurd” that any would conclude from it that one’s own goodness or righteousness can be in any way involved in our justification.³²⁰

Like Moody, Kyle Strobel is also critical of these views. For Strobel they undermine to some extent the position and importance of justification to Edwards’ theology. Strobel calls Edwards’ doctrine of justification “thin” in that it holds a narrow

³¹⁵ “Justification Today,” in *Edwards and Justification*, 26-27. The passage he refers to is *WJE* 19:158-59.

³¹⁶ “Justification Today,” in *Edwards and Justification*, 33.

³¹⁷ “Justification Today,” in *Edwards and Justification*, 28.

³¹⁸ Moody notes that Conrad Cherry suggests that when finding the word ‘sanctification’ in Edwards one should read it as ‘regeneration.’ Although Moody is not sure that Cherry is right, he thinks it closer to the right reading than some other options. “Justification Today,” in *Edwards and Justification*, 28.

³¹⁹ “Justification Today,” in *Edwards and Justification*, 35-39. McClymond and McDermott, however, note that what some of the Reformers, including Luther and Calvin, thought about justification and its relation to sanctification was not as clear cut and aligned to some later Reformed thought on justification by faith alone. See *Theology of Edwards*, 401-404.

³²⁰ “Justification Today,” *Edwards and Justification*, 39-40.

theological space that is nonetheless a critical hinge in Edwards' thought. "The doctrine of justification is the hinge on which all true religion turns for Edwards, regardless of early or late material, or his emphasis upon grace, infusion, or sanctification."³²¹ Strobel is critical of a variety of interpreters here, including McDermott, Schafer, Chamberlain, and McClymond.³²² Strobel argues for the close relation of justification to union with Christ. As he puts it, "Edwards's doctrine of justification stands and falls with his concept of union."³²³ In Strobel's view, believers do not receive Christ as a reward for faith. Rather, faith is the act or condition that produces a union.³²⁴ And it is in that union that one is justified and made righteous. So "for Edwards, the question is not, 'How can I become righteous and therefore justified?' but is instead, 'How can I become united to Christ, where righteousness and justification reside:'"³²⁵ For Edwards, the Reformed position on justification by faith does not create a 'legal fiction.' "Rather than opting for a declaration from God that makes the sinner righteous in justification, Edwards addresses both faith *in* and union *with* Christ as the reality which makes the declaration of righteousness true."³²⁶ God declares the believer righteous because in Christ the believer is truly righteous before God.

³²¹ Strobel, "By Word and Spirit," in *Edwards and Justification*, 49, n.13.

³²² Strobel is also later critical of Morimoto's reading of Edwards. "By Word and Spirit," in *Edwards and Justification*, 67, n. 77.

³²³ Strobel, "By Word and Spirit," in *Edwards and Justification*, 61.

³²⁴ See *WJE* 19:158.

³²⁵ Strobel, "By Word and Spirit," in *Edwards and Justification*, 58. Therefore, "faith is a mode of relation and union whose *telos* is not justification, *but* Christ. It is not a moral quality, but a relational one." 54-55.

³²⁶ Strobel, "By Word and Spirit," in *Edwards and Justification*, 55. He adds, "Edwards reconceives the nature of the declaration of justification. Instead of a gratuitously gracious declaration that constitutes a reality which is not (making righteous the unrighteous), God *qua* judge simply declares what is true: believers are righteous through the legal union they have with Christ." 58. "Edwards continually pushes questions concerning redemption back to Christ's person and work, using participation and regeneration as ways to bypass attacks against the Reformed position as promoting 'legal fictions.' In doing so, Edwards attempts to keep hold of a constituting declaration (located in the efficacious call), faith preceding justification and an unwavering bond between justification and sanctification by focusing the *ordo salutis* on Christ's gracious giving over the purchase made—the Holy Spirit of God.... For Edwards, the only true ground for forgiveness is Christ himself. Because salvation, in its entirety, is found in Christ, union, we could say,

From my own reading of Edwards, I believe that Moody and Strobel are largely correct. Although, as noted earlier in the chapter, Edwards does hold justification and sanctification together closely, justification does precede sanctification logically and temporally, and Edwards is often careful to point out that justification has no basis in any human work. For example, he writes, “goodness or loveliness is not prior in the order of nature to justification, or is not to be considered as prior in the order and method of God’s proceeding in this affair.”³²⁷ Or again, “when it is said that we are not justified by any righteousness or goodness of our own, what is meant is that it is not out of respect to the excellency or goodness of any qualifications, or acts, in us, whatsoever, that God judges it meet that this benefit of Christ should be ours; and it is not, in any wise, on account of any excellency, or value that there is in faith.”³²⁸ It is instead, as Strobel claims, fundamentally about the relation to Christ found in faith. As Edwards says, it is “purely from the relation faith has to the person in whom this benefit is to be had, or as it unites to that Mediator, in and by whom we are justified.”³²⁹ Faith involves the actual union of the believer with Christ. “Faith is the soul’s active uniting with Christ, or is itself the very act of union.”³³⁰ Righteousness is not a reward for faith, but rather what results from the union of the believer with Christ, which happens by faith.

Some of the difficulty in arriving at clarity among Edwards’ readers may stem from a certain amount of confusion over what is meant in describing something as a ‘condition’ of justification. It is important to distinguish between *condition* and *cause*. The

grounds the application of redemption. The work of God ‘in us’ is for the reception of that gift through union. Edwards is concerned to uphold human faculties in salvation, such that they can receive Christ’s free gift, but this move does not somehow relocate forgiveness to the human side of the equation.” 69.

³²⁷ *WJE* 18:341 (Misc. 712).

³²⁸ *WJE* 19:155.

³²⁹ *WJE* 19:155.

³³⁰ *WJE* 19:158. See also 160.

latter does not follow necessarily from the former. As Rhys Bezzant points out, “Edwards makes the distinction between faith rightly viewed as a *condition* of our justification, even when it will never be the *cause* of our justification.”³³¹ Edwards is really asserting nothing different here than what was previously covered in our discussion of the authentication of conversion. The best indicator of authentic conversion is that of changed actions over time. Works are a condition that accompanies true faith. They indicate the presence of regeneration, but they are not the cause of it. Rather they are the result of it. In the same way sanctification may be a condition of justification rather than its cause – in whole or in part.

There is no doubt that Edwards has serious concerns for sanctification. Even though one may find occasional statements that muddy the waters in this area, taking his writings as a whole and his context, there can also be no doubt that he taught the justification of the ungodly. One should not confuse the evidence of one’s justification, as shown by one’s good works, with the basis of justification, which is to be found in Christ’s work alone. “It is not suitable that God should give the sinner an interest in Christ’s merits, and so a title to his benefits, from regard to any qualification, or act, or course of acts, in him, on the account of any excellency or goodness whatsoever therein, but only as uniting to Christ.”³³² Edwards makes clear throughout his treatise on “Justification by Faith Alone” that believers are not saved by their works in any way, or any form of keeping the law in whole or in part, but only through faith in Christ. “We are not justified by any of our own goodness, virtue, or righteousness or for the excellency or

³³¹ “Gospel of Justification,” in *Edwards and Justification*, 75.

³³² *WJE* 19:163.

righteousness of anything that we have done in religion.”³³³ Upon justification believers become one legally with Christ, and he is their head. They receive the benefits of both his passive obedience (atoning death on the cross paying their penalty) and active obedience (his complete righteousness in keeping all of the law providing their righteousness).³³⁴ But this legal standing is based on a real union of Christ with believers, and not vice versa.³³⁵ As Douglas Sweeney aptly notes, Edwards “insisted to the end that justification in the sight of God had always been by grace alone through faith alone in Christ.”³³⁶

Edwards is so committed to salvation as an entirely gracious work of God, apart from any human act (which is also to say that regeneration precedes faith in the order of salvation), that he argues against those who suggest that there can be no salvation before the act of receiving Jesus and exercising faith. He notes that there is a sanctification (or what could here be better understood as a regeneration) of the sinner before faith can be expressed or holiness exercised. “There must be the principle before there can be the action, in all cases; there must be an alteration made in the heart of the sinner before there can be action consequent upon this alteration; yea, there must be a principle of holiness before holiness is in exercise. Yea, this alteration must not only be before this act

³³³ *WJE* 19:179. See also 201f.

³³⁴ See *WJE* 19:190-99, esp. 190-91.

³³⁵ “They only, that are one with Christ by their own act, should be looked upon as one in law: what is real in the union between Christ and his people, is the foundation of what is legal; that is, it is something really in them, and between them, uniting them, that is the ground of the suitableness of their being accounted as one by the Judge.” *WJE* 19:158.

³³⁶ Sweeney, “Justification by Faith Alone?,” in *Edwards and Justification*, 140. He adds, “faith is set forth in the Bible as a condition of justification.... It is not itself a work, however, that earns justification. Rather, faith is a gift of God by which a sinner clings to Christ, relying on Jesus and his work for justification.” 136. E. Brooks Holifield concurs. “Edwards continued to insist on the doctrine of justification through faith.” “Edwards as Theologian,” in *Cambridge Companion to Edwards*, 152. “Justification resulted from the excellency of the relation [of the believer with Christ], not of the faith. And although he always thought that a genuine faith was united with love, he could still say that faith alone made justification suitable. He opposed New England liberals who contended that faith justified because it included moral obedience in its essence.” 152. See “Justification,” *WJE* 19:163, 168-77, 180, 232; “Miscellaneous Observations,” Leeds edition, 8:517-524.

of faith in nature (as the cause before the effect) but also in time.”³³⁷ Edwards’ assertions regarding justifying faith are “the reverse of the scheme of our modern divines, who hold that faith justifies only as an act, or expression of obedience; whereas in truth, obedience has no concern in justification, any otherwise than as an expression of faith.”³³⁸

From all that we have seen both in this section and throughout this chapter on conversion, Edwards’ understanding of the order of salvation moves in the following order:

Election

Illumination/regeneration

Faith

Union with Christ

Justification

Sanctification

God’s free and gracious election leads to the opening or illumination of the heart to divine realities, which is regeneration. It is sight to the blind. From this follows faith by which the believer is united with Christ and declared justified before God on the basis of Christ’s righteousness alone. As a result of this personal revolution, this unity with Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit, the believer grows in grace and becomes more and

³³⁷ *WJE* 13:245 (Misc. 77). With this Edwards seems to support McDermott’s suggestion that “if some are ‘good’ because they have a regenerate disposition before they are outwardly converted to Christ, then perhaps conversion in those cases comes *after* they are already regenerate.” *Edwards Confronts the Gods*, 135. See also *WJE* 20:68-74 (Misc. 847), *WJE* 13:455-59 (Misc. 393).

³³⁸ *WJE* 19:208. This runs directly counter to McCormack’s concerns.

more sanctified in ways both hidden and public – which are evidences of, though not causes of, one’s regenerate state.³³⁹

There is here, as there was above when discussing Edwards’ views on the role of various human ‘faculties’ in conversion – intellect, emotions, will – a certain degree of artificiality in the ordering or division of the components of conversion for Edwards. As he puts it, “the graces of Christianity depend one on another. There is not only a conjunction whereby they are always joined together, but there is a mutual dependence of one grace and another, so that one cannot be without another.”³⁴⁰ There is a unity and interrelatedness to many of these steps such that an order of salvation, while in a certain logical sense technically correct, is still only of limited value. Some of his followers were later inclined to manipulate this order, and in a sense break apart what should not be broken. For example, as Holifield points out, “some of Edwards’s disciples would later conclude that his views of infused grace and the necessity for love in the regenerate heart implied that love must precede both faith and justification in the order of salvation. They were willing to redefine what had been the cardinal Protestant doctrine of justification through faith alone.” Even though Edwards at times suggests that love and faith are closely linked, Holifield writes that “he avoided, however, the revisions that his disciples

³³⁹ For more on the role of the Spirit as the agent in this process, see also *WJE* 21:194 (“Treatise on Grace”). “That holy, divine principle, which we have observed does radically and essentially consist in divine love, is no other than a communication and participation of that same infinite divine love, which is God, and in which the Godhead is eternally breathed forth and subsists in the third person in the blessed Trinity. So that true saving grace is no other than that very love of God; that is, God, in one of the persons of the Trinity, uniting himself to the soul of a creature as a vital principle, dwelling there and exerting himself by the faculties of the soul of man, in his own proper nature, after the manner of a principle of nature.” 194.

³⁴⁰ *WJE* 8:329. He adds, “faith promotes humility. For the more entirely anyone depends on God’s sufficiency, the more it will tend to a humble sense of their own insufficiency. And so humility tends to promote faith. For the more a person has of an humble sense of his own insufficiency, the more will his heart be prepared to trust alone in God, and depend entirely on Christ.. So love promotes humility... And humility promotes love.... And so it might be shown how all the graces do depend one upon another, by mentioning many other particulars. Humility cherishes all grace, and all other graces promote humility. So faith promotes all grace, and all grace cherishes faith. And the like might be shown of every one.” 329-30.

found necessary.”³⁴¹ In the end what is most critical for Edwards in the order of salvation is that conversion is God’s gracious act, and his alone.³⁴²

The Location of Conversion

Edwards inherited a view of conversion that was grounded in the church and corporate in nature. This is to say that conversion was a churchly activity, and was sought and verified within the body of believers of a given church, rather than some kind of solitary activity or event that may or may not require the church or verification and invigoration within its community. Solomon Stoddard, Edwards’ predecessor at Northampton and grandfather, did see the spirit as a special means of grace. But “notice that in Stoddard’s model, the Spirit poured through the ministers. His was still very much a church and community-based theology of conversion, different from some of the more individualistic and anti-clerical tendencies some evangelicals would later embrace.”³⁴³ Edwards, in many respects mirrors Stoddard’s views, but there is also a certain dichotomy or paradox in his understanding of or at least his impact on the location of conversion. The paradox lies in the contrast between Edwards’ explicit views of conversion, which tend more toward a corporate, churchly location, and the impact of Edwards’ broader

³⁴¹ “Edwards as Theologian,” in *Cambridge Companion to Edwards*, 152. Edwards writes that “faith promotes love, and love is the most essential ingredient in a saving faith.” *WJE* 8:329.

³⁴² Strobel summarizes issues with the order of salvation in Edwards well. “While it is possible to make logical and semantic delineations between regeneration, conversion, justification, and adoption, they are in fact wrought through one act of Christ upon the soul of the unregenerate through a giving of his Spirit. This Spirit, as love and grace itself, unites to Christ, illumines Christ, and works the very love of Christ (that is, love to Christ and Christ’s own love) into the heart of this person.” Strobel, “By Word and Spirit,” in *Edwards and Justification*, 64.

³⁴³ Kidd, “Prayer for a Saving Issue,” in *Emergence of Evangelicalism*, 138.

views on and role in revivals, which in some respects enhanced a more individualistic view of conversion that pushed its location away from the church.

A Corporate, Churchly Location for Conversion

On the one hand, it must be stated that Edwards' sees conversion as part of a corporate or communal church experience rather than in an individualistic and isolated manner. Like other Puritans of his time, Edwards is a covenant theologian, and an emphasis on community is inherent in his understanding of the faith. Later evangelical notions of a detached individual experiencing conversion and a form of Christian life largely outside of the church, one who does not need organized religion or the institution of the church, is foreign to him. In his context one cannot talk about conversion in a purely (or perhaps even in a primarily) individualistic sense. Conversion is so closely linked with significant social institutions and structures that any discussion of it is necessarily also corporate in nature.³⁴⁴

This can be seen in Edwards' *Religious Affections*. The kind of testing of one's faith for authenticity that Edwards suggests is meant not only for confirmation to oneself of one's conversion, but also as a process that is to be undertaken within the context of the church. The entire discussion of authenticity assumes a churchly context in which to carry out such measured testing of the faith. Thus in his description of the final (and chief) positive sign of authentic faith, that "Christian practice or a holy life is a great and distinguishing sign of true and saving grace," Edwards notes that the sign is not only for

³⁴⁴ Rhys Bezzant notes that "from a philosophical perspective, in the Age of Enlightenment, it is tempting to read back into the individuality of those awakened a newfound autonomy and appreciation of individual experience, which reflected a paradigm shift in Western culture. It behooves us well therefore to pause and remind ourselves of the profoundly corporate mind-set and social location of Edwards, his audience, and those whom he opposed." "Edwards's Social Vision," in *Edwards and Justification*, 87.

one's own conscience, but "as an evidence of the sincerity of professors unto others."³⁴⁵ It is a "manifestation and sign of the sincerity of a professing Christian, *to the eye of his neighbors and brethren.*"³⁴⁶ Edwards later qualifies the use of the sign as being for use in judging the sincerity of Christians desiring to be part of the community of believers, rather than for any outside the faith.³⁴⁷

Moreover, Edwards goes beyond Stoddard in raising the standards by which a person joins the Christian community. Rejecting the Half-Way Covenant, Edwards finally loses his pastorate over his insistence that conversion be a serious standard by which one joins the church community. Conversion is then submitted to a standard enforced by that church community and its pastoral leadership, rather than having it determined authentic by the private judgment of the individual. Such judgments necessarily have significance not only individually, but also corporately, as one's standing in the church community in Edwards' time affects one's social standing.³⁴⁸

Edwards also sees conversion as part of the broader renewal of society. As Rhys Bezzant puts it, "Edwards's gospel was not an attenuated theory of atonement" but rather was "necessarily social in its outworkings."³⁴⁹ He argues that "in Puritan New England, espousing certain theological confessions was intricately connected to communal values and norms," and that revivals were "understood not merely as the awakening of

³⁴⁵ *WJE* 2:406.

³⁴⁶ *WJE* 2:407 (emphasis mine).

³⁴⁷ *WJE* 2:412.

³⁴⁸ Logan comments that "the doctrine of justification is not... simply a matter of abstract theology. The doctrine of justification is directly involved in the definition of the nature and the purpose of the church." "Evangelical Obedience," in *Edwards and Justification*, 105. Edwards' conclusions on the matter led to his dismissal from his church as he steered a different direction than his grandfather on grounds for church membership.

³⁴⁹ Bezzant, "Edwards's Social Vision," 93. "Edwards maintained that sponsoring the regeneration of individuals would not necessarily lead to the fissiparous disordering of the community, as some feared, but the moral transformation of the community as it rediscovered its corporate moorings and thereby its social vision." 87.

slumbering individuals, but ultimately as the reformation of families and communities, perhaps even of the nation.” He notes that “in New England, revival was intricately linked to the renewal of the covenant,” which was intrinsically corporate in its nature.³⁵⁰ Edwards was supportive of such efforts, and in his own Northampton community sought corporate covenantal renewal through an external covenant of public profession of faith by church members, just as the Old Testament Jews did as part of their covenant community. Such a renewal of one’s profession of faith and willingness to follow God is termed ‘owning the covenant.’ McClymond and McDermott write that this ‘owning’ suggests “a corporate rather than individualistic model of how God related to Christian people.”³⁵¹ In all these various ways then, Edwards moves conversion beyond an individualistic experience into something necessarily corporate and churchly in nature.

The Great Awakening and a Shift in Location

If in these various ways Edwards’ views on conversion placed it squarely in the church community, on the other hand there is a case to be made that other aspects of Edwards’ thought and role resulted to some degree in the promotion of a more individualistic location for conversion much less bound to the church. The support for such a case tends to be found less in specific assertions on the nature of conversion, and more in broader perspectives on revival, and the direct or often indirect support lent through Edwards’ actions and role as revival leader for practices that lead toward a more individualistic setting for conversion.

³⁵⁰ Bezzant, “Edward’s Social Vision,” in *Edwards and Justification*, 72, 88.

³⁵¹ *Theology of Edwards*, 428 (see also chapters 21, 32).

For example, the rise in itinerant preaching as a result of the Great Awakening had a significant impact on the location of conversion. Although Edwards later became more critical of many of the practices of itinerant preachers, his early support for and participation in this practice opened the door to the devaluation of parish clergy and churches. In fact, Edwards' most famous sermon, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," provoked a tumultuous result not in his home church at Northampton, but away from his parish at Enfield, Connecticut. He was also a strong supporter of George Whitefield, who itinerated across the entire colonial seaboard, even if at some points Whitefield gave him cause for concern.³⁵² As McClymond and McDermott have noted, "the New Light proponents were challenging ministerial authority and the standing order of churches by offering parishioners their own choice of which preachers to hear and churches to attend."³⁵³

Edwards also gave his qualified support to the Presbyterian minister Gilbert Tennent, who – in a sermon from 1740, "The Danger of an Unconverted Ministry," "declared that it was 'lawful and expedient' for awakened parishioners to leave behind their regularly appointed synod parishes 'to hear Godly Persons' instead."³⁵⁴ The idea that one might choose one's church, rather than be tied to the local community of Christians, and this not on the basis of theological disagreement as much as a judgment about the spiritual standing of the clergy of the church, was a new innovation in the colonial religious landscape. Although Edwards was in fact critical of some of these ideas, his broad support for revivals and writings disseminating the effects and methods of the

³⁵² Edwards was uncomfortable at times with Whitefield's encouragement to parishioners to question the faith or regenerate standing of their ministers, and cautioned Whitefield against such teaching. See Marsden, *Life*, 211-15.

³⁵³ *Theology of Edwards*, 439.

³⁵⁴ McClymond and McDermott, *Theology of Edwards*, 437, quoting Tennent's sermon as found in *The Great Awakening*, ed. Richard L. Bushman (New York: Atheneum, 1970), 88, 93.

revivals played an indirect role in the rising popularity of those ideas, ideas which were undermining the parish ministry that was standard at this time, and threatening the powers of the colonial churches and clergy. Thus, in both teaching and methods, the first Great Awakening initiated a movement away from a church-centered, corporate model of conversion toward a more individualistic and isolated one. Although this shift did not all fall on the shoulders of Edwards, his was a prominent role in the First Great Awakening, a movement that initiated this shift that would only accelerate in the decades following.

Conclusions

Due both to the pressing concerns of his time, and to his own theological understanding of Scripture and the gospel, Edwards makes conversion a central concern of his theology and his preaching. Indeed, one would be hard-pressed to find a major theological figure in American church history who emphasizes conversion more than Edwards. There is an utter seriousness in his consideration of conversion and the vastness of its role.

Although no moniker is perfect, it should be clearer at this point why I have termed Edwards' model of conversion "supernatural affective vision." For Edwards, conversion begins with the electing God's illumination of the heart through the Holy Spirit, by which one is regenerated and faith initiated. It is this vision of divine realities, of God's goodness and holiness and beauty, that moves a person beyond any merely intellectual understanding to heart knowledge that moves and orients one's affections, the core of one's being, toward the triune God. Conversion is not a matter of persuasion,

even if reason still plays a necessary part in conversion. Reason can prepare for grace, rational knowledge becoming a means of grace, but a sense of the heart finally is needed – an *affectional* knowledge. All of one’s being is involved in true conversion; there is no division of into human faculties – some of which are involved with conversion and some not. Further, conversion can never be accomplished by human effort, whether will or intellect, but only by a supernatural, gracious process wrought by God. Thus preparation for conversion in any of its various possible forms is ultimately a work of the Holy Spirit.

Some suggest difficulties in Edwards’ views on conversion. Among those expressing concern is Robert Jenson, who argues that Edwards ends with an emphasis on one’s subjective experience that tends to push away a reliance on an objective Word of God and its relevant promises of God’s grace to those who put their faith in him, regardless of their experience. Jenson critiques the efforts of the Puritans generally, and Edwards particularly, to probe the inner realities of the converted life. “It is an infinite interiority of wheels within wheels into which Edwards here plunges. Puritans were adepts of its depths; Edwards was among the masters. Not all who entered found their way out again; one has frequent fears also for Edwards.”³⁵⁵ He argues that Edwards’ phenomenological exploration of conversion has resulted in “a dead end of its original purpose.”³⁵⁶ It is both unable to indicate with probability, much less certainty, those who are truly versus falsely converted, and it makes consciousness of grace reliant upon a form of experience in which one can have no confidence, rather than the assured presence of grace to the believer in Word and sacrament.³⁵⁷ He concludes, “If true religion is to be

³⁵⁵ Jenson, *America’s Theologian*, 84.

³⁵⁶ Jenson, *America’s Theologian*, 85.

³⁵⁷ For Edwards, “especially in sermons it becomes apparent that so far as either observation or introspection can take us, false religion and true are indistinguishable.” *America’s Theologian*, 86. Since in Puritanism, “where the spoken godpel [sic] and the sacraments are held to be ambiguous, if the authenticity

enraptured beyond myself by God's beauty, then the very act of asking 'Do I have true religion?' is an abandonment of it. The egocentric predicament cannot be overcome within standard Puritanism; it can only be driven to self-refutation."³⁵⁸

It does seem that Edwards' theology necessarily shifts focus somewhat to one's experience, but in essence this is only due to Edwards' evangelistic concern that one not be self-deceived by one's state. If anything, Edwards himself – at least in his later writings – provokes a skepticism regarding one's own experiences that would tend to drive one to the gospel. Yet for Edwards, trusting in salvation by grace alone does not result in any kind of quietistic reliance on gospel promises, but should result in action, in change over time, in sanctification, in works of love. If this shifts the emphasis in part to one's own life, then this for Edwards is the price that must be paid to avoid a form of assenting religion without a living affective knowledge of gospel truths that invariably produces works. For Edwards, adoption of the gospel involves *consent* rather than *assent*. Heart language is language of the will and disposition, and one consents such that actions result. It is more than a change in intellectual knowledge or belief. There are equally dangerous risks to moving toward a different direction of trust in God's Word and covenant objectively, without any subjective verification of the reality of that trust. Even though it is uncertain, it is no less uncertain than a confidence in God's promises that is not reflected in change in both the heart and the actions of a given Christian professor.

If the conundrum resulting from the elevation of subjective versus objective factors in conversion is difficult to avoid, so too is another conundrum occurring when requiring

of the experience of grace is not itself experienceable, grace disappears from consciousness altogether. For any descendent of Augustinian faith, this is disaster." 86. One can have no confidence of the presence of grace outside of one's experience.

³⁵⁸Jenson, *America's Theologian*, 86.

a certain degree of any kind of *knowledge* be present for conversion to take place. How can one ever define successfully the quantity and quality of knowledge required for conversion, once one makes it essential to one's paradigm of conversion? What of those who lack intellectual capacity? These are questions that will continue to arise in this dissertation.

As this chapter illustrates, there are many ways to consider conversion and its various aspects. There are many more possibilities for variation in one's view of conversion than simply considering a view to be Arminian or Calvinist, for example. While those are categories that can reflect distinct differences in one's view of conversion, they certainly cannot flesh out the numerous other variations possible in one's understanding of conversion – variations in which the typical Calvinist versus Arminian paradigm breaks down. There are other features of conversion in which Calvinists and Arminians will be united in support or opposition. This dissertation will continue to revolve around this matrix of features resulting in a fuller picture of the development and changing features of evangelical conversion.

If Edwards will forever be indelibly linked to the First Great Awakening, we turn next to a figure similarly linked to the Second Great Awakening, Charles Finney. As we shall see, Finney illustrates a shift in the mainstream of evangelicalism reflected in quite different forms of revivalism in the Second Great Awakening – which was itself a much more diverse and elongated affair than the First.³⁵⁹ For by the later awakening theological perspectives on revival – and conversion itself – were becoming much more varied, and although Edwards reflected the center of a movement chiefly debated across a spectrum of Old Lights and New Lights, the battle lines over the Second Great Awakening ran in

³⁵⁹ Certainly a part of the shift from Edwards to Finney involves a shift away from Calvinism and toward Arminianism, but this is hardly adequate in assessing the various developments and changing views in the understanding of conversion that were to occur in the Second Great Awakening and the nineteenth century.

several directions with greater diversity among its proponents and antagonists than its eighteenth century predecessor. Finney represents, then, only one perspective in support of these later revivals. Some other supporters would find as much reason to oppose Finney as to oppose the opponents of revival. This we shall see later in considering Charles Hodge and Princeton Seminary.

Chapter Two – Charles Finney

Charles Grandison Finney (1792-1875) was born into another world than that of Jonathan Edwards. In moving from Edwards to Finney one crosses into a dramatically different theological orientation and historical period. Finney has a different personality, a different history, a different context, and a different theology.

Edwards lived as a colonial citizen of Great Britain, whereas Finney lived as a citizen of a young but expanding and strengthening American nation and culture. This post-revolutionary context saw not only the expansion and diversification of the nation's population, but also the growth of those distinctly American cultural traits such as individualism, notions of freedom and liberty, common sense, and pragmatism, as well as the development of democratic political processes that were not even on the horizon during Edwards' lifetime. Furthermore, this period encompassed increasing strains over various social issues, the greatest of which (slavery) was to fracture the nation.

Finney was also at the forefront of a changing tide in American evangelicalism and culture. His significance in this period, theologically and historically, is difficult to question. Keith Hardman terms him "the key figure in American religion for the second quarter of the nineteenth century" and "the chief 'prophet'" of the period.¹ L. G.

¹Keith J. Hardman, *Charles Grandison Finney 1792-1875: Revivalist and Reformer* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1987), ix, xiv (further citations as *Finney*). He adds, "It is impossible to have a full-orbed understanding of the middle period of American history without some inclusion of his role in it." ix. He "captured the spirit of the age, gave it voice, and shaped and reshaped its spiritual institutions in ways that have endured." xiv.

Parkhurst, Jr. calls him “the greatest revivalist to ever grace the American scene.”² Harry Conn considers him “the greatest evangelist since apostolic times.”³ His significance for evangelicalism in particular was enormous. Douglas Sweeney calls him “the single most influential evangelical of his day.”⁴ John H. Gerstner states, “No one in the second quarter of last century had the ear of America in the spreading of what went by the name of evangelicalism as did Finney.”⁵ On a personal level, “it was widely acknowledged that Charles Finney was dynamic, magnetic, and arresting,” hardly the language one would use to describe Edwards, who typically read his long sermons from manuscripts.⁶ Given his importance to this period, and some of the theological changes we will see ushered in through him, his inclusion in this study was vital.

Finney’s essential theological framework was well-suited to the self-made man of western expansion, and to the activist social mentality of many in the eastern cities. His form of revivalism found fertile ground across a broad spectrum of American religious and cultural life. Many also link Finney to the rise of Jacksonian democracy.

In studying Finney, a number of initial questions arise. What was Finney’s relation to Edwards? What was his relation to his own historical context? Are there one or many different Finneys – to what extent did Finney’s views change or develop over his career?

Moving from study of Edwards to Finney seems akin at times to moving from a skillful theoretician to a somewhat brash practitioner. Reading Finney is quite a different

² Charles G. Finney, *Finney’s Systematic Theology: New and Expanded 1878 Edition*, ed. Dennis Carroll, Bill Nicely, and L. G. Parkhurst, Jr., Introduction by Rev. L. G. Parkhurst, Jr. (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1994) Introduction, xiii (further citations as *LST*).

³ From his Preface to the 1976 edition, found in Appendix C of *LST*, 573.

⁴ Douglas A. Sweeney, “Evangelical Tradition in America,” in *Cambridge Companion to Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Stephen J. Stein (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 217-238, 221.

⁵ John H. Gerstner, “The Theological Boundaries of Evangelical Faith,” in *The Evangelicals*, eds. David F. Wells and John D. Woodbridge (New York: Abingdon Press, 1975), 21-37, 27.

⁶ Hardman, *Finney*, 36.

experience from reading Edwards, as they were two individuals of different times and gifts. That both were gifted individuals is very clear. But Edwards was gifted in the life of the mind first of all, this gift spilling over into his many other roles as pastor, leader, evangelist, preacher, and the like in a rich diversity of expression. Finney, on the other hand, was first and foremost gifted as an evangelist, and it was by way of this gift that he came also to establish his career as a pastor, professor, and writer. They wrote in different times with different goals. In fact one cannot exactly speak of them both writing their works; many of Finney's major works were either put to print from notes of his lectures and sermons taken by others, or dictated by him. One will find no writing desk filled with thirty years of transcripts and notes for Finney as one did with Edwards.

But compare one must, for these two figures dominate their respective eras, and Edwards' shadow looms large over Finney's era as well, both by the presence of his published works and the teaching and influence of such followers as Timothy Dwight and Nathaniel William Taylor at Yale, or Edwards Amasa Park at Andover.⁷ The relationship of Finney's thought to Edwards is a matter of some dispute. Theologically, there are drastically different assessments of Finney's theology and his relation to and transition from Edwards and the earlier Calvinist tradition.

On the one hand, one can find an argument for the discontinuity of Finney with Edwards, and for some even his undermining of essentials of evangelicalism and Reformation theology. John Gerstner considers Finney to be a Pelagian at his core, and

⁷ Finney certainly read several of Edwards' works. Hardman discusses specifically the impact of Finney's reading of *Religious Affections* and *Thoughts on the Revival of Religion*. Finney evidently read them both while staying in Pastor Samuel Aikin's home for a few months in 1826-27. Hardman notes that these works had a moderating, restraining effect on Finney's preaching style against previous excesses, and he began to quote Edwards often in his teaching. *Finney*, 83-84. Finney was also almost certainly at least familiar with Edwards' *Life of David Brainerd*, which was very popular during Finney's lifetime, and the most reprinted work of Edwards in the nineteenth century.

argues that “his Pelagianism subverted the Reformation's understanding of grace precisely because it denied the Reformation's view of man.”⁸ In fact, according to Gerstner, “to this extent Finney, the greatest of nineteenth-century evangelists, became the greatest of nineteenth-century foes of evangelicalism.”⁹ The dominant tone of historians in describing the relationship of Edwards and Finney has also been one of contrast and opposition. William McLoughlin, historian and editor of Finney's *Lectures on Revivals*, exemplifies this approach. He calls *Lectures on Revivals* “more than a destructive attack upon ‘the traditions of the elders,’ as Finney scornfully referred to the old Calvinistic doctrines. It is a positive, ringing statement of the new religious, social, and intellectual philosophy that came to dominate popular American thought until well into the twentieth century.” It was Finney who “brought the Presbyterian and Congregational churches to their great schism of 1837 and completed the downfall of Calvinism.” McLoughlin terms Finney a Jacksonian with “little use for Calvinism,” representative of the times with a great faith in progress and the common man, who “was so far from Edwards in his philosophical outlook that it may seem odd that he frequently quotes Edwards to buttress his views on specific aspects of revival preaching.”¹⁰

While it may seem odd to McLoughlin, Charles Hambrick-Stowe finds this only to be expected for one who he sees as continuing largely within an Edwardsian tradition. Hambrick-Stowe sets out on a somewhat revisionist project in providing what he

⁸ The charge of Pelagianism is not new, and even in Finney's own lifetime his critics raised this issue.

⁹ Gerstner, “Theological Boundaries,” in *The Evangelicals*, 27.

¹⁰ Finney, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*, ed. William G. McLoughlin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960), x, xiv, viii, xi (further citations as *LOR*). He adds, “Unlike the majority of his clerical colleagues, Finney was a child of his age, not an enemy of it.... the basic philosophical and social principles underlying his thought were essentially the same as those associated with Jacksonian democracy. Like the Jacksonians, Finney had an ardent faith in progress, in the benevolence of God, and in the dignity and worth of the common man. Like the Jacksonians, he believed that the restrictive clerical and aristocratic traditions of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were out of date and that they must give way to a new and more liberal outlook if the nation was to continue to grow in peace, liberty, and prosperity under God.” viii.

considers a more accurate and balanced view of Finney. He argues that Puritan language was engrained in the very culture of Finney's day and sounded very natural to Finney's listeners.¹¹ As to Finney's relation to Edwards, he writes that "while Finney modified some aspects of Edwards's Calvinism, such as the doctrine of limited atonement, his theological language from the start was thoroughly Edwardsian." He notes the "vast amount of common ground shared by Finney, Nettleton, Beecher, and all the New School Presbyterians and Congregationalists who stood in the evangelical Edwardsian tradition."¹² Finney adopts wholeheartedly Edwards' notion of benevolence, he agrees with Edwards that the elect are known by their works,¹³ and he self-consciously refers to Edwards when relating his personal experiences of God's sweetness.¹⁴ In similar fashion to Edwards, "rejecting both antinomianism and legalism in traditional Calvinist fashion, he pleaded for the centrality of Jesus Christ and the Bible in evangelical preaching. Religion has to do not with excited feelings but with a holy will and benevolent action" that results from seeing God's truths from one's heart.¹⁵ And as to Finney being Jacksonian, Hambrick-Stowe writes that "in 1828 Charles Finney was definitely no Jacksonian,"¹⁶ providing solid evidence to support his case both in Finney's general emphases and in specific stands Finney takes against Jackson's party.¹⁷

Hambrick-Stowe's revisionist effort is further supported by Allen Guelzo, who writes in the foreword, "in startling contrast to his reputation as an anti-Calvinist, Finney did not hesitate to speak of himself as a disciple and admirer of Edwards and the New

¹¹ Charles E. Hambrick-Stowe, *Charles G. Finney and the Spirit of American Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 18 (further citations as *Charles Finney*).

¹² Hambrick-Stowe, *Charles Finney*, 29, 65.

¹³ Hambrick-Stowe, *Charles Finney*, 154.

¹⁴ Hambrick-Stowe, *Charles Finney*, 183.

¹⁵ Hambrick-Stowe, *Charles Finney*, 217. See also 218.

¹⁶ Hambrick-Stowe, *Charles Finney*, 93.

¹⁷ See Hambrick-Stowe, *Charles Finney*, 88-93, 177-78, 200.

England Theology.”¹⁸ Guelzo elsewhere argues even more persuasively on these very points, concluding that, “in the final analysis, Finney’s connections to the New England theology, both through Edwardseanism and Nathaniel William Taylor, underscore how persistent the direct influence of Edwards and New England were on American religion in the nineteenth century.”¹⁹

For reasons that should become more apparent in reading this dissertation, on this debate I would give a qualified affirmation to McLoughlin and others. Although initially I found Hambrick-Stowe and Guelzo compelling, the more of Finney I read, the more I found contrast over continuity with Edwards, both more broadly and in his views on conversion.

To what extent did Finney’s theological views change or develop over his career? Are there many different Finneys? An early revivalist Finney? A later revivalist? A Presbyterian vs. a Congregational Finney? Finney the professor? I would venture to argue that changes and developments in his theological positions related to conversion and other central Christian tenets over his lifetime are incremental rather than paradigm-shifting. His views on perfectionism, for example, become more explicit later in his career, but are not inconsistent with and are also strongly hinted at in his earlier writings. They are, in a sense, a natural development of his views of sanctification, of the moral law, and of human ability. And while, like Edwards, he is somewhat more circumspect later in his career about the lasting effects of revival and its methods on apparent converts, he also makes clear late in his career that he is unwilling to reverse himself on any significant

¹⁸ In Hambrick-Stowe, *Charles Finney*, viii.

¹⁹ Allen Guelzo, “An Heir or a Rebel? Charles Grandison Finney and the New England Theology,” *Journal of the Early Republic*, vol. 17, no.1 (Spr 1997), 61-94, 93-94.

points.²⁰ Even the fairly early (1835) *Lectures on Revivals* should be seen as representative of his views.²¹

This dissertation will be focused primarily on the period of Finney's life from roughly 1821-1850 – as a revivalist, as a preacher, and as a professor during the early period of his teaching career at Oberlin College. This was the period of his greatest influence, both within his context and also historically in terms of his lasting impact. While Finney's time at Oberlin College was significant and is in many ways insightful – especially in his more developed views of perfectionism, there was also a sense in which his later time at Oberlin was more isolated from his social and theological context, and less remembered in terms of his impact on history, at least in terms of the theological interests of this dissertation.²² For primary source materials this chapter mostly will draw on *Lectures on Revivals* and *Lectures on Systematic Theology*, supplemented by some sermon material and Finney's *Memoirs*.²³ These first two longer works represent Finney earlier in

²⁰ In the Preface to his *Memoirs* Finney writes, "On the strictly fundamental questions in theology, my views have not, for many years, undergone any change, except as I have clearer apprehensions of them than formerly, and should now state some of them, perhaps, in some measure, differently from what I should then have done." Charles G. Finney, *The Memoirs of Charles G. Finney: The Complete Restored Text*, eds. Garth M. Rosell and Richard A. G. Dupuis (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1989), 4 (further citations as *Memoirs*).

²¹ McLoughlin writes that Finney "did not, however, offer to retract any of his basic theological doctrines nor reverse any of the basic principles for promoting revivals that he had formerly espoused. But he did admit that some of the new measures and methods he had sanctioned were liable to grave abuse." Still, "in spite of these frank acknowledgments of the shortcomings and misplaced emphases in the *Lectures on Revivals*, Finney by no means repudiated his earlier work." *LOR*, 1, li.

²² Were one to consider his relation to social reforms of the day, it would be essential.

²³ Finney's *Memoirs* present some difficulties as a source. It is biographically somewhat unreliable. On this point Hardman, Hambrick-Stowe, and Finney's modern day editors of the *Memoirs* are agreed. Hardman notes, "It is apparent that Finney read back into his *Memoirs* his elderly reactions and positions, and we shall see how unreliable his *Memoirs* are at times, granting their charm." *Finney*, xiii. Hardman consistently favors George Gale's autobiographical accounts of various Finney experiences over Finney's own self-description, e.g. the circumstances of his training and ordination, or when he departed from his training and developed his own theological strain (George Gale, a Presbyterian pastor, was a mentor to Finney when he entered the ministry). Hardman writes that Finney often "interjected his later theological positions into" his accounts in the *Memoirs*. 53. Hambrick-Stowe concurs, and gives numerous examples of this in his biography (for some of those mentioned, see *Charles Finney*, 24, 10-11, 25, 32, 43, 50, 53, 64, 78, 124, 148). Rosell and DuPuis also agree, although they qualify their statement more carefully. "The reliability of Finney's memory has troubled many readers of his Memoirs.... The evidence from these and other sources shows that Finney was often incorrect in his statements. At other times, however, he was surprisingly accurate. His ability to

his career primarily as a revivalist, and then in his later, more developed theological reflections as a professor.²⁴

As with Edwards, it will be found that conversion plays a central role in Finney's theology. Indeed it plays such a central role at times that it becomes a point of criticism from his opponents. This is best captured in Mercersburg theologian John Nevin's expression that for Finney "Conversion is every thing [sic], sanctification nothing."²⁵ Whether this is a fair criticism remains to be seen. While it is not the pithiest expression, to capture best the distinctive emphases found in Finney's conception of conversion I use the phrase *immediate ongoing human decisionism*. As we will find, this encompasses several key points. It is termed immediate for Finney's emphasis on the necessity of immediate conversion at the hearing of the gospel without delay, without process, without any waiting on God. It is ongoing in the sense that this decision for God is one that essentially is constantly repeated, and it is in this repetition that one remains a Christian. As Finney emphasizes strongly the human's role in conversion over God's role, it is human. God *influences*, but humans *choose*. Thus finally, at its core, conversion for Finney is the result of a human *decision*, an ability every human has to embrace the gospel and turn to God. These points will be clarified as we proceed. Let us hear from Finney himself what might serve as a summary of this model of conversion.

The truth is, Regeneration [sic], or conversion, is *not* a progressive work. What is regeneration? What is it but the *beginning* of obedience to God? And is the beginning of a thing progressive? It is the first act of genuine obedience to God – the first voluntary

remember, in minute detail, scenes that had transpired forty years earlier is due in part to his frequently repeating them in sermons, lectures, and conversation." *Memoirs*, xxvii. In any case, while not always as accurate as it might be *historically*, *Memoirs* still has value in providing an amalgamated *theological* perspective of Finney from late in life.

²⁴ Finney's *Systematic Theology* was first published in 1847, with new editions in 1851 and 1878.

²⁵ John W. Nevin, *The Anxious Bench* (Chambersburg, PA: Office of the "Weekly Messenger," 1843), 27.

action of the mind that is what God approves, or that can be regarded as obedience to God. That is conversion. When persons talk about conversion as a progressive work, it is absurd.²⁶

Finally, it is worth mentioning at the outset that Finney denies the common Reformed theological distinction between *regeneration* as a work of God and *conversion* as a work of humanity. For Finney regeneration does not signify some initial work of God. He uses regeneration simply as a synonym for conversion. As he puts it, the distinction between conversion and regeneration “inculcates a false philosophy of depravity and regeneration,” and “it leads the sinner to wait to be regenerated, before he repents or turns to God,” which is of a “most fatal tendency.” Therefore Finney concludes that he will “discard the distinction.” He will “use regeneration and conversion as synonymous terms.”²⁷ This again illustrates the immediacy of Finney’s view of conversion.

Finney and Revivalism

One cannot consider Finney’s views on conversion without also discussing revivalism. Revivalism is the greatest reason for Finney’s prominence historically and theologically. Finney’s other activities only followed and grew out of his work as evangelist and revivalist, which would always be at the center of his orientation – if not always his outward activities.²⁸ This impulse was active within twenty-four hours of his dramatic

²⁶ Finney, *LOR*, 338-39.

²⁷ Finney, *LST*, 271.

²⁸ Finney’s activities as a revivalist were curtailed in the mid 1830s due to health concerns. Part of the impetus to publish his *Lectures on Revivals* was to transfer his methods and successes to others, as he could no longer strenuously toil in the field himself. Even after becoming a professor, however, his continued commitment to evangelism was apparent. He was allowed considerable time off from Oberlin to pursue other activities. An example of this is his work in England from 1849-51, where he found considerable success in the conducting of revivals. Finney also set out to write his *Memoirs* (which, more properly, would

conversion in 1821. Finney also both exemplified and furthered a shift in the theology of revivals, from the focus on God-centered activity of the First Great Awakening to the focus on human-centered activity in (especially the later portion of) the Second Great Awakening. Thus, more than any of the other primary subjects of this dissertation, Finney is most closely associated with revivalism. Edwards certainly is associated with revivals, although he is also regarded for his broad and creative theological acumen and writings. Finney, however, does to some degree represent a shift from revivals to revivalism, to a more systematic methodology designed to produce specific effects and largely under human control.²⁹ William Clebsch notes, “While Edwards’ preaching had been the *occasion* for the surprising work of converting souls, his successors preached with the aim of *inducing* conversions.”³⁰

This transition, however, did not suddenly appear with Finney. He was both a product and a purveyor of revivalism. While his ‘new measures’ brought his share of fame and controversy, not even all of these originated with him, and as Hardman notes, “he by no means initiated mass evangelism.”³¹ But he did represent the most important figure first to demonstrate this shift.

be named a history of his revival experiences and thoughts; it was not primarily biographical in any general way) to correct misapprehensions of his early revivals, methods, and doctrines. Even at this point in his later life he recognized his primacy in regard to revivals. The opening lines of *Memoirs* read, “It has pleased God in some measure to connect my name and labors with an extensive movement of the church of Christ, regarded by some as a new era in its progress. Especially has this been supposed to be true in respect to revivals of religion.” *Memoirs*, 1.

²⁹ The exploration of this distinction is the focus of Iain H. Murray’s book, *Revival and Revivalism* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Trust Publishing, 1994), which is highly critical of the tendencies of the later development of *revivalism*, which Murray distinguishes sharply from the idea of *revival*.

³⁰ *American Religious Thought: A History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), 60.

³¹ Hardman, *Finney*, xii. He adds, “It could be argued that his illustrious predecessor, George Whitefield, reached as great and, at times, greater audiences, and his impact, though much compressed in time, equaled or surpassed Finney’s.” xii. Regarding the new measures, Hardman writes that “very few, if any, of the new measures originated with Finney; many of them had been used previously by the Methodists.” 84.

It should be noted that for Finney revivals are not solely tied to conversion; revivals bring not only conversion, but also the renewal of existing Christians and the church. “Nothing else will restore Christian love and confidence among church members.”³² Only revival will save the church from “annihilation.” This being said, Finney’s thoughts on revival remain vitally important for understanding his views on conversion. Because he sees revivals not as an exceptional, but rather the expected usual state of affairs for a healthy church, most of his reflections on conversion are set into a revival context. Furthermore, the word, *reflections*, belies a certain theological detachment that typically is not present for Finney in discussing revivals and conversion. As he says in *Lectures on Revivals*, “I have no idea of preaching *about* revivals. It is not my design to preach so as to have you able to say at the close, ‘We *understand* all about revivals now,’ while you do *nothing*.”³³ Finney wants his hearers to put his words into practice, and go out and make revivals. And for such work he finds most ministers woefully unprepared. In his view “there is vast ignorance among ministers” regarding revivals. “Many get the idea that they already understand all about revivals, when in reality they know next to nothing about them.”³⁴ This ignorance extends to the entire church, in spite of the numerous revivals it has experienced.³⁵

For Finney revivals begin with the conviction of sin, repentance, and renewal of those within churches. These awakened churches then extend the revival outward to

³² Finney, *LOR*, 26. See also 27-30.

³³ *LOR*, 22.

³⁴ He adds that the church “should be trained and disciplined like an army” for revival. *LOR*, 329.

³⁵ “There is vast ignorance in the churches on the subject of revivals. After all the revivals that have been enjoyed, ... there are very few who have any real consistent *knowledge* on the subject.” Finney, *LOR*, 328. “There are multitudes in the church who never seem to suppose that the work of promoting revivals of religion is one that requires study, and thought, and knowledge of principles, and skill in applying the word of God, so as to give every one his portion in season. And so they go on, generally doing little or nothing because they are attempting nothing, and if they ever do awake, go headlong to work, without any system or plan, as if God had left this part of our duty out of the reach of sound judgment and good sense.” 329.

sinners outside the church.³⁶ Churches failing to do this bear an “awful guilt.” There are “multitudes of sinners going to hell in all directions,” while supposed Christians of the church slumber.³⁷ It is the “duty” of both its ministers and its members to work for revivals.³⁸ Revivals stop because the church stops advancing. “If the means could be made to bear upon the church, and upon the young converts, to keep them out of the way of sinners, and to keep them continually advancing in holiness, the revival would never cease.”³⁹

The practical character of Finney’s instructions on revival are well-suited to the rising pragmatism of the day. Often ideas on revival were evaluated not in terms of their theological import, but rather by whether they produced results. For example, in 1829 a group of New England Congregationalists who had relocated to New York City desired to have Finney come and lead a revival. “They understood that revival, and numerous conversions, was not something that [Gardiner] Spring [leading Presbyterian minister in New York City who leaned toward Old School] could promise. On the other hand, the possibilities of Finney’s sweeping in with his aggressive, time-tested program that was almost sure to produce results in the form of many converts, was an allurements difficult to resist.”⁴⁰ Often the desire for success became the definitive criterion, and theology moved to the background.

There is development in Finney’s views on revival. Early in Finney’s revivalist career he employed more emotional practices, and employed language that was “coarse,

³⁶ *LOR*, 15-16.

³⁷ *LOR*, 332.

³⁸ “We see the *awful guilt of this church*, who come here and listen to lectures about revivals and then go away and *have no revival*, and also the guilt of members of other churches who hear these lectures and go home and *refuse to do their duty*.” *LOR*, 331.

³⁹ Finney, *LOR*, 470.

⁴⁰ Hardman, *Finney*, 182. Later in 1829 Finney promised a group of lay leaders, mostly leading businessmen, that he would come to NYC. 183.

vituperous, and extremely inflammatory.”⁴¹ Later he appealed more strongly to the intellect of his hearers, and became more and more refined as his audience changed from a backwoods crowd to a more educated group.⁴² Also, as previously mentioned, he mirrors Edwards to some degree in becoming more wary of the potential for abuses in revivals. More particularly, he recognizes the potential for the misuse of some of his new measures.⁴³

Still, when Edwards considered the revivals, and their excesses and failures as well as successes, there was a careful form of theological and self-reflection present. This was much less prevalent in Finney’s writings. One could account for it in part in the different nature of their ministries. Edwards, while doing some itinerant preaching, was fixed in one community for most of his career and could observe more easily the long-term effects of revivalism. This gave a greater opportunity for critique. One could see more clearly what percentage of people maintained their change of character and practices after revivalistic conversion experiences. But during the peak revival years Finney was always moving, never even in one community for a year, much less a number of years, and so was less able to observe (at least firsthand) the long term implications of the revivals in the lives of those affected. Nevertheless, Finney was much less disposed than Edwards to wonder about some of these topics.

⁴¹ Hardman, *Finney*, 82. On his more emotional practices, see Hardman, 65-67. Hardman notes that none of this, however, approached the wildness of the Cane Ridge tradition and Kentucky camp meetings. 57.

⁴² As I will argue more later, Finney still was always intellectually oriented. At this early period he just used more emotional tools to make his points. Hardman notes that Finney himself tried to stress this intellectual character of even his early sermons. “Finney later portrayed his sermons at that time as somewhat intellectual, emphasizing that his debates with opponents were indeed contests of wits. In his *Memoirs* Finney suggested frequently that logic and appeal to the intellect were indispensable parts of his evangelistic technique at this stage of his career [~1825]. This is very doubtful.” *Finney*, 65.

⁴³ There were many so-called ‘new measures,’ but Hardman lists six which were the most controversial: public prayers of women amidst mixed audiences, protracted (daily) meetings, the preacher’s use of colloquial language, the anxious seat, praying for people by name, and immediate acceptance of converts into church membership. *Finney*, 84.

Perhaps the most significant difference between Finney and Edwards was in Finney's emphasis on human free will and his corollary belief that revivals were not, in fact, surprising works of God, but instead predictable works of human instrumentality in bringing sinners to a decision to turn to God. To explore this topic more fully, we now turn to the question of the supernatural nature of conversion.

Conversion as Supernatural

Looking at the history of revivals, Finney is deeply concerned because too many in the church have misunderstood the nature of revivals. "There has long been an idea prevalent that promoting religion has something very peculiar in it, not to be judged of by the ordinary rules of cause and effect; in short, that there is no connection of the means with the result, and no tendency in the means to produce the effect. No doctrine is more dangerous than this to the prosperity of the church, and nothing more absurd." The church has been "persuaded that promoting religion is somehow so mysteriously a subject of Divine sovereignty, that there is no natural connection between the means and the end" with grave results. "No doubt more than five thousand millions have gone down to hell, while the church has been dreaming, and waiting for God to save them without the use of means."⁴⁴

Finney seeks to correct this dangerous misperception. To suggest the indispensable need for revivals "would be strange preaching, if revivals are only miracles, and if the church has no more agency in producing them, than it has in making a thunder storm." He states very clearly in his *Lectures on Revivals* that a revival "is not a miracle, or

⁴⁴ *LOR*, 14.

dependent on a miracle, in any sense.” It involves no suspension of the laws of nature (although Finney says it does involve the special work of the Holy Spirit). This is evidenced by the very success of revivals in his day, which show that “God has overthrown, generally, the theory that revivals are miracles.” And although one cannot automatically equate revival with conversion, Finney states explicitly that the same is true of conversion. “Miracles have sometimes been employed to arrest the attention of sinners. And in this way, miracles may become instrumental in conversion, although conversion is not itself a miracle, nor do miracles themselves ever convert any body.”⁴⁵

So how are revivals brought about? For Finney, a revival “consists entirely in the *right exercise* of the powers of nature. It is just that, and nothing else... It is a purely philosophical result of the right use of the constituted means—as much so as any other effect produced by the application of means.”⁴⁶ Revival happens when one effectively carries out the correct procedures for bringing it to pass. It is then within the control of those working in the church to bring it about. While it may be based on miracle, including Christ’s resurrection or other works of God, in and of itself it is to be compared with a farmer planting grain. While like all things, this requires God’s blessing, we do not find in the growth of crops from that grain a miracle, nor do we find miracles in the results of seeds sown in revival.

Finney argues against those who propose the sovereignty of God is violated by such teaching by using the same farmer analogy. A farmer does not wait idly by for God to miraculously produce his crops, but plants crops using his own strength. Doing so does not interfere with God’s sovereignty. So too in revival there is cause and effect, means and

⁴⁵ *LOR*, 27, 13, 20, 140.

⁴⁶ *LOR*, 13.

end. God uses appropriate means. “Every thing goes to show, that God has connected means with the end through all the departments of his government—in nature and in grace. There is no *natural* event in which his own agency is not concerned.”⁴⁷ Revivals “*are brought about by the use of means* like other events.” Although “some people say God can carry on revival without means,” Finney has “no faith in it. For there is no evidence of it.... God never did and never can convert a sinner except with the truth. What is conversion? Obeying the truth.... The sinner’s own agency is indispensable, for conversion consists in the right employment of the sinner’s own agency.”⁴⁸

Such a view is quite different from Edwards’ *Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God* and his emphasis on God’s surprising, supernatural activity being behind successful revivals rather than human activity. Revivals, as well as conversions, are not supernatural occurrences, but natural occurrences that are brought about by the same type of appropriate, God-given, natural means as sowing crops from a field. If this is the case, then what role does God play, if any?

Role of the Human and the Holy Spirit in Conversion

Finney suggests that God works for the conversion of individuals through both the Holy Spirit and through his providence, by which “he so arranges events as to bring the sinner’s mind and the truth in contact.”⁴⁹ Acknowledging this, let us turn to the role of

⁴⁷ He continues, “He [God] has not built the creation like a vast machine, that will go on alone without his further care. He has not retired from the universe, to let it work for itself. This is mere atheism. He exercises a universal superintendence and control. And yet every event in nature has been brought about by means. He neither administers providence nor grace with that sort of sovereignty, that dispenses with the use of means. There is no more sovereignty in one than in the other.” *LOR*, 21.

⁴⁸ *LOR*, 318.

⁴⁹ *LOR*, 17.

the Holy Spirit specifically in Finney's understanding of conversion. Finney insists that the action of the Holy Spirit is absolutely necessary to conversion. He goes so far as to say that "no praying or preaching will be of any avail without him. If Jesus Christ were to come down here and preach to sinners, not one would be converted without the Spirit."⁵⁰ Furthermore, "if you die without the Spirit, you will fall into hell. There can be no doubt of this."⁵¹

The work of the Holy Spirit, however, is not transformative in the sense of constitutionally or physically changing any aspect of a person in conversion. The Holy Spirit never supersedes our natural faculties. Neither can the Holy Spirit's action be felt in the manner of some outside physical force on us. We do not feel "that some external influence or agency is applied to us. We are not to expect to feel our minds in direct physical contact with God. If such a thing can be, we know of no way in which it can be made sensible."⁵² This being said, Finney suggests that we still can know that the Spirit is at work in us. "You can always know whether your feelings are produced by the Spirit's influences, by comparing your desires with the spirit and temper of religion, as described in the Bible."⁵³

The role of the Holy Spirit is to teach us and to influence us. "We need the light of the Holy Spirit to teach us the character of God, the nature of His government, the purity of His law, the necessity and fact of atonement—to teach us our need of Christ in all His offices and relations, governmental, spiritual, and mixed."⁵⁴ The Holy Spirit can bring

⁵⁰ He adds, "I want you to have high ideas of the Holy Ghost, and to feel that nothing good will be done without his influences." *LOR*, 102.

⁵¹ *LOR*, 122.

⁵² He continues, "We are not to expect a miracle to be wrought, as if we were led by the hand, sensibly, or like something whispered in the ear, or any miraculous manifestation of the will of God." *LOR*, 95.

⁵³ *LOR*, 96.

⁵⁴ *LST*, 413.

truths to bear on each individual in unique ways because of the Spirit's access to our minds, our history, and our present condition (internal and external). The Spirit then "employs that truth which is best adapted to his particular case, and then sets it home with Divine power.... Under his influence, the truth burns and cuts its way like fire."⁵⁵ The Spirit can bring the appropriate truths to mind for any given circumstance, and thus have the greatest power of influence over an individual. It is this power of persuasion which is most basic to the power of the Holy Spirit in conversion of individuals.

Finney calls his view the Divine Moral Suasion scheme of regeneration. God acts through the Holy Spirit on persons in regeneration solely by moral suasion, by presenting the truth in such a way that they are persuaded of it and turn to God. According to Finney, this view is clearly seen in the Bible, in it truth is a sanctifying force, and the human consciousness is aware of no other force than this. "The Bible," he writes, "has settled the philosophy of regeneration. That He [God] exerts any other than a moral influence, or the influence of divine teaching and illumination, is sheer assumption."⁵⁶

This power, however, cannot overwhelm an individual, or force an individual to make a certain choice or action. "God calls effectually, but not irresistibly." Through the Holy Spirit God extends to the saints "so great and powerful a drawing, as not to force, but to overcome his reluctance or voluntary selfishness, and as to induce him to turn to God and to believe in Christ." Because of this, Finney says, "every person who was ever truly converted knows, that his conversion is not to be ascribed to himself, in any other sense, than that he finally consented, being drawn and persuaded by the Holy Spirit."⁵⁷

⁵⁵ *LOR*, 17.

⁵⁶ *LST*, 284.

⁵⁷ *LST*, 513.

We have a dependence on Christ and the Holy Spirit in responding to the gospel and obeying God, but this dependence “does not consist in a proper inability to will as God directs.”⁵⁸ Rather this dependence lies in the ability of the Holy Spirit to show and persuade us of truths that might overcome our sinful habits and “the great darkness of our souls in respect to Christ and His mediatorial work and relations.”⁵⁹ Were this force irresistible, it would be in conflict with our capacity as moral agents, and would not allow for an explanation for the biblical injunction against resisting the Holy Spirit.⁶⁰ One obviously could not resist God’s omnipotent force physically, so it must be in the form of resistible moral persuasion.

The Holy Spirit cannot, by his own power alone, bring about conversion. God never operates in conversion apart from human agency. Both are vital, he claims. “*Human agency is just as indispensable to a revival as divine agency.* Such a thing as a revival of religion, I venture to say, never did occur without divine agency, and never did occur without human agency.”⁶¹ So what is the role of the human in conversion?

All commands found in the Bible are, according to Finney, within our power to do. “When God commands us to do a thing, it is the highest possible evidence that we can do it. For God to command, is equivalent to an oath that we can do it. He has no right to command, unless we have power to obey.” This being the case, and even though “God induces him to do it,” and God “influences him by his Spirit,” it is a fundamental truth for Finney that “*Religion is the work of man.* It is something for a man to do. It consists in obeying God.”⁶² What God commands, we must do. We are commanded to be filled

⁵⁸ *LST*, 341.

⁵⁹ *LST*, 341.

⁶⁰ Charles G. Finney, *Sermons on Important Subjects*, 3rd ed. (New York: John S. Taylor, 1836), 31.

⁶¹ *LOR*, 318.

⁶² *LOR*, 108, 9.

with the Spirit. We are commanded to repent. We are commanded to obey. We are commanded to live a holy life. We are commanded to have a new heart. All these things we can do and should do. We are both able and obliged.

Therefore, when it comes to conversion, we are to turn to God, to repent, to make a new heart. Such commands we must actually *do*. In this venture we work together with God. “The conversion of a sinner consists in his obeying the truth. It is therefore impossible it should take place without his agency, for it consists in *his* acting right. He is influenced to this by the agency of God, and by the agency of men.”⁶³

Previously we mentioned that Finney does not distinguish between the terms *regeneration* and *conversion*. This dual activity of human and divine is clarified somewhat through a further description of Finney’s understanding of these terms.

For Finney, “regeneration is, in the Bible, the same as the new birth.” And to be regenerated implies being made holy. “Certainly, a sinner is not regenerated whose moral character is unchanged.” Rather, for Finney the term regeneration expresses “primarily and principally the thing done, ...the making of a sinner holy, and expresses also the fact, that God’s agency induces the change. Throw out the idea of what is done, ...the change of moral character in the subject, and he would not be born again, he would not be regenerated, and it could not be truly said, in such a case, that God had regenerated him.” Finney’s emphasis is on what *results* from God’s agency, a change in the sinner, and so he objects to restricting the term regeneration to God’s agency or activity. It “implies the turning or activity of the subject,” and therefore the subject’s agency. “Passive holiness is impossible.” Regeneration then is dependent not only on God but on human activity.⁶⁴

⁶³ *LOR*, 18.

⁶⁴ *LST*, 270.

“Both conversion and regeneration are sometimes in the Bible ascribed to God, sometimes to man, and sometimes to the subject,” Finney argues. This “shows clearly that the distinction under examination is arbitrary and theological, rather than biblical. The fact is, that both terms imply the simultaneous exercise of both human and Divine agency.”⁶⁵

As Finney sees it, in regeneration the subject is both passive and active. The subject is active in choosing the gospel, but at the same time passive in that “he acts only when and as he is acted upon.” He is passive in perceiving “the truth presented by the Holy Spirit.” This perceiving is distinct from regeneration, but also simultaneous with it. “It induces regeneration. It is the condition and the occasion of regeneration.”⁶⁶ Finney also uses a courtroom scene to describe the mutual participation of Spirit and sinner. “*A sinner, under the influence of the Spirit of God, is just as free as a jury under the arguments of an advocate.*”⁶⁷ The Spirit is an advocate for the truth; the sinner hears the Spirit’s arguments (passive), and then weighs them and comes to a decision (active). In sum, as Finney puts it, “the saints convert not themselves, in the sense that they turn or yield, until persuaded by the Holy Spirit. God converts them in the sense, that He effectually draws or persuades them. They turn themselves, in the sense that their turning is their own act.”⁶⁸

Although the above description would seem to ease any tension one might find between divine and human activity in conversion, this is not the case. Finney constantly returns to the same point in discussing our failure to obey God’s commands, necessary for our conversion and holiness. It is not that we *cannot*, but that we *will not* obey God. “Men

⁶⁵ *LST*, 271.

⁶⁶ *LST*, 276.

⁶⁷ *Sermons*, 31.

⁶⁸ *LST*, 514.

are wholly indisposed to obey; and unless God interpose the influence of his Spirit, not a man on earth will ever obey the commands of God.”⁶⁹ This seems to be consistent with what we found above. But then we find statements such as these: “obligation to perform duty never rests on the condition, that we shall first have the influence of the Spirit, but on the powers of moral agency. We, as moral agents, have the power to obey God, and are perfectly bound to obey, and the reason we do not is, that we are unwilling.”⁷⁰ So at times Finney specifically denies the need for *any* activity of the Holy Spirit in being obedient to God. The obligation of sinners to repent “rests, not upon the Spirit’s influences, but upon the powers of moral agency which they possess; upon their ability to do their duty. And while it is true that not one of them ever will repent without the influences of the Spirit, *still they have power to do so, and are under obligation to do so, whether the Spirit strives with them or not.*”⁷¹ Apparently, then, we have the capacity to ‘go it alone’ in conversion, though we never do. We will discuss this notion further below.

On the other hand, Finney at times seems to imply that the Holy Spirit is, in fact, needed for this capacity for obedience, that we cannot do what we are commanded to do in our natural state. Already above, as we have seen, he insists on the necessity of the Holy Spirit in conversion. Additionally, he writes “It is true indeed that God requires of men, especially under the gospel, what they are unable to do directly in their own strength.” He then qualifies the statement, suggesting that God tells them to take advantage of his strength and grace to meet his requirements. Therefore, he concludes,

⁶⁹ *LOR*, 9.

⁷⁰ *LOR*, 107-108. “When you tell sinners that without the Holy Spirit they never will repent, they are very liable to pervert the truth, and understand by it that they *cannot* repent, and therefore are under no obligation to do it until they feel the Spirit. It is often difficult to make them see that all the ‘cannot’ consists in [is] their unwillingness, and not in their inability.” *LOR*, 107.

⁷¹ *LOR*, 101 (emphasis mine).

“with strict propriety, it cannot be said that in this, or in any case, He requires directly any more than we are able directly to do.”⁷²

The one position Finney never defends is that this regeneration and obedience can be wrought by the action of the Holy Spirit alone. “Several theologians have held that regeneration is the work of the Holy Spirit alone. In proof of this they cite those passages that ascribe it to God. But I might just as lawfully insist that it is the work of man alone, and quote those passages that ascribe it to man, to substantiate my position.”⁷³ For Finney, the human is never passive in regeneration. A person never ought simply to wait for God to change him or her.⁷⁴ Finney argues that a sinner in this position will never respond or *act* on the gospel message. “He stands and waits for God to do what God requires him to do, and which no one can do for him. Neither God, nor any other being, can regenerate him, if he will not turn. If he will not change his choice, it is impossible that it should be changed.”⁷⁵ The human subject has a necessary and active role in conversion. On this Finney shows no lack of clarity.

What can we conclude about Finney’s view of the role of the human and Holy Spirit in conversion? First, we would suggest that whichever conflicting position of Finney on the matter we adopt, the role of the Holy Spirit is greatly minimized. His role is not unlike the role of a preacher, in Finney’s view. In the process of conversion he says there are three agents and one instrument at work. The agents are God, a human messenger who brings the gospel message and promotes conversion, and the sinner. The instrument

⁷² *LST*, 321.

⁷³ *LST*, 274. He suggests in this context I Peter 1:22 as an example.

⁷⁴ As he puts it in his sermon, “Sinners Bound to Change Their Own Hearts,” “*Sinners should not content themselves with praying for a new heart.*” *Sermons*, 36. They should not settle for this passive response, but should actively choose to change their hearts. They should not *wait*, but should *do*, and immediately. 36-38.

⁷⁵ *LST*, 276.

used is the truth.⁷⁶ The human messenger (the preacher, etc.) is not necessary, but when present works to persuade the sinner to convert through the truths of the gospel. “The preacher is a moral agent in the work; he acts; he is not a mere passive instrument; he is voluntary in promoting the conversion of sinners.”⁷⁷ Essentially, the preacher or other third party human agent functions in the same way as the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit has the advantage of a greater knowledge of the sinner and of the applicability of particular truths to the sinner’s situation, but is otherwise doing nothing that a preacher or other human agent might do.⁷⁸ In other words, it would seem in Finney’s view that the Holy Spirit’s function in conversion is not unique, and theoretically is not even necessary, since the same function can be fulfilled by human agency. Given that the entire role of *influence* in conversion is also technically not necessary, this only further weakens an already questionable role for the Holy Spirit in conversion.

In several other descriptions in Finney’s writings the role of the Spirit seems optional or superfluous. For example, he writes, “The influences of the Spirit are wholly a matter of grace. If they were indispensable to *enable* us to perform duty, the bestowment of them would not be a gracious act, but a mere matter of common justice.”⁷⁹ So these influences are dispensable, it appears. Elsewhere he suggests that the Spirit of God is only needed to persuade a sinner to turn from sin when he is so entrenched in it as to make the persuasions of other people inadequate. “The degree of his dependence upon the Spirit, is

⁷⁶ Sometimes Finney lists these in the manner here described, e.g. *LOR*, 17. He also sometimes includes truth as a fourth agent instead of an instrument, e.g. *LOR*, 195. However, even there the first three are moral agents, whereas reading further he describes truth as a “mere unconscious instrument.” *LOR*, 195.

⁷⁷ *LOR*, 18. See also *LST*, 274. Also see Finney’s sermon, “Sinners Bound to Change Their Own Hearts” in *Sermons*, 20-22.

⁷⁸ “It is true that God converts sinners. But there is a sense, too, in which ministers convert them. And you have something to do; something that requires wisdom; something which, if you do it wisely, will insure the conversion of sinners in proportion to the wisdom employed.” *LOR*, 193.

⁷⁹ *LST*, 108.

just the degree of his obstinacy.”⁸⁰ Evidently there is hope for some less obstinate individuals to manage apart from the Spirit. Or in yet another example, Finney suggests that the gospel, and with it “the gift of the Holy Spirit, to convict, convert, and sanctify the soul, is a system of grace throughout. But to maintain this, I must also maintain, that God might justly have required obedience of men without making these provisions for them. And to maintain the justice of God in requiring obedience, I must admit and maintain that obedience was possible to man.”⁸¹ Here Finney’s relentless logic drives him to the consistent conclusion that if, as he insists, to be a responsible moral agent involves the capacity to fulfill the obligation (refusing to acknowledge any distinctions in how this capacity might be understood, e.g. natural vs. moral inability), then this unassisted capacity must be present. This, ultimately, is at least one very important reason why Finney struggles with the role of the Holy Spirit.⁸² In sum, though Finney says no one is saved without the Holy Spirit, it is difficult to conclude anything other than that in Finney’s system the role of the Holy Spirit is, at most, a persuader and, at least, virtually irrelevant.

When Finney ventures to say that conversion “never did occur without divine agency,” perhaps he would have been more accurate to say that it never has occurred, but that it could. A critical perspective would note that it is indeed an odd coincidence that this purported human *ability* to obey God or to repent has not, even in Finney’s view, ever actually occurred in human history. Perhaps there is indeed a better explanation.

⁸⁰ *Sermons*, 27.

⁸¹ *LST*, 331.

⁸² Finney himself seems aware of this difficulty. “Whenever the necessity and importance of the Spirit’s influences are held forth, there can be no doubt that persons are in danger of abusing the doctrine and perverting it to their own injury. For instance, when you tell sinners that without the Holy Spirit they never will repent, they are very liable to pervert the truth, and understand by it that they *cannot* repent, and therefore are under no obligation to do it until they feel the Spirit. It is often difficult to make them see that all the ‘cannot’ consists in [is] their unwillingness, and not in their inability.” *LOR*, 107.

Finney is loathe to mention the notion of *inability* due to its misuse or misunderstanding in his context, but it certainly would appear to be the stronger explanation, and more consistent with biblical passages than some of the strained interpretations Finney at times provides.⁸³

As to biblical imagery, even Finney notes that “the sinner is dead in trespasses and sins,” but “God calls on him” to “Arise from the dead.” And so, in Finney’s view, “the sinner puts forth his activity, and God draws him into life; or rather, God draws, and the sinner comes forth to life.”⁸⁴ But here, in fact, is Finney’s dilemma in this question of roles. In the above declaration he puts forth two distinct and conflicting options as if they could be easily held together. Is he going to go with option number one (“the sinner puts forth his activity, and God draws him into life”) or option number two (“God draws, and the sinner comes forth to life”)? Does God initiate the process of conversion, or the human? And if Finney takes his own statement seriously, that the sinner is indeed dead in sins – an image that certainly fits the biblical expression of the human sinner, how could such a dead body initiate any process whatsoever? Finney seems to want it both ways, but this appears inherently problematic.⁸⁵

⁸³ For example, Finney writes, Regeneration is ascribed to man in the gospel, which it could not be, if the term were designed to express only the agency of the Holy Spirit.” *LST*, 270. He then quotes I Cor. 4:15 in support. “For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel.” How this clearly establishes his point is a mystery to me.

⁸⁴ *LST*, 271.

⁸⁵ Were Finney to respond to this discussion of the role of the Holy Spirit and the human in conversion, he would likely stress the historical context that he was addressing. In his *Lectures on Systematic Theology* he notes, “When I entered the ministry, I found the persuasion of an absolute inability on the part of sinners to repent and believe the gospel, almost universal.” He says he faced “stern opposition” when preaching for sinners to do their duty, as both sinners and those in the church said one must wait on God to repent. Likewise one needed to wait on God for revival. “Man had no more agency in producing them than in producing showers of rain.” *LST*, 330. In a passage from *Lectures on Revivals* he suggests that when the place of election and God’s sovereignty has been distorted such that sinners become passive, then human ability in conversion must be emphasized. Clearly in the Calvinist context in which he was working he believed this to be the case. “It has been customary, in many places, for a long time, to bring the doctrine of election into every sermon. Sinners have been commanded to repent, and told that they could not repent, in the same sermon.” *LOR*, 205. In such a context a minister must “go right over against them, and crowd upon

It seems that one might finally say that for the Calvinist one cannot turn to God in repentance and obedience unless one is regenerated, whereas for Finney one cannot be regenerated unless one turns to God. Next we must consider what the nature of the change is that occurs at this regeneration or conversion.

The Nature of the Change of Conversion

In examining Finney's understanding of the nature of the change that occurs at conversion, one point is very clear. In Finney's view conversion never results in any change to a person's basic faculties, natural abilities, physical nature, or any aspect of one's substance. "Physical regeneration, under every modification of it, is a stumbling-block. Original or constitutional sinfulness, physical regeneration, and all their kindred and resulting dogmas, are alike subversive of the gospel, and repulsive to the human intelligence."⁸⁶ Regeneration is not "a change in the substance of soul or body."⁸⁷ To admit that this is in any way true would be to acknowledge that in our natural state, we lack some portion of ability to respond to God's call. As we have seen above, Finney believes this would remove the moral responsibility of sinners and render them not responsible for their sins.

them their ability to obey God, and to show their obligation and duty, and press them with that until he brings them to submit and be saved. They have got behind a perverted view of these doctrines." *LOR*, 200. If, on the other hand, there is too much emphasis in a congregation on human ability, the minister must stress the work of the Spirit. So one might temper one's criticisms of Finney by arguing that he is overstating his case to address his context. He adds, "When talking of election, the preacher is not talking of the sinner's duty. It has no relation to the sinner's duty. Election belongs to the government of God. It is part of the exceeding richness of the grace of God. It shows the love of God, not the duty of the sinner. And to bring election and repentance together in this way is diverting the sinner's mind away from his duty.... A great deal of ingenuity has been exercised in endeavoring to reconcile a sinner's 'inability' with his obligation to obey God. Election, predestination, free-agency, inability, and duty, have all been thrown together in one promiscuous jumble." *LOR*, 205.

⁸⁶ *LST*, 285.

⁸⁷ *LST*, 271.

Finney reiterates this further in his sermon, “Sinners Bound to Change Their Own Hearts,” which is based on Ezekiel 18:31 (“Make you a new heart and a new spirit, for why will ye die?”). There he argues that the word *spirit* is used in the sense of the temper or spirit of a person, and not of a spiritual entity.⁸⁸ The word heart, which has many meanings in the Bible, is not used in the passage to mean any change in the substance or constitution or faculties of a person. Any constitutional change providing some principle of holiness in a person would remove the virtue of one’s holiness, making it the result of physical necessity rather than choice.⁸⁹ Similarly, if the making of a new heart involved some physical change, it would be unreasonable. One cannot be held responsible morally for something one cannot do, just as one cannot be condemned if commanded to fly unless God gave a person wings. No reasonable person condemns himself under such circumstances. Since God commands us to change our hearts on pang of eternal death, it is intrinsic to such a command that we are able to do so. So the question of whether the demand is reasonable hinges on the ability of a person to make the change. A physical change is unreasonable, but a moral (voluntary) change is not. All humans have the power to choose to obey or not to obey God, to choose him for their end or their own selfish interests.⁹⁰ Finney suggests that all such doctrines “be laid aside as relics of a most unreasonable and confused philosophy.”⁹¹

Neither should one claim that this change is merely a mystery. Finney warns that couching religion in mystery provides undue comfort to sinners. Tell a sinner “that regeneration is all a mystery, something he cannot understand; and leave him all in a fog

⁸⁸ *Sermons*, 4.

⁸⁹ *Sermons*, 5-6. Finney also discusses biblical notions of the “heart” in *LST*, 272f. When the heart is used to represent the center of moral actions, it “cannot be meant to designate any involuntary state of mind” since such a state can have no moral character. 272. The heart is “something over which we have control.” 273.

⁹⁰ *Sermons*, 17-18.

⁹¹ *LST*, 285.

of darkness, and you relieve his anxiety. It is his clear view of the nature and duty of repentance, that produces his distress. It is the light that brings agony to his mind, while he refuses to obey.... Only cover up this light, and his anxiety will immediately become far less acute and thrilling.”⁹²

If the nature of the change that occurs to an individual in conversion is neither physical, constitutional, nor mysterious, what does it consist in exactly? This change of nature is a change in heart, an active *choice* to follow God in obedience to his law, a willful submission to God, all of which results in a holy life. It is a total moral reformation and a reorientation of one’s will to godly desires. In a passage from *Lectures on Systematic Theology* Finney summarizes his view: “Regeneration is represented in the Bible as constituting a radical change of character, as the resurrection from a death in sin, as the beginning of a new and spiritual life, as constituting a new creature, as a new creation, not a physical, but a moral or spiritual creation, as conversion, or turning to God, as giving God the heart, as loving God with all our heart, and our neighbor as ourselves.”⁹³ Let us further explore various aspects of his views on this change.

One important element of this change that Finney mentions often, reminiscent of Edwards, is that regeneration always involves a *change in heart*. Regeneration “expresses the act of turning; the changing of the heart, or of the ruling preference of the soul.” It is a “turning from sin to holiness, or more strictly, from a state of consecration to self to a state of consecration to God” and it is “the repentance that is required of all sinners.”⁹⁴ When speaking to anxious sinners, “no direction should be given, that does not include a

⁹² *LOR*, 340.

⁹³ *LST*, 273.

⁹⁴ *LST*, 343, 344.

change of heart.... In other words, nothing is proper, which does not imply actually becoming a Christian.”⁹⁵

For Finney the spiritual heart is analogous to the physical heart, the source of “the moral affections and actions of the soul.” It is “*the fountain of spiritual life, ... that deep seated but voluntary preference of the mind, which lies back of all its other voluntary affections and emotions, and from which they take their character.*”⁹⁶ In this regard it is not unlike Edwards’ notion of the disposition, although Finney is much more careful never to allow such a disposition any physical or constitutional reality in a person.⁹⁷ To speak of a change of heart for Finney is not so much to speak of a change in an individual, but rather an individual’s shift to godly obedience and affections, a living out of God’s directives. One does not wait until one’s heart is changed, after which one does these things. Instead it is in doing these things that one changes one’s heart. “God requires sinners to love him. *That is* to change his heart. God requires him to repent. *That is* to change his heart.... The very word itself, *repent*, signifies a change of mind or heart. To do either of these things, is to change your heart, and to make you a new heart, just as God requires.”⁹⁸ A change of heart, and conversion itself, is always tied to obedience for Finney. “All religion consists in obeying God from the heart. All religion consists in voluntary action.”⁹⁹ The resulting change of conversion is quite simply obedience, which results in holiness.

⁹⁵ *LOR*, 363.

⁹⁶ *Sermons*, 8.

⁹⁷ Finney actually equates the notion of a holy heart with a holy disposition in his “Sinners Bound” sermon. “We know by experience that it is the nature of mind to be controled [sic] in its individual exercises and affections, by a deep-seated *disposition* or *preference* of a particular course or object.” *Sermons*, 10. Nevertheless, Finney gives the idea of disposition no where near the emphasis that Edwards does, and seems to use it in a more limited sense than Edwards did. For Edwards the disposition is at the center of one’s being and orientation, and is almost something of an entity. For Finney the disposition is defined by one’s choices more than being the basis for those choices, and is more closely akin to the idea of one’s will.

⁹⁸ *LOR*, 373.

⁹⁹ *LOR*, 413. As he says elsewhere, “Our prime object should be, to induce the sinner to *obey God.*” 337.

Finney asks, “What is religion?” His answer is plain and simple; “it is obeying God.” Since obedience is in the very nature of conversion, the notion that someone might be *seeking* Christ is meaningless to Finney. To seek God is to obey God. “To say that a person can seek to obey God, and yet not obey him, is absurd.... To seek *religion*, implies a willingness to obey God, and a willingness to obey God is religion.”¹⁰⁰ Therefore at its core the change of conversion is a *choice*. It “must consist in a change in the attitude of the will, or a change in its ultimate choice, intention, or preference; a change from selfishness to benevolence.”¹⁰¹ Because, as has been said previously, all humans have the ability to obey, what is then vital in conversion is to *choose* to obey. If we choose to obey, we will obey. This is why, for Finney, the notion of seeking is nonsensical.

It is in our choices that we define our heart and moral character. This has been true since Adam. When first created, Adam had no moral character or disposition. He only became defined when he acted or made choices. He became holy in disposition in choosing to follow God, and hence had a completely holy heart.¹⁰² When Adam disobeyed, when he chose his own ends over God’s desires, the change “was a real change of heart; from a perfectly holy, to a perfectly sinful one. But here was no constitutional change, no change in the substance of either body or mind.” His disposition, moral character, his heart was changed not by changing his powers of choice, but by his choice itself.”¹⁰³ Finney states that even God is defined by his disposition, by his choices. “His holiness does not consist in the substance of his nature, but in his preference of right. His

¹⁰⁰ Therefore “it is a contradiction to say that an impenitent sinner is seeking religion.” *LOR*, 335.

¹⁰¹ *LST*, 273. It is, he says, “is a radical change of the ultimate intention, and, of course, of the end or object of life.” 273.

¹⁰² *Sermons*, 10-12.

¹⁰³ *Sermons*, 13.

holiness must be voluntary.”¹⁰⁴ Holiness, then, is for Finney a moral concept rather than a form of participation in the divine nature.

In a telling illustration of his conception of the nature of this change in conversion, Finney compares the change of an individual in choosing to follow Christ with changing one’s choice of a political candidate. When a person moves from supporting one candidate to a different candidate, the person works towards their interest and election. “He has new political friends on the one side, and new political enemies on the other. So with a sinner; if his heart is changed, you will see that Christians become his friends—Christ his candidate. He aims at honoring him and promoting his interest in all his ways.”¹⁰⁵ However, just as no one would think a person’s actual physical or constitutional makeup must be modified to change one’s choice of candidates, so too, when one chooses Christ in conversion no change is needed beyond the choice. We can cast our votes for God and his kingdom, or for ourselves and our kingdoms. In these preferences our hearts are defined.

There are some issues and difficulties that arise in part from Finney’s perspective on the nature of the change of conversion, particularly as related to sanctification (which Finney insists must be entire – perfectionism), and to perseverance and moral character (how or where in a person is moral and/or spiritual development and character preserved? Is perseverance even possible?). These will be addressed later in this chapter.

Thus far we have determined that for Finney, conversion, like revival, is not supernatural, but accomplished through natural means, that it is wrought by the work of humans and the Holy Spirit, that the Holy Spirit does this work by persuasion, and that

¹⁰⁴ *Sermons*, 12.

¹⁰⁵ *Sermons*, 15.

the change that takes place in conversion is not accomplished “by physical force, or by a change wrought in their nature or constitution.” Instead it occurs when the heart is changed, which involves the active choice of the subject in choosing God’s concerns over selfish concerns. Another of the ways that Finney describes this change of conversion is that of “yielding to the truth.” This truth, “made effectual by the Holy Spirit,” is instrumental in the accomplishing of conversion.¹⁰⁶ It is to Finney’s notion of the role of the intellect and truth or knowledge that we now turn.

The Role of Knowledge and the Intellect in Conversion

Finney makes numerous references to the critical role of knowledge and intellect for conversion and Christian life. In the earliest pages of his *Lectures on Systematic Theology* he writes, “You were made to think.... God designed that religion should require thought, intense thought, and should thoroughly develop our powers of thought.” Finney wants his readers to think “intensely” for themselves in forming their theological positions, and insists that such positions can and should be completely logical. He writes, “I regard the assertion, that the doctrines of theology cannot preserve a logical consistency throughout, as both dangerous and ridiculous.”¹⁰⁷ Proper use of the Bible also demands this same reasoning capacity. Finney is dedicated to rejecting or modifying any doctrine which conflicts with progress in knowledge and holiness.

This forms part of the basis for Finney’s rejection of some of the views of his teachers and other Calvinists. Finney believes that they “were driven to confess that they

¹⁰⁶ *LOR*, 334.

¹⁰⁷ *LST*, 2.

could not establish the logical consistency of their system;” they had to “shut their eyes and believe, when revelation seemed to conflict with the affirmations of reason.”¹⁰⁸ Such a path Finney refuses to take. Indeed, we shall examine later just how central these notions of reasonableness are to Finney’s project. Although faith is not merely intellectual, faith “implies an intellectual perception of the things, facts, and truths believed. No one can believe that which he does not understand.”¹⁰⁹

If reasoning is crucial to the Christian life and faith, so too is knowledge, the material of reason. Knowledge is required for healthy Christian life. To be “*sound in the faith,*” converts are to “be taught fully and plainly, all the leading doctrines of the Bible. Doctrinal knowledge is indispensable to growth in grace.”¹¹⁰ Knowledge is also required to enter the Christian life. One must let go of any hope in oneself and find in Christ alone the soul’s “all-sufficient portion and salvation.” Finney writes that such knowledge is “the indispensable condition of appropriating faith.”¹¹¹

Types of Knowledge

Unlike Edwards, Finney does not distinguish strongly between different kinds of knowledge or knowing, but he does maintain something of the same distinction, although less prominently. On occasion when he speaks of knowledge he distinguishes between what amounts to mere mental assent and knowing from the heart, deep in one’s being. He writes that in the Bible there is described what he terms an “intellectual faith.” This is

¹⁰⁸ *LST*, 1.

¹⁰⁹ *LST*, 353. He adds, “I must first understand what a proposition, a fact, a doctrine, or a thing is, before I can say whether I believe, or whether I ought to believe, or not.” 353.

¹¹⁰ *LOR*, 405.

¹¹¹ *LST*, 416.

“a simple conviction of the truth.”¹¹² Such a faith is passive, and is not saving. Even the demons have that. Those in the Bible that are portrayed as having faith but then falling away probably had this kind of faith. The other kind of faith is a “saving faith,” and moves beyond intellectual assent to a type of belief that results in virtue and in actions.¹¹³

In this latter saving faith Christ is “revealed to the inward being.” In assenting faith “nothing is done more than to store our heads with notions or opinions and theories,” and our hearts become “more and more, at every moment, like an adamant stone.” Finney suggests that this deeper faith and knowledge is not accomplished solely by one’s intellect. It is “an entirely different thing to know Christ, as He is revealed by the Holy Spirit.”¹¹⁴ Through this deeper faith the knowledge of Christ becomes transformative through the Holy Spirit.¹¹⁵

Finney’s Faculty Psychology

There is a faculty psychology at work for Finney in discussing the intellect and other capacities of a human being. In his theology lectures he describes “three primary faculties of the mind which we call *intellect*, *sensibility*, and *will*.” The intellect is further

¹¹² *LST*, 530.

¹¹³ An example illustrating Finney’s criticisms of the reduction of Christianity to assenting knowledge can be found in Finney’s *Memoirs*. There Finney describes the process by which people were considered converted in a German Reformed church in Evans Mills, NY. The minister would come to a church and “catechize their children, and receive such of them as had made the required attainments in knowledge. This was the way in which they were made Christians. They were required to commit to memory the catechism, and to be able to answer certain doctrinal questions; whereupon they were admitted to full communion in the church. After receiving the Communion they took it for granted that they were Christians, and that all was safe. This is the way in which that church had been organized and continued.” *Memoirs*, 74. Finney preached that what they needed was holiness, and not just some kind of head knowledge, and there was a great revival of the small community. “This revival among these Germans resulted in the conversion of the whole church, I believe, and of nearly the whole community of Germans.” 76-77.

¹¹⁴ *LST*, 415.

¹¹⁵ “I have often feared, that many professed Christians knew Christ only after the flesh; that is, they have no other knowledge of Christ than what they obtain by reading and hearing about Him, without any special revelation of Him to the inward being by the Holy Spirit.” *LST*, 415.

divided into “the three-fold fundamental distinction of the *sense*, the *reason*, and the *understanding*.”¹¹⁶ Finney also acknowledges other divisions of the intellect not relevant to his discussion, e.g. imagination or memory.¹¹⁷ We will have further occasion to discuss his faculty psychology below, but here let us describe briefly his understanding of these divisions of the intellect.

In Finney’s view, the sense perceives sensations and brings them to consciousness. The reason intuits self-evident truths, such as mathematical, philosophical, and moral axioms. “The classes of truths given by this function of the intellect are self-evident. That is, the reason intuits or directly beholds them, as the faculty of sense intuits or directly beholds a sensation.” In the same way one perceives a house merely by looking at it, so too self-evident truths appear before reason when examined. There is no reasoning necessary. Truths from the senses are certain as experienced sensations, but are subject to doubt in that one is not always certain that what one perceives matches the external object or reality. However, self-evident truths perceived through reason are not subject to doubt; “this faculty directly beholds the truths which it affirms.”¹¹⁸

Finney distinguishes between *reason* and the *understanding*.¹¹⁹ The understanding organizes and classifies the information gained through the senses using the self-evident truths or principles given by reason. Although the truths of reason are never in error, the knowledge and opinions formed by the understanding may be in error, and the result is considered knowledge “only in a modified and restricted sense.”¹²⁰

¹¹⁶ *LST*, 12.

¹¹⁷ *LST*, 14.

¹¹⁸ *LST*, 13.

¹¹⁹ The Romantics made analogous distinctions in the 1830s and 1840s, e.g. Emerson and Coleridge.

¹²⁰ *LST*, 14.

There are two broad divisions of truth: those which need proofs and those which do not. All truths are of the former type except for those directly intuited by reason. Truths of demonstration become certain truths to a mind when properly demonstrated and then become undeniable. Truths one has demonstrated to be true to one's own mind still must be demonstrated to be true to the minds of others to be accepted. If demonstrated properly others "cannot but see the truth demonstrated." Because of this one cannot merely pronounce theological truths to others, since it is "of little use to dogmatize, when we ought to reason, demonstrate, and explain." One must not merely assert religious truths, therefore, but should demonstrate them. "God convinces and produces faith, not by the overthrow of, but in accordance with, the fixed laws of mind."¹²¹ So we are not merely to leave the resolution of what we assert to others in the hands or sovereignty of God, without first demonstrating them.¹²² All of this puts one's reasoning powers at the forefront of conversion.

Truths of divine revelation, Finney suggests, require proof. "Some of these truths are above reason in the sense that the reason can, *a priori*, neither affirm nor deny them." Thus Finney argues that what needs to be proved is that a given truth has been "given by a divine inspiration." If that is established, then the truth is to be believed because our minds are constituted in such a way as always to be obligated to believe what God has uttered.¹²³

¹²¹ *LST*, 14.

¹²² *LST*, 14-15.

¹²³ *LST*, 15.

Role of Knowledge in Conversion

How does all this relate to the role of knowledge and intellect in conversion?

According to Finney, truth is the instrument God uses in bringing about conversion.¹²⁴

We have already seen above the role of the Holy Spirit and of other humans in *persuading* individuals to follow Christ. “Truth is the outward means” of this persuasion. So for Finney, “regeneration and sanctification are to be effected by moral means – by argument and not by force.”¹²⁵

In one of Finney’s list of inferences at the close of his “Sinners Bound to Change Their Own Hearts” sermon, he writes, “*The idea that the Spirit converts sinners by the truth, is the only view of the subject that honours either the Spirit, or the truth of God.*”¹²⁶ Whether it be the Holy Spirit, and or the preacher, one must use the truth to bring the mind of an anxious sinner, “by the shortest rout [sic], to the practical conclusion, that there is, in fact, no other way in which he can be relieved and saved, but to renounce himself and rest in Christ alone. To do this with effect, requires great skill.”¹²⁷ This repentance implies self-reflection, and understanding of the nature of sin and the law, and a full acceptance of the law’s “reasonableness.”¹²⁸

In a clear indication of the importance of one’s intellect and reasoning to conversion, Finney suggests that both the quantity of knowledge available and the degree of one’s capacity for reason both influence the probability of conversion. For example, in commenting on how best to preach the gospel, Finney notes that the leading minds of

¹²⁴ Finney writes, “There is not one in a thousand, if one in a million, converted in any other way than through the truth, made known and urged by human instrumentality.” *LOR*, 318-19.

¹²⁵ He continues, “There never was and never will be any one saved by any thing but truth as the means.” *LOR*, 175.

¹²⁶ *Sermons*, 30.

¹²⁷ *LOR*, 334.

¹²⁸ *LST*, 345.

many communities historically have not responded well to the gospel because of how the gospel is presented. In the past “ministers had not grappled with mind, and *reasoned* so as to make that class of minds see the truth of the gospel, and feel its power.” But when the minister shows them “the reasonableness of religion,” then one finds “that class of minds are more easily converted than any other. They have so much better capacity yielding to the force of reason, that as soon as the gospel gets a fair hold of their minds, it breaks them right down, and melts them at the feet of Christ.”¹²⁹ Finney believes in the capacity of every human being to respond to the gospel, if only it can be placed powerfully in front of them. If they have strong rational capacities, then they can be persuaded more easily by powerful reasoning to respond to the gospel. As he puts it elsewhere, “the more truth can be brought to bear on the mind, *other things being equal*, so much the more probable is it that the individual will be converted.”¹³⁰ Finney then constantly stresses the *reasonableness* of Christian beliefs, and the value of knowledge and intellect in the conversion of sinners.

Intellect not Fallen?

Finney’s view of the role of the intellect is so high that it is a question as to whether he sees it as in any way fallen or broken by sin. Consider how Finney defines sin in the following passage in which he discusses Romans 5:12-19. “Paul and other inspired writers represent sin as consisting in a carnal or fleshly mind, in the mind of the flesh, or in minding the flesh. It is plain that by the term flesh they mean what we understand by

¹²⁹ *LOR*, 215.

¹³⁰ *LOR*, 334. On a related note, Finney also suggests that a lack of knowledge limits both one’s responsibility and the strength of one’s faith. “The obligation of every moral being must be graduated by his knowledge.” *LST*, 112. One is only responsible to act on that which one knows. Some form of revelation or light is necessary for either faith or unbelief. There is no moral character when there is no knowledge. See *LST*, 352-59. There can be no weak faith in the sense that it is sinful, but only less informed. The strength of one’s faith is due to the clarity of one’s knowledge. *LST*, 117. “Faith, to be real faith at all, must be equal to the light we have.” *LST*, 118.

the sensibility, *as distinguished from intellect*, and that they represent sin as consisting in obeying, minding, the impulses of the sensibility.”¹³¹ Does Finney consider the intellect to be free from the effects of sinful depravity? He seems to pit the law of the flesh against the law of reason. “The law in his members, that warred against the law of his mind, of which Paul speaks, is manifestly the impulse of the sensibility opposed to the law of the reason.” It is not the law of reason, but this law of flesh, “the impulse of his sensibility,” that “brings him into captivity, that is, influences his will, in spite of all his convictions to the contrary.”¹³² At least here it appears that an unfallen capacity of reason is set against one’s fallen flesh. Such a view also fits with Finney’s denial of any form of constitutional depravity that would incline one to sin and hence waive one’s moral responsibility for it.

Limits of Knowledge

Although we see that for Finney the intellect and knowledge have an exalted function in his system of theology, knowledge does have its limits as well. One must take care, for example, not simply to equate possession of religious knowledge with religion itself. Religion does not consist in doctrinal knowledge. “Knowledge is essential to religion,” Finney writes, “but it is not religion. The devil has doctrinal knowledge, but he has no religion.”¹³³ Nor does a greater volume of knowledge necessarily indicate conversion or an increase in grace in one’s life. “Knowledge is indispensable to grace, and growth in knowledge is essential to growth in grace, but knowledge is not grace, and

¹³¹ *LST*, 264 (emphasis mine).

¹³² *LST*, 264.

¹³³ *LOR*, 411.

growth in knowledge does not constitute growth in grace.”¹³⁴ Moreover, the impact of knowledge on a person’s spiritual state is only felt when that knowledge is internalized by the action of the Holy Spirit. This is even true, in Finney’s view, of knowledge directly from Scripture. In a statement that seems reminiscent of something between Friederich Schleiermacher and Karl Barth, Finney writes, “*The Bible* is not *of itself*, strictly and properly a revelation to man. It is, properly speaking, rather a history of revelations formerly made to certain men. To be a revelation to *us*,” Finney writes, “its truths must be brought by the Holy Spirit within the field of spiritual vision. This is the condition of our either knowing or properly believing the truths of revelation.”¹³⁵

Results of Knowledge

What is the result of the kind of saving knowledge described above? How does one know that one has a saving faith through a deep, inner knowledge of Christ? For Finney, to know Christ is to be converted, and to be converted is to obey. As Finney puts it, “What is conversion? Obeying the truth.”¹³⁶ At the end of the day for Finney, it is not about what you think; it is about what you *do*.

Finney is quite clear about this. He has a pragmatic, utilitarian, instrumental view of knowledge. It is important as a basis for *action*, and not for its own sake. Finney’s concern is that people will slip into a passive role, thinking that merely notional ideas of the truth in one’s mind indicate one’s converted state. But growing in grace is not the same as getting new notions. Christians do not need new notions, but rather dutiful action.

¹³⁴ *LOR*, 449. Elsewhere he writes, What is growing in grace? Is it hearing sermons and getting some new *notions* about religion? No – no such thing. The Christian who does this, and nothing more, is getting worse and worse, more and more hardened, and every week it is more difficult to rouse him up to duty.” *LOR*, 28.

¹³⁵ *LST*, 10-11.

¹³⁶ *LOR*, 318.

“The only design of doctrine is to produce practice,” Finney exclaims. “The church is mighty orthodox in *notions*, but very heretical in practice, but the time must come when the church will be just as vigilant in guarding orthodoxy in practice as orthodoxy in doctrine, and just as prompt to turn out heretics in practice as heretics that corrupt the doctrines of the gospel.”¹³⁷ We will have more to say on this relation of knowledge and practice when discussing below the role of experience in and authentication of conversion.

Finney insists that knowledge is vital to conversion, but it does not stand alone. “Two things are indispensable to evangelical or saving faith. The first is intellectual conviction of the truth of a thing,” not meaning “merely the abstract truth of it, but in its bearing on you.”¹³⁸ That this is Finney’s position we have now made clear. The second thing indispensable to Finney in true conversion is a result of the first, a change in “a corresponding state of the affections.”¹³⁹ It is impossible for a person to possess in one’s heart these kinds of spiritual truths about God and Christ, and not *feel* differently about them. To explore this further, we turn now to the role of emotions in conversion.

The Role of Emotions in Conversion

Finney shares with Edwards a concern for head and heart religion. As has been observed above, Finney is concerned with the mind. No less clear is the inadequacy of the mind for faith when operating independent of the heart and emotions. “When he comes to take up theology in a cold abstract way he finds his spirituality as little promoted as if

¹³⁷ He adds that, “in fact, it is vastly more important.” *LOR*, 401.

¹³⁸ Charles G. Finney, *Letters to Professing Christians* (1837; rpt. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1985), 9.

¹³⁹ Finney, *Letters to Professing Christians*, 10.

he was studying Euclid.”¹⁴⁰ Held in the abstract, the multiplication of new notions about Christianity merely hardens the heart. Indeed revival at its core seems to be the movement from head to heart, as one comes to realize the power of the truths that one holds through the power of the Holy Spirit.

In examining the role of emotions in Finney’s view of conversion, or even in revivalism more generally, one might expect the revivalist to seek to instill emotional responses in his hearers through powerful, emotive speaking, emphasizing the emotions over against an intellectual component. Although some may have been critical of Finney in his earliest years for using sheer emotionalism with his less literate backwoods audiences, in reality Finney moves fairly quickly toward a much more intellectual approach that stresses notions of truth and forms of intellectual persuasion over strictly emotional appeals. By his middle age he is even more critical of forms of revivalism based on emotionalism.¹⁴¹

Certainly there are signs throughout Finney’s writings indicating that stereotyping Finney’s revivalism and theology of conversion as anti-intellectual emotionalism is unjustified. Finney sees preaching as “hot passion and cold logic” and seeks always to persuade the mind and move the heart.¹⁴² He is a lawyer arguing his case, but with the intended result not merely to convince hearers of an intellectual point after which they might go on their way, but rather that they turn their life in a new direction. It is by focusing the mind, in fact, that Finney believes emotions are changed; one does not access them directly. As Finney puts it, “People talk about religious feeling, as if they thought

¹⁴⁰ *LOR*, 469.

¹⁴¹ For example, Hambrick-Stowe makes the interesting contrast between a more emotional revivalist, Jedediah Burchard, and Finney, now fifty years old and more gentrified and reasoned in his sermons. *Charles Finney*, 208-9.

¹⁴² *LOR*, 35.

they could, by direct effort, call forth emotion. But this is not the way the mind acts.”

Finney counters, “The *emotions* of the mind are not *directly* under our control. We cannot by willing, or by direct volition, call forth our emotions.... The emotions are purely involuntary states of mind.” One’s emotions can, in fact, be controlled, just not directly. Emotions “can be controlled *indirectly*. Otherwise there would be no moral character in our emotions, if there were not a way to control them.”¹⁴³

Finney expresses his ideas on this in a somewhat contradictory way. If emotions are “purely involuntary states of mind,” then, in his view, one should not be held morally accountable for them. Yet Finney wants to give them a moral tone. What this amounts to is that a person is responsible for one’s emotions to the extent that one makes choices as to what content is placed in one’s mind, content that brings with it emotional responses. But this all starts with the intellect, not the emotions. As Finney writes, “A man can direct his attention to any object, about which he ought to feel and wishes to feel, and in that way he will call into existence the proper emotions.”¹⁴⁴

Because of this dynamic, one should expect that with deep piety toward God come powerful emotions and other manifestations.¹⁴⁵ Moral beings, in Finney’s view, are wired to be impressed by great moral character, and are therefore to be most impressed and awestruck by consideration of God’s holiness and take delight in him. It is more colloquially termed ‘love for God.’ The intellect perceives this character of God, which leads to strong feelings in the sensibility. But we must consciously be aware of such a love,

¹⁴³ *LOR*, 39.

¹⁴⁴ *LOR*, 39.

¹⁴⁵ Finney discusses some of this in *LOR*, 65f.

and act on it, rather than merely noting the warm feelings in our hearts. One must never mistake emotional responses for saving faith.¹⁴⁶

The Holy Spirit plays a part in these emotional responses. The Spirit does not help us by “superseding the use of our faculties.”¹⁴⁷ Instead he helps “by exciting our own faculties.” Again here we find that the source of emotions are found in the intellect. The Holy Spirit, to aid in instilling godly emotions in us, “enlightens our minds, and makes the truth take hold of our souls.” The Spirit “leads us to a deep consideration of the state of things; and the results of this, the natural and philosophical result, is, *deep feeling*.”¹⁴⁸

Even when Finney seems to be writing primarily about emotions, the subject often shifts to discussions of or appeals to the intellect. In his instructions for how to promote a revival, for example, he writes, “If you mean to break up the fallow ground of your hearts, you must begin by looking at your hearts – examine and note the state of your minds, and see where you are.”¹⁴⁹ To look at the state of one’s heart and emotions typically leads to a consideration of the mind or intellect, because it is the avenue by which the feelings are affected. To the extent that individuals need to be brought to excitement by revivalists,

¹⁴⁶ See *LST*, 148-51. The moral nature of emotions still remains somewhat ambiguous in Finney’s writings. Although, as described above, he can write of the moral character of one’s emotions, in other places he seems to insist that bringing emotions to mind by contemplation of certain morally excellent content still is “altogether an involuntary state of mind” and “has no moral character.” *LST*, 149. When stressing such points, however, it seems Finney’s concern is to prevent an individual from mistaking particular positive emotional responses to content such as God’s goodness with some kind of salvific or proper standing before God, as if to have such feelings indicates a living faith. Faith involves active choices, actively willing to orient one’s life in conjunction with God’s priorities and will. Too many “judge of their religious state, not by the end for which they live, that is, by their choice or intention, but by their emotions.” *LST*, 149.

¹⁴⁷ *LOR*, 90.

¹⁴⁸ *LOR*, 91 (emphasis mine). “The Spirit makes the Christian feel the value of souls, and the guilt and danger of sinners in their present condition.” He also helps us to “apply the promises of Scripture.” 91. To some extent emotions even seem to be an indicator for Finney of the presence of the Spirit. For example, “Prayer meetings are often *too long*. They should always be dismissed while Christians have feeling, and not be spun out until all feeling is exhausted, and the spirit is gone.” 135. As we have seen already, a lack of feeling indicates a lack of depth in the appropriation of truths beyond an abstract level. Because the Holy Spirit plays a role in persuading individuals of the truth of the gospel, stronger feelings could be considered an indicator of the Spirit’s presence.

¹⁴⁹ *LOR*, 40. Or again, “To break up the fallow ground, is to *break up your hearts* – to prepare your minds to bring forth fruit unto God.” 38.

this is due to the weak state of their knowledge. Finney anticipates a time after which the church has matured and is “enlightened, and the counteracting causes removed, and the entire church will be in a state of habitual and steady obedience to God.”¹⁵⁰

One must not forget that Finney also spent years in the classroom at Oberlin where he sought to help students to think for themselves and not merely follow his points of view. As his career progressed he moved further and further in this direction, such that in 1860 in England he was upset by the noise and antics of the Methodists to whom he was preaching (it certainly seemed no worse than what he had inspired in his early years of revival). “He insisted that penitents needed to be ‘intelligently converted.’”¹⁵¹ In essence, emotions are a byproduct of the internalized knowledge of the truths of the gospel.

Problems with emotions may arise in relation to conversion and revivalism. Some may wait for certain feelings, especially if they observe them expressed by others, e.g., at a revival. “Sinners often lay out a plan of the way they expect to feel, and how they expect to be converted, and in fact lay out the work for God, determined that they will go in that path or not at all.”¹⁵² This, Finney says, is a mistake. There is no one path and no certain set of feelings that accompany every person’s true response to the gospel. To insist on them only prevents one from responding in action to the gospel call. More often than not the feelings one experiences are even unexpected.

Some think that revivals should be dispensed with because of the problems and excesses that are sometimes associated with them. “This cannot, and must not be. True, there is danger of abuses. In cases of great *religious* as well as all other excitements, more or

¹⁵⁰ LOR, 11.

¹⁵¹ Hambrick-Stowe, *Charles Finney*, 260.

¹⁵² LOR, 167.

less incidental evils may be expected of course.” Finney argues that “the best things are always liable to abuses.”¹⁵³ Emotional appeals are grounded in intellectual convictions. And if, in the course of revivals, evils or abuses arise, they are “of small importance when compared with the amount of good produced by revivals.” The belief of some that the church should abandon the use of revivals “brings in its train the damnation of the world.”¹⁵⁴

Although there may be a danger of too much or misdirected emotion, in Finney’s view the greater problem is a lack of emotions. This indicates a lack of true conviction, repentance, and conversion. Too many in the church “are only half converted, and their religion is rather a change of opinion than a change of the feeling of their hearts. There is mechanical religion enough, but very little that looks like deep heart-work.”¹⁵⁵ True repentance involves “not only a change of views, but a change of feelings.” More specifically, one comes to feel as God does about sin, and has an “abhorrence of sin.”¹⁵⁶ It is not merely refraining from sinful things; those who have truly repented have “turned their mind away” from sinful things.¹⁵⁷ If one is truly converted one no longer even *desires* to do sinful things. If one still desires to sin, then one is not converted.

The carnal lack these emotional responses to the truths of the gospel. “The thought of God, of Christ, of sin, of holiness, of heaven, and hell, excites little or no emotion in the carnal mind.”¹⁵⁸ Such a want of emotion (and action) in response to these truths indicates that a person “is an infidel, let his professions be what they may. He that

¹⁵³ *LOR*, 21.

¹⁵⁴ *LOR*, 22.

¹⁵⁵ *LOR*, 50.

¹⁵⁶ *LOR*, 365.

¹⁵⁷ *LOR*, 366.

¹⁵⁸ *LST*, 412.

feels nothing and does nothing, believes nothing. This is a philosophical fact.”¹⁵⁹ Here again Finney again links feelings to what one knows or believes to be true.¹⁶⁰

Ultimately, in sum, one must say that Finney places emotions in a very secondary role. The lack of emotions can be cause for concern regarding one’s converted state, but are never to be considered an actual barrier to conversion, nor a clear indicator either way of one’s converted state. Those who lack emotion should still be encouraged to *act* on the gospel, all feelings aside.¹⁶¹ Those who are filled with emotion should do the same, because those emotions themselves are no secure indication that one is converted. “Religion does not consist in raptures, or ecstasies [sic], or high flights of feeling. There may be a great deal of these where there *is* religion. But it ought to be understood that they are all involuntary emotions, and may exist in full power where there *is no* religion.”¹⁶² Indeed the more mature a Christian becomes, the less one regards one’s emotions – even though much emotion may be present. Such a person “*acts* less under the influence of feeling or emotion. He does things less because he feels so, and more because it is right.”¹⁶³ What is so critical for Finney is not for one to *feel*, but for one to *act* on the *knowledge* one has of religion, to order one’s life and priorities in view of God’s desires, and to *act* in a way consistent with them. Choosing to act on behalf of the gospel brings us to our next section on the role of the will in conversion.

¹⁵⁹ LOR, 366-67.

¹⁶⁰ “Repentance always consists in a change of views and feelings.” LOR, 366.

¹⁶¹ Finney is especially insistent that young converts not rely on emotions. “Young converts should be carefully taught, when duty is before them to *do it*. However dull their feelings may be, if duty calls, do it. Don’t wait for feeling, but DO IT. Most likely the very emotions for which you would wait will be called into exercise when you begin to do your duty.” LOR, 400 (capitalization his). Later he also writes, “The way to call emotion or feeling into exercise, is to engage, *from principle*, in the performance of duty.” LOR, 451.

¹⁶² LOR, 411.

¹⁶³ LOR, 451. “An individual who grows in grace is more and more actuated by principle, and less and less by emotion or feeling... By principle in contradistinction from feeling or emotion, I mean a controlling determination in the mind to *do right*.” LOR, 451.

The Role of the Will in Conversion

Although Finney denies that the emotions are a sure indicator of one's converted or unconverted state, he does, as we have seen, at times insist that emotions will accompany saving faith. Finney also denies that "the will, or heart, may be right, while the affections or emotions are wrong."¹⁶⁴ Finney argues that any emotions not consistent with one's intentions are not of any moral significance or character. Moral character is to be found in one's intentions, while emotions can be the result of necessity rather than choice. One cannot control one's emotions completely the way one controls one's choices. One should not focus on what one cannot control, since one is ultimately therefore not morally responsible for those things.¹⁶⁵

What we can control is our will, which is why Finney insists that "where there is true saving faith, there is always corresponding conduct."¹⁶⁶ Human will is free and unfettered, and Finney incessantly emphasizes the primacy of the choices one makes as the central concern in one's standing before God. In his study of Finney Glenn Hewitt goes so far as to say that "by the time he was writing his mature theological reflections, Charles Finney was convinced that regeneration was almost entirely a matter of personal deliberate choice."¹⁶⁷ Finney's own words indeed seem to support this position.

The very definition of conversion seems to consist in this human choice. Finney writes in *Lectures on Revivals* that "sinners cannot be converted without their own agency,

¹⁶⁴ *LST*, 113.

¹⁶⁵ "The state or choice of the will does not necessarily so control the feelings, desires, or emotions, that these may never be strongly excited by Satan or by circumstances, in opposition to the will, and thus become powerful temptations to seek their gratification, instead of seeking the highest good of being." *LST*, 165.

¹⁶⁶ *Letters to Professing Christians*, 10.

¹⁶⁷ Glenn A. Hewitt, *Regeneration and Morality* (Brooklyn, NY: Carlson Publishing Inc., 1991), 23.

for conversion *consists in* their voluntary turning to God.”¹⁶⁸ Later, at the very outset of his *Lectures on Systematic Theology*, Finney describes his intention to press to their logical conclusions the truths and consequences of various doctrines, foremost among them “that the will is free, and that sin and holiness are voluntary acts of mind.”¹⁶⁹

Finney believes that this is a notion drawn from the Bible, which he believes “everywhere, and in every way, assumes the freedom of the will.”¹⁷⁰ Finney denies that there can be any passivity in conversion. In his view, evangelical faith is not just firm conviction or intellectual assent, though that form of it can also be found in the Bible. No virtue can be attached to that passive variety of faith. “The Bible distinguishes between intellectual and saving faith.” The former is the faith of devils, the latter of saints. Faith is also not “a feeling of any kind.”¹⁷¹ These also are passive. As a virtuous action, “it must be a phenomenon of the will.... It is the will’s closing in with the truths of the gospel.”¹⁷²

This notion is clearly present in the aforementioned analogy wherein conversion is likened to changing one’s vote from one candidate to another. The only change present in conversion is not one of one’s constitutional makeup, but a *choice* and the concomitant actions that come as a result of that choice. “Regeneration then is a radical change of the ultimate intention, and, of course, of the end or object of life.” This change “must consist in a change in the attitude of the will, or a change in its ultimate choice, intention, or preference; a change from selfishness to benevolence.”¹⁷³

Finney’s shift to an emphasis on free will is born out in his own conversion experience. As Hardman describes it, on Finney’s conversion on October 10, 1821,

¹⁶⁸ *LOR*, 280.

¹⁶⁹ *LST*, 2.

¹⁷⁰ *LST*, 330.

¹⁷¹ *LST*, 352.

¹⁷² *LST*, 353.

¹⁷³ *LST*, 273.

“suddenly it became clear; until then he had believed scripture intellectually, but he had not realized that faith was a voluntary trust, not an intellectual state. It was to place oneself under the mercy of a supremely forgiving heavenly Father.” In choosing to trust and follow God, “he found himself in a totally different state, full of joy.”¹⁷⁴ The act of *choosing* God is transformative; it reorients a person.

Finney’s strong emphasis on conversion as a free choice is closely related to his view of the nature of moral agency. For moral obligation to exist, both free will (more broadly moral agency) and light or knowledge is required.¹⁷⁵ Finney himself remarks at the beginning of his systematic text that what he has said “on ‘Moral Law’ and on the ‘Foundation of Moral Obligation’ is the key to the whole subject.”¹⁷⁶ For Finney, all moral agents in their voluntary actions should obey the moral law through which God expresses his moral government. “It is the rule for the government of free and intelligent action, as opposed to necessary and unintelligent action. It is the law of liberty, as opposed to the law of necessity.”¹⁷⁷ The moral law directs the free will, but does not control it. Most importantly, there is no moral element involved in any decision that is not voluntary. Free will *must* be present for morality to be in play. Liberty is an essential attribute of a moral law. Moral laws tell people what they ought to do, but do not force them to do it. All forms of government are either moral or physical, the former providing what one ought to do and the latter obeyed by necessity.¹⁷⁸ The former is a government of motive; the latter is a government of force. Whatever the moral law requires of the

¹⁷⁴ Hardman, *Finney*, 41. Finney’s own account of his conversion can be found in *Memoirs*, 16-26.

¹⁷⁵ He writes, “Moral agency is universally a condition of moral obligation.” *LST*, 31. One must also have an awareness of what is required morally. *LST*, 33-34.

¹⁷⁶ He continues, “Whoever masters and understands these can readily understand all the rest. But he who will not possess himself of my meaning upon these subjects, will not understand the rest.” *LST*, 2.

¹⁷⁷ *LST*, 20.

¹⁷⁸ *LST*, 25.

moral agent must be possible for the agent. If it is not possible, then the individual is under necessity and no longer a moral agent. Choice is intrinsic to moral law. “To talk of inability to obey moral law is to talk nonsense.”¹⁷⁹

Therefore, because for Finney there can be no moral implications, no right or wrong, in any decisions that are not voluntary, it is absolutely necessary that one be completely free and able either to accept or reject God. Otherwise one cannot be held responsible for the rejection of God and God’s moral law. Finney claims that everyone is conscious of being a moral agent, and of the idea of right and wrong. Thus by these alone everyone is aware of being under moral obligation. It is because we all possess this free will in relation to our choices that we are all under the demands of the moral law.¹⁸⁰

It is by way of these free choices also that Finney defines the Christian expression of right and wrong in one’s life in terms of holiness or sin. All sin is voluntary; otherwise it is not sin. To choose sin is to reject God’s law. “Every sin, then,” Finney writes, “consists in an act of will.”¹⁸¹ The same is true of holiness, even for God’s holiness. “All holiness, in God, angels, or men, must be *voluntary*, or it is not holiness. To call any thing that is a part of the mind or body, holy—to speak of a holy substance, unless it be in a figurative sense, is to talk nonsense.”¹⁸² Holiness is not praiseworthy unless it is voluntary, and it is not a

¹⁷⁹ *LST*, 21. These points are stressed constantly in this section of *LST*, and throughout Finney’s writings. “Moral agency implies the possession of *free will*. By free will is intended the power of choosing, or refusing to choose, in every instance, in compliance with moral obligation. Free will implies the power of originating and deciding our own choices, and of exercising our own sovereignty, in every instance of choice upon moral questions.... That man cannot be under a moral obligation to perform an absolute impossibility, is a first truth of reason.” If a person “has no freedom he is not a moral agent.” Additionally, “consciousness of affirming the freedom of the will, that is, of power to will in accordance with moral obligation, or to refuse thus to will, is a necessary condition of the affirmation of obligation.” *LST*, 33.

¹⁸⁰ Finney writes, “Man, by a law of necessity, affirms himself to be under moral obligation. He cannot doubt it. He affirms absolutely and necessarily, that he is praiseworthy or blameworthy as he is benevolent or selfish. Every man assumes this of himself, and of all other men of sound mind. This assumption is irresistible, as well as universal.” *LST*, 37.

¹⁸¹ *LST*, 109, see also 127.

¹⁸² *Sermons*, 7.

substance one possesses, but defined by the ongoing choices one makes.¹⁸³ We define our choices as right and wrong through our intentions, however, and not always through the actual consequences of our actions, since we only have complete control over our intentions. It is by these intentions or motives that we are judged.¹⁸⁴

In conversion, this willing or turning to God involves more than the completion of simple, outward acts, even acts of obedience. Religion does not, for Finney, “consist in going to meeting or reading the Bible, or praying, or any other of what are commonly called *religious duties*.”¹⁸⁵ Those duties are not at the core of religion, but rather “A LIFE OF PIETY” to which these activities may or may not contribute.¹⁸⁶ To be pleasing to God, right actions must be accompanied by right motives and a right heart. “All religion consists in obeying God from the heart.”¹⁸⁷ It is a willingness to obey God, but moreover having the heart of one who is “willing that God should rule in all things.” Finney even goes so far as to say that “obedience to God *consists* in the state of the heart.”¹⁸⁸ It is a foundational or fundamental choice or orientation of submission to God’s will in all things, that controls all other choices.

Finney terms this state of submission and obedience to the moral law of God benevolence. Benevolence is at the core of right willing. It is the state in which God always exists. “The moral attributes of God and of all holy beings, are only attributes of benevolence. Benevolence is a term that comprehensively expresses them all. God is love.

¹⁸³ See *Sermons*, 7-8, also 16-17.

¹⁸⁴ “Moral obligation respects in the strictest sense and directly the intention only.... This is a first truth of reason. It is a truth universally and necessarily assumed by all moral agents, their speculations to the contrary, in any wise, not withstanding.” *LST*, 39. Even young children recognize “I didn’t mean to” as a justifiable excuse. “Every moral agent necessarily regards such an excuse as a perfect justification, in case it be sincerely and truly made.” 40, see also 34.. Finney points out that it is commonly said that people are judged by their motives, and the Bible supports this view. 40-41.

¹⁸⁵ *LOR*, 411-12.

¹⁸⁶ *LOR*, 412 (capitalization his).

¹⁸⁷ *LOR*, 413.

¹⁸⁸ He continues, “It is being willing to obey God; willing that God should rule in all things.” *LOR*, 415.

This term expresses comprehensively God's whole moral character. This love, as we have repeatedly seen, is benevolence."¹⁸⁹ Finney defines benevolence as "the obedience of the will to the law of reason and of God. It is willing good as an end, for its own sake, and not to gratify self." Selfishness, on the other hand, is "a spirit of self-gratification."¹⁹⁰ Finney spends considerable time exploring the nature of benevolence via a consideration of the attributes of love, e.g. virtue, humility, impartiality, universality, and opposition to sin. Ultimately, Finney writes, "every form of sin may be resolved into selfishness, just as every form of virtue may be resolved into benevolence."¹⁹¹ Ultimately his discussion is familiar, stressing again the place of voluntarily willing the good, as defined in accordance with the universal application of God's interests to any given situation, apart from any self-interest, and denying that any element of benevolence extends beyond willful choices into the constitution or substance of the self, which would eliminate the moral character of benevolence.¹⁹²

One must take care to distinguish *willing* from *desiring*. For Finney the former always results in actual choices, whereas the latter is equivalent to something like wishful thinking. For example, "people often *desire* to be Christians, when they are wholly *unwilling* to be so."¹⁹³ There are many things that we desire, but which for various reasons we choose not to will to do. "WILLING to obey Christ is to be a Christian. When an individual actually *chooses* to obey God, he is a Christian. But all such desires, as do not terminate in actual choice, are nothing."¹⁹⁴ People can have all kinds of good desires, but

¹⁸⁹ *LST*, 140.

¹⁹⁰ *LST*, 141.

¹⁹¹ *LST*, 152.

¹⁹² On this extended discussion of benevolence and selfishness, see *LST*, 139-201.

¹⁹³ *LOR*, 373.

¹⁹⁴ *LOR*, 374 (capitalization his).

if they do not result in actions they amount to “practical Atheism.” Therefore, Finney writes, “No degree of desire is itself virtuous.”¹⁹⁵

Relation to God’s Sovereignty and Election

How does Finney frame his notion of God’s sovereignty with that of complete human free will? Finney mostly comes to struggle with notions of God’s sovereignty and election only later in his career as a professor of systematic theology. There he insists that “foreknowledge and election are not inconsistent with free agency.”¹⁹⁶ Finney argues that the election of God exists, but is misunderstood by those who reject the doctrine. Finney believes that people oppose election because they think it means that the elect are saved regardless of their conduct, and also that salvation is not possible for the non-elect. Election neither frees the elect from the obligation to obedience, nor denies salvation to any who are willing to repent and obey God. To think otherwise, Finney argues, is to misunderstand election. “The elect were chosen to eternal life, upon condition that God foresaw that in the perfect exercise of their freedom, they could be induced to repent and embrace the gospel.”¹⁹⁷

Similarly, the doctrine of reprobation does not represent God’s ultimate end in creation, or that he intends endless misery for any. Reprobation does not mean that any will be condemned against their will, nor is it the cause of their destruction, nor that no means were applied to bring about their salvation, or that any are sent to hell except for

¹⁹⁵ *LOR*, 413. He adds, “Religion does not consist in *desires to do good actions*. Desires that do not result in choice and action are not virtuous. Nor are such desires necessarily vicious.” *LOR*, 412.

¹⁹⁶ *LST*, 459.

¹⁹⁷ *LST*, 459. Finney continues, “Sinners, your salvation or damnation is as absolutely suspended upon your own choice, as if God neither knew nor designed anything about it.” *LST*, 459-60.

their own voluntary wickedness.¹⁹⁸ “The only true reason why all of you [sinners] are not Christians,” Finney writes, “is that you are unwilling [to accept God’s terms of salvation]. You are not made unwilling by any act of God, or because you are reprobate; but if you are reprobate, it is because you are unwilling.”¹⁹⁹

Why does God not make the sinner willing to accept him? Because, according to Finney, “He sees that it would be unwise in Him to do so.” How does Finney know? He calls it “an irresistible inference” due to “two facts.” The first is that God is “infinitely benevolent.” The second is that, if God does not actually make all sinners willing, then there must be good reason not to since Finney does not “believe that God would neglect anything that He saw to be wise and benevolent, in the great matter of man’s salvation.”²⁰⁰

For Finney, then, reprobation is just; everyone is free to choose salvation or not. Reprobation is also benevolent, because in the total picture a universe with the reprobate is a better universe because of the balance of good that comes to others in such a universe. Reprobation is the necessary side effect of allowing humans free choice and moral agency, and having a moral government in place that is just.²⁰¹

Some insist that Romans 9 and other Bible passages teach that God sovereignly creates some for condemnation and some for salvation, “and forms the character of both so as to fit them for their respective destinies, with an absolutely irresistible and efficient sovereignty.”²⁰² Finney argues that this is, morally speaking, impossible. One must be free

¹⁹⁸ See *LST*, 464.

¹⁹⁹ *LST*, 468.

²⁰⁰ *LST*, 469.

²⁰¹ *LST*, 470-71.

²⁰² *LST*, 474.

to choose or reject God, or one is not a moral being at all. Such a position amounts to “fatalism.”²⁰³

Finney distinguishes “decree” from purpose. By purposes Finney means design or intention, and these are “ultimate and proximate.” God’s ultimate purpose is to secure his ultimate end, but he does this through means or proximate purposes. Decree can mean a law or statute, or it can mean foreordination – to render certain. Most theological writers use it in the latter sense, but often confound its meaning with that of purpose. Finney objects to using the word decree in regard to the acts of moral agents, since God does not actively determine them but only foreknows them. The moral agent’s free will ultimately determines the outcome.²⁰⁴ Finney prefers using purpose when speaking of God’s government, and decree when speaking of God’s law or command.²⁰⁵

Sounding vaguely like Edwards, Finney describes a form of certainty he calls moral certainty. There are certain events “conditioned upon, the free actions of moral agents. This class do not occur under the operation of a law of necessity, though they occur with certainty.” He clarifies further his notion of this certainty: “It is not a certainty of necessity in any sense; it is only a mere certainty, or a voluntary certainty, a free, certainty, a certainty that might, by natural possibility in every case, be no certainty at all.”²⁰⁶ God knows these events through his foreknowledge, but does not make them certain. “They are certain in themselves.”²⁰⁷ It does seem as though such certainty has a

²⁰³ *LST*, 474-77.

²⁰⁴ *LST*, 486-87.

²⁰⁵ God may also have a different purpose for an event than a free moral agent intends, as in the Genesis story of Joseph and his brothers. *LST*, 492-93.

²⁰⁶ *LST*, 505. Finney adds, “When I say, that any event may, by natural possibility, be otherwise than what it will in fact be, I mean, that the free agent has natural power in every instance to choose otherwise than he does or actually will choose.” *LST*, 506. God knows “what it will in fact be,” even though the individual is free to choose otherwise.

²⁰⁷ *LST*, 505.

necessary correlation with God's foreknowledge, or that God's foreknowledge includes within it a kind of implicit certainty, even if not *caused* by God. This is reminiscent of Edwards in *Freedom of the Will*; knowledge implies certainty. Perhaps Edwards would even term it necessity, even though Finney would undoubtedly object to that.²⁰⁸

However one may view this, Finney makes clear finally his view; the “foreknowledge and designs of God respecting our conduct or our destiny, do not in the least degree interfere with our free agency. We, in every case, act just as freely as if God neither knew nor designed anything about our conduct.”²⁰⁹ Any other view, in Finney's mind, empties individuals of their moral agency and moral responsibility. In essence, all of God's sovereignty expressed through both election and reprobation is never in contradiction with human free will. Finney argues for a position that would now likely be termed “middle knowledge.” God foreknows, but does not foreordain, the choices of moral free agents. “Neither the Divine fore-knowledge nor the Divine purpose, in any instance, sets aside the free agency of the creature.”²¹⁰

Finney and Edwards/Reformed Thought

Finney has, perhaps, no deeper disagreement with, and no notion he reacts as strongly and frequently to, as Calvinist notions regarding inability – and related notions such as original sin. In the very first line of his preface to *Lectures on Systematic Theology* he declares, “To a great extent, the truths of the blessed gospel have been hidden under a false philosophy.”²¹¹ Finney stridently opposes Calvinist doctrines that deny free will and,

²⁰⁸ “God's purposes do not render any event, dependent upon the acts of a moral agent, necessarily certain, or certain with a certainty of necessity.” *LST*, 503.

²⁰⁹ *LST*, 476.

²¹⁰ *LST*, 503.

²¹¹ *LST*, 1.

in his view, promote a form of passivity and waiting on God, especially regarding conversion. He complains, “People have been told that they must repent, and, in the same breath, told that they could not repent.”²¹² Sinners throw “their duty off upon God, or else run into despair, from the supposed impracticability of doing what is requisite for their salvation.” They are caught in “theological labyrinths and mazes” that make it ever more difficult for a preacher or revivalist to lead them to the gospel.²¹³ To a large degree these difficulties are due to Calvinist conceptions of moral depravity.

Finney argues that there is such a thing as total moral depravity, but that it has been misrepresented by Calvinism. Too often it has been explained in a manner that confuses physical with moral depravity. Moral depravity does not involve constitutional (involuntary) states, but rather only willful choice. “Moral depravity is sin itself and not the cause of sin.”²¹⁴ It is “not a sinful nature but a sinful heart.”²¹⁵ Moral depravity must not be tied to any form of physical or constitutional depravity, since “physical depravity, being depravity of substance as opposed to depravity of the actions of free will, can have no moral character.”²¹⁶ There can be no such thing as “involuntary sinfulness.” Sin is, by its nature, voluntary, else it is not sin.²¹⁷ Finney constantly reiterates this point.

Finney is aware that some passages of Scripture are sometimes understood as supporting inability, but he argues that “the strong language often found in scripture upon the subject of man’s inability to obey God, is designed only to represent the strength

²¹² *LOR*, 376.

²¹³ He adds, “The labor of ministers is greatly increased, and the difficulties in the way of salvation are greatly multiplied, by the false instructions that have been given to sinners. The consequence has been, that directions which used to be plain are now obscure. People have been taught so long, that there is something awfully mysterious and unintelligible about conversion, that they do not try to understand it.” *LOR*, 375.

²¹⁴ *LST*, 249.

²¹⁵ *LST*, 246.

²¹⁶ *LST*, 243.

²¹⁷ “We deny that the human constitution is morally depraved, because it is impossible that sin should be a quality of the substance of soul or body. It is, and must be, a quality of choice or intention, and not of substance.” *LST*, 261.

of his voluntary selfishness and enmity against God, and never to imply a proper natural inability.”²¹⁸ He considers Romans 7 specifically, arguing that when Paul says he cannot do what he wills, by willing he means “legal resolutions” made by “convicted sinners and backslidden saints,” and not the experience of true saints. “Paul speaks as if speaking of himself, but was doubtless speaking as the representative of a class of persons already named [sinners and backsliders].”²¹⁹ He argues further that we often say we “cannot” when we mean we “will not” do something in popular speech. This, Finney suggests, is how Paul is using the term in Romans 7. He concludes that it is “a gross and most injurious perversion of scripture, as well as a contradiction of human reason, to deny the natural ability, or which is the same thing, the natural free agency of man, and to maintain a proper natural inability to obey God.”²²⁰

Moral depravity, in Finney’s view “consists in selfishness.” It is “a spirit of self-seeking, a voluntary and entire consecration to the gratification of self. It is selfish ultimate intention; it is the choice of a wrong end of life.”²²¹ Original sin undermines Finney’s belief that God never demands that people do something they are incapable of doing. Original sin cannot be accepted in any material sense, since it would then absolve an individual of any moral responsibility for any resulting sinful behaviors. One is not born with original sin. Instead “*Sinners make their own wicked hearts*. Their preference of sin is their own voluntary act.”²²² They do this virtually from birth, always seeking to gratify their various appetites. The will becomes habituated to satisfying the sensibility at an early age before the reason is even developed. This accounts for the reality of habitual sinfulness

²¹⁸ *LST*, 330.

²¹⁹ *LST*, 340.

²²⁰ *LST*, 330. It is noteworthy that he also contrasts his position against an Arminian position with its “absurd dogma of a gracious ability to do our duty.” *LST*, 330.

²²¹ *LST*, 245.

²²² *Sermons*, 23.

from a young age, but there is no moral sin until the reason is developed adequately to reveal the choice of moral obligation, with the aid of the Holy Spirit. Finney complains that those who preach or teach this view “are charged with preaching heresy, because they presume to teach that faith is an exercise, and not a principle, and that sin is an act, and not a part of the constitution of man.”²²³ Finney himself was prompted to leave the Presbyterian church rather than face heresy charges over such issues. Finney, as well as many others at this time, insist that God condemns no one on the basis of original sin, nor is anyone forced to sin.

Finney rejects any Edwardsean style distinction between natural and moral ability, and directly engages Edwards as representative of this Calvinist conception. He calls Edwards’ notion of natural ability “no ability at all,” but rather “nothing but an empty name, a metaphysico-theological fiction.”²²⁴ God’s moral government “assumes and implies the liberty of the human will, and the natural ability of men to obey God.” Furthermore, “the human mind necessarily assumes the freedom of the human will as a first truth.”²²⁵ It is a universal and practical assumption, even for those who in theory might deny it. Freedom of the will is an absolute necessity for any choices of moral significance to exist. “The natural ability or liberty of Edwards and his school,” Finney insists, “has nothing to do with morality or immorality,” because it only encompasses outward actions rather than actual willing.²²⁶ Even though Finney distinguishes his position from Edwards, he almost sounds like Edwards when he writes, “I admit the

²²³ *LOR*, 375.

²²⁴ He adds, “It is absurd and sheer nonsense to talk of an ability to do when there is no ability to will.” *LST*, 305.

²²⁵ *LST*, 307.

²²⁶ *LST*, 304.

ability of man, and hold that he is able, but utterly unwilling to obey God.”²²⁷ In practice it does not seem so unlike Edwards’ insistence that in our natural state we do as we will, but we always will not to obey God.

Finney even suggests that those who try to enhance God’s glory by stressing human inability actually take away from it. “Instead of making his only difficulty to consist in an *unwillingness*, they insist upon his *inability*, and thus destroy [sic] his guilt, and of course the grace displayed in his salvation.”²²⁸ Finney seems to press together his notion of free will with God’s agency in conversion in ways that are not altogether satisfying or clear. It does not “detract from the glory of God that the act of turning is the sinner’s own act. The fact is, he never does, and never will turn, unless God induces him to do it; so that although the act is the sinner’s own, yet the glory belongs to God, inasmuch as he caused him to act.”²²⁹ Finney seems to want to preserve something of God’s sovereignty and grace, even though his conception of human will seems to rule it out. This tension has already been seen in the earlier discussion of the role of the human and Holy Spirit in conversion, and remains here as well.

Voluntarism vs. Intellectualism

It might seem like a foregone conclusion with all his constant talk of ability and the will to label Finney a voluntarist. Certainly Finney outwardly *sounds* like a voluntarist. Could there even be a more pronounced example of an individual that showcased the

²²⁷ *LST*, 332.

²²⁸ *Sermons*, 29. He makes the same point in *LST*. “The denial of ability is really a denial of the possibility of grace in the affair of man’s salvation.” 332.

²²⁹ *Sermons*, 29.

importance of freedom and ability and choice than Finney? However, a closer look at the question suggests a more ambiguous response.

The path to willing goes through persuasion, and the path to persuasion invariably goes through the mind. All willing is based on knowledge and reasoning, on *persuasion*. Indeed, as we have already observed, persuasion is the very tool used by the Holy Spirit in inducing conversion. For Finney, even God is confined to this in working toward the conversion of individuals. As Harry Conn, editor of the 1976 edition of the *Lectures on Systematic Theology*, puts it, “Mr. Finney aimed his preaching at man’s intellect, not his emotions, and believed that all virtue resides in the proper exercise of the will. He believed that the means that the Father used to draw men to Christ is truth (John 6:44, 45), which removes the idea of causation in salvation.”²³⁰

Persuasion is the tool used by preachers. Finney himself moves more and more into reasoned arguments in his revivalistic work. While clearly present even within any emotional excesses of his early revival context, his tendency toward intellectualism becomes even more pronounced as his career progresses.²³¹ He is ever concerned to be rational, and in fact this rationalistic bent seems often to rule over all other authorities including Scripture. It is this strong occupation with reasoning that pushes him into some extreme positions (e.g., perfectionism). He is compelled almost always to *follow the logic* of a given view to its end. His desire to “preserve a logical consistency” can be seen throughout his theology – even in his very conception of God.

God himself, by his very nature, is eminently reasonable. God is, in fact, bound by reason. God never acts unreasonably or contrary to reason. Even when humans cannot

²³⁰ *LST*, 573.

²³¹ See the previous section on emotions for more on this point.

see a reason for God's actions and commands, "our reason affirms that He has and must have good and sufficient reasons for every command."²³² Were this not the case, we would not be bound to obey God.

This predilection toward reason is often apparent, for example, in the ways in which Finney talks about God. At times he even refers to the "divine reason" as a kind of synonym for God.²³³ Finney can be very impersonal and philosophical in his speech about God, as though God is just part of a larger reasoned argument. Reason indicates that God must be such and such kind of being to be God, and a number of other truths necessarily follow from these truths. Even though at times Finney quotes Scripture at length to support his views (at other times it is notably lacking), it seems in a certain sense superfluous to his argument. It would stand without the support of Scripture because it is a necessary demand of reason, and God himself is the highest expression of reason. For example he writes, "The reason could not recognize any being as God to whom these attributes did not belong. But if infinite wisdom and benevolence are moral attributes of God, it follows of course that all His designs or purposes are both perfectly wise and benevolent."²³⁴ Uncounted arguments in the book run along the logic of this example: reason demands a, b, c; therefore x, y, and z follow necessarily.

Much of this type of speech about God is better understood when one understands that moral obligation is not founded on God's will. Finney believes the demand to seek the highest good of all is a moral obligation of all in itself, outside of any command of God. Like every other moral being, God himself is under this moral

²³² *LST*, 480.

²³³ For example Finney writes, "Holiness is, doubtless, a characteristic, or quality of each and all of His moral attributes. They will harmonize in this, that no one of them can consent to do otherwise than conform to the law of moral purity, as developed and revealed in the Divine Reason." *LST*, 174-75.

²³⁴ *LST*, 501.

obligation. The moral law's "known intrinsic value would, of itself, impose obligation on moral agents to choose it for its own sake, even had God never required it; or, if such a supposition were possible, had He forbidden it. Thus, disinterested benevolence is a universal and an invariable duty."²³⁵ If, therefore, God seems at times to be an unnecessary accessory to Finney's moral system, it is because in some ways he is.

Reason is the highest authority. God cannot modify its demands. Reason is the final judge, and Finney has such confidence in this reason that he even deems himself capable of using it in judgment of God. Should God "command me to choose, as an ultimate end, or for its own intrinsic value, that which my reason affirmed to be of no intrinsic value, I could not possibly affirm my obligation to obey Him."²³⁶ Such a remarkable elevation of reason and the confidence in humanity to wield it makes clear that the foundation of much of Finney's theology comes not from the God of Abraham, who demanded of him the sacrifice of his son, but a deified, nineteenth century model of reason.²³⁷ At many points it is this confidence in reason that brings Finney to his particular beliefs about conversion, human ability, and moral law.

For Finney, Christianity is eminently reasonable. Every movement toward reason is a movement toward holiness, because reason always moves one toward God's laws,

²³⁵ *LST*, 46. See also 47. Finney finds those who claim the basis of obligation to be benevolence grounded in the will of God, to be "grossly inconsistent and nonsensical," since one cannot put the benevolence of others first and still have a base motive of obedience to God's will. 50. The sovereign will of God as basis for moral law is "a totally erroneous conception both of the character of God, and of the nature and design of His government." 90. It makes God "an arbitrary sovereign. He is not under law Himself." 90. If God is subject to no law, then he has no moral character, since there is no law by which God may be judged good, according to Finney. All of this leads to a much broader philosophical and theological debate that will not be resolved here.

²³⁶ *LST*, 49.

²³⁷ One wonders what Finney would think of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac on the basis of God's command in Genesis 22, when it seems to run counter to any notion of reason. Finney actually answers this question: "Should he command me to do that which my reason affirmed to be unwise and malevolent, it were impossible for me to affirm my obligation to obey him." *LST*, 49. Soren Kierkegaard framed God's command to Abraham as the "teleological suspension of the ethical," and this idea runs directly counter to Finney's conception of the ground of ethics.

which, like the moral law, are eminently reasonable. Although Finney warns against any purely notional form of Christianity that involves only cold intellectual assent without the heart, his tendency to stress the power of reasoning and the almost explicit idea that reason operates in individuals unscathed by the effects of sin work against those warnings. He is a lawyer in the courtroom of reason even more than the courtroom of revelation. Yes, he can warn that unbelief “is not ignorance of truth.”²³⁸ It is not merely a negation of knowledge or of faith, but an active state (like impenitence), a willful act.²³⁹ But at the same time, he also notes that “God only requires of you to choose and act reasonably, for certainly it is in accordance with right reason to prefer the glory of God, and the interest of his immense kingdom, to your own private interest.”²⁴⁰

Thus one might say that the problem is the will, but the deeper problem can be seen as irrationality. To follow God is, for Finney, the only rational path of a human being. To will otherwise is irrational. If “the great and fundamental sin, which is at the foundation of all other sin, is unbelief,” a state, or rather choice, of the will, such a choice is inherently irrational.²⁴¹ Rationality is the substrata of the entire scheme. Unbelief “is the heart’s rejection of evidence, and refusal to be influenced by it.”²⁴² Intellectual skepticism in the presence of light implies unbelief, closing one’s eyes to the truth. It is a sin. Unreasonableness is an attribute of selfishness. “The selfish choice is in direct

²³⁸ *LST*, 356. Likewise, he writes in his *Sermons*, “If right apprehensions of truth presented by the Spirit of God convert a sinner, does it not follow that his ignorance is the cause of his sin? I answer, No!” 32.

²³⁹ Every sinner “at first sins against what knowledge he has by overlooking the motives to obedience, and yielding himself up to the motives to disobedience, and when once he has adopted the selfish principle, his ignorance becomes wilful [sic] and sinful, and unless the Spirit of God induce him, he *will* not see.” *Sermons*, 33. Here the sinner hates God not because he has false notions of God, but because God is the benevolent opposite of his own selfish orientation.

²⁴⁰ *Sermons*, 19.

²⁴¹ *LST*, 409.

²⁴² *LST*, 356.

opposition to the demands of the reason,” which is designed to follow the rule of God.²⁴³ Finney defines benevolence as “the obedience of the will to the law of reason and of God.”²⁴⁴ Conversely, sinners are not governed by their reason, “but by feeling, desire, and impulse.”²⁴⁵ Selfishness “is a dethroning of reason from the seat of government, and an enthroning of blind desire in opposition to it.... It is a denial of that divine attribute [reason] that allies man to God, makes him capable of virtue, and is a sinking him to the level of a brute.”²⁴⁶ Saints, on the other hand, are ruled by reason.²⁴⁷ To be a Christian is to follow the dictates of reason wherever they may lead (certainly an intellectualist position), whereas to be unregenerate is to follow the will in defiance of the reason. To do something unreasonable is to do something immoral.

Finney seems to arrive at a position that is in tension with his claims of human ability, suggesting that when the problem of knowledge is resolved sinners may still choose unbelief – a willful act, and can then only be turned by the Holy Spirit. Hence Finney denies that the problem of unbelief is a problem of knowledge. Yet then one is left with a sinner possessing adequate knowledge, but not the *will* to follow that knowledge to God. Why do sinners not choose God if the problem is not ignorance? Certainly Finney has made clear that such a choice involves no inherent constitutional bias toward sin. How can such a state be resolved? If one has the *ability* always to choose for God, and the degree of knowledge is not at issue, then what is left for the Holy Spirit to influence in conversion? If Finney is saying that although sinners *know*, they lack the *will* to obey, he

²⁴³ *LST*, 181.

²⁴⁴ *LST*, 141.

²⁴⁵ *LST*, 294.

²⁴⁶ *LST*, 182. Even if the feelings of sinners happen to match with their intelligence, it is the feelings that are controlling the will. Finney adds, “The fact is, that there is not, and there never can be, in earth or hell, one impenitent sinner who, in any instance, acts otherwise than in direct and palpable opposition to his reason.” *LST*, 182.

²⁴⁷ “The saint is governed by reason, the law of God, or the moral law.” *LST*, 294.

seems to violate his own principles. If there is no substance or actuality in the constitution of a person, however conceived, that prevents the will from choosing God in the light of adequate knowledge of God, then what is the cause for the rejection of God? Is choosing selfishness over benevolence merely a random act? It seems that in an unconverted state we are *able* to but in fact never actually do *choose* God, which runs counter to Finney's constant stress on human ability.

It seems that it is the will to submit to reason that ultimately brings one to God, and denial of reason that is cause to reject God. Finney writes that "when reason is thoroughly developed by the Holy Spirit, it is more than a match for the sensibility [the ability to feel and sense], and turns the heart to God." The problem arises when "the sensibility gets the start of reason, and engages the attention in devising means of self-gratification, and thus retards, and in a great measure prevents, the development of the ideas of the reason which were *designed to control the will*." The Holy Spirit forces truth on individuals in such a way "as to secure the development of reason," and thereby "brings the will under the influence of truth" and gives "reason the control of the will. This is regeneration and sanctification."²⁴⁸

As can be seen, then, there remains ambiguity on this question. Finney indeed stresses the primacy of the will throughout his writings, and yet also directly and indirectly stresses reason, which forms the underlying basis for virtually everything he does in his theological work. Reason is thus intrinsic to conversion. It is inherently reasonable to be a Christian, and in following reason one should never go astray.

Finney's emphasis on the power and importance of reason is characteristic of his time, as Brooks Holifield, Mark Noll, and others have clearly shown. More than any

²⁴⁸ *LST*, 268 (emphasis mine).

other figure in this dissertation, Finney displays the characteristics and confidences that come with Scottish Common Sense Philosophy.²⁴⁹ Throughout his writings Finney shows a remarkable confidence in reason, and an elevation of its authority to the highest position.

Conversion and the (Dis)Unity of the Self

How are the will, intellect, and emotions interrelated in individuals? Previously some of Finney's views on faculty psychology were mentioned in relation to his views of the intellect. Here we return briefly to a further consideration of his views of the unity of the self, and the relation of these views to his understanding of the workings of conversion.

Often it seems more accurate in reading Finney to describe his view of the *disunity* of the self. Finney seems to consider the various faculties not as psychological fictions – concepts to explain the interplay of various functional aspects of the human mind, but as actual divisions of human existence, even entities that exist independently within a person. Early in his theology text he states that “all human investigations proceed upon the assumption of the existence and validity of our faculties.”²⁵⁰ He discusses these various

²⁴⁹ A key principle of Scottish Common Sense Philosophy or Realism, Mark A. Noll writes, was brought to America especially through the writings of Francis Hutcheson. This was “the assertion that just as humans know intuitively some basic realities of the physical world, so they know by the nature of their own being certain foundational principles of morality.” “Common Sense Traditions and American Evangelical Thought,” *American Quarterly*, Vol. 37, No. 2 (Summer, 1985), 216-238, 221. He adds that this “reliance on a Hutchesonian moral sense was a staple of nineteenth-century Unitarianism and transcendentalism. Yet it was also very much a part of the evangelical mainstream as well. The Oberlin revivalists Asa Mahan and Charles Finney made constant use of that which was ‘intuitively evident’ in morals and religion according to ‘the changeless laws of our being.’” 222. These types of references are to be found throughout Finney's writings, and perhaps more than any other reason, account for the sense that Finney's writings often seem more philosophically than theological or biblically oriented.

²⁵⁰ *LST*, 5. In his introductory remarks to this volume, the Rev. Parkhurst suggests likewise, writing that “Finney taught that we must assume or suppose or presuppose as a fact that we have faculties; such as the three primary faculties of the mind: *intellect*, *sensibility*, and *will*.” *LST*, xx.

faculties in almost a technical sense, and spends considerable energy detailing the various faculties and their roles and relations to one another, and to things like love or virtue.²⁵¹ The intellect does this, while the sensibility does that. The sensibility feels some attribute of love, e.g. patience, but it is not a virtue in this feeling state because it has not been intentionally willed.²⁵² However, he rarely, if ever, makes any statements that represent these divisions as conceptual fictions that help us to understand ourselves.

Finney wants to suggest that such an approach is scientific, some kind of interaction between components with various causes and effects. In fact, he writes that “theology is, to a great extent, the *science* of mind in its relation to moral law, and that it is “so related to psychology that the successful study of the former without a knowledge of the latter is impossible.”²⁵³ Thus he attempts to parse the activities and relations of these components. For example, in assessing the features of selfishness, Finney writes that it “consists in the will’s yielding itself to the impulses of the sensibility in opposition to the demands of the intelligence.”²⁵⁴

It is in failing to maintain this very precision regarding psychological science that Finney faults Edwards. As Finney puts it, “Edwards throughout confounds desire and volition, making them the same thing. Edwards regarded the mind as possessing but two primary faculties –the will and the understanding. He confounded all the states of the sensibility with acts of will.” Edwards makes the strongest desire “identical with volition or choice, and not merely that which determines choice.”²⁵⁵ In Finney’s view Edwards, like

²⁵¹ See, for example, his long discussion of the attributes of love, *LST*, 139-76.

²⁵² *LST*, 164-65.

²⁵³ *LST*, 12 (emphasis mine).

²⁵⁴ *LST*, 182.

²⁵⁵ *LST*, 311.

many others, “confounded actions of the will with emotions and desires, which results in “a theoretical denial of the freedom of the will.”²⁵⁶

Such parsing, however, seems a questionable task. How does one divide yielding to feeling with willful choice? Finney argues that the former is not morally praiseworthy while the latter is. Is there not choice involved with yielding to good desires within oneself? If one follows good sensibilities in oneself, leading to good actions, are these not good and moral acts? How can yielding to the sensibility ever really be a choiceless act? Finney discusses the example of a compassionate man who gives to the poor, but who Finney judges to be selfish because his actions are caused by an overdeveloped sensibility of compassion, since he gratifies himself by giving. Finney writes, “There is no virtue, no benevolence in it. It is a mere yielding of the will to the control of feeling, and has nothing in it of the nature of virtue.”²⁵⁷ For Finney these divisions are determined by one’s intentions, seeking to please oneself versus seeking the good of being in general. “The choice of any thing whatever, because it is desired, irrespective of the demands of the reason, is selfishness and sin. It matters not what it is.”²⁵⁸ It seems, however, a pretty fine line between being pleased in doing good and being selfish. In fact it pushes even further in the direction of disunity, since desire and reason are split, and necessarily undermine each other.

Finney is, in this regard, a reflection of his time. This type of faculty psychology was dominant in his day, and he seems to embrace it somewhat uncritically.²⁵⁹ Its clean divisions undoubtedly appeal to him, even as they seem somewhat contrived to a

²⁵⁶ *LST*, 334.

²⁵⁷ *LST*, 185.

²⁵⁸ *LST*, 186.

²⁵⁹ Hardman specifically discusses Finney’s timebound notions of faculty psychology, suggesting that it entails “totally inadequate categories and explanations for human behavior.” *Finney*, 388.

contemporary reader. Finney differentiates sharply, even artificially, between various human components in a desire for fully rational, precise, and airtight arguments for his positions. These sharp lines and differentiation typify his thinking in several areas. At the close of the chapter we will comment further on this characteristic of Finney's theology.

The Means of Conversion

Means are necessary for conversion. Finney takes a very common sense approach to the use of means in conversion. He is matter of fact in declaring that means are critical to conversion and revival, and that God always carries out his work through human means. "No sinner ever was or ever will be converted, but by means wisely and philosophically adapted to this end."²⁶⁰ That is why, for example, revivals are works of humans as well as of God. That is why, should humans stop applying these means, revivals will cease. As we have already seen above, conversion is not a supernatural change or transformation of an individual. In the same way, the means to conversion and revival are not supernatural, "not a miracle, or dependent on a miracle, in any sense."²⁶¹ They are not arbitrary acts expressing God's sovereignty that preclude "a rational employment of means for promoting a revival of religion."²⁶² In fact, Finney says, the devil is pleased when people think that they cannot promote a revival because they might interfere with God's sovereignty.²⁶³ Neglecting the means of grace is a sin of omission.²⁶⁴

²⁶⁰ *Sermons*, 39.

²⁶¹ *LOR*, 13.

²⁶² *LOR*, 21.

²⁶³ *LOR*, 21.

²⁶⁴ *LOR*, 41-45.

Contrary to such arbitrary acts of God, these means are natural; revival can be wrought through “a purely philosophical result of the right use of the constituted means.”²⁶⁵ The relationship of these means to the end of conversion is virtually that of cause and effect. “There has long been an idea prevalent that promoting religion has something very peculiar in it, not to be judged of by the ordinary rules of cause and effect; in short, that there is no connection of the means with the result, and no tendency in the means to produce the effect.” Finney considers this idea absurd, and suggests that “no doctrine is more dangerous than this to the prosperity of the church.”²⁶⁶

As mentioned previously, Finney compares human efforts for the salvation of souls to the farmer and his wheat field. The harvest is from God, but there is no harvest without the farmer’s activity. Some think that if a revival is truly the work of God it cannot be stopped, but Finney says this is not so. “A revival is the work of God, and so is a crop of wheat; and God is as much dependent on the use of means in one case as the other.”²⁶⁷

To call these means necessary and natural, in Finney’s view, is not to place God outside of the picture. It is God who has established a world in which certain means bring about specific results, in conversion as well as in farming. Specific means are necessary, but all means are divinely established. “God has connected means with the end through all the departments of his government – in nature and in grace. There is no *natural* event in which his own agency is not concerned.”²⁶⁸ These means, whether in nature or in grace, are not random, but are instead those means appropriate to the task as appointed

²⁶⁵ *LOR*, 13.

²⁶⁶ *LOR*, 14. Elsewhere he writes, “Few more mischievous sentiments have ever been broached, than that there is no philosophical connexion between means and end in the conversion of sinners.” *Sermons*, 39.

²⁶⁷ *LOR*, 278.

²⁶⁸ *LOR*, 21.

by God. One does not use random means in sowing wheat for the harvest, but instead must use proper techniques of farming. The same is true for revivals and conversion. Both involve God's blessing as God establishes the laws by which both operations are successful. Neither are miraculous or magical, however. Instead the implementation of proper means or causes are directly connected to results.²⁶⁹

Finney actually minimizes to a great degree *any* difference between the operation of nature and of grace. Their operation seems virtually indistinguishable. All that happens in nature is due to God's providence, and is accomplished through means. God "neither administers providence nor grace with that sort of sovereignty, that dispenses with the use of means. There is no more sovereignty in one than in the other."²⁷⁰ Grace, too, is *natural*, in the sense that means are logically or actually linked to results. What makes it grace is not how it works but that it is made available at all to undeserving sinners. The apparatus itself just works. Such a scheme works to Finney's liking – with clean, clear, rational connections between means and results, causes and effects. All that we need in life "are obtained with great *certainty* by the use of the simplest means."²⁷¹

If the means to conversion are necessary, natural, and also divinely established, just what are these means? Broadly speaking, the means used for conversion involve persuasion by the truth. Finney states this categorically: "There never was and never will be any one saved by any thing but truth as the means." Sinners are to be converted "by

²⁶⁹ It is worthwhile to quote Finney at greater length on this point. Means "will not produce a revival, we all know, without the blessing of God. No more will grain, when it is sowed, produce a crop without the blessing of God. It is impossible for us to say that there is not as direct an influence or agency from God, to produce a crop of grain, as there is to produce a revival. What are the laws of nature, according to which, it is supposed, that grain yields a crop? They are nothing but the constituted manner of the operations of God. In the Bible, the word of God is compared to grain, and preaching is compared to sowing seed, and the results to the springing up and growth of the crop. And the result is just as philosophical in the one case, as in the other, and is as naturally connected with the cause." *LOR*, 13-14.

²⁷⁰ *LOR*, 21.

²⁷¹ *LOR*, 15.

argument and not by force,” respecting their own free will and power of choice.²⁷²

Regeneration “is nothing else than the will being duly influenced by truth.”²⁷³

More specifically, Finney considers many kinds of means in these persuasive efforts that lead to conversion. Finney emphasizes that conversion and revival results from “the *right* use of the appropriate means.” These means bring about results, but only when used properly. For Finney, when working to convert others, it is one of the marks of being filled with the Spirit “to use means wisely, in a way adapted to the end, and to avoid doing hurt.”²⁷⁴

One of these means is prayer, which is “an essential link in the chain of causes that lead to a revival; as much so as truth is.” Some have so emphasized the use of truth in converting others that they have little heeded the need for prayer. Others have made the opposite mistake, but “sinners are not converted by direct contact of the Holy Ghost, but by the truth, employed as a means.”²⁷⁵ Both are necessary. Prayer is especially important because, of all these means to influence humans, prayer is the means to influence God.²⁷⁶

²⁷² *LOR*, 175.

²⁷³ *LST*, 275.

²⁷⁴ *LOR*, 13, 120.

²⁷⁵ *LOR*, 53.

²⁷⁶ In *LOR* Finney spends considerable space discussing prayer. Some of this moves beyond the bounds of this dissertation, but it is worth mentioning his argument that there is a form of prayer that he terms *prevailing* or *effectual prayer*, or a *prayer of faith*. This is “that prayer which attains the blessing that it seeks.” 54. Finney describes the elements of such a prayer, and insists that it will always be successful if it meets the criteria he lists. A prayer of faith always obtains the blessing sought. It is a particular type of prayer distinct from other benevolent wishes we bring to God in prayer, which may or may not result in the thing being requested. 73-74. “This kind of faith *always obtains the object*.” 79. Finney goes so far as to argue that it is precisely because Christians have failed to use the prayer of faith that family members and others are in hell. It is because no believers used the prayer of faith on their behalf for their conversion. 85-87. “There is reason to believe millions are in hell because professors have not offered the prayer of faith.” 86. Even “pious parents can render the salvation of their children certain. Only let them pray in faith, and be agreed *as touching* the things they shall ask for, and God has promised them the desire of their hearts.” 331. On prevailing prayer, see 52-88.

Another important means is preaching, which William Cooper considers to be Finney's "chief means of persuasion."²⁷⁷ But if there is to be preaching, there must be a preacher. Thus other humans are a means of conversion, or at least an agent for the means. The preacher is not a removed third party, but "a willing, designing, responsible agent, as really so as God or the subject is."²⁷⁸

Finney's "New Measures"

Given Finney's understanding of the nature of conversion and the importance of persuasion in bringing individuals to that point of choosing the gospel and voluntarily willing themselves to submit to God's will and laws, the means of accomplishing this take on even greater importance. If one can find the most persuasive means, then one will have the most success in making converts. During Finney's lifetime there was much controversy over his "new measures," which could as easily be called new means, used as revival methods. In actuality, as others have shown previously, most of these measures were not entirely new, nor were they primarily Finney's invention.²⁷⁹ Nevertheless, he became well-known for championing their use and they came to be associated with his theology and practices.

In Finney's view, one is never limited to a certain, defined set of means to conversion. One has flexibility. Finney argues that although there were specific measures

²⁷⁷ William H. Cooper, Jr., *The Great Revivalists in American Religion, 1740-1944*, (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2010), 76.

²⁷⁸ *LST*, 274.

²⁷⁹ For example, in *LOR*, 267, fn.17, McLoughlin describes the probable source of Finney's "anxious seat" as the "mourner's bench" of Methodist camp meetings. Finney himself argues that the history of these innovations is gradual rather than sudden. "Our present forms of public worship, and every thing, so far as *measures* are concerned, have been arrived at *by degrees*, and by a *succession of New Measures*." *LOR*, 250. Finney appeals to Luther and the other reformers, to Wesley, and to Edwards in support of this long history of innovative measures. Finney also argues, for example, against the notion of protracted meetings being new. *LOR*, 262f.

given to the Jews in the Old Testament, under what he calls the gospel “anti-type” in the New Testament “it was left to the discretion of the church to determine, from time to time, what *measures* shall be adopted, and what *forms* pursued, in giving the gospel its power.”²⁸⁰ The early apostles did not imitate one another or set down measures, and the great commission prescribed no forms or directions on measures, only to preach the gospel and disciple all the nations. Nevertheless, some measures are necessary to carry out the preaching of the gospel. Just as the early church created its own set of new measures through which to communicate the gospel, one must always be adapting one’s means according to the needs of the time.

Finney here makes a legitimate point that one must not concretize the means of a given period as the only right means, that change in means or measures is normal and can be seen going all the way back to the early church. Although many might agree with such a point, the difficulty still remains in determining which means are appropriate and which are not. A critic might agree that new measures are necessary and yet disagree about the impact of specific means such as Finney’s “anxious seat.”²⁸¹

For Finney, judging the appropriateness of means is a rather simple task. The recommended means are those that work, the means that are most effective in bringing sinners to conversion. “If a measure is *continually or usually* blessed,” he declares, “let the man who thinks he is wiser than God, call it in question. TAKE CARE! how you find

²⁸⁰ *LOR*, 251.

²⁸¹ In *LOR*, Finney describes the “anxious seat” as “the appointment of some particular seat in the place of meeting, where the anxious may come and be addressed particularly, and be made subjects of prayer, and sometimes conversed with individually.” 267.

fault with God.”²⁸² The opponents of the new measures are so taken up with the evils of the measures that they have had no success in revivals themselves.

Finney acknowledges, “that there have been evils, no one will pretend to deny.”²⁸³ But he argues that the blessings greatly outweigh any evils, and that the same or greater evils have accompanied all other great revivals in history. He also goes so far as to argue that concern with the measures used in revivals is a sign of not being filled with the Spirit.²⁸⁴ “It is the *right and duty of ministers to adopt new measures* for promoting revivals.”²⁸⁵ Some churches have opposed their minister merely because he used measures seen as *new*. Finney counters that “without new measures it is impossible that the church should succeed in gaining the attention of the world to religion.”²⁸⁶ Although “novelties should be introduced no faster than they are really called for,” nevertheless “new measures we *must have*.”²⁸⁷

Finney compares his Protestant opponents of new measures to Roman Catholics, who he believes defend every particular form or means as divinely instituted. “This zealous adherence to particular forms and modes of doing things, which has led the

²⁸² LOR, 190 (capitalization his). Or again, “The success of any measure designed to promote a revival of religion, demonstrates its wisdom.” 189. Finney gives two exceptions to this statement: a. measures introduced solely for their novelty or effect, and b. measures that accompany a revival which are not the actual reason for its success, and are perhaps even a hindrance. “But when the blessing evidently follows the introduction of the *measure itself*, the proof is unanswerable, that the measure is wise.” LOR, 189.

²⁸³ LOR, 272.

²⁸⁴ LOR, 121-22.

²⁸⁵ LOR, 275. “Let a minister enter fully into his work, and pour out his heart to God for a blessing, and whenever he sees the want of any measure to bring the truth more powerfully before the minds of the people, let him adopt it and not be afraid, and God will not withhold his blessing. If ministers will not go forward, and will not preach the gospel with power and earnestness, and will not turn out of their tracks to do any thing *new* for the purpose of saving souls, they will grieve the Holy Spirit away, and God will visit them with his curse, and raise up other ministers to do work in the world.” 275.

²⁸⁶ LOR, 272.

²⁸⁷ LOR, 273. Finney is especially concerned that those being trained for ministry realize this. “We see the importance of having *young ministers obtain right views of revivals*. In a multitude of cases, I have seen that great pains are taken to frighten our young men, who are preparing for the ministry, about the evils of revivals, new measures, and the like.” LOR, 274. Finney singles out Princeton Seminary as an example of this.

church to resist innovations *in measures, savors strongly of fanaticism.*”²⁸⁸ Such a view is contrary to the Bible, in Finney’s view. “The fact is, that God has established, in no church, any particular *form*, or manner of worship, for promoting the interests of religion. The scriptures are entirely silent on these subjects, under the gospel dispensation.”²⁸⁹

Looking back while writing his *Memoirs* Finney describes the typical means he used when at work in revival. “The means used were simply preaching, prayer and conference meetings, much private prayer, much personal conversation, and meetings for the promotion of that work. There was no appearance of fanaticism, no bad spirit, no divisions, no heresies, no schisms.”²⁹⁰ Finney describes and defends at length various new measures in his lecture, “Measures to Promote Revivals,” found in *Lectures on Revivals*.²⁹¹ These various new measures include lay exhortation, female prayer meetings, and most controversially, anxious meetings, protracted meetings, and the anxious seat. The point of all these measures was, again, the persuasion of the sinner by the truth. For the purposes of this study it is not necessary to evaluate all the various measures as much as to recognize that means are necessary and flexible, and that God’s approval of various means is seen in their successful implementation.

The means of conversion, in Finney’s view, are not to be used *by* sinners but rather *on* sinners for their conversion. Means are for the church’s use. “It is a mistake of sinners, to think they are using means for their own conversion. The whole drift of a revival, and every thing about it, is designed to present the truth *to* your mind, for your

²⁸⁸ *LOR*, 275.

²⁸⁹ He adds, “The church is left to exercise her own discretion in relation to all such matters.... The only thing insisted upon under the gospel dispensation, in regard to measures, is that there should be *decency and order.*” *LOR*, 276.

²⁹⁰ *Memoirs*, 78.

²⁹¹ *LOR*, 250-76. The editor calls this lecture “Finney’s definitive reply to ten years of criticism by conservative Calvinists against his ‘new measure’ revivalism.” 250, fn 1.

obedience or resistance.”²⁹² For a sinner to be told to do anything but submit to God is “false comfort.” This includes telling a sinner that “he must *use the means*.”²⁹³ He will use the means and not submit his heart. “What is the sinner’s use of means, but rebellion against God? God uses means. The church uses means, to convert and save sinners, to bear down upon them, and bring them to submission. But what has the sinner to do with using means?”²⁹⁴ Anything apart from the deliberate choice to follow God is merely distraction. The purpose of the means are to put that decision front and center in view of the sinner by persuasive demonstration of the truth.

Finney argues that God’s election secures the success of means. He calls election “*the only ground of hope in the success of means*.” At the same time, election “*does not render means for the salvation of the elect unnecessary*.”²⁹⁵ Here there is a definite tension with some of Finney’s previous assertions. It is difficult to see how this is a consistent and coherent position given Finney’s position on human choice and on the cause and effect nature of the operation of means. If there is indeed such a “philosophical” or necessary connection between properly implemented and appropriate means and their effects, how or where does God’s election factor into it? Finney holds to a view of election because he finds it in Scripture, but it seems a very weak view as “God’s purposes do not render any event, dependent upon the acts of a moral agent, necessarily certain, or certain with a certainty of necessity.”²⁹⁶ Again confirming the necessity of free human choice in conversion, he insists that “neither the Divine fore-knowledge nor the Divine purpose, in any instance,

²⁹² *LOR*, 19. “What sinners do is to submit to the truth, or to resist it. It is a mistake of sinners, to think they are using means for their own conversion.” 19.

²⁹³ *LOR*, 343.

²⁹⁴ *LOR*, 344.

²⁹⁵ *LOR*, 457.

²⁹⁶ *LOR*, 503.

sets aside the free agency of the creature,” nor does election “*pose any obstacle to the salvation of the non-elect.*”²⁹⁷

Neither the atonement, nor the Holy Spirit can properly be considered means for Finney. The atonement gives the sinner no positive righteousness.²⁹⁸ The atonement “was not a commercial transaction.” It was not simply “the payment of a debt.” It appears that Finney’s understanding of the atonement is not ultimately for sinners at all. “The atonement of Christ was intended as a satisfaction of public justice [rather than retributive justice].”²⁹⁹ God cannot repeal or change the moral law, but he can show how he is justified in pardoning sin. The atonement is not a means to conversion, but a public demonstration of God’s rightness in saving sinners. God does not bypass moral law. Its requirements are met, but atonement then becomes something necessary for the defense of God’s character, not the salvation of human sinners.

The Holy Spirit, acting alone (i.e. miraculously), also cannot be considered a means to conversion for Finney. The Holy Spirit can only work *through* various means of persuasion for conversion. Finney notes that for those who hold to some kind of constitutional regeneration the Holy Spirit is the sole agent, with no other means or instruments of conversion. For them regeneration is “an act of creative power.” For them regeneration “is a miracle,” since for them “there is no tendency whatever in the gospel, however presented, and whether presented by God or man, to regenerate the heart.” These theologians have claimed “that there is no philosophical connection between the preaching of the gospel and the regeneration of sinners,” and that, in fact, the very means

²⁹⁷ *LOR*, 503, 457.

²⁹⁸ “Christ’s obedience to the moral law as a covenant of works, did not constitute the atonement.” *LST*, 218.

²⁹⁹ *LST*, 219.

of preaching the gospel itself increases the enmity of sinners to the message apart from the work of the Holy Spirit.³⁰⁰ In essence they deny all means. Finney responds, “Instead of telling him that regeneration is nothing else than his embracing the gospel, [it is] to tell him that he must wait, and first have his constitution recreated before he can possibly do anything but oppose God! This is to tell him the greatest and most abominable and ruinous of falsehoods.”³⁰¹ This Finney can never accept. The means of conversion place the choice of the gospel in the control of the human will.

The Relation of Conversion to Baptism

Even though baptism is considered by most Protestants to be, at the very least, a public witness to the conversion of an adult or the reception of a child into the covenant community, Finney has surprisingly little to say regarding it. Throughout his *Lectures on Revivals* it is rarely even mentioned. Given the New Testament’s strong connection between conversion and baptism, this is fairly surprising. It also probably says as much about Finney’s ecclesiology and the location of conversion (considered further below) as it does about his particular views of baptism. In one of the few references to it, Finney is discussing the anxious seat and the public nature of its challenge to sinners to declare for the gospel. He then, in a rather striking way, compares this practice to baptism, writing, “The church has always felt it necessary to have something of the kind to answer this very purpose. In the days of the apostles *baptism* answered this purpose. The gospel was preached to the people, and then all those who were willing to be on the side of Christ

³⁰⁰ *LST*, 275.

³⁰¹ *LST*, 276.

were called on to be *baptized*. It held the precise place that the anxious seat does now, as a public manifestation of their determination to be Christians.”³⁰² It seems that baptism is somewhat interchangeable with other practices. One is left wondering what role remains for baptism now, why – with the anxious seat – it is even still necessary. On the other hand, one could as easily inquire of Finney why the New Testament practice of baptism should not continue instead of being displaced by the anxious seat. But at least in my readings Finney is silent on these matters. Baptism certainly does not bear any prominent place for Finney in conversion and its aftermath, and cannot be said to be in any critical way related to it.

The Timeframe of Conversion

Finney strongly emphasizes the immediacy of conversion. It is so central as to characterize a primary component of Finney’s model of conversion (*immediate ongoing human decisionism*). There is never reason to delay. Such a view is inherent to Finney’s previously described position, since the need to delay would imply some limitation of the sinner in responding to the gospel. The call to conversion demands an immediate response. The timeframe is always *now*.

Finney is critical of those who give false comfort by telling sinners that conversion is a progressive work. Such preachers reject sudden conversions, and suggest that people “get better by degrees.” Finney rejects this approach entirely. “All this is false as the bottomless pit,” he writes.³⁰³ “Regeneration, or conversion, is *not* a progressive work,”

³⁰² *LOR*, 268-69.

³⁰³ *LOR*, 338.

Finney insists. To think of it as progressive is “absurd.” What is regeneration if not “the *beginning* of obedience to God? And is the beginning of a thing progressive? It is the first act of genuine obedience to God – the first voluntary action of the mind that is what God approves, or that can be regarded as obedience to God. That is conversion.”³⁰⁴

Finney expects conversion to take place quickly in circumstances where the gospel is preached clearly. He always urges his listeners to repent *here* and *now*. “If there be sinners in this house, and you see your duty clearly, TAKE CARE how you delay. If you do not submit, you may expect the Spirit of God will forsake you, and you are LOST.”³⁰⁵ There are some who acknowledge that God is at work through revivals, for example, but think that “perhaps it is quite as well to have sinners converted and brought into the church in a more quiet and gradual way.” Such types, Finney adds, “think it so much safer and better, to indoctrinate the people, and spread the matter before them in a calm way, and to bring them in gradually, and not run the danger of having animal feeling or wildfire in their congregations.”³⁰⁶ Such people for Finney do not acknowledge the *necessity* of revivals, and the immediate nature of their work. Or some might advise an anxious sinner to set aside their concerns for the present and wait on God. Finney mocks this approach, suggesting that such types “have assumed to be so much wiser than God, that when God is dealing with a sinner, by his Spirit, and endeavoring to bring him to an *immediate* decision; they think God is crowding too hard, and that it is necessary for them to interfere.” They then find reasons for the sinner to delay his or her decision, when in fact “the proper course to take with a sinner, when the striving of the Spirit throws him into distress, is, to *instruct* him, to clear up his views, correct his mistakes, and make the

³⁰⁴ LOR, 338-39.

³⁰⁵ LOR, 379 (capitalization his).

³⁰⁶ LOR, 315.

way of salvation so plain that he can see it right before him.”³⁰⁷ This approach leads to an immediate response.

Finney argues that to delay that response is virtually never advisable, and may result in the sinner never returning to such a point of decision. To any inclined to wait on God Finney writes, “God comes with pardon in one hand, and a sword in the other, and tells the sinner to repent and receive pardon, or refuse and perish.” The choice is a simple and present one. But “now here comes a minister of the gospel, and tells the sinner to ‘wait God’s time.’ Virtually he says, that God is not ready to have him repent *now*, and is not ready to pardon him *now*, and thus, in fact, throws off the blame of his impenitence upon God.” According to Finney, such ministers need something like “the rebuke of Elijah when he met the priests of Baal.”³⁰⁸

As was seen above, the use of means should never interfere in, but rather encourage, the immediacy of the response of a sinner to the gospel call of obedience. Means are for use in bringing a sinner to conversion, and not for use by the sinner – which can only distract from immediate submission to God. That is what is needed. Such an approach also rejects “telling the sinner to *pray for a new heart*.”³⁰⁹ This is only again another diversion from immediate repentance and turning over one’s heart to God. Finney’s approach also rejects “telling the sinner to *persevere*.”³¹⁰ For Finney this is like telling the sinner to continue in his or her sin. Finney here appears somewhat reminiscent of Edwards’ discussion of false religious affections. Finney is perceptive of all the ways a

³⁰⁷ *LOR*, 339.

³⁰⁸ *LOR*, 342.

³⁰⁹ *LOR*, 344.

³¹⁰ He continues on this point later, writing, “God calls the sinner to repent, he threatens him, he draws the glittering sword, he persuades him, he uses motives, and the sinner is distressed to agony, for he sees himself driven to the dreadful alternative of giving up his sins or going to hell. He ought instantly to lay down his weapons, and break his heart at once. But he resists, and struggles against conviction, and that creates his distress. Now will you tell him to persevere? Persevere in what? In struggling against God!” *LOR*, 345.

sinner may be self-deceived, and refuses to tolerate excuses for delaying one's immediate response to the gospel call when, in fact, one has the capacity to do so.

Conversion is instantaneous and concurrent with the moment the sinner ceases in rebelling against God and submits to him. Such a sinner "ceases, from that moment, to be a rebel in his heart, just as soon as he comes to this conclusion. So it is with the sinner when he yields the point, and consents in his heart to do, and be, whatever God shall require."³¹¹

All the means discussed above are to work toward this immediate response, and never are to be used in any way to delay such a response. So in the use of prayer for sinners, one "should pray that they may be converted *there*. Not pray that they may be awakened and convicted, but pray that they may be converted on the spot."³¹² Likewise in preaching, preachers should use the best means available under any given circumstances to convert the sinner "upon the spot."³¹³ They should try to convince the sinners immediately to convert, just as one would in arguing on any other point.

Finney's new measures are no different. Their purpose is immediate conversion. Anxious meetings, for example, can take two forms. One can talk briefly with each anxious sinner present and then make remarks to the group to remove their objections, or one can talk at length individually with each one. The goal of both, however, is the same – "to lead them immediately to Christ."³¹⁴ The anxious seat is likewise a provocation to

³¹¹ *LOR*, 369.

³¹² He continues, "No one should either pray or make any remarks, as if he expected a single sinner would go away without giving his heart to God. You should all make the impression on his mind, that NOW he must submit." *LOR*, 139.

³¹³ *LOR*, 40. See also 206-207.

³¹⁴ *LOR*, 262. In a footnote McLoughlin notes, "As Albert Dod pointed out in his review of these lectures, Finney's critics did not object to Anxious Meetings as such, for they had been long used in New England. They merely objected to Finney's manner of conducting them, and particularly to his demand for immediate conversion by the anxious sinner." *LOR*, 262, fn. 13. This immediatism was clearly a point of

immediate response. In effect, it forces an anxious sinner to make a clear declaration one way or the other regarding the gospel, and denies the sinner the opportunity for passivity in the midst of the gospel call.

“FINALLY,” Finney writes, “never tell a sinner any thing, or give him any direction, that will lead him to stop short, or that does not include absolute submission to God. To let him stop at any point short of this, is infinitely dangerous.”³¹⁵ Because, as we have seen previously, one has the ability always to respond to the gospel call, there can never be any justification for delay, and at the very point of submission to God one is converted. Finney makes a multitude of similar statements, all insisting that conversion is immediate rather than gradual, and should always be sought with sinners without toleration of delay.³¹⁶

contention between Finney and his Calvinist critics. Hardman notes that for Finney the doctrine of election hinders preaching, because “it stifled seminary graduates in urging their congregations toward immediate response.” *Finney*, 282.

³¹⁵ *LOR*, 359 (capitalization his).

³¹⁶ Some further samples of such statements should make this apparent. “No direction should be given to a sinner, that *will leave him still in the gall of bitterness* and the bonds of iniquity. No answer is proper to be given, with which, if he complies, he would not go to heaven, if he should die the next moment.” *LOR*, 363. “Any direction given to sinners, that does not require them *immediately* to obey God, is an indulgence to sin. It is in effect, giving them liberty to continue in sin against God. Such directions are not only wicked, but ruinous and cruel. If they do not destroy the soul, as no doubt they often do, they *defer*, at all events, the sinner’s enjoyment of God and of Christ.” *LOR*, 379. “Sinners are expected to repent NOW.” *LOR*, 206 (capitalization his). Sinners need to know they have something to *do* immediately. “Religion is something to *do*, not something to *wait for*. And they must do it now [repent], or they are in danger of eternal death.” *LOR*, 207. For the sinner “another moment’s delay, and it may be too late for ever. The Spirit of God may depart from you—the offer of life may be made no more, and this one more slighted offer of mercy may close up your account, and seal you over to all the horrors of eternal death.” *Sermons*, 41-42. Finney may have tempered his views on immediatism somewhat later in his career. Hardman discusses this. By 1845 Finney was back in print on revivals, but now in a more critical form to counteract abuses and shortcomings in revival practices. He had a series of articles in the *Oberlin Evangelist* in 1845. Among other things, Finney asserted, in Hardman’s words, “that many evangelists were apparently interested chiefly in immediate results, or numbers, rather than in the permanence and stability of their converts.” *Finney*, 382. He also argued “that recent evangelists relied on their own persuasive power over an audience to get them to express a desire for change, rather than relying upon the power of God. This would be a fundamental fault, Finney believed, in that at the outset an evangelist would not impress upon an audience that only God can bring about any true and complete conversion.” 382. Hardman notes that this is virtually a criticism of Finney’s own earlier views. 382-83.

The Authentication of Conversion

How can one ascertain the authenticity of these immediate experiences of conversion? Are there marks of true conversion? How does one know if one is a Christian? The Bible, Finney states, “enjoins it as an imperative duty” to answer this last question.³¹⁷ Like Edwards before him, Finney looks to the fruit of one’s life to determine the answer. The Bible insists on “the necessity of a holy life, if we think of ever getting to heaven.”³¹⁸ And the measurement of one’s holiness, of the fruit of one’s life, is simply obedience. Obedience lies at the core of conversion. Everyone who has truly repented and submitted to God will display obedience to God’s law. “Repentance consists in the turning of the soul from a state of selfishness to benevolence, from disobedience to God’s law, to obedience to it.”³¹⁹

Such obedience cannot be reduced simply to external actions. For Finney one’s moral nature is always bound up with one’s intentions. Hence the real question for Finney is, “What are evidences of a change in the ultimate intention? What is evidence that benevolence is the ruling choice, preference, intention of the soul?” This is not always immediately obvious, since the experience and outer life of saints and sinners may be alike in several areas, in areas where “the attitude of their will” is not immediately apparent.³²⁰ Finney argues that it is part of the constitutional nature of all moral agents to “approve of what is right and disapprove of what is wrong,” and thus “both saints and sinners may both approve of and delight in goodness.”³²¹ They may share a desire for

³¹⁷ *LST*, 302.

³¹⁸ *LOR*, 142.

³¹⁹ *LST*, 122.

³²⁰ *LST*, 286.

³²¹ *LST*, 287.

their own or others' happiness, and a dread of misery for either, or for the triumph of truth and righteousness. They may both equally admire and approve of the character of good individuals. They can both abhor sin, or delight in justice or in truth. They may both be fair in business. There remains, however, a key difference between them.

Although they may both share the same outward actions, "the sinner is constrained by his feelings to do what the saint does from principle, or from obedience to the law of his intelligence."³²² That is to say, sinners often do good things because it makes them feel good, not because they know it to be the right thing to do because of their understanding and appreciation of the law. They are then only honoring and obeying themselves and their own desires, rather than God.³²³

In spite of external ambiguities, Finney says that "as a general thing, it is easy to distinguish sinners, or deceived professors from saints by looking steadfastly at their temper and deportment in their relations to reform. They are self-indulgent."³²⁴ The true saint, on the other hand, "denies himself." It is the essence of regeneration that a saint is oriented to the greatest good of being, and thus does not act out of self-gratification. Even if this self-denial is not always apparent on the outside, internally "self-denial consists in

³²² *LST*, 291.

³²³ Finney writes, "Many professors of religion, it is to be feared, have supposed religion to consist in desires and feelings, and have entirely mistaken their own character." He adds, "It is infinitely important, that both professors of religion and non-professors, should understand more than most of them do of their mental constitution, and of the true nature of religion." *LST*, 288. Later he clarifies this difference between saints and sinners further. "The Christian is such just because he has become the master of his appetites and passions, has denied them, and consecrated himself to God. The sinner is a sinner just because his appetites and passions and the impulses of his desires are his masters, and he bows down to them, and serves them. They are his masters instead of his servants, as they are made to be. He is consecrated to them and not to God." *LST*, 299. Finney, then, is quite opposed to any conception of Christian hedonism, such as might be expressed today by someone like John Piper. "It should be forever remembered, that a self-indulgent Christian is a contradiction." *LST*, 299. His view in some ways is reminiscent of a Kantian ethic, wherein acts can only be good if done from duty.

³²⁴ *LST*, 297.

the actual and total renunciation of selfishness in the heart.”³²⁵ Both a king and a poor man can live either for the good of all or for self-gratification.³²⁶

This being said, Finney stresses the countercultural, counter-worldly message of Christianity. Christians should show the impenitent "the *great difference* between them and Christians."³²⁷ Christians should be “living above the world.” They should not try to conform Christianity to the world, but instead conform individuals to the demands of Christianity. This contrast is itself a sign of authentic conversion. Finney lists several specific biblical truths to which a Christian should testify, including the immortality of the soul, the vanity of all earthly goods, the “glorious sufficiency of religion,” “the guilt and danger of sinners,” the reality of hell, Christ’s love for sinners, the necessity of a holy life for going to heaven, the necessity of self-denial, and of “meekness, heavenly-mindedness, humility, and integrity.” In short, there is “the necessity of an entire renovation of character and life, for all who would enter heaven.”³²⁸

Christians should appear and act differently from others. Finney often seems less interested in what individuals *profess*; what is important is what people *do*. True Christians distinguish themselves not by profession of right doctrines, but rather “by *precept and example*, on every proper occasion, by their lips, but mainly by their lives.” They certainly ought to profess the truths of Christianity; “Christians have no right to be silent with their lips; they should rebuke, exhort, and entreat with all long-suffering and doctrine.”

However, this alone cannot distinguish true Christians from hypocrites. Finney repeats the old adage, “Actions speak louder than words.”³²⁹ The elect are “known by their

³²⁵ *LST*, 298.

³²⁶ *LST*, 298-99.

³²⁷ *LOR*, 146.

³²⁸ *LOR*, 142.

³²⁹ *LOR*, 142.

character and conduct.”³³⁰ Authentication of conversion comes through evidence in one’s actions, and one’s motivations.

Later in *Lectures on Revivals* Finney details further the signs of faith. The presence of faith is indicated by a person’s greater purity and singleness of heart in his or her desire to glorify God and save souls. There should be a greater love for God, and for other people. A converted person should demonstrate greater self-abasement and humility. Other evidences include a greater abhorrence of sin, “less relish for the world,” a greater delight in fellowship with other Christians, a more forgiving spirit, growth in charity, less anxiety about worldly things, greater willingness to give away one’s property, having no separate interest apart from Christ, more willingness to confess one’s faults in front of others, and being raised more and more above the world such that one cares less about its opinions of oneself.³³¹

A final, but noteworthy characteristic of the converted is their reforming instinct. Perhaps as much describing himself, Finney writes, “Saints are interested in, and sympathize with, every effort to reform mankind, and promote the interests of truth and righteousness in the earth. The good of being is the end for which the saint really and truly lives.” The notion of a ruling benevolence for all cannot be just a theory, but must take hold of one’s heart, which leads necessarily to the reformation of society in all ways necessary to improve the lot of humanity. Far from being disinterested, spiritually content observers, “as saints supremely value the highest good of being, they will, and must, take a deep interest in whatever is promotive of that end. Hence, their spirit is necessarily that

³³⁰ *LST*, 459.

³³¹ *LOR*, 454. The discussion of all of these signs of faith appears on 450-57.

of the reformer.”³³² Finney insists that “true saints love reform. It is their business, their profession, their life to promote it.”³³³

The person who exhibits these many signs without and motivational transformation within can be at peace within, even amidst occasional conflicts of feelings and desire. In such a person, “conscious as he is of conformity of heart to the moral law, he cannot but affirm to himself, that the Lawgiver is pleased with his present attitude.” The Spirit witnesses that the person is God’s child. Such persons know that they are pleasing God, and that they have “God’s smile of approbation.”³³⁴ This peace of God exists in them because they “and God are pursuing precisely the same end, and by the same means.”³³⁵

If this peace is the result of true conversion, what of those who doubt? “Ordinarily,” Finney writes, “the very idea of a person’s expressing doubts, renders his piety truly doubtful.”³³⁶ In fact, Finney suggests that the best course of action when encountering doubters is to encourage their doubts further.³³⁷ Otherwise such individuals may be self-deceived as to their status before God. Finney seems even to disdain doubt, and is *undoubtedly* troubled by the ambiguity in the status of a doubter. He also suggests, rather pragmatically, that “it is inconsistent with the greatest usefulness, for a Christian to be always entertaining doubts. It not only makes him gloomy, but it renders his religion a

³³² *LST*, 295.

³³³ *LST*, 296.

³³⁴ *LST*, 294.

³³⁵ *LST*, 295.

³³⁶ *LOR*, 387.

³³⁷ “A real Christian has no need to doubt. And when one is full of doubts, ordinarily you ought to doubt for him and help him doubt.” *LOR*, 387.

stumbling block to sinners.”³³⁸ Yet because there are those who are uncertain, Finney on more than one occasion explores marks of a lack of true faith in the sinner.

We cannot be certain, but because of the many descriptions of reprobates in the Bible “we may form a pretty correct opinion, whether we or those around us are reprobates or not.”³³⁹ Signs of an unregenerate state include long prosperity in sin, “habitual neglect of the means of grace,”³⁴⁰ those who grow old in sin, the absence of God’s discipline or chastisement, people who remain unreformed/unchanged even after chastening, and “embracing damnable heresies.”³⁴¹ The unregenerate also lose their desire for heartfelt discussions of faith, and lose their inclination for public or private duties of devotion. In those inclinations they retain they become hypocritical and take “more delight in public meetings than in private duties and secret communing with God.” They feel “less delight in revivals of religion,” and become more “captious about measures used in promoting revivals.”³⁴² They also do not display the regenerate tendency toward reform and the improvement of the world. “The sinner,” Finney writes, “is never a reformer in any proper sense of the word.”³⁴³ The sinner may seek reform outwardly at times, but always does so for selfish reasons. He does not do so for principle but for feelings or sensibility.

All of this reflects the lack of change in one’s inner motivations. Unlike the disinterested benevolence that marks the heart and motivations of a regenerate person, all unregenerate persons have a heart of selfishness, which leads them always to self-

³³⁸ *LOR*, 387.

³³⁹ *LST*, 471.

³⁴⁰ *LST*, 472.

³⁴¹ *LST*, 473.

³⁴² *LOR*, 464.

³⁴³ *LST*, 297. Hardman notes, “To help cure the world’s sickness, full and dedicated service from each child of God was the inevitable consequence of true faith. If, therefore, a person did little for the kingdom, his or her salvation was certainly in question.” *Finney*, 255.

gratification in all their choices. And unlike the role of reason and law in the regenerate, the sinner, as we have seen above, is not governed by reason, but feeling, which never results in morally praiseworthy actions since the intention behind them are selfish.

Finney argues that this is a great problem especially among those influenced by revivals. They are brought by great emotion to act in ways consistent with the Christian life – giving money and time to the cause of Christ, and are fully convinced that they have experienced conversion, but it is a “deep delusion,” and they are still “governed by their feelings” instead of their intelligence controlling their will. When the feelings die down, they revert to previous behaviors.³⁴⁴ The sinner is, after all, finally a slave to sin. “The seventh of Romans,” Finney says, “is his experience in his best estate.”³⁴⁵

There are others who have a conversion experience or response to the gospel and yet “seem to be stillborn” rather than born again. Finney writes that “we may charitably hope they are Christians, but still it is uncertain and doubtful. Their conversion seems rather a change of opinion, than a change of heart.” Their conversion has been only one of assent, and has not been a transformation of their deepest motivations. That is why the manner of revivals is so important. One must recognize that at the right time, “if, when a sinner is under conviction, you pour in the truth, put in the probe, break up the old foundations, and sweep away his refuges of lies, and use the word of God, like fire and like a hammer, you will find that they will come out with clear views, and strong faith, and firm principles.” They will be soundly converted, secure in their faith, “not doubting, halting, irresolute Christians, but such as follow the Lord wholly.”³⁴⁶

³⁴⁴ *LST*, 291.

³⁴⁵ *LST*, 301.

³⁴⁶ *LOR*, 377.

Those uncertain of their condition need not remain in such a state. The best solution for individuals uncertain of their converted state is simply to repent immediately. “Whether you are a Christian or not, don’t stop to settle that, but repent, as if you never had repented.”³⁴⁷ Those unwilling to do this give evidence of their sinful state.³⁴⁸

According to Finney, a revival practice particularly helpful in the authentication of conversion is the anxious seat. Although some object to the seat as a cause of deception and delusion, Finney argues that it has the opposite effect on sinners. It calls forth those who are wavering, who may seem agreeable to the gospel message but are not wholly committed to it. Preach to the awakened sinner, and at that moment “he thinks he is willing to do any thing, he thinks he is determined to serve the Lord, but bring him to the test, call on him to do one thing, to take one step, that shall identify him with the people of God, or cross his pride, . . . and he refuses.” In effect the anxious seat calls a person’s bluff; “his delusion is brought out, and he finds himself a lost sinner still; whereas, if you had not done it, he might have gone away flattering himself that he was a Christian.” The anxious seat “prevents a great many spurious conversions, by showing those who might otherwise imagine themselves willing to do any thing for Christ, that in fact they are willing to do *nothing*.”³⁴⁹

Here again one can also see Finney’s emphasis on the immediacy of the decision. While Finney is probably correct in asserting that the anxious seat could prevent certain forms of self-delusion, one can certainly imagine it having the opposite effect. One could be so moved as to make a public commitment in a highly emotional context, and yet be

³⁴⁷ *LOR*, 103.

³⁴⁸ “If you will now submit yourselves to God, you may have evidence that you are elected. But every hour you put off submission, increases the evidence that you are not elected.” *LST*, 459.

³⁴⁹ *LOR*, 268.

deluded by and ever recall that particular experience of the moment as evidence that one is a Christian in spite of ongoing evidence to the contrary.

Finney emphasizes in no uncertain terms that some of the greatest difficulties regarding the authentication of conversion stem from Calvinist notions of depravity. “This notion of physical depravity, and physical regeneration, and physical sanctification is the great curse of the church.”³⁵⁰ It is the cause of a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of saving faith, substituting passivity and waiting on God for an active obedience to the law of God. Finney considers it “a false philosophy of the mind, especially of the will, and of moral depravity.” This problematic view “has covered the world with gross darkness on the subject of sin and holiness, of regeneration, and of the evidences of regeneration, until the true saints, on the one hand, are kept in a continual bondage to their false notions; and on the other, the church swarms with unconverted professors, and is cursed with many self-deceived ministers.”³⁵¹

Such a view, in Finney’s eyes, prevents regenerate Christians from thinking obedience to God’s law is possible, and deceives unregenerate individuals from requiring obedience of themselves as an indication and requirement of conversion. The notion of physical depravity serves as the great excuser of non-obedience. It teaches that virtue consists in something other than obedience to the law. Even though “it is generally asserted in their articles of faith, that obedience to moral law is the only proper evidence of a change of heart,” many people believe that anyone who claims to keep the moral law is a hypocrite or heretic. Those believing this are generally considered orthodox Christians, and they “must assume that there is some rule of right, or of duty, besides the

³⁵⁰ *LOR*, 467.

³⁵¹ *LST*, 293.

moral law; or that virtue, or true religion, does not imply obedience to any law.”³⁵²

Finney vigorously denies this, and argues that there is no other duty or law of right besides the moral law, and that only in keeping the moral law does God’s government consider a person virtuous or truly religious. Although some suggest that such a state of non-obedience can result in the growth of faith, Finney exclaims, “The idea that persons grow in grace during seasons of declension, is abominable.”³⁵³

For Finney obedience to God is not only possible, but is also total. One who has submitted to God will obey God, and obey God completely. There can be no confusion in one’s moral activities and motivations. The Calvinist model has caused many to believe this is not possible. “The idea has so long prevailed, that we *cannot be perfect here*, that many professors do not so much as seriously aim at a sinless life. They cannot honestly say, that they ever so much as really meant to live without sin.” There is neither the reality, nor even the intention, to be sinless, but rather the expectation that since this is not possible, sin is ever mixed with righteousness. Such professors “drift along before the tide, in a loose, sinful, unhappy and abominable manner, at which, doubtless, the devil laughs, because it is, of all others, the surest way to hell.”³⁵⁴

Such a perspective is directly contrary to the very nature of religion. “What is religion,” Finney declares, “but a supreme purpose of heart or disposition to obey God? If there is not this, there is no religion at all.”³⁵⁵ Basic to the very core of any true Christian is (at the least) an intention to obey God in all things. No real Christian can hope to approach God with only some kind of partial submission to God’s will.

³⁵² *LST*, 121.

³⁵³ *LOR*, 466.

³⁵⁴ *LOR*, 146.

³⁵⁵ *LOR*, 419-20.

The severity with which Finney argues this point varies. Early on he seems content to describe such total obedience in terms of intention only.³⁵⁶ Young converts, for example, are to “*aim at being perfect*. Every young convert should be taught, that if it is not his *purpose* to live without sin, he has not yet began to be religious.”³⁵⁷ Since young converts may have many points on which they remain ignorant, they must be allowed to grow and be directed into greater righteousness. Other Christians must then “*point out things that are faulty in the young convert* which he does not see” since “he is but a child, and knows but little about religion.”³⁵⁸ Implicitly such a position suggests that all intentions, if not all actions, be sinless.

Ultimately, however, Finney concludes explicitly that there can be no mixture whatsoever of sinful moral actions with obedience. There is no such thing as partial obedience. “The only sense,” Finney qualifies, “in which obedience to moral law can be partial is, that obedience may be intermittent. That is, the subject may sometimes obey, and at other times disobey.”³⁵⁹ “Present evangelical faith,” Finney reasserts, “implies a state of present sinlessness.”³⁶⁰ This must be so, if the whole will is dedicated to Christ. In fact, no one can be justified while remaining in sin, “either upon legal or gospel principles, unless the law be repealed.”³⁶¹ The ramifications of this view will be explored further below in examining the permanence of conversion, but at present it must be stated clearly that Finney has no toleration for any mixture of intentions, nor of moral actions. At any given moment an individual is either in a state of total obedience or disobedience. “The

³⁵⁶ Given Finney’s own terms, this is a rather incoherent position. If all have the ability to obey, then certainly anyone who actually intends to obey does so.

³⁵⁷ *LOR*, 419.

³⁵⁸ *LOR*, 424.

³⁵⁹ *LST*, 120.

³⁶⁰ *LST*, 355.

³⁶¹ *LST*, 126.

theory of the mixed character of moral actions, is an eminently dangerous theory” since “it leads its advocates to place the standard of conversion, or regeneration, exceedingly low—to make regeneration, repentance, true love to God, faith, etc., consistent with the known or conscious commission of present sin.”³⁶² As in a variety of other areas of Finney’s thought, there can be no ambiguity here.

Even in his earlier *Lectures on Revivals* Finney makes this quite clear in the following striking passage. “Obedience to God consists in an obedient state of heart, a preference of God’s authority and commandments to every thing else.” Such a preference cannot be partial. “If, therefore, an individual *appears* to obey in some things, and yet perseveringly and knowingly disobeys in any one thing, he is deceived. He offends in one point, and this proves that he is guilty of all; in other words, that he does not, *from the heart*, obey at all.”³⁶³ Finney’s standard is perfection, and his logic tends toward the view that any true Christian should be perfect.

Authentication, Sanctification, and Perfectionism (Entire Sanctification)

What is implicit in Finney’s early theology soon becomes explicit and remains a key part of his theology for the rest of his life. A perfected life is the ultimate authenticator of conversion, and Christians are called to and capable of perfection, of a sinless state.³⁶⁴ “The truly regenerate soul,” Finney declares, “overcomes sin.”³⁶⁵ Cooper considers this

³⁶² *LST*, 120.

³⁶³ *LOR*, 415.

³⁶⁴ The notion of perfectionism we now explore is to be distinguished from a present or momentary sense of perfectionism, which as we have seen is present at any given moment that an individual is in obedience and submission to God’s law. What is now referred to is an *enduring* state of perfection. There is much that could be said and debated in regard to the subject of Finney’s perfectionism, however this takes us beyond the scope of this dissertation. Although I will discuss a variety of points related to perfectionism, it is not my intent to explain its every dimension or resolve every question related to it.

³⁶⁵ *LST*, 300.

perfectionist teaching “the most controversial novelty flowing from Finney’s theological outlook.”³⁶⁶ Whether or not one agrees with this assessment, it is certainly a striking feature of his thought that flows logically from his other beliefs and assumptions.

Finney and others at Oberlin began to stress the doctrine of perfectionism in the fall of 1836. Hardman notes that, as was true with Finney, “much of Burned-over District perfectionism differed little from traditional Methodist teaching stemming from John Wesley, and this can be seen as one contributing source, but unquestionably there were other sources, now lost to history.”³⁶⁷ It is worth noting that Finney sees his perfectionist theology not in opposition to Calvinism, but following from it.³⁶⁸ Since, in Finney’s view, it is always possible through natural ability not to sin, then it must be at least theoretically possible to be totally sanctified, since it is within one’s power. Even many moderate Calvinists have typically agreed to this.

Even from the first pages of his *Lectures on Systematic Theology* Finney wants to press to their logical conclusions the truths and consequences of various doctrines, foremost among them “that the will is free, and that sin and holiness are voluntary acts of mind.”³⁶⁹ For Finney every command of God implies the human capacity to fulfill the command. If God commands us to love him with all heart, mind, strength, and soul, then it must be

³⁶⁶ Cooper, *Great Revivalists*, 71.

³⁶⁷ *Finney*, 324. Hardman considers other sources for Finney’s and Oberlin’s perfectionism, apart from Methodism, on 324-28. By 1840 Finney was teaching a form of perfectionism very clearly, although he sought to distinguish it from both Wesleyan perfectionism, and from other radical expressions of perfectionism such as those of John Humphrey Noyes (founder of two different “communities” (Oneida Commune) and holder of odd views on perfectionism, and on “complex marriage” and other ideas. Hardman, 331-33. Finney is critical of the Wesleyan view for its disregard of the requirements of Old Testament law, which it dismisses. For more on the background of perfectionism, see Whitney R. Cross, *The Burned-Over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800-1850*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1965).

³⁶⁸ Hambrick-Stowe comments on this in *Charles Finney*, 182.

³⁶⁹ *LST*, 2.

possible to do so.³⁷⁰ Furthermore, every command can also be read as a promise. Passages like Deuteronomy 10:12³⁷¹ and 30:6³⁷² show that obedience to the law requires entire sanctification, and “if the law requires a state of entire sanctification... then this is a promise of entire sanctification,” since in Finney’s view God will never require that which we are unable to do. But “faith is an indispensable condition of the fulfillment of this promise. It is entirely impossible that we should love God with all the heart, without confidence in Him.”³⁷³

In similar fashion, by Finney’s explicitly stated logic, any promise can be read as a command since, “if His bountifulness equals His justice, His promises of grace must be understood to mean as much as the requirements of His justice;” what God promises to do also involves what we are capable of doing without our wills being violated. “It appears to be profane trifling, when such language is found in a promise, to make it mean less than it does when found in a command.”³⁷⁴

Finney declares that if what he has said is true, if only full obedience to God’s moral law is virtue, then “the church has fallen into a great and ruinous mistake, in supposing that a state of present sinlessness is a very rare, if not an impossible, attainment in this life.” Such an error “teaches us to hope for heaven, while living in conscious sin.”³⁷⁵ Such a state cannot indicate the presence of any saving faith or virtue.

³⁷⁰ *LST*, 382.

³⁷¹ “And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul” (ESV).

³⁷² “And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live” (ESV).

³⁷³ *LST*, 384.

³⁷⁴ *LST*, 385, 386.

³⁷⁵ *LST*, 128.

Finney provides several biblical passages that, “understood and pressed to the letter, would not only teach, that all regenerate souls overcome and live without sin, but also that sin is impossible to them.” For all such individuals born of God, “to overcome sin is the rule,” and to sin, on the other hand, “is only the exception.” The biblical image of the regenerate is that they “habitually live without sin, and fall into sin only at intervals, so few and far between, that in strong language it may be said in truth they do not sin.”³⁷⁶

Among those passages Finney uses in support for this doctrine is Eph. 4:15-19, which Finney terms “a very strong passage” supporting his perfectionist doctrine. “It asserts that abundant means are provided for the sanctification of the church in this life. And as the whole includes all its parts, there must be sufficient provision for the sanctification of each individual.”³⁷⁷ And since the means provided are meant for this life, then so is entire sanctification. He also considers Jer. 31:31-34 “undeniably a promise of entire sanctification.”³⁷⁸ Finney says that “the church, as a body, have certainly never received this new covenant [in Jer.],” but many individuals throughout its history have received it.³⁷⁹

Finney considers various other passages that he argues support entire sanctification without question.³⁸⁰ Finally, Finney considers Paul to be a supreme example of the attainability of perfection. Finney considers various writings of Paul to make the case that he considered himself entirely sanctified. He also considers passages

³⁷⁶ *LST*, 300. Finney continues on this point, “The fact is, if God is true, and the Bible is true, the truly regenerate soul has overcome the world, the flesh, and Satan, and sin, and is a conqueror, and more than a conqueror. He triumphs over temptation as a general thing, and the triumphs of temptation over him are so far between, that it is said of him in the living oracles, that he does not, cannot sin. He is not a sinner, but a saint.” 301.

³⁷⁷ *LST*, 383.

³⁷⁸ *LST*, 385.

³⁷⁹ *LST*, 386.

³⁸⁰ See, for example, *LST*, 386f. He includes passages such as Ezek. 36:25-27, I Thess. 5:23-24, Col. 3:12, and 2 Cor. 7:1.

that would tend to contradict the doctrine, notably Romans 7, which, he argues, is used as an illustration of the carnal state, and not as a description of Paul's sanctified state. It must stand in contrast to the entire sanctification indicated in Romans 8. He concludes, "In relation to the character of Paul, let me say: If Paul was not sinless, he was an extravagant boaster, and such language used by any minister in these days would be considered as the language of an extravagant boaster."³⁸¹

Denying the doctrine of perfectionism creates apathy about sin in the church, Finney asserts, and the effects of this denial can, in fact, be seen in the church in his day. He suggests that one must deal with sin as one would deal with the problem of alcohol; "total abstinence" is the only path to "high attainments in holiness."³⁸² In Finney's mind, to teach sanctification and not teach entire sanctification is like preaching only for the partial obedience of God. Does one implore Christians to more obedience at the same time as teaching that they are not expected to obey fully?

Finney's interpretations of biblical passages in support of his views on perfection are often less than convincing. Many of the passages urge hearers to obedience, but in Finney's reading all commands or urgings imply a capacity for perfection. He seems unable to acknowledge the possibility that even though we are called to full obedience, we will fall short and require God's grace. Such a reality does not remove the expectation of obedience; it only covers our failings in attaining it. In Finney's logic, however, such a scenario compromises the teaching of the Bible on the attainability of entire sanctification.

³⁸¹ *LST*, 403.

³⁸² *LST*, 395.

The Permanence of Conversion

Finney's views on the permanence of conversion, or what – in traditional Reformed terms – is termed the *perseverance of the saints*, are somewhat conflicted. Finney says he has “felt greater hesitancy in forming and expressing my views upon this, than upon almost any other question in theology. I have read whatever I could find upon both sides of this question, and have uniformly found myself dissatisfied with the arguments on both sides.” At times in his ministry he has nearly concluded “that the doctrine is not true.”³⁸³ But he cannot reconcile that position with the Bible. Therefore, as we will find, he attempts to hold together the biblical notion of God's secure election and his key beliefs in unfettered human ability and freedom – free from interference by any outside force. The success of that which comes out of this mix remains to be seen.

The Possibility of Permanence

Given Finney's prior theological commitments it must first be asked, how, even theoretically, in Finney's theological system is any notion of permanence possible? Put differently, how is there any place for ongoing sanctification or growth in character and virtue, or for total, enduring perfectionist obedience, if there is no change within individuals other than the choices they make at any given moment? How is sanctification or character *preserved* in the life of a Christian? Finney speaks of “a preference of the glory of God and the interests of his kingdom to one's own happiness” in the converted individual. He speaks of the weakening of old habits, and the strengthening of godly

³⁸³ *LST*, 510.

habits, and says that “every act of obedience to God strengthens this preference, and renders future obedience more natural.” How or where is this preference strengthened and preserved? At times he seems to consider this preference as somehow a feature of the individual. Unlike the self-interest expressed by the selfish heart, for example, “a new heart consists in a preference of the glory of God and the interests of his kingdom to one’s own happiness.” A sinner’s “own selfish *orientation*” runs opposite to God’s desires. Christians must “change our *moral character*; our *moral disposition*; in other words, . . . change that *abiding preference* of our minds, which prefers sin to holiness.”³⁸⁴ Finney says this is a change of the *end* of our actions, not the *means* by which we might seek such an end. But how do such changed preferences *abide*?

In similar fashion, one wonders how “the saints persevere,” as Finney writes, “not by virtue of a constitutional change,” but by the abiding and indwelling influence of the Holy Spirit.”³⁸⁵ Exactly where does the Spirit *abide*? If such possible inconsistencies imply Finney’s uncertainty over an actual or constitutional change of some kind in sanctification, Finney’s overt statements indicate otherwise. It is only a change of intention, of ruling principle. “By principle,” Finney writes, “I do not mean a seed, or sprout or root, or any thing created and put into the soul. It is all nonsense to talk about such kind of holiness, or such a principle as that.” It is rather “a controlling determination in the mind to *do right*.”³⁸⁶ It is willing to follow the principle of God’s benevolence over selfishness, this and nothing more.

Finney suggests that Christians, especially new Christians, be taught to *expect* to persevere. One must not tell converts that they must walk by faith, not sight, as an excuse

³⁸⁴ *Sermons*, 10, 16, 10, 33 (emphasis mine), 8 (emphasis mine).

³⁸⁵ *LST*, 513.

³⁸⁶ *LOR*, 451.

for them not to *practice* their faith. In Finney's view, this is to tell them, essentially, that "you must learn to get as cold as death, and then hang on to the doctrine of the Saint's Perseverance, as your only ground of hope that you shall be saved." Immediately one sees that perseverance means something different for Finney than a typical Reformed view in which it is God who actively preserves the saint in salvific faith by grace. Finney can find in such a view only antinomianism. He mocks, "*Cease to persevere and then hold on to the doctrine of perseverance....* It is not faith, it is *presumption*, that makes a backslider hold on to the doctrine of perseverance as if that would save him, without any sensible exercises of godliness in his soul.... Faith without works is dead."³⁸⁷ Works can never become detached from any discussion of perseverance.

As regards the human then, perseverance is something active rather than passive. It is that same active obedience that brings one to perfection. And as was mentioned in that discussion of perfectionism above, Finney insists that there can be no such thing as partial obedience, "*in the sense that the subject ever does, or can, partly obey and partly disobey at the same time.*" If consecration is real it is total. One can only will one ultimate end at any given moment. "Sin is the supreme preference of self-gratification. Holiness is the supreme preference of the good of being."³⁸⁸ These two preferences cannot exist at the same time. Furthermore, Christ himself "has expressly taught that nothing is regeneration, or virtue, but entire obedience, or the renunciation of all selfishness. 'Except a man forsake all that he hath, he cannot be My disciple' (Luke 14:33)."³⁸⁹ Finney argues for the all or nothing nature of obedience and virtue on multiple occasions. He absolutely denies that "selfishness and benevolence can coexist in the same mind." He also denies that an

³⁸⁷ *LOR*, 397.

³⁸⁸ *LST*, 104.

³⁸⁹ *LST*, 119.

act or choice can “have a complex character, on account of complexity in the motives which induce it.” He argues that there can be no ambiguity in the ultimate end chosen. Sin and holiness “cannot by any possibility, coexist.”³⁹⁰

As in sanctification, regeneration “implies an entire present change of moral character, that is, a change from entire sinfulness to entire holiness.”³⁹¹ Because there can be no mixing of these states, for Finney one is always completely sanctified or completely sinful at any given moment. Therefore it would seem that there can be no sense of the perseverance of the saints. One is gaining or losing one’s salvation constantly, at any given moment, unless one reaches a state of perfection, and even that state is not secure. At times Finney attempts to avoid this scenario by insisting that the growth in grace that occurs in Christians is a growth in knowledge which a Christian constantly incorporates into one’s actions as one lives out one’s love for God. The love is total, but the knowledge is partial.³⁹² At other times Finney overtly embraces the scenario. If there can never be any kind of substantial, constitutional, or material change in a person in conversion – nothing but a change in one’s own, inviolate will, then how are converted individuals at any given moment not always in the identical place of the unconverted in choosing for Christ or themselves?

Indeed it appears that, for Finney, this is precisely the place of Christians. “The Christian... is justified no longer than he obeys, and must be condemned when he

³⁹⁰ *LST*, 109. This point is made directly and indirectly throughout the book in various ways. For example, “In short, let any one attribute of benevolence be destroyed or overlooked, and you have destroyed its perfection, its beauty, its harmony, its propriety, its glory. You have, in fact, destroyed benevolence.” 161. In *LOR*, one can read of “the necessity of an *entire* renovation of character and life, for all who would enter heaven.” 142 (emphasis mine).

³⁹¹ *LST*, 276-77.

³⁹² “This does not imply that there is yet sin remaining in the regenerate heart which we are required to put away by degrees.” *LST*, 277. Sinless perfection is still required, but its outward expression is limited by one’s knowledge.

disobeys.” “Until he repents,” Finney declares, “he cannot be forgiven. In these respects, then, *the sinning Christian and the unconverted sinner are upon precisely the same ground.*” When a Christian sins he is under the condemnation of the law, because the law of God cannot be abrogated. The Christian sinner is different from an unconverted sinner in that “a Christian is a child of God. A sinning Christian is a disobedient child of God. An unconverted sinner is a child of the devil.” As a child of God, Finney writes, a “Christian sustains a covenant relation to God; such a covenant relation as to secure to him that discipline which tends to reclaim and bring him back, if he wanders away from God.”³⁹³ Essentially a Christian has some advantages that make it easier to turn away from sin, but while in sin a Christian – in Finney’s eyes, is not different than an unconverted sinner. “Whenever a Christian sins he comes under condemnation, and must repent and do his first works, or be lost.”³⁹⁴

Is there some way, then to bring about conversions that endure? It is certainly not, according to Finney, by preaching misleading models of perseverance. Christians must be taught the proper meaning of perseverance. This has not been done adequately in Finney’s view, since “it is astonishing how people talk about perseverance. As if the doctrine of perseverance was ‘Once in grace, always in grace,’ or ‘Once converted, sure to go to heaven.’” Instead Finney suggests that the true idea of perseverance is “that if a man is truly converted, he will CONTINUE to obey God. And as a *consequence*, he will

³⁹³ *LST*, 116 (emphasis mine).

³⁹⁴ *LST*, 128. He adds, “If a righteous man forsake his righteousness, and die in his sin, he must sink to hell.” 128. Or again, “Does a Christian cease to be a Christian, whenever he commits a sin? I answer... Whenever he sins, he must, for the time being, cease to be holy.” 116. Finney asks, “Can a man be born again, and then be unborn?” 117. Finney’s answer is YES. “If there were anything impossible in this, then perseverance would be no virtue. None will maintain, that there is anything naturally impossible in this, except it be those who hold to physical regeneration.” 117. Hardman notes that one of Finney’s clearest expressions of opposition to eternal security is found in a lecture in the *Oberlin Evangelist* on 12/16/1840 on I Cor. 10:12. Quoting Finney Hardman writes, “‘Nothing that grace has done, or ever will do for us, can render our perseverance in holiness *unconditionally* certain.’” *Finney*, 345.

surely go to heaven. But if a person gets the idea, that because he is converted, *therefore* he will assuredly go to heaven, that man will almost assuredly go to hell.”³⁹⁵ Perseverance, this passage makes clear, depends upon a Christian persevering, on continued obedience. The ordering here is indeed important; obedience and sanctification are not a consequence of conversion, but rather *the only validation of and justification for that state*. A Christian’s fate lies in that immediate, ongoing, human decisionism that we suggest characterizes Finney’s model. These human decisions are made in the present, and must continue to be made in every present moment of a Christian’s life. Any declaration, repentance, or commitment to God is rendered void by the sin of any given moment, and one must start again.

Perseverance depends ultimately on right teaching. In a manner similar to his claims regarding revivals, Finney suggests that if one teaches Christian converts properly, giving them the necessary biblical principles that result in right conduct, they can and will live out those principles. But, “if the education of young converts is defective, either in kind or degree, you will see it in their character all their lives. This is the philosophical [scientific] result, just what might be expected, and must be always so.”³⁹⁶ As with revivals, from the correct procedures come the right effects. However, after wrong instruction “they will be left justly in doubt whether they are Christians.”³⁹⁷

³⁹⁵ LOR, 415 (capitalization his).

³⁹⁶ He adds, “If the instruction given to young converts is not correct and full, they will not grow in grace, but their religion will dwindle away and decay. Their course instead of being like the path of the just, growing brighter and brighter to the perfect day, will grow dimmer and dimmer, and decay and finally perhaps go out in darkness.” Happily, in Finney’s view, there is another effect of right teaching. “If young converts are rightly instructed and trained, it will generally be seen that they will take the right side on all great subjects that come before the church.” LOR, 425. For Finney the divide between right and wrong is always clear, even on divisive issues.

³⁹⁷ LOR, 425.

Wrong instruction leaves the Christian at high risk of backsliding.³⁹⁸ Finney suggests that there are two kinds of backsliders. The first kind “*profess* religion, whether they *possess* it or not.” Perhaps they outwardly professed faith and joined a church, or expressed some other form or appearance of religion but likely were never actually converted. The second type of backslider describes one “who is truly converted and is a Christian, but has left his first love. His zeal has grown cold.”³⁹⁹ Such backsliders are “*worldly minded*,” and do not feel their hearts “drawn out in *painful anxiety and prayer in view of the state of the church*.”⁴⁰⁰ They must be *born again, again*. In essence, a backslider has lost the fervor of the heart in his or her Christian practices, and especially in his or her secret life before God.

Backsliders are a very unhappy lot, since “they neither enjoy God nor the world.” They are the “*most despicable of all people*,” despised by both Christians and non-Christians.⁴⁰¹ Finney considers them also to be the “*most inconsistent*,” hardest to please, “*most loathsome*,” “*most injurious*” to religion, and “*most hypocritical*.”⁴⁰² One must guard against backsliding from the beginning of conversion. Like an alcoholic having just one small drink, backsliding comes on with that first small sin. And like an alcoholic, the obviously safe method of avoiding backsliding is “TOTAL ABSTINENCE from sin.”⁴⁰³ In other words, the method is perfection, a sinless state.

³⁹⁸ Such converts “will inevitably backslide. If their instruction is defective, they will probably live in such a way as to disgrace religion.” *LOR*, 426.

³⁹⁹ *LOR*, 431.

⁴⁰⁰ *LOR*, 432.

⁴⁰¹ *LOR*, 440, 441.

⁴⁰² *LOR*, 442-43.

⁴⁰³ *LOR*, 445 (capitalization his).

There is some ambiguity in Finney's comments on the backslidden state. The converts of revivals are prone to "declension and backsliding."⁴⁰⁴ He says that in the midst of revivals Christians must regularly be "re-converted." This moves them out of a mechanistic mode of meeting Christian duties and reignites their hearts.⁴⁰⁵ What the status of such backsliders is salvifically is not in these references made clear, although one would assume – given his other statements on total obedience, etc. – that such backsliders would be in a state of condemnation before God.

Later, in *Lectures on Systematic Theology*, Finney considers some of those biblical figures that are suggested to be backsliders, notably King Saul, David, and Solomon. Finney suggests that Saul was never truly converted, and that David and Solomon ultimately did persevere in holiness. He is clearly not inclined to suggest that David, for example, had lost his salvation. He suggests as well that neither in contemporary cases of converted backsliders, or in other biblical examples, can the notion of perseverance be shown clearly to be false.⁴⁰⁶ He calls perseverance "an unalterable condition of justification," adding that "perseverance in faith and obedience is a condition, not of present, but of final or ultimate acceptance and salvation."⁴⁰⁷ In such a reference true perseverance can only be recognized by looking back, not by looking forward.

Finney's Arguments for Perseverance

Were it not for some material toward the end of *Lectures on Systematic Theology*, one would never conclude that Finney supports any notion of permanence in conversion.

⁴⁰⁴ *LOR*, 307.

⁴⁰⁵ *LOR*, 284.

⁴⁰⁶ *LST*, 557-68.

⁴⁰⁷ *LST*, 369.

However, here he turns, somewhat surprisingly, to a defense of the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints.⁴⁰⁸ In an effort to come to grips with the numerous scriptural passages pointing toward the security of salvation for the saints, Finney puts forth a positive assessment of the meaning of perseverance. In its essential form, the most this version of perseverance claims is that God assures that all who take hold of the means of salvation and live their lives in obedience are assured of their salvation. If one does x, y will follow. In such a scheme one's salvation is only as secure as one's performance in living a holy and obedient life.

Finney attempts to describe the manner in which one can say that a Christian's salvation is secure or certain. Making every effort to maintain previous assertions regarding the nature and freedom of human moral choices, Finney suggests that the certainty of salvation for true saints falls under a form he terms "moral certainty." These are certain events "conditioned upon, the free actions of moral agents. This class do not [sic] occur under the operation of a law of necessity, though they occur with certainty." He clarifies further that far from being a necessary certainty, "it is only a mere certainty, or a voluntary certainty, a free, certainty, a certainty that might, by natural possibility in every case, be no certainty at all." God knows these events through his foreknowledge, but does not make them certain. "They are certain in themselves."⁴⁰⁹ From the human perspective, there is also every chance that such events will not take place. There is, as he puts it, "the utmost danger, in the only sense in which there can be in fact any danger

⁴⁰⁸ As mentioned in the opening of this section, this was clearly a topic that produced some conflicts in his own understanding that he found difficult to resolve.

⁴⁰⁹ *LST*, 505.

that any event whatever will turn out differently from what it does, in the sense that it is not certain how it will be.”⁴¹⁰

Although such events and certainties are no certainty to humans, “God may foresee that so intricate is the labyrinth, and so complicated are the occasions of failure, that nothing but the utmost watchfulness and diligent use of means on His part, and on our part, can secure the occurrence of the event.”⁴¹¹ In such a way God knows the certainty of the final salvation of every elect saint, as the Bible teaches, even though, at the same time Christians may fear for their salvation. This certainty of God does not render the obedience of individuals more or less probable. The certainty offered by the doctrine is such that should cause one to take greater hold of the means, not less, as would a farmer assured of a good crop if diligent.⁴¹²

Finney writes, “Regeneration is represented as securing perseverance in obedience.”⁴¹³ Whereas earlier we saw Finney express regeneration as dependent upon perseverance and in some ways analogous to obedience, here Finney reverses the order, and makes perseverance inherent in regeneration.⁴¹⁴

Assessment

If, in mild contrast to *Lectures on Revivals*, Finney is more circumspect when discussing perseverance by the time of his *Lectures on Systematic Theology*, the same

⁴¹⁰ *LST*, 506.

⁴¹¹ *LST*, 506.

⁴¹² *LST*, 510.

⁴¹³ *LST*, 532.

⁴¹⁴ Finney later writes, “I know that to this it has been replied, that although nothing else can separate us from the love of God, yet we may separate ourselves from His love. To this I answer, true; we may, or can do so; but the question is, shall we, or will any of the elected and called do so? No, indeed; for this is the thing which the apostle intended to affirm, namely, the certainty of the salvation of all true saints.” As expressed there Finney in fact seems very close to Reformed doctrine. *LST*, 539.

controlling principles are present in both. The priority of the free and unencumbered human will, and the all or nothing character of human intentionality and obedience continue to be emphasized in the later book, even if some of Finney's other rhetoric regarding perseverance is toned down. Those principles that run throughout all of Finney's works seem to allow for only the weakest of conceptions of perseverance. Sin, any sin, breaks the relationship with God so completely that a sinning Christian is every bit as condemned as a non-Christian by God's law.

The perseverance of the saints is often termed eternal security. It is a doctrine that has been used by Luther and others as a great comfort for Christians, that they might look with confidence to God's firm and gracious grasp on their lives, rather than constantly questioning their own capacities and success in gaining God's approval. In Finney's hands, however, this doctrine does no such thing. In place of security it offers only insecurity, and an even greater emphasis on the necessity of one's constant and unflinching choice of holiness in one's life. In the context of perseverance Finney seems never to direct an individual toward God's grace and saving works; he never suggests one look to Christ's work on the cross, for example. The emphasis is always on human activity and choice – continued obedience and holiness. Although from a divine perspective Finney's doctrine offers certainty, from a human perspective it offers none. Any notion of perseverance that Finney provides dies the death of a thousand qualifications.

Consider, for example, what Finney overtly says is not meant by the perseverance of the saints. He does not mean "that any sinner will be saved without complying with the conditions of salvation; that is, without regeneration, and persevering in obedience to the end of life." The truly regenerate still have the natural possibility that they could fall from grace and be lost. He does not mean "that the true saints are in no danger of apostasy

and ultimate damnation.” He does not mean that, from a human perspective, some of the saints may not fall and be lost. He does not mean that salvation is possible apart from “great watchfulness and effort, and perseverance on their part, and great grace on the part of God.” He does not mean that the salvation of saints is certain, “in any higher sense than all their future free actions are.” Additionally, he says, “There is and must be, as much real danger of the saints failing of ultimate salvation, as there is that any event whatever will be different from what it turns out to be.”⁴¹⁵ It appears that for Finney, the perseverance of the saints offers no more assurance than one has about any of one’s other free acts in life. That is to say, one cannot differentiate Finney’s notion of perseverance, as a certainty of God’s foreknowledge, from an overall notion of God’s knowledge of the future and the certainty of all things that comes with it. The most that perseverance amounts to in Finney’s view involves the certainty of God’s foreknowledge, a foreknowledge that God has of every free or humanly uncertain act.

Similarly, Finney’s view of perseverance makes God’s role in election and perseverance essentially passive. God does not act on saints, or even actively choose them, but merely has knowledge of future events. God is a watcher and a knower but not a doer or active agent. This general principle of foreknowledge does not ever seem to translate into any kind of unique activity of God in holding the saints close to his breast.

Finney’s view of perseverance is consistent with our previous discussion of the nature of the change of conversion. The change of conversion is simply the change in one’s will and actions to follow God. To choose sin is to unconvert. Ultimately the idea of perseverance amounts to very little. The sinning Christian is in certain respects identical with the unconverted sinner, and in that moment destined as surely for hell as the sinner.

⁴¹⁵ *LST*, 508-509.

Perseverance becomes simply a *descriptive* phrase for certain humans rather than a *predictive* phrase or a *prescriptive* action (of God).

In sum, it is to Finney's credit that he attempts to incorporate the biblical teaching on perseverance into his theological system, but given his other theological commitments it cannot be maintained in any meaningful fashion. Finney tries to hold to some form of election and perseverance together with his views on nature of conversion and the priority of an unfettered human will, but he cannot. There is, in reality, no possible security or permanence in his conception of conversion, apart from that which depends on the continued performance of the human being in willing and doing good and maintaining holiness. There is no resting in God's grace for the Christian. Although God may be passive, the Christian never can be.

A Morphology of Conversion and the Ordo Salutis

Having viewed Finney's understanding of conversion through a variety of lens, we are now in a position to say something regarding his understanding of the order of salvation. Unlike Edwards, Finney spends little time considering directly any formal theological notion of the *ordo salutis*, nor does he address older Puritan notions of preparationism. However one can find clues, both explicit and implicit, for his views on these subjects. We turn first to an exploration of Finney's thoughts on any progression or morphology of conversion or need for preparation.

As has been demonstrated above, if Finney stresses anything regarding conversion, it is its immediacy. There is never good reason to delay for tomorrow one's response to the gospel call today. Thus Finney has little patience with those who might encourage

sinners to hesitate in any way while following some progression of steps to conversion. As is often the case, he seems to have in mind certain Calvinist trends and ideas, such as those that would indicate that some kind of waiting on God is necessary.⁴¹⁶

One should not pray for repentance, but simply repent immediately. Likewise, praying for the conviction or the Holy Spirit merely delays what one should do *now*. Nor should one “tell the sinner *he has not repented enough*. The truth is, he has not repented at all. God always comforts the sinner as soon as he repents.”⁴¹⁷

One must also not encourage sinners to think “that they must *suffer a considerable time under conviction*, as a kind of punishment, before they are ready properly to come to Christ.”⁴¹⁸ Long periods of conviction in the sinner are, in Finney’s view, the result of poor instruction. Finney believes that a sinner under conviction, when clearly and forcefully presented with the gospel, will accept or reject it rather quickly. “If he does not soon submit, his case his hopeless. Where the truth is brought to bear upon his mind, and he directly resists the very truth that must convert him, there is nothing more to be done. The Spirit will soon leave him.”⁴¹⁹

⁴¹⁶ Hambrick-Stowe writes, “Almost everyone was familiar with Jonathan Edwards’s edition of *The Life of David Brainerd*, first published in 1749 and still in print and enormously popular during Finney’s lifetime.” *Charles Finney*, 16. They considered Brainerd’s conversion story to be archetypal. Hambrick-Stowe notes that Finney read Edwards’ *Life of David Brainerd, Some Thoughts Concerning the Present Revival of Religion*, and *Religious Affections* (17). He suggests that Finney’s experience followed this long-established pattern going back to the Great Awakening (16). He argues that Finney was very tied to this Puritan conversion language and tradition, and that the Puritan language was engrained in the very culture of Finney’s day and sounded very natural (18). Finney’s conversion experience was typical, he knew, and “conforming also to the basic lines of the archetypal Puritan pattern, itself rooted in Scripture, Finney’s conversion in essence restated the tradition for his generation. He felt that what God had done in his heart was what God also wanted to do for others.” 19. While it is true that Finney’s own conversion reflects some of this classic Puritan pattern, Finney does not seem ever to use his own conversion as a model for his thinking, or recommend anything like the Puritan steps to others. As can be seen in this section, he seems – on the contrary – to be quite opposed to the notion.

⁴¹⁷ *LOR*, 349.

⁴¹⁸ *LOR*, 372.

⁴¹⁹ *LOR*, 378. He adds earlier, “People pray that sinners may *have more conviction*. Or, they pray that sinners may *go home solemn* and tender, and take the subject into consideration, instead of praying that they may *repent now*.... Instead of bringing them right up to the point of immediate submission, on the spot, it gives

In short, Puritan preparationism plays no part in Finney's views. Preparationism amounts to an unnecessary delay by a human subject who possesses already the capacity to respond to the gospel. It is an error for sinners to think first that "they must make themselves better, or prepare themselves" for conversion, or to look to any "legal course to get relief."⁴²⁰ Conversion is like sanctification, which is not attained through "a long introduction of preparatory exercises."⁴²¹ The problem is "voluntary selfishness," and the solution is voluntary as well – choose to turn and obey God.

Turning to his view of the *ordo salutis*, Finney himself shows no special attention to a formal order of salvation in his own writings, but still there is much one can say about his perspective, even if it cannot all be stated definitively. Any ordering scheme put forth to represent Finney must be qualified in several ways. Because of Finney's all or nothing approach to conversion and sanctification, almost any notion of order appears strained as the entire order is reduced or simplified to the voluntary act of any given moment. And because he believes the born again person can be *unborn*, any ordering must also be understood as reversible. Adding further confusion to any suggested scheme is the distinction Finney sometimes introduces between *present* and *permanent* sanctification and justification, which is considered further below.

[Election]

Repentance

Regeneration/Conversion

them time to breathe, it lets off all the pressure of conviction, and he breathes freely again and feels relieved, and sits down at his ease." 356. Elsewhere he writes, "An idea has prevailed in the church, that sinners must have a season of protracted conviction, and that those conversions that were sudden were of a suspicious character." Finney disagrees with this. "We nowhere in the Bible read of cases of lengthened conviction."

Sermons, 38.

⁴²⁰ *LOR*, 371.

⁴²¹ *LST*, 410.

Faith

Present Sanctification

Present Justification

Permanent Sanctification (Perfectionism)

Permanent Justification

Election is bracketed in this suggested order. Finney might claim that election is rightly first on such a list, and his statements toward the end of *Lectures on Systematic Theology* support his contention.⁴²² However, such a claim is, at best, dubious, given the conclusions arrived at in our previous section on the permanence of conversion. There is a passivity to God's work related to salvation; foreknowledge does not equal active election, and other central tenets of Finney's system are incompatible with the necessity of any active electing by God. In fact it becomes very difficult to require *any* special activity of God in this order, aside from his general revelatory activity that is available to all humanity – and thus an activity that is not unique to any salvific activity or order.

As is clear by now, for Finney the will plays a primary role in conversion. Thus when one considers the *ordo salutis*, it is the *choice* of a person that is critical to conversion. Repentance then, as a human act temporally and logically rises in this order above sanctification, above justification, even above regeneration.⁴²³ Repentance is the key moment of salvation.

⁴²² For example, he writes, "God by His own agency secures the conversion, sanctification, and salvation of all that ever were or will be saved." *LST*, 451. Finney declares the biblical doctrine of election to be "that all of Adam's race, who are or ever will be saved, were from eternity chosen by God to eternal salvation, through the sanctification of their hearts by faith in Christ. In other words, they are chosen to salvation by means of sanctification. Their salvation is the end—their sanctification is a means." *LST*, 449.

⁴²³ Finney is very clear about repentance preceding justification. He writes, "Repentance is also a condition of our justification... It must be certain that the government of God cannot pardon sin without repentance. This is as truly a doctrine of natural as of revealed religion. It is self-evident that, until the sinner breaks off

It is not quite as simple as this, however. There is a sense in which a part of this order of salvation is being constantly repeated in the life of a Christian, since for Finney every time a Christian chooses sin that person is – at that present moment – fully a sinner and even, it appears, outside of God’s grace. So repentance must constantly reoccur until a Christian reaches a state of entire sanctification or Christian perfection. At this point a Christian has become so sanctified as to never intentionally choose sin over obedience.

Because of this, Finney at times distinguishes between present and permanent sanctification and justification. In contrast to present sanctification, permanent sanctification is “a permanent state of obedience to God.” The distinction in justification is analogous. Present obedience to God is a condition of present justification, and the more permanent form (perfectionism) is a condition of permanent justification. A permanent state of sanctification “is doubtless a condition of permanent justification,” and it is this form of sanctification that the Bible speaks of as following after (present) justification, but this permanent state is “not a condition of present justification.”⁴²⁴

It should also be noted that although regeneration in this scheme is placed after repentance, they are virtually synonymous. For Finney regeneration *is* repentance (and conversion is regeneration). Because Finney is so insistent that there can be no change in one’s substance or constitution in regeneration, regeneration becomes then nothing more or less than the turning of one’s will to God and obedience. It is this act of turning that is regeneration. And this act of turning is what one calls repentance. Regeneration is not a state as much as a series of choices, an orientation of the will. This orientation, however,

from sins by repentance or turning to God, he cannot be justified in any sense. This is everywhere assumed, implied, and taught in the Bible.” *LST*, 366.

⁴²⁴ *LST*, 368.

is not grounded in some deeper disposition. Finney objects to the language of those like Edwards here. It is always found in the act of willing obedience at the present moment.

What is perhaps the most striking and most certain feature in Finney's ordering of the salvific process is the placement of sanctification before justification. Here Finney diverges most strongly from the Reformed and Puritan traditions. "It certainly cannot be true," Finney writes, "that God accepts and justifies the sinner in his sins. The Bible everywhere represents justified persons as sanctified, and always expressly, or impliedly, conditionates justification upon sanctification, in the sense of present obedience to God."⁴²⁵ Finney then seems to make a distinction similar to Edwards, suggesting that sanctification is not the *ground* of, but instead the *condition* of justification.⁴²⁶ But it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that for Finney sanctification not only accompanies justification but is, in certain logical and temporal aspects, the ground of it. Such a conclusion is difficult to avoid upon reading statements such as the following from Finney: "Present, full, and entire consecration of heart and life to God and His service, is an unalterable condition of present pardon of past sin, and of present acceptance of God." "The penitent soul," Finney says, "remains justified no longer than this full-hearted consecration continues. If he falls from his first love into the spirit of self-pleasing, he falls again into bondage to sin and to the law" and must repent and return to Christ.⁴²⁷ Finney notes that "some theologians have made justification a condition of sanctification, instead

⁴²⁵ *LST*, 368.

⁴²⁶ "Present sanctification, in the sense of present full consecration to God, is another condition, not ground, of justification." *LST*, 368.

⁴²⁷ *LST*, 369.

of making sanctification a condition of justification.” Finney calls this “an erroneous view of the subject.”⁴²⁸

There is even a sense in which one could argue that sanctification be put above even repentance in the above order. To be sanctified is to be set apart voluntarily in service of God. It “is present obedience to the moral law.” It “is implied in repentance, faith, regeneration, as we have abundantly seen.”⁴²⁹ All these other aspects imply sanctification because they imply submission and obedience to God and his laws, and this obedience is complete at any given moment. Therefore sanctification is implicit in all of those steps.⁴³⁰ Repentance without sanctification cannot be repentance but only a self-deception. For God to provide forgiveness of sin through repentance alone, a power that every sinner is capable of, “would be a virtual repeal of the divine law” since humans would “trample on the divine authority” and know that they might sin and still be forgiven through their repentance.⁴³¹

In some respects it would be more akin to Finney’s thinking simply to collapse this whole order into two steps, the first a compendium of repentance, faith, regeneration, and sanctification which could be summed up as willful obedience, and the second being justification.

⁴²⁸ *LST*, 368. He says further, “No faith receives Christ as a justification, that does not receive Him as a sanctification, to reign within the heart.” Therefore “perseverance in obedience to the end of life [i.e., sanctification] is also a condition of justification.” 367.

⁴²⁹ *LST*, 368.

⁴³⁰ At the same time, however, Finney says that sanctification is brought about through faith, which seems to place faith ahead of sanctification. Finney writes, “It should never be forgotten that the faith that is the condition of justification, is the faith that works by love. It is the faith through and by which Christ sanctifies the soul.” *LST*, 366. Yet on the next page he says that faith, “from its very nature... implies repentance and every virtue [i.e., sanctification],” which seems to put sanctification ahead of faith. 367.

⁴³¹ *LST*, 213.

The Location of Conversion

Having now considered numerous aspects of Finney's understanding of conversion, we turn lastly to where conversions are best attained. Finney's inclinations on the location of conversion are not entirely uniform. Even though in *Lectures On Revivals* he is very critical of much ministerial training, and of Calvinist/Presbyterian ministers in particular, Finney does direct much of his advice for the preaching of the gospel at the church and ministers. In doing so he also writes considerably about the effectiveness of lay people in sharing the gospel; all of the church and not only the minister should be involved in efforts at conversion and revival. In what follows we will examine the ways in which Finney promotes various locations or contexts for conversion, and some of the related attitudes he demonstrates related to location.

Even in *Lectures on Revivals*, his most revival- versus church-centric book, Finney suggests an important role for the church in conversion. "So far as we know," he writes, "neither God nor man can convert the world without the co-operation of the church.... God cannot convert the world by physical omnipotence, but he is dependent on the moral influence of the church."⁴³² In the work of conversion, the church is as important for God's work in it as for humanity's. In a sense this merely reflects what we have seen previously, the diminished activity of God in conversion and the agency of humans in bringing it about.

Still, Finney is skeptical of converts who are unwilling to place themselves within a church context. "Sometimes persons professing to be converts will make an excuse for not joining the church, that they can *enjoy religion just as well* without it. This is always

⁴³² LOR, 280.

suspicious. I should look out for such characters. It is almost certain they have no religion.”⁴³³ Christians are not meant to be lone wolves, but to live their faith in community. Finney calls on new converts to associate themselves with a church as soon as possible. “Young converts should, ordinarily, *offer themselves for admission to some church of Christ immediately*.... They should not *wait*.”⁴³⁴ This does not mean that in all cases the churches should accept them for membership immediately. But in general, and especially in the country, people should be received immediately.⁴³⁵

Moreover, Finney suggests that some criticisms of the church and clergy related to conversion are unjustified. A minister’s lack of success is not always due primarily to the minister. “If they are blameworthy, let them be blamed. And no doubt they are always more or less to blame when the word produces no effect. But it is far from being true that they are always the *principal* persons to blame.” Although this is something of a mixed note, it does indicate the importance of the ministerial office. The problem is often not the preacher, but the hearers. “Churches should remember that they are exceedingly guilty, to employ a minister, and then not aid him in his work.”⁴³⁶ Too many church members are passive and expecting the clergy to do all the work of conversion without their participation. They are to be actively involved in this critical aspect in the life of the church.

Even in the midst of Finney’s apparent emphasis on the role of the church in conversion, however, one can find signs of a weakened conception of it. Finney suggests often that the church has failed in some central tasks, most notably evangelism expressed

⁴³³ He adds, “Ordinarily, if a person does not desire to be associated with the people of God, he is rotten at the bottom.” *LOR*, 395.

⁴³⁴ *LOR*, 389. This was also an implicit criticism of Calvinist churches as well. McLoughlin notes that most Calvinist churches at that time made a revival convert wait six to twelve months before joining.

⁴³⁵ *LOR*, 389-92.

⁴³⁶ *LOR*, 243.

through revival efforts. “We see the *awful guilt of this church*,” Finney writes, “who come here and listen to lectures about revivals and then go away and *have no revival*, and also the guilt of members of other churches who hear these lectures and go home and *refuse to do their duty*.”⁴³⁷ If the church has failed, perhaps revival efforts must move outside of it.

Finney also minimizes the role of doctrinal content of the church in conversion. He suggests that “in examining young converts for admission to the church, their consciences should not be ensnared by examining them too extensively or minutely *on doctrinal points*.” Even though the role of the church is, in part, to teach them doctrines, “if they are to be kept out of the church till they understand the whole system of doctrines, this end is defeated.”⁴³⁸ Instead, in examining young converts for church membership one should focus not on their head knowledge, “how good scholars they are in divinity,” but “is to find out whether they have a *change of heart*, to learn whether they have experienced the great truths of religion by their power in their own souls.”⁴³⁹

If Finney considers the church important to conversion, he also in various ways pushes the location of conversion away from the church, and is critical of both the institutional church and its ministers. We turn now to a consideration of some of the ways in which this takes place. If Finney discusses the church often, the conception of the church for which he strives is minimalist, emphasizing the laity, looking to the power of the Spirit rather than any denominational forms, deemphasizing doctrine, and critiquing the clergy in a variety of ways.

Finney makes no shortage of remarks that can be deemed anti-clerical, or at least minimize the clergy/laity distinction, and that encourage a very *low* conception of the

⁴³⁷ LOR, 331.

⁴³⁸ LOR, 392.

⁴³⁹ LOR, 393.

ministry and church. It has already been mentioned that Finney called on church members to assist their ministers in the work of conversion. One should avoid in theory or practice any idea that revival is the work of the minister alone. Finney makes this point on several occasions, and works to raise the role of the laity and reduce any contrast of their work with that of the clergy.⁴⁴⁰ He chastises his lay listeners, “Do not *complain of your minister* because there is no revival, if you are *not doing your duty*. *That alone* is a sufficient reason why there should be no revival.”⁴⁴¹

Far from being passive, “Church members ought to *study and inquire* what they *can do*, and then *do it*.”⁴⁴² At times Finney employs war imagery in describing the work of laity. “Young converts,” he says, “should be *trained to labour*, just as carefully as young recruits in an army are trained for war.”⁴⁴³ Or again, he remarks, “Christians should be trained like a band of soldiers.” The role of the minister in this army is “to train them for usefulness, to teach them and direct them, and lead them on, in such a way as to produce the greatest amount of moral influence.”⁴⁴⁴

This means that any number of lay practices, such as lay prayers, should not be opposed. “Ministers and many others have very extensively objected against a layman’s praying in public, and *especially in the presence of a minister*. That would let down the authority of the clergy, and was not to be tolerated.” Finney considers this ridiculous. Finney also defends others lay practices against opposition, including the practice of lay

⁴⁴⁰ Hardman comments on this: “Until this time in America, the great prestige of the clergy had made it its responsibility, and not that of the laity, to be evangelists and win the lost.... With the great influence that his *Lectures on Revivals* were to have for the next century, Charles Finney was bringing about a dramatic reversal of the old understanding, and insisting that *every* Christian was directly and inescapably charged with the responsibility of evangelism.” *Finney*, 280.

⁴⁴¹ *LOR*, 225.

⁴⁴² *LOR*, 242-43.

⁴⁴³ *LOR*, 428.

⁴⁴⁴ *LOR*, 243.

exhortation. Finney even (inaccurately) appeals to Edwards on this practice, stating that “so much opposition was made to this practice nearly a hundred years ago, that President Edwards actually had to take up the subject, and write a labored defence [sic] of the rights and duties of laymen.”⁴⁴⁵

Church members not only are called to many of the same activities as ministers, especially regarding conversion, but are called to live by the same standards of holiness. “It has long enough been supposed that ministers must be more pious than other men.” This is a mistake, according to Finney. “Other men... are just as *absolutely* bound to consider their whole time as God’s and have no more right to love the world, or accumulate wealth, or lay it up for their children, or spend it upon their lusts, than ministers have.”⁴⁴⁶ The same call to holiness applies to all Christians, and young converts especially should be taught to be as holy as their ministers.

In this regard church members have often failed, perhaps because they are only formal members of a denominational church, instead of true members of the universal church of Christ. Finney bemoans the state of the church. “If the church were to live only one week as if they believed the Bible, sinners would melt down before them.”⁴⁴⁷ Church members, regardless of maintaining formal ties to the church, have not committed fully to Christ. “The church is now filled up with hypocrites,” Finney pronounces, “because they were never made to give up the world. They never were made to see that unless they

⁴⁴⁵ *LOR*, 258. On this the editor remarks in a footnote, “As Albert Dod pointed out in his review of Finney’s lectures, Finney was mistaken in stating that Edwards ever wrote a defense of the right of laymen to exhort, though he may have spoken of their right to offer prayer in the presence of a minister. Edwards abhorred lay exhorters, as did all Congregationalists and Presbyterians, and he explicitly said so in Part IV, Section 5, of his *Thoughts Concerning the Present Revival of Religion*. See *Works*, IV, 241ff. It is surprising that Finney did not correct this error in his revised edition of the lectures.” 258, fn. 8.

⁴⁴⁶ *LOR*, 248. See also 418-19.

⁴⁴⁷ *LOR*, 151.

made an entire consecration of all to Christ, all their time, all their talents, all their influence, they would never get to heaven.”⁴⁴⁸

Finney often places the Spirit in opposition to the churches and their ministers. It seems to him that often the laity are more in touch with the Spirit of God than the clergy. “The *piety* of the ministry, though *real*, is so superficial, in many instances, that the spiritual part of the church feel that ministers cannot, do not, sympathise [sic] with them.” Those filled with the Spirit “will often be grieved with the state of the ministry.” Finney considers this “one of the most prominent, and deeply to be deplored evils of the present day.”⁴⁴⁹

Moreover, many of the very forms and expressions of denominational life run counter to the Holy Spirit and squelch it. In fact, in reference to prayer, Finney believes that “the very idea of using a form, rejects, *of course*, the leadings of the Spirit. Nothing is more calculated to destroy the spirit of prayer, and entirely to darken and confuse the mind, as to what constitutes prayer, than to use forms.”⁴⁵⁰

Finney’s own revival activities also illustrate the relative disregard he has for church structures and denominational borders. Finney operates as an itinerant preacher for the bulk of his early career. On many occasions in his revival work, as well as in his work while pastoring in New York City, he readily works across denominations. Even though he is himself ordained as a minister, he felt no restraint in preaching the gospel before ordination, and involves himself in denominational issues only as necessary to

⁴⁴⁸ *LOR*, 171.

⁴⁴⁹ *LOR*, 117, 116, 117.

⁴⁵⁰ *LOR*, 103. He continues, “Forms of prayer are not only absurd in themselves, but they are the very device of the devil to destroy the spirit and break the power of prayer.” 103.

pursue his revival work and use of new measures.⁴⁵¹ He rarely mentions denominational creeds, and when he does it is often for the purpose of criticizing some doctrine within them. And when his denominational ties to Presbyterianism are threatened by possible heresy charges, he readily breaks with the Presbyterians for the Congregationalists. McLoughlin writes that Finney “disliked man-made creeds; he saw no need for institutionalized denominational systems; he believed in the priesthood of all believers. His mission, as he saw it, was to create a universal Church based upon the fundamentals of the gospel.”⁴⁵²

Especially early on in his public career as a revivalist, Finney raises concerns among more establishment-minded preachers like Lyman Beecher. According to Hardman, “In Beecher’s view, Finney did not call his converts to propriety and preservation of the old, but rather to enthusiasm and unpredictability, and he posed the menace of detaching religion from the institutional framework, for he believed the churches to be lukewarm and impotent.”⁴⁵³ In another sign of their diminished standing, Finney notes that ministers even in the past few decades used to have particular ways they were to dress, which now have incrementally largely fallen by the wayside (no more wigs, cocked hat, short or small clothes, gowns). “Reason has triumphed” and the demands of particular dress for ministers are falling by the wayside.⁴⁵⁴

⁴⁵¹ Hardman provides attendance data showing that Finney “rarely attending meetings” of his presbyteries and synods, even though “it was always mandatory that all clergymen attend unless they could present a valid excuse. After he had been ordained for a year or two, Finney (according to these minutes) did not ask to be excused but simply did not bother to attend, and the presbyteries allowed his cavalier disdain only in deference to his prominence and heavy work load, whereas a lesser man might have been stringently disciplined.” *Finney*, 310.

⁴⁵² *LOR*, ix.

⁴⁵³ Hardman, *Finney*, 148.

⁴⁵⁴ *LOR*, 252-54. McLoughlin, the editor, notes, “When Finney says that reason triumphed over the customs of former times he typifies the self-satisfaction of the age of the common man. These paragraphs on the changing dress of the Calvinist clergy are also indicative of the clergy’s declining prestige and social status. And despite Finney’s protests, it did reflect a secularization of religion. Finney’s pleasure at the fact

Some suggest that the shift toward the power of the laity and away from the clergy has less to do with theology and more to do with Finney's methods and theology finding synergy with rising political and social trends of his day.⁴⁵⁵ Whatever its sources, however, it places conversion into a much less settled and diminished traditional church context for conversion and Christian growth.

The area in which Finney is perhaps most critical of his ministerial colleagues is that of their training or education. The types of traditional (read Calvinist) training they have received have left them ill-suited for ministry. Such critiques are found especially throughout the pages of *Lectures on Revivals*. Ministers are ineffective. "There is evidently a great defect in the present mode of educating ministers. This is a SOLEMN FACT, to which the attention of the whole church should be distinctly called; that the great mass of young ministers who are educated accomplish very little." Ministerial education is actually an impediment to ministry, Finney charges. "It is common for those ministers who have been to the seminaries, and are now useful, to affirm that their course of studies there did them little or no good, and that they had to *unlearn* what they had there learned, before they could effect much."⁴⁵⁶

that ministers now dressed like everyone else, both in and out of the pulpit, is part of the anti-clericalism which he shared with the Jacksonians." 253-54, fn. 4.

⁴⁵⁵ Hardman comments, "This shift away from the primacy of the clergy – utterly foreign to Mather, Edwards, Timothy Dwight, or Beecher – was of course very much in harmony with the Jacksonian democracy of his day." *Finney*, 281. He suggests that some of the reason for his early success was closely tied with "his determination to democratize American Protestantism, and the relationship between this force embodied in his career and the democratizing influence of President Andrew Jackson's political thought [elected in 1828].... Just as Jackson railed against privilege, monopoly, and property qualification for voting, Finney railed against the social conservatism of the Presbygational church structure." 151. William Cooper concurs. He writes, "The influx of political changes from what we now call Jacksonian democracy mixed with the influence of a popular theology of the people finds its clearest religious expression in the New Measures. The New Measures, organized around lay participation, depending upon a clear-cut biblical literalism, expressly anti-Calvinistic, unsacramental, pragmatic and non-sectarian, was really the religious expression of Jacksonian Democracy." *Great Revivalists*, 55.

⁴⁵⁶ *LOR*, 186 (capitalization his), 188.

A minister, Finney argues, must be able to draw out all classes of sinners in the congregation, and must destroy lies held by sinners without providing new lies in which sinners take refuge. Finney assails bookish ministers who rail against various heresies through book knowledge without understanding how the people of the day are actually thinking about such things, sometimes resulting in people becoming more enamored with the heresies than with the objections presented regarding them.⁴⁵⁷ Ministers “must be acquainted with the real views of men in order to meet them, and do away their errors and mistakes.”⁴⁵⁸ But Finney’s colleagues are out of touch with the laity. Due to their training young ministers “are not familiar with the mode in which common people think.” Instead they are “shut up in their schools” and fail to learn how to relate to the average layperson.⁴⁵⁹ In fact, Finney says that some business people, more familiar with everyday humanity, are much more effective and well-equipped for ministry than the learned.

It is somewhat paradoxical that Finney both emphasizes the intellectualist component in faith, and yet also can display somewhat anti-intellectual tendencies. In respect to ministerial training, this shows itself in the great respect shown to the more ‘common’ wisdom of the laity, and Finney’s aloofness to more rigorous scholarly training that may leave one in an ivory tower and unable to relate to normal people. In contrast to those so trained, Finney notes that a minister may be very *wise* and not very *learned*. . He comments, “A learned minister and a wise minister are different things.... Do not

⁴⁵⁷ *LOR*, 179-81.

⁴⁵⁸ *LOR*, 181.

⁴⁵⁹ *LOR*, 188. Seminary professors are not only out of touch, but out of date. Finney writes, “Those fathers who have the training of our young ministers are good men, but they are ancient men, men of another age and stamp, from what is needed in these days of excitement, when the church and world are rising to new thought and action.” *LOR*, 192.

understand me to disparage learning. The more learning the better, if he is also wise in the great matter he is employed about.”⁴⁶⁰

How is one then to assess the value of ministerial education? Finney insists that the value of one’s learning must be measured by one’s capacity to win souls. “Those are the *best educated ministers*, who win the most souls.... Learning is important, and always useful. But after all, a minister may know how to win souls to Christ, without *great* learning, and he has the best education *for a minister*, who can win the most souls to Christ.”⁴⁶¹ This measures not only the value of a minister’s learning, but also a minister’s overall wisdom, all learning aside. “The amount of a minister’s success in winning souls (*other things being equal*) invariably decides the amount of wisdom he has exercised in the discharge of his office.” In other words, all other things being equal, the wisdom of a minister is indicated “by the *number* of cases in which he is successful in converting sinners.”⁴⁶² It is just like a doctor’s skill being indicated by his cure rate. For Finney this is an objective and hard measurement that may be used. “Are we at work, wisely, to win souls?” He asks. “Or are we trying to make ourselves believe that success is no criterion of wisdom? *It is* a criterion. It is a safe criterion for every minister to try himself by.”⁴⁶³ It is a pragmatic measurement.

Again, however, one finds Finney equalizing the clergy and laity. Finney can use this same standard in judging the reality of the faith of lay Christians, since they also have the same call on them to convert others. Laypeople in the church who know how to win

⁴⁶⁰ LOR 186.

⁴⁶¹ LOR, 186. He adds, “I would say nothing to undervalue, or lead you to undervalue a thorough education for ministers. But I do not call that a *thorough education*, which they get in our colleges and seminaries. It does not fit them for *their work*. I appeal to all experience, whether our young men in seminaries are thoroughly educated for the purpose of winning souls. Do they do it? Every body knows they do not.” 191.

⁴⁶² LOR, 183.

⁴⁶³ LOR, 193.

souls should be considered wise, and those who do not, regardless of other knowledge or learning, should not be considered wise as Christians.⁴⁶⁴ In both cases any learning outside of that which contributes to soul-winning is devalued.

If Finney equalizes clergy and laity, his practices and attitudes also show little concern for denominational borders or their distinguishing theological features. He desires to preach a gospel in many respects free from the hindrances of theological nuance and stripped down and equipped for preaching in any context. As Hardman comments, “Part of his methodology was a broad, undenominational approach to presenting the gospel, which might be accepted as much by Methodists, Baptists, and Episcopalians as by Presbyterians.”⁴⁶⁵ This kind of lowest common denominator preaching and theology in many respects anticipates a variety of features that develop more forcefully later within evangelicalism, including parachurch ministries, a kind of evangelical ecumenism, and nondenominational churches. Hardman notes that “from 1828 on, Charles Finney was always willing to cooperate with as many churches and clergymen as would join in united work in a city.”⁴⁶⁶

Finney’s affinity with Jacksonian ideology has previously been mentioned. Finney’s perspective in this regard trends toward individualism and away from a corporate mentality.⁴⁶⁷ The call of the gospel is a call to individuals to repent. Although Finney does also maintain a concurrent concern for reform of the society, which he

⁴⁶⁴ *LOR*, 190.

⁴⁶⁵ *Finney*, 210.

⁴⁶⁶ *Finney*, 171. He adds, “Finney’s four months of preaching at the German Reformed Church in Philadelphia [1828-29] was a truly cooperative effort among a number of churches to reach the entire populace, in the largest auditorium of the city. The same was true of the Rochester revival of 1830-1831, where all the denominations of the city united in the work, and it became truly ecumenical.” 171. He also comments regarding Finney’s Rochester revival of 1830-31 that “for the extent of interchurch cooperation, and the magnitude of support, it was the first citywide evangelistic effort that may be properly compared with the urban campaigns of the last third of the nineteenth century.” 210.

⁴⁶⁷ McLoughlin notes, “It can be said that Finney and Jackson, each in his own way, were striving for much the same kind of free, individualistic, and egalitarian society.” *LOR*, xlix.

believes is inherent to true Christianity, everything starts with the individual. Give a person a Bible, preferably alongside the preaching of the Word, and let that person repent and turn to God. Nothing else need be involved, because the power to turn to God lies within each and every person. “Sinners cannot be converted without their own agency, for conversion *consists in* their voluntary turning to God. No more can sinners be converted without the appropriate moral influences to turn them; that is, without truth and the reality of things brought full before their minds either by direct revelation or *by men*.”⁴⁶⁸ Humans can play a part in the conversion of others, but it still works largely on an individual level, and others are not vital to the sinner’s conversion.

Even when Finney talks about the New Covenant he can shift it away from a form of corporate agreement or influence and toward its impact on individuals. Finney says that “the church, as a body, have certainly never received this new covenant,” but many individuals through its history have received it.⁴⁶⁹ Finney here does not see the covenant operating on the community as a whole, but on individuals. Someday it will apply to every Christian in the church, but it has not yet. Thus this is not a covenant that can be applied generally to the church as fulfilled in Christ, but only to some specifically. This seems a very strange interpretive grid for such a covenant promise, but does nevertheless accentuate his individualistic outlook and low ecclesiology.

Hardman perhaps captures the essence of much of this discussion of location in a passage from his biography. He suggests that due to Finney’s background and experiences (and enhanced by his rejection by three seminaries), these

⁴⁶⁸ *LOR*, 280.

⁴⁶⁹ *LST*, 386.

went far to solidify his pietistic insistence that he could learn all he (or any *true* man of God) needed from a solitary study of the Bible, and that all human institutions and organizations, including church and clergy, inhibited his work for God. Pietism as well as anti-intellectualism are at work here. One thing is certain; Finney during his Oberlin years may have overcome his aversion to institutional loyalty, but all his life he remained nondenominational, and the seeds of this were surely planted at this time.⁴⁷⁰

Conclusions

A number of issues have already been raised in this chapter regarding Finney's views on conversion. In concluding let me make a few other critical observations on some of Finney's broader theological and personal tendencies that drive him toward his view of conversion as immediate ongoing human decisionism.

First one should recognize that Finney has a pragmatic approach to conversion. He has little patience in parsing all that might be entailed in conversion theologically. His concern is practical; convert the sinner, and do it now. This aspect of Finney's thinking pushes him to stress what I have termed the *decisionism* that is characteristic of his model of conversion. Finney charges that "all preaching should be *practical*."⁴⁷¹ Doctrine likewise should be judged in practical terms. He argues, "Any thing brought forward as doctrine, which cannot be made use of as practical, is not preaching the gospel. There is none of that sort of preaching in the Bible. That is all practical." Preaching doctrines abstractly is

⁴⁷⁰ *Finney*, 51.

⁴⁷¹ "All preaching," he says, "should be doctrinal, and all preaching should be practical. The very design of doctrine is to regulate practice. Any preaching that has not this tendency is not the gospel." *LOR*, 198.

“absurd.” Instead, he says, “God always brings in doctrine to regulate practice. To bring forward doctrinal views for any other object is not only nonsense, but it is *wicked*.”⁴⁷²

There seems to be an implicit anti-intellectualism in such a view. For Finney, one must never lose oneself pondering deep issues when they cannot be related directly to everyday life. Yet there are many topics that require such forms of thinking, but which will be devalued by such a view. I would suppose that this is the reason why any number of theological concerns receive little or no treatment by Finney. They are not worth one’s time.

It is also, I suppose, Finney’s practical and serious manner that causes him to condemn humor and jesting. Humor serves no purpose except to draw a person away from the task at hand. Among the various causes of backsliding Finney lists levity, considering it so self-apparent that it has no place in the Christian life that he can condemn it in one sentence before moving to his next point.⁴⁷³ Elsewhere he suggests that serious Christians should “be shocked to see a minister show levity,” or to show any of that same levity in their own lives.⁴⁷⁴ Why use humor when one can speak directly anyway? This leads to another dominant characteristic of Finney’s thinking; he has no toleration for ambiguity.

Finney’s intolerance of ambiguity is one of the most striking features of his thinking. Most always for Finney things are black or white, all or nothing; there is no in between state. This characteristic of Finney is hard to overstate, and has been observed

⁴⁷² He adds, “The very idea of making this distinction [between practical and doctrinal] is a device of the devil.” *LOR*, 198 (emphasis mine).

⁴⁷³ Finney writes that levity “is so obviously a cause of backsliding, that I need not dwell upon it.” *LOR*, 440.

⁴⁷⁴ *LOR*, 418. As we saw earlier, lay Christians should apply the same standards to themselves as to their ministers. Finney later warns new converts against levity. “I need not enlarge on this any farther than to say, that it is the besetting sin of many persons, and unless they place a tenfold watch at the door of their lips, they will never grow in grace.” 457.

throughout this chapter. There can be, for example, no ambiguity in any moral act. There can be no mixture of motives, intentions, or preferences. There can be no mixture of sinfulness and holiness in a person, no mixture of obedience and disobedience, no ambiguity on the state of one's heart, and no mixture in one's preference for selfishness or benevolence. There can be no ambiguity in the moral tenor of any human act or condition. One never does anything with *mixed motives*. All moral actions are either completely holy or completely sinful, since all stem ultimately from two polar opposite preferences or states of the heart, selfishness and benevolence. No hyperbole seems adequate to Finney to express their opposite natures. They are so utterly divided and distinct as to be "as contrary as heaven and hell, and can no more coexist in the same mind, than a thing can be and not be at the same time."⁴⁷⁵ They are "just as much and as necessarily at war with each other, as God and Satan." Finney says further, "They are the two, and the only two, great antagonistic principles in the universe of mind."⁴⁷⁶ At any given moment a person fully embraces one or the other.

In a variety of ways this all links directly with Finney's thoughts on conversion (and sanctification). This characteristic ties in forcefully with Finney's notion of the *immediacy* of conversion, since any notion of a *process* of conversion implies blurred lines and undefined states entirely unacceptable to him. A person is completely converted at any given moment, or not at all. A person is following God, or is not. A person is perfectly obedient in all things, or is otherwise completely sinful. Christians do not sin.⁴⁷⁷ The

⁴⁷⁵ *LST*, 162.

⁴⁷⁶ *LST*, 188.

⁴⁷⁷ "Present evangelical faith," Finney states, "implies a state of present sinlessness." *LST*, 355. This must be so, if the whole will is dedicated to Christ.

presence of any degree of sin indicates not *less* faith, but *no* faith.⁴⁷⁸ There can be no such thing as *partial* obedience.⁴⁷⁹ Finney takes issue with those who teach that God accepts the partial obedience of Christians because of Christ's work.⁴⁸⁰ How can God justify one who only obeys the moral law partially? Finney argues, "The theory of the mixed character of moral actions, is an eminently dangerous theory.... It leads its advocates to place the standard of conversion, or regeneration, exceedingly low—to make regeneration, repentance, true love to God, faith, etc., consistent with the known or conscious commission of present sin."⁴⁸¹ It gives those within the church reason to accept the presence of sin, instead of attaining to sinless perfection.

If true Christians are sinless, non-Christians are completely sinful. They possess no virtue whatsoever. "*The moral depravity of the unregenerate moral agents of our race is total.*" That is to say, "the moral depravity of the unregenerate is without any mixture of moral goodness or virtue, that while they remain unregenerate, they never in any instance, nor in any degree, exercise true love to God and to man," even if they may perform outward actions that appear as such.⁴⁸² A person is one or the other completely – holy or sinful, obedient or disobedient, Christian or non-Christian, justified or not justified.

How does this stark divide between sin and holiness in Finney translate to the lives of people, of saints, who are invariably a mixture of the two? Ironically, these unambiguous declarations of sinfulness and holiness result in even greater ambiguity, and almost a schizophrenic outlook for those Christians who, at times, encounter sin in their own lives. There can be no rest, no security, in one's experience of the Christian faith in

⁴⁷⁸ Finney writes, "Sin and holiness, then, both consist in supreme, ultimate, and opposite choices, or intentions, and cannot by any possibility, coexist." *LST*, 109.

⁴⁷⁹ As he puts it, one cannot "*partly obey and partly disobey at the same time.*" *LST*, 104.

⁴⁸⁰ He writes, "This appears to me, to be as radical an error as can well be taught." *LST*, 123.

⁴⁸¹ *LST*, 120.

⁴⁸² *LST*, 248.

such a scheme. Finney's view seems neither realistic as a view of the Christian life, nor biblical, and is certainly out of character with fundamental Protestant beliefs stemming from the Reformation, and even from Paul himself. One can only imagine what Luther would say to Finney. That would make for some interesting table talk!

Perhaps some of Finney's rigid thinking stems from his previous training as a lawyer. In some respects Finney remains ever the lawyer at heart throughout his second career as a churchman, ever an advocate for conversion. He never seems to have left his legal methods behind. His desire to persuade in "colloquial, lawyer-like" language is rooted in his early training, as is his emphasis on rational persuasion and the moral agency of his hearers.⁴⁸³

In his first published sermon, "Sinners Bound to Change Their Own Hearts," Finney uses overt courtroom imagery to describe the role of God and sinner in approaching conversion. God exerts the same moral power as a courtroom advocate to argue a case to the jury. The jury is made up of sinners, who are free to accept or reject the arguments of the lawyer, to render a verdict. Finney openly espouses ministers to adopt this perspective, and "should labour with sinners, as a lawyer does with a jury, and upon the same principles of mental philosophy."⁴⁸⁴ Such a context is ideal, in Finney's eyes, for conversion. The jury box becomes the anxious bench. The preacher should make the gospel case powerfully, convincingly, and directly, and the sinner is then pressed to consider the evidence and make a decision without delay, "*while the truth is held up in all its blaze before the mind.*"⁴⁸⁵

⁴⁸³ *LOR*, 218.

⁴⁸⁴ *Sermons*, 32.

⁴⁸⁵ *Sermons*, 38. Finney unfavorably contrasts many ministers to lawyers, who have learned successfully how to speak thoughtfully and powerfully in an extemporaneous style. Too many ministers, on the other hand, are so confined to thinking by writing that they are limited and ineffective in many contexts. Finney argues

Hardman makes the case that not only Finney's *methods*, but also the *content* of his theology, were influenced by his law training. He suggests that "the influences of a legal training, and his own demand for individual responsibility, made Finney impatient with the doctrine of original sin and inability."⁴⁸⁶ He notes that in Finney's legal studies he read Blackstone's legal textbook, in which the notion of free will was critical to any punishable offense, and freedom and responsibility were indelibly linked. Blackstone also influenced Finney's view of the law. Hardman writes, "This contribution of Blackstone to Charles Finney's presuppositions and categories is basic for an understanding of him in later years as a preacher and theologian. Foundational to Finney's approach both to evangelism and to theology is the unquestioned assumption that, forensically and religiously, human beings are responsible to higher law."⁴⁸⁷ One does not have to read much Finney to find nearly omnipresent the idea of responsibility to the law.

Finney is said to have made one of his most famous remarks on the day following his conversion. The lawyer Finney responded to his client, "Deacon Barney, I have a retainer from the Lord Jesus Christ to plead his cause, and I cannot plead yours."⁴⁸⁸

that more extemporaneous preachers are needed, versus manuscript preachers – who cannot maintain the kind of force, contact, and flexibility with their audience as the former group. Although some object that this style of preaching ends up lacking depth and is repetitious, Finney suggests it only seems repetitious because hearers remember the content better, whereas read sermons are quickly forgotten and seem new when repeated. "We can never have the *full meaning* of the gospel, till we throw away our notes," he suggests. *LOR*, 218. Furthermore, too many theology professors, including his old teachers, do not read and interpret the Bible in ways "such as would be admitted in a court of justice." *LST*, 1. And thus their views on several basic doctrines (regeneration, faith, repentance, love, inability, etc.) seem contrary to Scripture and reason.

⁴⁸⁶ *Finney*, xiii.

⁴⁸⁷ *Finney*, 38. In his *Memoirs* Finney tells of his first buying a Bible as a lawyer to study how its principles were related to laws. In another sign of his lawyer mind at work, he was critical of George Gale's lack of precision when using terms like regeneration, sanctification, etc. *Memoirs*, 10-12.

⁴⁸⁸ *Memoirs*, 27.

Finney continued pleading the case for his new client, and represented the case for Christ to his jury of sinners for much of the rest of his life.⁴⁸⁹

Those jurors convinced and converted by these arguments find that the Christian life is actually one of constant conversions. Conversion, for Finney, amounts to an *ongoing* series of temporary decisions to obey God's law. Everyone is always in a state either of sin and judgment before God's law, or of virtue and obedience to the moral law. There is no in between state. Conversion is only as permanent as one's obedience to the moral law. In this sense a Christian and a sinner are in the same position, in that neither escape the condemnation of the law except through obedience, and both are punishable if in a state of sin. Every time a Christian sins he returns to the same state before God as an unconverted sinner. Only repentance and a return to obedience puts the Christian right before God. Conversion essentially is repentance, and is repeated throughout one's life.

If conversion is repentance, it is also sanctification (and vice versa). The two collapse into each other. At any given moment a true Christian *is* holy, not *becoming* holy. Because of Finney's particular understanding of conversion and sanctification, as much as he talks about the latter, he is at the same time talking about the former. This reduces sanctification to conversion, and in some respects validates Nevin's criticisms that for Finney and his ilk, conversion is everything and sanctification nothing. Finney offers no real *development* in the Christian life, beyond perhaps growth in knowledge that results in greater obedience. Finney does not talk about the development of Christian virtues, for example. To be fair, Finney does guard against all forms of antinomianism. He does not

⁴⁸⁹ Hardman relates an interesting account of Finney's speaking at his great Rochester revival of 1830-31. A journalist, Henry Brewster Stanton, wrote an account of hearing Finney at the time: "It did not sound like preaching, but like a lawyer arguing a case before a court and jury.... The discourse was a chain of logic, brightened by the felicity of illustration and enforced by urgent appeals from a voice of great compass and melody. Mr. Finney was then in the fulness [sic] of his powers.... His style was particularly attractive for lawyers. He illustrated his points frequently and happily by reference to legal principle." *Finney*, 201-2.

tolerate a type of conversion that gives only freedom from the law. But he also does not offer any rich notion of sanctification. Even his thoughts on entire sanctification or perfection generally have a rather legalistic feel, rather than a sense of the kind of character and love that is the sign of a mature Christian. He does on occasion speak of love, but those occasions often tend to go in the more impersonal or philosophical direction of benevolence.

Although Finney spends considerable time on the importance of right intentions, overall Finney is much stronger in describing external characteristics of Christian life than internal. Obey the law; carry one's love into society through reform efforts: Finney is always focused on *doing* something more than *being* something. This is a self-conscious effort on Finney's part. "The church has entirely mistaken the manner in which she is to be sanctified," Finney contends. "The experiment has been carried on long enough, of trying to sanctify the church, without finding any thing for them to do. But holiness consists in obeying God." Here we find what seems to be a notion of growth in sanctification. Sanctification is linked to obedience, but "sanctification, as a process, means obeying him more and more perfectly." Perhaps Finney can talk about development! But what does this sanctifying process look like? "The way to promote it in the church, is to give every one *something to do*." Not only is this development externalized, but it also, even in action, lacks depth. The main activity for all Christians is "saving sinners." Everyone should be trained to do this. One who is converted finds growth by converting others.⁴⁹⁰ In this way Finney anticipates certain segments of evangelicalism

⁴⁹⁰ *LOR*, 429 (emphasis mine). Finney is clear that the measure by which to judge the growth of sanctification is, as has been mentioned previously, the ability to convert others. "Jesus Christ has made his people co-workers with him in saving sinners, for this very reason, because sanctification *consists in* doing those things which are required to promote this work." 429. Finney does, at times, sound some contrary notes to this picture. For example he writes, "It is just as indispensable in promoting a revival, to preach to

today, emphasizing the saving of souls to such an extent that the *content* of the Christian life is emptied of substance.

Finney's practicality, his black and white tendency of thinking, his legal background, and certain emphases of his theology all conspire to leave a hollowness in his description of the interior Christian life. In these ways Nevin's criticism of Finney in particular and revivalism in general are not without justification.⁴⁹¹

Finney's views on conversion lend credence to the oft repeated accusation that Finney's theology is Pelagian. One of the fundamental principles on which Finney bases his theology is that the natural human ability exists to choose to obey God or to sin, that there is freedom of the will, and that without these features there can be no morality or condemnation for sin.⁴⁹² Everything turns on Finney's understanding of moral law and anthropology. Given these principles, Finney is opposed absolutely to any perspective suggesting divine modification of the human constitution for conversion, since that would deny a preexisting human ability vital for his notion of moral responsibility. As much as Finney labors to conceptualize the work of God and of grace in such a framework, it is inevitable that the charge of Pelagianism should arise. It is virtually inherent in Finney's core anthropology. Humans have the capacity, unassisted, to obey God, to convert and

the church, and make them grow in grace, as it is to preach to sinners and make them submit to God. Many seem to think that if they can only get people converted, the whole ground is gained, and that they will grow in grace of course without any special aid. But... young converts will no more grow in grace, without being properly preached to, than sinners will turn to God without being preached to." *LST*, 469. Yet all the tendencies of his theological system work against such a notion of growth, and it is not well-developed in most of his writings. It is worth noting that this very quote does not come until the second to last page of *LST*, and is in the context of the need for preaching the truth to both sinners and Christians, since of both are required obedience – the former initially and the latter continuing – to be a Christian.

⁴⁹¹ For a good discussion of Nevin's perspective and his criticisms of Finney, see chapter 1 in Christopher J. Ganski, "Spirit and Flesh: On the Significance of the Reformed Doctrine of the Lord's Supper for Pneumatology," Ph.D. diss. (Marquette University, 2011). See especially 48-63.

⁴⁹² Hence Finney strongly opposes the Calvinist doctrine of original sin. He writes, "If men are without excuse for sin, as the whole law and gospel assume and teach, it cannot possibly be that their nature is sinful, for a sinful nature would be the best of all excuses for sin." *LST*, 263.

sanctify themselves, to make for themselves a new heart. Any command of God, even any promise, implies the *human* capacity to fulfill it. One is not a Christian because of anything God has wrought in a person. At its core conversion is wrought by a *human decision*.

In Finney's scheme of immediate ongoing human decisionism the cross slips in disturbing fashion to the background. Christ's death is more for the moral defense of God, a justification for his choosing to forgive sinners, than it is any justification for sinners themselves.⁴⁹³ And what grace God extends in repentance to the sinner is always only for *past* sins, never *present* ones. Both the initiation and the maintenance of one's salvation is the work of the human.

In his *Lectures on Revivals* Finney is most animated in opposing two tendencies, ministers poorly prepared for actual ministry and preaching of the gospel, and theological perspectives that overemphasize God's sovereignty and election – resulting in a kind of quietism or passive response to gospel preaching. In his view both of these tendencies are best embodied, not coincidentally, in Old School Presbyterianism and Calvinism. Finney is constantly complaining of the unsuitability of the formal training received by most ministers. He suggests that their education serves more as an obstacle than a help to the spread of the gospel. Ministers too often seek to impress their hearers with their educated views and scholarship, rather than reach them in ways they can understand with the gospel message. They too often use illustrations from ancient history rather than common, everyday ones, and they use terms that are little understood by most of their congregations. Their learning actually obfuscates rather than clarifies the gospel. Finney

⁴⁹³ Finney writes, "The atonement of Christ was intended as a satisfaction of public justice [rather than retributive justice]." *LST*, 219. God cannot repeal or change the moral law, but he can show how he is justified in pardoning sin. 219. The atonement, in Finney's view, is not a payment for sin, but a revelation of God's character and a strengthening of his moral government. For more on Finney's view of justification see, for example, *LST*, 360-77.

goes so far as to suggest that a minister is “*wicked*” if he or she fails to communicate the gospel in colloquial forms and terms.⁴⁹⁴ For too many ministers, the difficulty is not “for the want of mind, but from the wrong training.”⁴⁹⁵ We turn next to the views of that venerable institution of which Finney was so critical, Princeton Seminary.

⁴⁹⁴ *LOR*, 208.

⁴⁹⁵ *LOR*, 216.

Chapter Three – Archibald Alexander and Princeton Seminary

The Princeton Theology was a significant theological force in the nineteenth century. Representative of a particular blend of Old School Calvinism, New School Presbyterianism, and Scottish Common Sense Realism, its representatives at Princeton Seminary addressed all manner of theological and cultural issues and were widely read and respected in America by both their friends and their foes. For the purposes of this study a consideration of their views on conversion is fruitful, as they represent the center of an Old School Calvinism of great influence in nineteenth century American theology, and that is, at least among some evangelicals, almost as influential today as it was when it was first expressed. They also represent a unique blend of concerns that result in a particular view of conversion not shared by others in this study. Although closest in form to that of Jonathan Edwards, they depart from his views in significant ways.¹

What we will find upon closer examination of the views of Princeton is an approach to conversion that bears much theological similarity to Edwards, although from

¹ There are a variety of significant secondary sources on Princeton and its leading figures and theology. A few of the most notable include *The Princeton Theology 1812-1921*, ed. Mark A. Noll (1983; rpt. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001); Noll, *America's God* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); William K. Selden, *Princeton Theological Seminary: A Narrative History, 1812-1992* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992); David B. Calhoun, *Princeton Seminary, Vol. 1: Faith and Learning 1812-1868* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1994); Calhoun, *Princeton Seminary, Vol. 2: The Majestic Testimony 1869-1929* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1996); James H. Moorhead, *Princeton Seminary in American Religion and Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012); E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003); Andrew W. Hofferker, *Piety and the Princeton Theologians* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 1981); and *Reformed Theology in America*, ed. David F. Wells (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1997). There is no lack of primary sources, as the leading figures of the seminary, especially Charles Hodge, wrote extensively. Further materials on Charles Hodge are described in the following chapter. This chapter will lean most heavily on Archibald Alexander's 1844 book, *Thoughts on Religious Experience* (1844; rpt. New York: Arno Press, 1972).

a somewhat different mindset. They share Edwards' view of conversion as a supernatural work of God. They also, contrary to some characterizations of Princeton, share a distinct emphasis on the place of piety and experience in conversion. Unlike Edwards, however, they tend to place a greater stress on the importance and role of knowledge in conversion – knowledge that is both spiritual and cognitive. Thus I have termed the Princetonian model of conversion *transformative spiritual knowledge*. The Princetonians in many respects are in direct opposition to Finney's approach, and yet still share – to at least some degree – certain characteristics with Finney, especially regarding the location of conversion.

Before examining this position in greater detail, some additional background is in order. In the nineteenth century Princeton Seminary was, as David Calhoun puts it, “one of the centers – in its earlier years, perhaps *the* center – of American evangelicalism.”² Thus in a study of the changing models of conversion in American evangelicalism Princeton simply cannot be ignored. Of the three major Princeton theologians of the century – Archibald Alexander (1772-1851), Charles Hodge (1797-1878), and Benjamin B. Warfield (1851-1921) – Hodge was the most influential.³ We will examine Hodge in detail in the following chapter. Aside from Hodge, the two figures most central to the Princeton Theology were Alexander and Warfield. The former was first Hodge's professor and later his colleague. The latter, after a short gap in years, succeeded Hodge as the preeminent Princeton theologian and extended Princeton's views into the early twentieth century. This chapter will introduce the reader to the views of Princeton

² Calhoun, *Princeton* vol. 1, xxii. Mark Noll likewise considers Princeton Seminary the most influential of the nineteenth century in America. See *Princeton Theology*, 18-20.

³ Andrew Hoffecker comments, “Charles Hodge is the central figure in any discussion of the Princeton theology.” *Piety*, 44.

Seminary and the “Princeton Theology” on conversion, especially through the thought of its first professor, Archibald Alexander.

There remains, however, the question of the “Princeton Theology.”⁴ Is it proper to speak of this institution’s theology in a unified manner? Would it not be more accurate to speak of Hodge’s theology, or Alexander’s, or Warfield’s? Furthermore, how much development even within the careers of each of these figures was there such that their views varied at various points of their careers?

The extent to which Alexander and Hodge are unified, at least as regards the topic of conversion, should become clear in this and the following chapter. As a historian, however, I realize fully that there were, of course, various developments within and across these three figures as the nineteenth century proceeded. They were each faced with different and changing social, political, cultural, and religious contexts. Thus each of them had particular emphases in their theologies addressing these concerns.

Alexander came out of the Revolutionary era and the birth of the nation, with all of its uncertainties and changes. In his younger days there would be many alive that could still attest to various religious experiences of the First Great Awakening. Later he lived in the midst of the country’s Second Great Awakening, and as a Presbyterian leader and Princeton professor evaluated various expressions of those revivals.⁵ As the first professor at Princeton Seminary Alexander carried much responsibility in establishing the views and culture of the new school.

⁴ Hodge himself denied that such a thing as the “Princeton Theology” existed, believing that what they taught was simply that which had been taught for centuries. His theological conservatism prompted his famous remark that “a new idea never originated in the Seminary.” A. Hodge, *LCH*, 521. See also *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review Index Volume*, vol. 1, 11 (1870-71) (further citations as *BRPR*).

⁵ Alexander himself considered his conversion to have taken place in the earliest days of the Second Great Awakening, in 1788. See Calhoun, *Princeton* vol. 1, 45-47.

Hodge's situation was somewhat different. First, he grew up essentially in the bosom of the Presbyterian seminary. As a twelve-year-old he attended the installation of Alexander at Princeton. He later attended the college and the seminary, was the protégé and spiritual son of Alexander, and at an early age became a member of the seminary's faculty, with almost no other professional or pastoral experience previous to this. Almost his entire life revolved around the seminary, and in his long decades there he saw changing religious, cultural, and societal tides. During his tenure European theology, especially out of Germany, had a growing influence on the American theological context. Biblical and historical criticism were gaining momentum. The sciences continued to grow in knowledge, breadth, and influence. Powerful forces were also at work in society and culture. Hodge lived through the great slavery debates and divisions, and through the ultimate division of the country in the Civil War. He also experienced and played a part in great upheavals and splits within the nineteenth century Presbyterian church bodies.

By the time of Warfield's career, new concerns were rising up, particularly in the areas of science and of biblical criticism. Whereas Alexander and Hodge had found it relatively easy to argue for the congruency of science and Christianity, and for the authority of Scripture, by Warfield's time these were no longer givens. Thus one finds in Warfield a much greater emphasis on apologetics.

If their contexts brought from them occasional writings on somewhat varied subjects, the theological foundation out of which those writings came remained remarkably similar. As David Calhoun, author of a two-volume history of the seminary, puts it, "from 1812 to 1929, Princeton Theological Seminary represented a coherent, continual effort to teach and practice what the Princetonians believed was historic Reformed Christianity." In his assessment, they were successful. They "stood squarely in

the great stream of historic Christianity and orthodox Calvinism.”⁶ Granting their different emphases, there remains a remarkable degree of continuity among these three figures throughout and across their careers. It would be difficult indeed to attempt to distinguish between an ‘early’ and a ‘late’ Alexander or Hodge. Alexander, near the end of his life, commented that his “views of theological truth are what they have always been.”⁷ Hodge’s theological base remained anchored in a confessional Reformed model that he had learned under Alexander.⁸ Although it was not until several years into his Princeton career that Hodge actually took a position in systematic theology (he was initially Professor of Oriental and Biblical Literature), this shift in teaching responsibilities was not the result of, nor did it result in, any significant changes to his theological position. As Hodge himself wrote, “it does not become us to have so little confidence in what God has said, as to allow ourselves to be driven about by every wind of doctrine.”⁹

The continuity between these three figures also can be seen clearly. Having been taught by Alexander, Hodge adopted his mentor’s thought wholeheartedly. For most of his career, until his own *Systematic Theology* was published, he saw fit, like his teacher, to use Francis Turretin’s dogmatics as a primary theological text with his students.¹⁰ When

⁶ *Princeton* vol. 1, xxiv, xxv.

⁷ *Religious Experience*, xiii.

⁸ In his introduction to Alexander’s *Thoughts on Religious Experience*, W. J. Grier wrote that “Dr. Miller [second professor at Princeton Seminary], Dr. [Charles] Hodge and he [Archibald Alexander] lived and worked together for many years ‘in absolute singleness of mind, in simplicity and godly sincerity, in utter unselfishness and devotion to the common cause, in honour preferring one another. Truth and candour was the atmosphere they breathed; loyalty, brave and sweet, was the spirit of their lives.’ To their students through all the years the concord and affection of these servants of Christ was a beautiful sight. This concord sprang from devotion to the same great system of truth.” *Religious Experience*, xiv. He is quoting from A. Hodge, *LCH*, 378.

⁹ CHMC, folder 20:11, “Let your conversation becometh the Gospel,” September, 1826.

¹⁰ Mark Noll observes, “When Alexander stepped aside from Princeton’s chair of theology in 1840 out of deference to Hodge, little change occurred in the actual teaching of that subject. Hodge continued to quiz the students on their reading, to assign theological questions for their homework, and to use as textbook the seventeenth-century dogmatics (in Latin) of the Swiss Reformed theologian Francis Turretin.” Charles Hodge, *Charles Hodge: The Way of Life*, ed. Mark A. Noll (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 22.

Warfield arrived, he saw no need to produce a new text, adopting Hodge's *Systematic Theology* instead. He described Hodge as "my ideal of a teacher."¹¹ Reading the histories of Princeton Seminary and other biographical information on the three professors, one does not find Hodge or Warfield making any major correctives to their respective predecessors.¹² At the centennial celebration of the seminary it was said that Princeton's professors "all spoke the same thing and there were no divisions among them."¹³ Hoffecker observes that "an overwhelming continuity exists in the succession from Alexander through Hodge to Warfield."¹⁴ In the nineteenth century this continuity was reflected across the seminary's entire faculty.¹⁵ Although Warfield's views on conversion will not be considered in this dissertation, his continuance of the theological traditions of Alexander and Hodge is worthy of recognition. He carried their theological notions into the twentieth century and to new generations of theological students.

¹¹ Benjamin B. Warfield, *Selected Shorter Writings of Benjamin B. Warfield* vol. 1, ed. John E. Meeter (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1970), 439.

¹² In his history of Princeton Seminary Selden notes, "The deaths of Charles Hodge in 1878 and of his son Archibald Alexander Hodge in 1886 in no way diminished the commitment of Princeton Theological Seminary to the Reformed faith as espoused by the Old School adherents. If for no other reason the continued presence of William Henry Green and the appointment to the faculty of Benjamin Breckenridge Warfield in 1887 assured theological constancy." *Princeton Narrative History*, 68.

¹³ Francis L. Patton, "Princeton Seminary and the Faith," in *The Centennial Celebration of the Theological Seminary of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America at Princeton, New Jersey* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Theological Seminary, 1912). 342.

¹⁴ Hoffecker, *Piety*, 95. Between the three theologians Hoffecker says "a remarkable consensus was manifest." vi. Mark Noll concurs, writing that the Princeton Theology "retained a remarkable consistency over the course of its remarkable life." *Princeton Theology*, 40.

¹⁵ Of the 13 professors appointed after William Henry Green in 1851, "all but three were alumni of the Seminary seven had been students of Charles Hodge and two were his sons. Calvinistic doctrines as espoused at Princeton Seminary were inbred in their souls." Selden, *Princeton*, 57. Calhoun notes that "of Princeton's thirty-one professors until 1929, twenty-three were graduates of the seminary." *Princeton* vol. 1, xxv.

Princeton and Revivalism

In nineteenth century America, it is virtually impossible to discuss conversion in any comprehensive fashion without also addressing the impact of revivalism. Revivalism's close relationship to conversion extends back to Edwards and the First Great Awakening, but in the century that followed Edwards revivalism was such an ongoing part of the landscape and contributed to such a marked degree to changing views of conversion that it requires some attention in this study.¹⁶ This is all the more true as Edwards and later Finney played such a large role in the revivals of their day. Though one might assume (as a few too many scholars have) that the environment at the bastion of Old School Calvinism was markedly opposed to all forms of revivalism, this was not the case. Princeton's relation to revivalism was much more complex. Certainly there was considerable animosity to the views of Charles Finney, and the basis of this animosity will be considered further in this and the following chapter. However, it would be a mistake to assume that Princeton's aversion to Finney's revivalism was representative of its overall attitude toward revivalism. Nor was this animosity transferred to all revivalists. Notable among the exceptions in the nineteenth century was Dwight L. Moody, who was even invited to speak at the Princeton campus in 1876.¹⁷ Revivalist Asahel Nettleton (1783-1844) was also well-regarded by Princeton.

¹⁶ It has been suggested that the Second Great Awakening was really more of a series of awakenings occurring on and off throughout much of the nineteenth century in America. In his fine historical study of the first half of that century, *What Hath God Wrought*, Daniel Walker Howe writes, "In terms of duration, numbers of people involved, or any other measure, the Second Great Awakening dwarfed the First. Because of its diversity, perhaps it should be called a multitude of contemporaneous 'awakenings.'" (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 186.

¹⁷ "In February [1876] evangelist D. L. Moody and his associate, Ira Sankey, came to Princeton at the invitation of [Princeton College president James] McCosh, Charles Hodge, and the students." Calhoun, *Princeton* vol. 2, 24. Calhoun writes that Princeton "gladly supported D. L. Moody." 24.

It is not so surprising that Princeton would have some openness to revivalism when one considers that Princeton had its roots in the old ‘Log Cabin School’ of the eighteenth century – many of whose students had been profoundly shaped by the revivalist George Whitfield and the First Great Awakening. Many of the seminary’s early students were brought to faith or strongly influenced by revivals. The college experienced numerous periods of revival in its early decades, and this revivalistic impulse carried over to the seminary when it was established.¹⁸

Perhaps the most significant figure in the early history of Princeton outside of its first three professors was Ashbel Green (1762-1848). Green was president of Princeton College for a decade and later head of the seminary’s board. His 1831 sermon to Princeton Seminary students illustrates his and Princeton’s attitudes toward revivalism. In this sermon, aside from guarding against anti-intellectualism, preaching on the Bible, and the importance of a missionary spirit, Green embraced revivals of religion. “‘We hope and trust,’ he said, ‘there is no student in this seminary, who is not a cordial friend to such a display of divine grace, as is commonly called a *revival of religion*.’ He urged the students to spend at least part of their coming vacation ‘in some place or congregation—easily to be found, blessed be God, at the present time—where a revival of religion exists.’”¹⁹ Green’s positive assessment of revivalism was representative of Princeton’s attitude as a whole regarding revivalism. In his history of the seminary Calhoun notes that Green’s

¹⁸ Calhoun observes, “The majority of the students in Princeton’s early years—including a number of converts from the notable awakening which occurred in 1815 at Princeton College—were products of revivals.” *Princeton* vol. 1, 219.

¹⁹ Calhoun, *Princeton* vol. 1, 187. His quotations are from Ashbel Green’s sermon to Princeton Seminary students on 16 May, 1831. “An Address to the Students of the Theological Seminary, at Princeton,” *Biblical Repertory and Theological Review*, 3 (1831), 350-60 (further citations as *BRTR*).

“wholehearted support of revivals” was one theme among others that “the students heard continually in classes and chapel, in formal presentations and informal conversations.”²⁰

The Princetonians, according to Calhoun, attempted to avoid the extremes of opposition to any form of revivals on the one hand, and embracing forms of revivalism that brought with them theological innovation on the other. Princeton not only attempted moderation in its approach to revivals, but also even participated in them. There were revivals on the college and seminary campus. Professors and students also went out and preached amidst occurrences of revival, generally without any “new measures.”²¹ Later the seminary both supported and benefitted from the “Businessman’s Revival” in 1857 and the years following, reaching its peak enrollment in the nineteenth century in 1858.²² Revivals at the College continued sporadically over most of the century.²³

This moderated support for revivals was exemplified in the seminary’s first professor, Archibald Alexander, who was himself a strong but careful supporter of revival.²⁴ Alexander defended the authenticity of religious revivals and the conversions they brought about, even if he was also circumspect regarding their abuses. He believed that revivals resulted in conversions of a supernatural nature, but that they were often also accompanied by any number of false conversions – those swept up by the common

²⁰ *Princeton* vol. 1, 188.

²¹ See Calhoun, *Princeton* vol. 1, 230-34. “New measures” refer to innovative revivalistic practices of Finney and many other revivalists designed to bring about conversions through emotional appeals or other psychological pressures, e.g. the “anxious bench” at the front of the revival where those who were wavering on the brink of converting were brought in the sight of the assembly and often pressured directly by the evangelist to convert.

²² See Calhoun, *Princeton* vol. 1, 369-71.

²³ Warfield, who attended Princeton College from 1868-71, wrote, “It was said in our time that no class in Princeton College ever passed through its four years without experiencing a religious revival. Our class formed no exception.” As quoted in Calhoun, *Princeton* vol. 2, 22.

²⁴ “There was no one in the Presbyterian church who had studied more closely the whole subject of revivals than Archibald Alexander. His lifelong positive attitude toward revivals was partly due to his early experiences in Virginia. His warnings concerning the dangers of emotional excesses, unbiblical methods, and doctrinal deviations were not the observations of a detached critic.” Calhoun, *Princeton* vol. 1, 230.

emotions and force of the group, but lacking true conviction of sin and repentance and renewal. He at one point even suggested that perhaps what was termed a ‘revival’ would not be considered as such if only those with lasting conversions responded to the period of revival.²⁵ But he was unwilling to bind the work of the Spirit in bringing about true change and conversions in the midst of revivals. “The opinion entertained by some good people that all religion obtained in a revival is suspect, has no just foundation. At such times, when the Spirit of God is really poured out, the views and exercises of converts are commonly more clear and satisfactory than at other times, and the process of conversion more speedy.”²⁶

It is not insignificant for this study that Princeton’s attitudes toward revivalism varied significantly. This variation illustrates the differences across various expressions of revivalism in views on conversion and its significance for the theology and ministry of the church. For example, Princeton fought against Finney’s “new measures” because it saw in them a movement from conversion as a supernatural work of God to a human work. It was, in their view, a return to a form of Pelagianism. More on these issues will arise in the course of this study.

Archibald Alexander

We begin this story not with Charles Hodge, but with his teacher Archibald Alexander, who was to have a formative influence on Hodge’s theology, and even on all

²⁵ After all revivals, there is a sad declension in the favourable appearances; because that which has no root must soon wither. In looking back after a revival season, I have thought, how would matters have been if none had come forward, but such as persevere and bring forth fruit? Perhaps things would have gone on so quietly that the good work would not have been called a *revival*.” Alexander, *Religious Experience*, 54.

²⁶ Alexander, *Religious Experience*, 54.

of the Princeton men of the nineteenth century. Alexander addresses many of the concerns and questions of this dissertation in a book he published in 1844 titled *Thoughts on Religious Experience*.²⁷ In fact, it probably includes the most expansive consideration of conversion of anything I found within this Princeton era. Before delving into Hodge's own views, a briefer description of Alexander's views on conversion will be helpful to understand the background of Hodge's own views and the continuity of the 'Princeton theology' over this period.

Conversion as Supernatural

What are the characteristics of conversion as understood by Alexander? First of all, at its root source conversion is the result of a *supernatural* act. It is not something that humans can bring about by following certain practices or methods, by self-denial, even by pleading with God in prayer. It is not an event that one can will to happen, nor one that can be obtained through knowledge alone. In short, it is beyond the capacity of humans to bring it about. It is, instead, "a *spiritual* operation; or as the effect produced is confessedly above the powers of unassisted nature, let us call it *supernatural*, which is the precise technical term used by the most accurate theologians."²⁸

Alexander despairs over those enthusiasts and revivalists who seek to bring about results that can be observed through various human means and efforts, without resting on

²⁷ For the purposes of this study my concern is to capture the views of the Princeton Theology. Thus although Alexander had a long career already as a pastor and teacher before coming to Princeton Seminary as its first professor, I will not explore that period of his life. I have no reason, however, to think that his earlier views were in any substantive way different from those we find in the latter half of his career spent at Princeton. As, was already noted above, Alexander himself commented near the end of his life how his views had not changed (see 268, fn. 7).

²⁸ Alexander, *Religious Experience*, 62.

the Holy Spirit for the true work of lasting conversion. “That, through ignorance, vanity and enthusiastic ardour, many preachers in our day have attempted to produce such excitements, cannot be denied, and by the true friends of vital piety is greatly lamented.” He continues, “Perhaps nothing has so much prejudiced the minds of sensible men against experimental religion as the extravagance and violence of those factitious excitements which have been promoted in various places by measures artfully contrived to work upon the passions and imagination of weak and ignorant people.”²⁹ This, for Alexander, is the very definition of *enthusiasm*. Alexander regards practices to be those of an enthusiast when, instead of garnering religious affections through meditation on biblical truths, they instead seek to manufacture religious affections through the use of particular human efforts and means. Enthusiasm “always substitutes human fancies or impulses for the truths of God, which it uniformly undervalues.”³⁰ Reliance on human abilities and practices rather than on God’s action is always the mark of enthusiasm for Alexander.

How does a person know that a supernatural force is at work in them in conversion? One cannot have conscious awareness of the source of one’s new thoughts and orientation, but one can be assured through the Word of God that the movement from iniquity to delight in the service of God is of divine origin. Alexander also argues that this verifies the authenticity of the gospel against skeptics, because the resulting change in the person cannot be explained through natural means alone. “Those who would ascribe all experimental religion to mere natural feelings, artificially excited, must believe that there are no such transformations of character as have been mentioned, and

²⁹ Alexander, *Religious Experience*, 56-57.

³⁰ Alexander, *Religious Experience*, 105.

that all who profess such a change are false pretenders.”³¹ Alexander considers such a view “manifestly untenable,” since, from his perspective, there can be no question as to the fact that people have been transformed by the preaching of the gospel.

If Alexander demands that one view conversion as a supernatural event, he also admits that the supernatural aspect can be overemphasized or distorted. He acknowledges that many readers of his book may find it lacking in its account of conversion since it does not discuss “dreams and visions, or voices and lights, of a supernatural kind.” Likewise there are some who “glory in their ignorance and lack of education” and claim God’s special inspiration in their lives. Alexander considers this another form of enthusiasm, for it adds human requirements to a biblical understanding of conversion. He does not deny that there are many ways in which the Holy Spirit can be at work in conversion, including dreams, and is unwilling to limit the activity of the Spirit so long as the changes wrought by such activity are “proved to be genuine by the future life of the person.”³² To require unusual or extraordinary circumstances as evidence of one’s conversion, however, would be a mistake.

The Role of the Human and the Holy Spirit in Conversion

Alexander is often concerned not to limit God’s freedom in how he brings about change in those he elects, and he takes care not to overdefine or explain the process of conversion in a way that confines God’s activities or denies the essential mystery involved. God’s ways are not our ways, and we must acknowledge a lack of capacity to understand

³¹ Alexander, *Religious Experience*, 55.

³² Alexander, *Religious Experience*, 79, 81.

them. Therefore “the mode of the Spirit's operation in regeneration is altogether inscrutable: and an attempt to explain it is worse than folly.” Later in his book Alexander uses biographical narratives of various individuals, including conversion narratives, to illustrate and discuss features of religious experience. After providing an account of an Episcopal clergyman who, previously outside the faith entirely, discovered the reality of faith, he comments on the unusual circumstances surrounding how this person came to faith. “These are all remarkable circumstances, and to some, may seem to savour of enthusiasm. But we cannot prescribe limits to the Holy Spirit in His ways of leading benighted souls into the path of life.”³³ Alexander is thus guarded about declaring what is and is not of the Spirit, in spite of his aversion to certain forms of ‘enthusiasm.’ The changes wrought in conversion push beyond the limits of human understanding.

Although a person has a role in responding to and growing in grace (sanctification), there is no human role at the point of regeneration, the foundation of conversion. The desire to add some further human dimension to the process is ever the temptation for human beings. Alexander is alert to what he sees as the rise of Pelagian ideas in certain theological streams of his day. Perhaps with Finney in mind, he writes, “Among all the preposterous notions which a new and crude theology has poured forth so profusely in our day, there is none more absurd, than that a dead sinner can beget new life in himself.”³⁴ Dead in sin, we can have no part in the new birth. Those who argue that we can will our own conversion are, in his view, deeply mistaken.

³³ Alexander, *Religious Experience*, 59, 137.

³⁴He continues, “The very idea of a man's becoming his own father in the spiritual regeneration is as unreasonable as such a supposition in relation to our first birth. Away with all such soul-destroying, God-dishonouring sentiments!” Alexander, *Religious Experience*, 22.

Regeneration is the result of grace alone. “The doctrine of free grace, without any mixture of human merit, is the only true object of faith.” Christians must “derive their life entirely from Christ.” But this is a very difficult spiritual habit and a difficult pastoral task. “To exercise unshaken confidence in the doctrine of gratuitous pardon is one of the most difficult things in the world; and to preach this doctrine fully without verging towards antinomianism is no easy task, and is therefore seldom done.”³⁵

The Nature of the Change of Conversion

If conversion is the result of a supernatural act of the Holy Spirit, and if it occurs by grace alone – apart from any human impetus, what is the nature of the change that occurs in conversion? In Alexander’s view, the change occurs at a fundamental level of the person. Conversion, in this model, is *transformative*. As he puts it, “an entire revolution has taken place in his principles of action as well as in his sentiments respecting divine things.” The unregenerate person lacks the capacity for spiritual perception. “I hold that no unregenerate man is, while in that state, any more capable of spiritual perception than a blind man is of a perception of colours.” In the change of conversion “a principle of holiness is implanted, spiritual life is communicated, the mind is enlightened, the will renewed, and the affections purified and elevated to heavenly objects.” This change is wrought without violating our human nature. “God operates on the human mind in a way perfectly consistent with its nature, as a spirit, and a creature of understanding and

³⁵ Alexander, *Religious Experience*, 165.

will.” He restores the soul’s “lost power of spiritual perception and susceptibility of holy feeling, without doing any violence to its free and spiritual nature.”³⁶

The transformation of conversion occurs at the core of our being, “by the power of God creating ‘a new heart,’ to use the language of Scripture.”³⁷ A person can have a great deal of ‘head knowledge’ about God, and perhaps even be an adept theologian of sorts, but still lack that inner transformation that allows the knowledge of the gospel to penetrate and affect his or her entire being.³⁸ “The truth is necessary, but until the mind is brought into a state in which it can perceive it in its beauty and glory, it is heard and read and contemplated without any transforming effect—without drawing the affections to God, or subduing the power of selfish and sensual desires. The fault existing in the percipient being, there must be such an exertion of divine power as will remove it, and this is regeneration.” The unregenerate person has a disposition oriented away from divine things and unable to feel their force. Alexander argues that if there are those who “cannot conceive of permanent, latent dispositions in the soul, both good and evil, I can do no more than express my strong dissent from their opinion, and appeal to the common sense of mankind.”³⁹ Here Alexander lands at a position similar to Edwards, although his appeal to common sense is certainly more at home in the nineteenth century. As the reader may recall, Edwards argued that it was precisely at this inner disposition that the change of regeneration took place, changing a person from a being oriented toward evil to one oriented toward the divine and receptive to God’s goodness and beauty.

Alexander uses very similar language here, although he tends less toward Edwardsean

³⁶ Alexander, *Religious Experience*, 55, 62, 59, 59, 62.

³⁷ Alexander, *Religious Experience*, 61.

³⁸ “An unregenerate man may be able to deliver able lectures on all the points of theology, and yet not have one glimpse of the beauty and glory of the truth with which he is conversant.” Alexander, *Religious Experience*, 63.

³⁹ Alexander, *Religious Experience*, 61, 62.

notions of taste and sight, and more toward references to knowledge and truth, to which we now turn.

The Role of Knowledge and the Intellect in Conversion

Knowledge plays a critical role in Alexander's view of conversion, such that it is included in the descriptive phrase for Princeton's model. If conversion is not brought about by knowledge alone, still knowledge is required for conversion. For Alexander, to be converted is to have a saving faith. Such a faith involves, at a fundamental level, the acquisition of knowledge and a firm belief in that knowledge. As he put it, faith "is a firm persuasion or belief of the truth, apprehended under the illumination of the Holy Spirit," or even more simply "*a belief of the truth.*"⁴⁰ To have faith requires content to be believed, an object of faith. Thus knowledge is an essential component in conversion.

Alexander refers to knowledge often, and one might infer from this that Alexander works from a predominantly intellectualist position, and has even reduced faith to mere assent to propositions. Alexander is well aware of this potential misunderstanding, and explains at length how his view differs from faith as assent. He denies that the knowledge of which he speaks involves only "a naked assent of the understanding."⁴¹ What is crucial is that the unregenerate person lacks a capacity for spiritual knowledge, and thus there is no way for a view of that knowledge to be efficacious. Mere assent to the gospel, without a deeper perception and embrace of it, does not represent true conversion. A strictly

⁴⁰ Alexander, *Religious Experience*, 65, 64.

⁴¹ Alexander, *Religious Experience*, 65.

intellectual knowledge of divine things is powerless to bring about transformation.⁴² Even though the misconceptions of a regenerate person may be corrected by teaching better doctrine, or by a more complete presentation of the gospel, Alexander insists that the problem is not in the measure of truth received. “The blindness is in the mind, which can only be removed by an influence on the soul itself.”⁴³ Until that inner transformation is wrought by God in regeneration, no amount of information – regardless of how accurate – will have a transforming effect.

While Alexander does not refer overtly to the older Puritan conceptions of a two-fold manner of knowing in any writings I encountered, his approach resembles theirs and perhaps is even in the background of his thought.⁴⁴ Thus, as we also saw earlier in Jonathan Edwards, Alexander distinguishes merely intellectual knowledge from what could, again like Edwards, be termed an affective knowledge – or, as Alexander sometimes calls it, a spiritual knowledge. Again and again Alexander refers to saving knowledge as something that moves beyond mere factual or doctrinal knowledge to a knowledge that is perceived and felt in its fullness. It is an affective, integrated, life-changing knowledge.

Therefore what makes knowledge saving versus merely knowledge regarded as true is the content of that knowledge, and the capacity to perceive it in its totality. Following the inner change of regeneration wrought by God, knowledge of divine things that had formerly perhaps been merely ‘head’ knowledge can now be perceived in its true force. Alexander sees this illumination as “the first effect of regeneration.”⁴⁵ One is not

⁴² “The truth is viewed by the intellect of unregenerate man, but has no transforming efficacy.” Alexander, *Religious Experience*, 61.

⁴³ Alexander, *Religious Experience*, 61.

⁴⁴ See chapter 1, 34-43.

⁴⁵ Alexander, *Religious Experience*, 62.

only able to recognize the truth intellectually, but also to feel its force and power, and respond mindfully, willfully, and emotively. In turn, faith is the first response of a regenerated person.⁴⁶ “A saving faith is produced by the manifestation of the truth in its true nature to the mind, which now apprehends it... in its spiritual qualities, its beauty, and glory, and sweetness; whereas a historical or speculative faith may rest on the prejudices of education, or the deductions of reason; but in its exercise there is no conception of the true qualities of divine things.” This capacity to know more fully in a deeper, more spiritual sense is given only by God through the Holy Spirit. The unregenerate person is not transformed by divine knowledge because he or she does not really know it in this deeper sense. “If men are unaffected with the truth known, it must be because they do not know it aright: neither can they perceive it in its true nature until they are regenerated. Did any man ever see an object to be lovely and not feel an emotion corresponding with that quality?” In these very same truths, perceived by the regenerate person, new meanings, insights, and affections are found. “Every man on whom this divine operation has passed experiences *new views of divine truth*. The soul sees in these things *that* which it never saw before. It discerns in the truth of God a beauty and excellence of which it had no conception until now.”⁴⁷ One cannot know spiritual truths in this deeper sense and not be affected. Hence *transformative spiritual knowledge* is at the very core of Alexander’s Princetonian model of conversion.

How much knowledge is required for conversion? Alexander declines to answer this question, arguing that it cannot be known. “What degree of knowledge is absolutely

⁴⁶ “Faith is the first act of the regenerated soul; and the most important act, for it draws all holy affections and emotions in its train. But though it sweetly mingles with every other grace, it is distinct from them all.” Alexander, *Religious Experience*, 65.

⁴⁷ Alexander, *Religious Experience*, 66, 63, 64.

necessary to the existence of piety cannot be accurately determined by man, but we know that genuine faith may consist with much ignorance and error.”⁴⁸ But what he does say is that the more accurate the knowledge, and the greater the quantity of it available to the regenerated person, the greater the transformation and growth. At least *some* knowledge of spiritual truths is required, and the regenerated person perceives the fullness and power of what spiritual truths are available as illumined by his or her newfound capacity.⁴⁹ However, that which is in error or not known at all cannot play a part in this new perception, and hence cannot contribute to this transformation of conversion, or its continuation in sanctification.⁵⁰ “As spiritual knowledge is the foundation of all genuine exercises of religion, so growth in religion is intimately connected with divine knowledge. Men may possess unsanctified knowledge and be nothing the better for it; but they cannot grow in grace without increasing in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.”⁵¹ Alexander argues that children should be provided with religious education, and that it is also of value to those adults who have not yet experienced regeneration. A greater and more accurate knowledge, even if not transformative in and of itself, will not hurt the unregenerate individual and will provide more content to be illumined should that individual be regenerated by the work of the Holy Spirit.⁵² It also protects regenerate persons from enthusiasm by judging their experiences against the truths of Scripture.⁵³

⁴⁸ Alexander, *Religious Experience*, 28

⁴⁹ “If genuine religious experience is nothing but the impression of divine truth on the mind, by the energy of the Holy Spirit, then it is evident that a knowledge of the truth is essential to genuine piety.” Alexander, *Religious Experience*, xviii.

⁵⁰ “It is here taken for granted, that nothing but divine truth can be the object of holy affections. or furnish the motives from which true Christians are bound to act, and that faith in all its actings has respect to revealed truth. But that which is unknown can be the object neither of faith nor love, and that which is known obscurely, and viewed indistinctly, can never operate with the same effect as that which is clearly understood.” Alexander, *Religious Experience*, 28.

⁵¹ Alexander, *Religious Experience*, 168.

⁵² “The proper inference from the fact stated is, that they are egregiously in error, who think that the religious education of children is useless or even injurious; and their opinion is also condemned who

The Role of Emotions in Conversion

Emotions play a role in conversion. They represent part of the response to a true spiritual knowledge of divine things. If one gains knowledge in this deeper sense of God and Christ, he or she cannot help but be swayed or affected, and an emotional response is part of an authentic response to the gospel. As such it is to be expected, and if completely absent would raise questions as to the authenticity of the conversion experience. Just as a clear vision of the beauty and love of one lover to the other, or a stirring work of art, cannot help but produce emotional responses, a clear view of God and his love and grace as expressed in Christ's person and work cannot help but produce emotional responses.⁵⁴ So too those with a spiritual view of Christ, a true knowledge that moves beyond merely intellectual knowledge, cannot help but find in him the beauty and glory of God, and adore him.

On the other hand, one must be careful not to demand a particular emotional response. There are a multitude of factors that affect how individuals respond to grace. No template can be produced. Alexander is critical of those who would specify the 'appropriate' emotions that should result from conversion.

Realizing that humans are social beings and that religion is a social phenomenon as well, Alexander also addresses the social aspect of emotions. We are influenced emotionally by each other, and all the more so when gathered together as a large group

maintain that it matters little what men believe provided their lives are upright. All good conduct must proceed from good principles, but good principles cannot exist without a knowledge of the truth.... Between truth and holiness there is an indissoluble connection." Alexander, *Religious Experience*, 28.

⁵³ "In judging of religious experience it is all-important to keep steadily in view the system of divine truth contained in the Holy Scriptures; otherwise, our experience, as is too often the case, will degenerate into enthusiasm." Alexander, *Religious Experience*, xviii.

⁵⁴ As was observed above in discussing the role of knowledge. "Did any man ever see an object to be lovely and not feel an emotion corresponding with that quality?" Alexander, *Religious Experience*, 63.

for worship or revival. Although it can be abused, Alexander welcomes a place for the influence of emotions across a shared body in worship. “Without it how dull and uninteresting would social worship be.” We share emotions in worship, and this is part of what makes a gathering of Christians one body, having “but one heart and one soul... as their voices mingle in the sacred song of praise to the Redeemer.” Likewise, in a revival, common emotions also spread. Alexander writes that “it is no evidence of a spurious work that the sympathies [shared emotions] of the people are much awakened, or that many are led to seriousness by seeing others affected. God often blesses this instinctive feeling in this very way.”⁵⁵

Like knowledge, however, emotions can deceive as evidence of conversion. They can lead people astray. They can do so on an individual basis, as when one sees in oneself certain raised emotions that are mistaken for a conversion experience. Perhaps more commonly, emotions can lead people astray this same way in shared social settings. In such settings individuals can be swept away in the common tide of emotion and be deceived regarding their own spiritual state or experience of conversion. Simply raising emotions without a deeper grasp of truth is, like mere intellectual knowledge, problematic.

At one point Alexander shares with the reader his experience while observing a revival meeting some time earlier. He noticed that while many were attentive, some paid little or no attention to the preacher and talked among themselves throughout the preacher’s sermon about crops, planting seasons, and the like. He relates how later as the sermon neared its climax many in the audience were quite affected and demonstrative in their emotions, with a variety of cries and moans, raised hands, and other agitations. This emotional response spread through the group like the tide. “But,” he writes, “what

⁵⁵ Alexander, *Religious Experience*, 52, 52, 53.

astonished me most of all was that the old tobacco-planters whom I have mentioned and who, I am persuaded, had not heard one word of the sermon, were violently agitated. Every muscle of their brawny faces appeared to be in tremulous motion, and the big tears chased one another down their wrinkled cheeks.”⁵⁶ They were just some of the many in the audience that had paid little attention to the content of the sermon but been swept into various powerful emotions. Raised emotional responses without the accompanying sight of spiritual truths is a danger in revivals.

Even though there are legitimate group emotions present in any revival setting that accompany a true response to the gospel, there are bound to be many who are not responding to that content but merely swept up in the common emotions of the group. These people are then in danger of self-deception, thinking themselves converted and resting easy when no regeneration has taken place. This is cause for Alexander to object to the practices of certain revivalists that are more concerned to produce certain responses than they are to preach the gospel with clarity and provide the content on which meaningful conversions are built, regardless of the response. In what seems a clear reference to Finney’s new measures, he asks whether it is “judicious, by impassioned discourses addressed to the sympathies of our nature, to raise this class of feelings to a flame? Or [sic] to devise *measures* by which the passions of the young and ignorant may be excited to excess? That measures may be put into operation which have a mighty influence on a whole assembly is readily admitted; but are excitements thus produced really useful?”⁵⁷ Alexander’s answer is clearly no. In a letter regarding his thoughts on

⁵⁶ Alexander, *Religious Experience*, 58.

⁵⁷ Alexander, *Religious Experience*, 53. Elsewhere he writes that a revival “may take place when a few persons only are under the saving operations of the Holy Spirit; but when many are affected by sympathy [Alexander’s term for the effects of group emotions on an individual], and by the application of

conversion Alexander is even more direct in his thoughts on the question of inducing strong emotional responses. “All means and measures which product a high degree of excitement, or a great commotion of the passions, should be avoided; because religion does not consist in these violent emotions, nor is it promoted by them; and when they subside, a wretched state of deadness is sure to succeed.”⁵⁸ Authentic revival is then not only not aided, but also actually damaged by such enthusiastic measures and disorder.

For Alexander emotional responses to the gospel are both appropriate and desirable. But they must rise up in response to the spiritual knowledge or vision of the person of Christ and content of the gospel, and not be sought independent of that firm ground. The sense of knowing described by Alexander moves beyond head knowledge, and influences all aspects of the regenerate person, including the emotions.⁵⁹ Yet to the extent that emotions interfere with a response to true spiritual knowledge, they are harmful. And in his view almost without fail extreme emotions do precisely this.⁶⁰

The Role of the Will in Conversion

We have discussed the place of knowledge, and indirectly of intellect, and we have discussed the place of emotions. Another category commonly used in describing aspects of a person is the will. Unlike Edwards, Alexander does not explore extensively the place of the will (at least not in this work). However, again like Edwards, Alexander grates under

extraordinary means of awakening the feelings.” From his letter in the appendix of William B. Sprague, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*, 2nd ed. (New York: Daniel Appleton & Co., 1833), 230

⁵⁸ From his letter in the appendix of Sprague, *Lectures on Revivals*, 234.

⁵⁹ In the new spiritual perception of the converted soul, “there is a new perception of truth; whether you ascribe it to the head or the heart, I care not.” Alexander, *Religious Experience*, 64.

⁶⁰ “When people are much excited, their caution and sober judgment are diminished.” From his letter in the appendix of Sprague, *Lectures on Revivals*, 234.

the supposed divisions that make up a person, and argues for a more unified view of the person. There is a certain artificiality in attempting to address the role various components of a person in conversion. Alexander rejects the kind of faculty psychology in use by some in his day that divide the operation and even the substance of human being into various divisions – will, intellect, emotions or similar terms – each of which carry out particular functions. In his view the intellect, will, and emotions are all part of a unified human being and cannot be divided.

This is evident in his criticism of the notion of some that the will is fallen but the intellect unscathed by the fall, or that the will alone is responsible in matters of morality. “That doctrine is not true which confines depravity or holiness to the will, and which considers the understanding as a natural and the will as a moral faculty.” He argues that the understanding and the will are *both* natural *and* moral faculties. Alexander does not believe, as some accuse the Princeton school of believing, that the rational or reasoning capacities of a human being can avoid the disordering of the fall. As he puts it in a pithy manner, “the soul is not depraved or holy by departments.”⁶¹ He is critical of those who make “too wide a severance between the understanding and the will; between the intellect and the affections.”⁶² Human beings are fallen in the unity of their being, and are also converted in that same unity. The faith that follows from regeneration “comprehends the objects ascribed both to the understanding and the will.”⁶³

As was described earlier, Alexander sees conversion as a supernatural act wrought by the Holy Spirit. As such, the will plays no role at the initial point of regeneration. The

⁶¹ Alexander, *Religious Experience*, 63.

⁶² Alexander, *Religious Experience*, 62. He later adds, “The wide distinction between the understanding and will, which has very much confounded our mental philosophy, has come down to us from the schoolmen.” 65.

⁶³ Alexander, *Religious Experience*, 65. He does not admit the distinction of some that the understanding is a faculty for truth claims, and the will for the question of goodness.

will can have no part in the act of regeneration without the obliteration of grace. This is not to say that people do not appear to choose to follow Christ. But that choice is already a sign of God's grace to them, without which they never would have chosen. Likewise some appear to choose to leave the faith. Alexander would argue that they were then never really converted. Conversion is at its root wholly an act of God. If the will is involved in any capacity grace is undermined. But the will, together with all aspects of the person, is renewed in conversion, and the renewed will seeks to know and serve God as its highest pleasure.

For Alexander the lack of any place for the will in conversion can be illustrated by some of his comments while discussing the place of dreams and visions in conversion. Although we saw previously that he opposes those who would require some kind of extraordinary dreams or visions as evidence for conversion, he does not deny the possibility that God might work through dreams and the like. He even considers the testimonies of some who have claimed to have been converted while asleep, which would certainly remove any place for a conscious will in choosing conversion. He does not disallow that such conversions may occur, noting that while they may be "suspicious," still "if they are proved to be genuine by the future life of the person, we should admit the possibility of God's giving a new heart, just as He does to the infant."⁶⁴ Alexander cites the example of the infant as another clear example of conversion apart from conscious will or intellect paralleling the first.

⁶⁴ Alexander, *Religious Experience*, 81.

The Means of Conversion

The gospel message is the only right means of conversion. Any preaching or evangelistic activity that does not stress this primary means, providing the opportunity to gain a true knowledge of the gospel in its deeper sense, is bound to run astray. We have already seen some of Alexander's critical comments on those using methods along the lines of Finney's new measures. The biblical message of Christ's sacrifice on the cross on our behalf is the foundation of conversion, and its means involves the transmission of that spiritual knowledge. Alexander writes that "commonly before a person comes to the knowledge of a truth, the need of information is sensibly felt; and the appropriate means of communicating it are provided."⁶⁵ These means may be the preaching or teaching of the Word, Scripture reading, or other means that involve the acquisition of this knowledge.

Alexander notes that this acquisition often occurs before conversion. "It is a great practical error," he writes, "to suppose that nothing connected essentially with the sinner's conversion is experienced or done until the moment of his conversion."⁶⁶ Rather, the sinner may have to correct errant opinions, learn Christian truths, learn the Bible and God's path of salvation. Alexander is critical of any means that do not involve this transfer of the knowledge on which one's redemption and confidence before God are based.⁶⁷ He also argues that in a revival "it makes the greatest difference in the world, whether the people have been carefully taught by catechizing, and where they are

⁶⁵ Alexander, *Religious Experience*, 116.

⁶⁶ Alexander, *Religious Experience*, 116.

⁶⁷ Such knowledge is merely notional or conceptual before one's conversion; in the regenerative work of the Holy Spirit this notional knowledge is transformed into spiritual knowledge.

ignorant of the truths of the Bible.”⁶⁸ Those in the former category are primed for true revival, but those in the latter category are susceptible to spurious revival efforts based on emotions and wildness instead of clear spiritual truths. This is because in a genuine revival the effects on the people mirror the depths of the truths preached. Alexander uses the illustration of the impression made on wax by a seal. The wax is conformed perfectly to the image of the seal. So too is the truth impressed on the hearer, and the less distinct or accurate those truths, the more blurred their impression.⁶⁹

In fact, Alexander stresses the same means for conversion and sanctification. Knowledge is essential to coming to faith, and knowledge is essential to growth in faith. Growth in the Christian life is a progressive experience in which believers are, according to Scripture, to “mortify sin and crucify the flesh, and to increase and abound in all the exercises of piety and good works.”⁷⁰ The means by which this occurs, Alexander clearly states, is knowledge. “The origin and nature of this growth... is *knowledge*, even the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Just so far as any soul increases in spiritual knowledge, in the same degree it grows in grace.”⁷¹ As noted previously, this knowledge is not merely rote head knowledge, as if memorizing a catechism yields instant results. Rather it is the taking to heart of this knowledge, by the agency of the Holy Spirit. He suggests that a person “learn to contemplate the truth in its true nature, simply,

⁶⁸ Alexander, from his letter in the appendix of Sprague, *Lectures on Revivals*, 232.

⁶⁹ Alexander, from his letter in the appendix of Sprague, *Lectures on Revivals*, 232.

⁷⁰ Alexander, *Religious Experience*, 157.

⁷¹ Alexander, *Religious Experience*, 158. In another clear statement of this point he writes, “As spiritual knowledge is the foundation of all genuine exercises of religion, so growth in religion is intimately connected with divine knowledge. Men may possess unsanctified knowledge and be nothing the better for it; but they cannot grow in grace without increasing in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.” 168.

devoutly, and long at a time, that you may receive on your soul the impression which it is calculated to make.”⁷²

Alexander does not demand any particular context for the delivery of this message. It can happen anywhere. It may happen in a church context, but just as well may occur, for example, in a revival meeting, or in individual reading and reflection of Scripture. This is, I would suppose, due largely to Alexander’s inclination not to limit unduly the activity of the Spirit. Nevertheless, this weak link between conversion and the church contributes to a weak ecclesiology.

The Relation of Conversion to Baptism

Alexander’s minimal ecclesiology can be seen in the relation, or lack thereof, between conversion and baptism. Rarely does Alexander speak of baptism together with conversion. He seems content to leave out any mention of baptism when addressing issues related to conversion. The exception to this is when he examines the question of whether baptism and regeneration can coincide. He suggests that children could be regenerated at baptism (theoretically, if God chose to act at that moment), but that this is not typical. “Although the grace of God may be communicated to a human soul at any period of its existence in this world, yet the fact manifestly is, that very few are renewed before the exercise of reason commences; and not many in early childhood.”⁷³ This comment is consistent with his stress on the reception of spiritual knowledge as the foundation of the conversion experience.

⁷² He continues, “Avoid curious and abstruse speculations respecting things unrevealed, and do not indulge a spirit of controversy.” Alexander, *Religious Experience*, 161.

⁷³ Alexander, *Religious Experience*, 13-14.

The Timeframe of Conversion

For Alexander there is no set timeframe for conversion. He is careful to acknowledge the variety of forms in which people are converted, and this variety includes variation in the timeframe of conversion. He insists on neither the necessity of a sudden conversion experience nor a gradual one. He believes that both can and do occur. “Light breaks in upon the soul, either by a gradual dawning, or by a sudden flash; Christ is revealed through the gospel, and a firm and often a joyful confidence of salvation through Him is produced.”⁷⁴

Alexander also points out that often a conversion that appears to some as a sudden event is actually the result of a much longer process. Too often, he believes, people fail to comprehend all that was at work in a person before an outward conversion event. “They seem to think that nothing has any relation to the conversion of the sinner but that which immediately preceded this event; and the Christian is ready to say, I was awakened under such a sermon, and never had rest until I found it in Christ; making nothing of all previous instructions and impressions.”⁷⁵ Because of this, people are often prone to lift up as successful only those preachers who produce these immediate results, rather than acknowledging the steady work of others whose preaching and teaching of gospel truths cultivated the ground out of which those seemingly ‘immediate’ conversions sprung.⁷⁶ Alexander suggests instead that we should recognize that “sometimes persons

⁷⁴ From his letter in the appendix of Sprague, *Lectures on Revivals*, 232.

⁷⁵ Alexander, *Religious Experience*, 2.

⁷⁶ “So, when a revival occurs under the awakening discourses of some evangelist, people are ready to think that he only is the successful preacher whose labours God owns and blesses; whereas he does but bring forward to maturity, feelings and convictions which have been long secretly forming and growing within the soul, but so imperceptibly that the person himself was little sensible of any change.” Alexander, *Religious Experience*, 2-3.

are brought along very gradually in their acquisition of the knowledge of the truth. One discovery is made at one time, and another truth is revealed at another time; and between these steps there may be a long interval.”⁷⁷

Even though he recognizes the possibilities of both immediate and gradual conversion experiences, Alexander suggests that the latter are to be preferred as a better indicator of true and lasting change of heart. Even though both those appearing to be gradual and those that seem to occur suddenly may be valid conversions, “in general, those impressions which come gradually, without any unusual means, are more permanent than those which are produced by circumstances of a striking and alarming nature.” By the steady work of the preaching and teaching of the word people are readied for conversion, rather than through some rash experience filled with emotional excesses, the dangers of which have already been discussed. Still, Alexander insists that “even here there is no general rule. The nature of the permanent effects is the only sure criterion. ‘By their fruits ye shall know them.’”⁷⁸ The validity of a conversion experience is to be judged not by the timeframe in which it occurs, but by the lasting changes which that experience produces. As it was for Edwards, for Alexander the converted can only be recognized by the permanent changes that result in their lives – even though the manner and circumstances of those conversions will vary greatly.⁷⁹

Even though what appears to be a gradual process of conversion is often to be preferred, regeneration specifically, as distinguished from the more general process often described with the term conversion, is in fact never gradual. Although from a human

⁷⁷ Alexander, *Religious Experience*, 116.

⁷⁸ Alexander, *Religious Experience*, 15.

⁷⁹ And even here, making such determinations based on the assessment of changes in the lives of individuals is for Alexander risky business, as we shall see below.

perspective conversion often appears to be gradual, in reality there is always a particular moment or instant at which regeneration occurs, a particular time at which a change is wrought in an individual by God. Thus Alexander can speak of changes in a person that occur “at the moment of their conversion.” Or he can compare the Wesleyan view of sanctification to regeneration in that it is “instantaneous.”⁸⁰ Alexander argues that there is typically gradual preparation for conversion through common grace, and gradual sanctification after, but there is never gradual regeneration.

The difficulty from the human perspective with focusing on this moment, however, is that it is not readily identifiable. So while regeneration is immediate, the broader process of conversion often appears as gradual. Alexander is suspicious of those who would insist in reducing that wider process to a moment in time, or who would declare with confidence the timing of this moment in themselves or others, or who would require such declaration as an evidence of one’s conversion. Even when such a moment may seem clear, that moment we choose to call the moment of conversion may only be a later development of an earlier hidden regeneration. It is therefore hard to determine the moment of conversion in this more narrow sense of regeneration. The new birth of conversion, Alexander suggests, can be compared to physical birth, in that, like physical birth, the new birth is only the outward sign of a process that was started much earlier in conception, a moment that cannot be precisely determined.⁸¹ Or it is like a seed that first sprouts underground, and only later breaks the surface. “We believe that, as no mortal can tell the precise moment when the soul is vivified, and as the principle of spiritual life in its commencement is often very feeble, so it is an undoubted truth, that the

⁸⁰ Alexander, *Religious Experience*, 157, 130.

⁸¹ Alexander, *Religious Experience*, 72.

development of the new life in the soul may be, and often is, very slow; and not infrequently that which is called conversion is nothing else but a more sensible and vigorous exercise of a principle which has long existed.”⁸²

Much of the later portion of Alexander’s book on religious experience is filled with various narrative examples, some of which he uses to demonstrate this point. In one chapter he provides a narrative of the experience of someone known only by the initials R.C. to illustrate especially “the gradual manner in which some persons are brought to the knowledge of the truth; and the extreme difficulty of ascertaining, in many cases, where common grace ends and special grace commences.”⁸³ He writes that as he looks at this man’s experience he is “utterly at a loss to say when the work of grace commenced.” Even if he suggested a particular time, “perhaps scarcely any two persons, taken at random, would agree in this point; for while some would scarcely admit that there was any exercising of saving faith until the last manifestation here described, others would be for carrying it back to the very beginning of the exercised soul’s serious attention to religion.”⁸⁴ Another narrative example later in the chapter, in which Alexander gives a very long quoted narrative of Sir Richard Hill’s long path to conversion, reinforces this point. It continues to the end of the chapter, and describes the fits and starts by which Hill finally comes to an assurance of conversion and confidence in his faith in Christ.⁸⁵ I can only surmise that Alexander’s insertion of this extended quotation of about nine pages without any further comments indicates his desire to communicate to the reader

⁸² Alexander, *Religious Experience*, 4. The initiation of the conversion process is hidden, “just as the seed under ground may have life, and may be struggling to come forth to open day.... No one supposes, however, that the moment of its appearing above ground is the commencement of its life; but this mistake is often made in the analogous case of the regeneration of the soul.” 4.

⁸³ Alexander, *Religious Experience*, 107. This narrative and his consideration of it is found on 107-116.

⁸⁴ Alexander, *Religious Experience*, 116.

⁸⁵ Alexander, *Religious Experience*, 117-25.

the complexities of the path to salvation and the difficulties that arise in mapping the process of conversion or its precise moment. Ultimately Alexander does consider regeneration to occur at a specific moment in time, but he also believes that from our limited human perspective such a moment is not easily identifiable with certainty in most cases. Therefore conversion is much more likely to appear as a process than as a moment.

The Authentication of Conversion

For Alexander there are great difficulties intrinsic to making judgments on the validity of others' conversions based on their religious experiences or actions. Finally it is only through the fruits of their lives over time that one might have the best indication of real conversion, but no one can, from the human perspective, declare with certainty those who are converted and those who are not. The operation of the Holy Spirit on the hearts of individuals is a mystery. "Who can trace the work of the Spirit in this wonderful renovation? ... Surely, then, there must be mystery in the second birth!"⁸⁶

Alexander's views on gradual conversion serve to illuminate his suspicions regarding the place of experience in conversion. A central reason for arguing against an emphasis on instantaneous conversion is what Alexander perceives as the unreliability of self-perception or self-testimony to account for one's inner state and changes. "All investigations of the exercises of the human mind are attended with difficulty, and never more so, than when we attempt to ascertain the religious or spiritual state of our hearts."⁸⁷ In a process that is largely hidden from human perception, we typically cannot

⁸⁶ Alexander, *Religious Experience*, 23.

⁸⁷ Alexander, *Religious Experience*, Preface, xvii.

even discern the moment of our own conversion, much less judge the validity of the conversion experiences of others. This is true all the more in a revival context, where valid works of conversion of individuals by the Spirit are mixed with those individuals merely affected temporarily by their environment.⁸⁸

Thus due to a variety of factors, some of which have already been mentioned (e.g., the effect of strong group emotions on the emotions of an individual), a supposed knowledge of the specific time of one's conversion is no sure indicator of the reality of that conversion. Alexander gives examples of those who, after ardently professing a specific time of conversion, later fall away from the faith. In his view this "falling away" really indicates that the person was never converted in the first place. An overemphasis on experience can also, at times, cause those who are in fact not actually converted to have a false confidence.

On the flip side, Alexander discusses other examples of pious, clearly converted persons who cannot name the time of their conversion with any precision. These include, for example, Thomas Halyburton, and Philip and Matthew Henry.⁸⁹ He also discusses John Wesley, and suggests that he was a penitent Christian both before and after his experience at Aldersgate.⁹⁰ For some the change of the new birth seems readily apparent, while for others it remains more hidden. One cannot predict its effect on people. "Whether those 'chosen in Christ' are not, in their natural state, subject to impressions which others never experience, must remain undetermined, since we know so little of the

⁸⁸ "While so many are affected, but few may be truly converted; and no human wisdom is adequate to discern between those who are savingly wrought upon, and those who are only the subjects of the common operations of the Holy Spirit.... The wind which agitates the whole forest, may tear up but few trees by the roots." From his letter in the appendix of Sprague, *Lectures on Revivals*, 230.

⁸⁹ See Alexander, *Religious Experience*, 99f.

⁹⁰ Alexander, *Religious Experience*, 98.

real state of the hearts of most men.”⁹¹ The conversions of great sinners may not be dramatic, and those of upright and moral persons striking, feeling the weight of their sin in greater fashion.⁹²

Though some suggest that obtaining a sense of comfort is indicative of regeneration, Alexander argues that this too is not reliable. “Comfort is no sure evidence of a genuine birth; some who become strong men in the Lord are born in sorrow. They weep before they are able to smile.”⁹³ The variety of factors that impact the ways in which we respond to the Spirit’s work of regeneration make that response too unpredictable to classify.

To seek out a ‘conversion experience,’ or to preach or use means that make such experiences central to one’s view of conversion, is then to place confidence in what are often highly questionable events. This is not to say that God might not be at work in those events, but they take the focus away from a confidence founded in the gospel of grace and replace it with a confidence in a particular form of experience, an experience that, as evidenced by the lives of many pious Christians, is not common to all Christians.

Alexander’s aversion to the use of experience as a measure of conversion becomes even more apparent when he argues against the practice of giving account of conversion “of the exercises of their minds” before admittance to communion (here he means church membership). He notes how these conversion accounts generally bear a striking resemblance to one another. Due to public pressure as well as an awareness of typical

⁹¹ Alexander, *Religious Experience*, 3.

⁹² See his comments in, *Religious Experience*, 23-28. He provides a variety of anecdotal accounts to illustrate his point here, such as the experiences of the slave trader John Newton, and pastor/theologian Jonathan Edwards.

⁹³ Alexander, *Religious Experience*, 72.

conversion accounts, in such situations people often merely say what is expected.⁹⁴ “Few persons have humility and discretion enough to be trusted to declare in a public congregation what the dealings of God with their souls have been.”⁹⁵ Religious language can easily be learned and copied by a hypocrite.⁹⁶ He observes that the practice can also often lead to a spiritual pride in the amount of one’s supposed humility in their account.⁹⁷ Most importantly, he writes that “the practice seems also to be *founded on a false principle, namely, that real Christians are able to tell with certainty whether others have religion, if they hear their experience.*”⁹⁸ But this, he notes, is precisely what many sects of enthusiasts believe. “Enthusiasts have always laid claim to this discernment of the spirits, and this enthusiasm is widely spread through some large sects; and when they meet with any professing piety, they are always solicitous to hear an account of their conviction, conversion, etc.”⁹⁹

Alexander continues to criticize the use of experience as a guide to another’s spiritual condition for all of these reasons. Any assurance that we do take from experience should be grounded not in what we might see as a *moment* of conversion or other particular conversion experience, but in our trust and confidence in Christ’s work for us in the gospel of grace. The gift of assurance, then, is rooted fundamentally in a true spiritual knowledge (as discussed above) of Christ for us.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁴ “In those social meetings in which every person is questioned as to the state of his soul, the very sameness of most of the answers ought to render the practice suspect.” *Religious Experience*, 29.

⁹⁵ Alexander, *Religious Experience*, 29.

⁹⁶ “Temporary believers may use the same language, and exhibit to others precisely the same appearance as true converts.” From his letter in the appendix of Sprague, *Lectures on Revivals*, 230.

⁹⁷ Alexander, *Religious Experience*, 34.

⁹⁸ Alexander, *Religious Experience*, 29 (emphasis mine).

⁹⁹ Alexander, *Religious Experience*, 29.

¹⁰⁰ It is not a gift, however, given to all. The diversity of genuine Christian experiences of conversion also applies to the presence of assurance or lack thereof. “Among some classes of religious people, all doubting about the goodness and safety of our state is scouted as inconsistent with faith. It is assumed as indubitably true, that every Christian must be assured of his being in a state of grace, and they have no charity for those who are distressed with almost perpetual doubts and fears. This they consider to be the essence of unbelief; for faith, according to them, is a full persuasion that our sins are forgiven. No painful process of self-

If experience is not a sufficient justification for knowing one is converted, neither is it irrelevant. The best way to judge experience is over a long period of time. One who has been regenerated will over time display signs of that conversion as a process of sanctification moves forward. Even though there may be struggles with the ‘old man’ and sin in one’s life, the converted individual will typically progress in piety and good works. Such a process, while not completely trustworthy as an indicator, is still a confirmation and an encouragement to those pondering their state before God.¹⁰¹

The Permanence of Conversion

The above discussion anticipates our final point regarding Alexander’s understanding of conversion. In Alexander’s view, true conversion is always a permanent change. The inner transformation by a supernatural regeneration brought by the Holy Spirit is not reversible. “Under the preaching of the gospel we find a permanent change of moral character taking place: so great a change that, even in the view of the world who observe it, the subject appears to be ‘a new man’.” However hidden it may at times

examination is therefore requisite, for every believer has possession already of all that could be learned from such examination. Among others, doubting, it is to be feared, is too much encouraged; and serious Christians are perplexed with needless scruples originating in the multiplication of the marks of conversion, which sometimes are difficult of application, and, in other cases, are not scriptural, but arbitrary, set up by the preacher who values himself upon his skill in detecting the close hypocrite, whereas he wounds the weak believer, in ten cases, where he awakens the hypocrite in one.” Alexander, *Religious Experience*, 30.

¹⁰¹ Against Wesley and others who would argue for the attainment or gift of complete sanctification, Alexander sees sanctification as a gradual process. “It is understood that the followers of John Wesley hold, in conformity with his recorded opinion, that *sanctification* is not a gradual and progressive work, which remains imperfect in the best in this life, but that, like regeneration, it is instantaneous, and that the result is a complete deliverance from indwelling sin; so that from that moment believers are perfectly holy, and sin no more—unless they fall from this high state of grace—in thought, word, or deed. Here then there can be no similarity between the religious experience of an Arminian, who has attained sanctification, and a Calvinist, who is seeking to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one is conscious of no sin, inward or outward, of nature or of act, and must have perpetual joy—a heaven on earth; while the other is groaning under a deep sense of inherent depravity which works powerfully against his will, and continually interrupts and retards his progress.” Alexander, *Religious Experience*, 130.

appear, or however much a regenerated soul may ‘backslide,’ they are still ever under God’s mercy. “There are few truths of which I have a more unwavering conviction, than that the sheep of Christ, for whom He laid down His life, shall never perish. I do believe, however, that grace may for a season sink so low in the heart into which it has entered, and be so overborne and buried up, that none but God can perceive its existence.”¹⁰²

Against the view of Methodists, who argue that one might be converted but then fall from grace, for Alexander the only alternative view of the ‘backslider’ is to see that individual as never truly converted in the first place. This we have alluded to earlier in discussing the limited value of a supposed knowledge of the time of one’s conversion. Self-testimony is not a reliable indicator of a truly regenerated heart, and those that appear to fall out of grace were never in his view under grace. Alexander describes different forms of backsliding, and seems to distinguish between cases of Christians backsliding, and of those who have been exposed or influenced strongly in some way by Christianity, but were never truly converted and have fallen away from it, never to return. There is no falling away from a truly regenerated heart. As he puts it, “We never hear of a sinner being born a *third time*.”¹⁰³

A Morphology of Conversion and the Ordo Salutis

The typical steps to conversion, according to Alexander, include conviction, external reformation and adoption of religion, despair, and God’s gracious regeneration. But these steps are not to be held or demanded rigidly. He argues, for example, that a

¹⁰² Alexander, *Religious Experience*, 55, 7.

¹⁰³ Alexander, *Religious Experience*, 175.

sense of conviction, while very common, may not always precede conversion, nor is it proven to be required from Scripture.¹⁰⁴ All these steps are common, but as we have seen elsewhere, Alexander refuses to insist on a strict path for the operation of the Spirit in areas that are not clearly prescribed by Scripture. He notes that “there are some truly pious persons who are distressed and perplexed, because they never experienced that kind of conviction which they hear others speak of, and the necessity of which is insisted on by some preachers.”¹⁰⁵ Insistence on certain steps not prescribed by the Bible can be damaging.

R. C., the previously mentioned subject of one of Alexander’s chapters, describes in the most personal and detailed terms his struggle to be converted. R. C. attempted to arrive at a state of conviction which might then lead to regeneration, but found himself unable to arrive at a proper sense of conviction of sin. But in talking with a preacher, he learned that there was no certain amount of conviction needed for conversion; one must only throw oneself at the mercy of Christ and rest in him alone. When at the culmination of this process of conversion, “with a deep and feeling conviction of my utter helplessness” he prayed, “God be merciful to me a sinner,” R. C. described what followed. “God was pleased to give me such a manifestation of His love in the plan of redemption through Christ, as filled me with wonder, love, and joy. Christ did indeed appear to me as altogether lovely, and I was enabled to view Him as my Saviour, and to see that His

¹⁰⁴ “It would be very difficult to prove from Scripture, or from the nature of the case, that such a preparatory work [conviction] was necessary” for conversion. Alexander, *Religious Experience*, 16. He later adds, “I do not consider legal conviction as necessary to precede regeneration, but suppose there are cases in which the first serious impressions may be the effect of regeneration.” 20.

¹⁰⁵ Alexander, *Religious Experience*, 17.

sufferings were endured for me.”¹⁰⁶ He was given an assurance of God’s favor, though he still at times later continued to struggle with sin.

Alexander does not discuss an *ordo salutis* in the manner of some earlier Reformed scholastics, but he does indicate clearly that regeneration precedes faith. Even though “the discovery of the purity of the law, and this deep feeling of the evil of sin, commonly precede any clear view of Christ and the plan of salvation,” Alexander writes, “this has given rise to the prevalent opinion that repentance goes before faith in the natural order of pious exercises. But, according to our idea of faith... it must necessarily precede and be the cause of every other gracious exercise.”¹⁰⁷ According to Alexander, one’s faith is always a response to a previous act of God.

Prominence of Conversion in Theological Viewpoint

Conversion holds a prominent place in Alexander’s theology. Although Jonathan Edwards will always be intimately connected with revivalism due to his place in the First Great Awakening, in my reading of Alexander, I would argue that he is even more the revivalist theologically than Edwards. Conversion is a centerpiece of his theology. As he puts it, “THERE is no more important event which occurs in our world than the new birth of an immortal soul.”¹⁰⁸ It is what opens him to so much of the revivalist spirit of his day. There is no greater concern than the salvation of souls for Alexander, and this expresses itself in the strong, individualistic, evangelistic and revivalistic concerns of his writing and activity.

¹⁰⁶ Alexander, *Religious Experience*, 115 (quoting R. C.’s narrative).

¹⁰⁷ Alexander, *Religious Experience*, 73.

¹⁰⁸ Alexander, *Religious Experience*, 21.

Over the course of this chapter we have seen that Alexander has a robust concern for conversion, and for the closely related phenomenon of revivalism. We have observed the importance of knowledge of the gospel and biblical truths as a means to that conversion, a knowledge that is not merely notional but involves the deeper, richer, and often emotive response of a unified human being of intellect, emotions, and will to a vision of the truth as provided through the supernatural work of the Spirit. Alexander's view of the indeterminate timeframe of conversion and its permanence has been described. We have observed several similarities between Alexander's views and those of his evangelical predecessor, Jonathan Edwards – most especially in the supernatural and gracious nature of conversion, and in the dispositional change at its root. They also share a common interest in revivals and the examination of those experiences that flow out of revival activity and their potential in authenticating conversions. We have also observed some differences between the two, most noteworthy among them Alexander's lesser emphasis on discussions of the will and greater emphasis on and greater role for knowledge. Along with this has also come the difficulty of defining clearly the nature of this knowledge and the extent or quantity of knowledge necessary for conversion. This is likely the most problematic area of Alexander's views on conversion. Also problematic has been the rather weak ecclesiology that flows out of his views on conversion.

It remains to be seen in what forms Alexander's views on conversion are to be carried on or modified at Princeton by his student, colleague, 'spiritual son,' and successor, Charles Hodge. It is to these concerns that we turn in the following chapter.

Chapter Four – Charles Hodge

Although in the evaluation of the views of Princeton Seminary the focus is on Charles Hodge (1797-1878), some considerable space has been taken to consider the views of Archibald Alexander. This has been done first to show, as we shall see, the remarkable consistency across these two generations of Princeton professors. It also is necessary, I would argue, for any thorough understanding of Hodge's views and development. It would be hard to overestimate Alexander's impact on Hodge. In his recent biography of Hodge, Andrew Hoffercker writes that while Hodge was a student at the seminary Alexander "took special interest in the young Hodge, who responded willingly with filial devotion." He suggests that Alexander was "the most dominant influence" on Hodge at this formative time, and that "he served as teacher and surrogate father" to Hodge.¹ David Calhoun, historian of Princeton Seminary writes that "when he was a child, Charles Hodge had lost his own father; and Archibald Alexander became, in a special sense, his father."² It was Alexander who was crucial to Hodge returning to

¹ Andrew W. Hoffercker, *Charles Hodge: The Pride of Princeton* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2011), 50, 47. Likewise John W. Stewart considers Alexander to be "the third and surely the most formidable influence on the adolescent Hodge. Hodge always addressed him as 'Doctor' and was overtly uncomfortable when he differed with his mentor, which was not very often." "Mediating the Center: Charles Hodge on American Science, Language, Literature, and Politics," *Studies in Reformed Theology and History*, Vol. 3, No 1 (Winter 1995), 1-114, 19.

² David B. Calhoun, *Princeton Seminary Vol. 1: Faith and Learning 1812-1868* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1994), 105. In correspondence between Hodge and Alexander included in the biography of Hodge by his son, Hodge himself refers to Alexander as "my revered Father." Alexander A. Hodge, *The Life of Charles Hodge* (1880; rpt. New York: Arno Press, 1969), 275 (further citations as *LCH*). In addition to material mentioned in the previous chapter, the most significant secondary sources on Charles Hodge include his son Alexander's biography and two other recent biographies: Andrew Hoffercker's *Charles Hodge*, and Paul C. Gutjahr, *Charles Hodge: Guardian of American Orthodoxy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), and another book of essays, *Charles Hodge Revisited: A Critical Appraisal of His Life and Work*, ed. John W.

Princeton as a professor. It was Alexander under whom Hodge served as a junior colleague for the first decades of his long career. Hodge named his firstborn son after Alexander. When Alexander was close to death he sent for Hodge to visit him. Calling Hodge “his dear son,” he wished to bid him farewell, telling him, “I consider it one of my greatest blessings that I have been able to bring you forward.” Upon returning to his home Hodge made a note to himself that he might remember this “solemn interview with my spiritual father, to whom I am more indebted in every respect than to any man or to all other men.”³ Upon Alexander’s death, “to show the depth of his attachment to Alexander, Hodge purposely walked in the same group as his sons during the funeral procession. In their four decades together, no single man had exercised a more profound influence on Hodge’s life and thinking.”⁴ Alexander was a formative force in Hodge’s theological views, and an abiding influence throughout Hodge’s life. Even in his address at the “Semi-Centennial” celebration of Hodge’s fifty years at Princeton Seminary toward the end of his life in 1872 Hodge did not fail to refer to him. Calhoun quotes A. A. Hodge’s comment that “Hodge always affirmed that he was ‘moulded [sic] more by the character and instructions of Dr. Archibald Alexander, than by all other external influences combined.’”⁵

Stewart and James H. Moorhead (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002). Primary sources for Hodge are massive, and include published books and mountains of journal articles, and enormous repositories of his papers and letters, the most significant of which are the Charles Hodge Manuscript Collection in the Princeton Theological Seminary Archives (further citations as CHMC), and the Charles Hodge Papers in the Princeton University Archives (further citations as CHP). The published books most referred to in this dissertation are Hodge’s *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (1871-72; rpt. London: James Clarke & Co., 1960), (further citations as *ST* followed by volume number: page); *Conference Papers* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1879), (further citations as *CP*).

³ CHP, folder 6-27. Miscellaneous Manuscript Material. Note dated 10/12/1851.

⁴ Gutjahr, *Hodge*, 260. He also writes that Alexander’s “philosophical predilections and theological stances proved to be the single most important interpreter for Hodge of both the Bible and the Westminster Confession.” 202.

⁵ Calhoun, *Princeton* vol 1, 105, quoting *LCH*, 47. A. A. Hodge comments later that “Dr. Hodge never departed from the theology of his beloved teacher [Alexander].” 273.

If Alexander's influence is undeniable, nevertheless it is Hodge who has had the greatest impact on the nineteenth century and beyond. Paul Gutjahr, his biographer, notes that in the years after replacing Alexander as professor of theology Hodge's "voice came to represent the standard of conservative confessional orthodoxy among American Presbyterians."⁶ Hodge's long career came to define the seminary itself, and his influence continued in central ways for decades after his death.⁷ Of the thirteen professors appointed after William Henry Green in 1851, "all but three were alumni of the Seminary seven had been students of Charles Hodge and two were his sons. Calvinistic doctrines as espoused at Princeton Seminary were inbred in their souls."⁸ Hodge was also very influential in the broader Presbyterian church, taking an active role in its oversight, officially representing his Presbytery at the General Assembly on a regular basis from 1842 on, and serving as the moderator of the General Assembly in 1846.

One could even argue that no single Protestant theologian was as influential in nineteenth century America as was Hodge. As the leading voice of what was arguably the leading Protestant theological institution of the century, and as a professor of thousands of students over a fifty-plus year career of classroom teaching, Hodge had an enormous influence on generations of budding theological students, pastors, and teachers.⁹ "No

⁶ Gutjahr, *Hodge*, 206.

⁷ William K. Selden writes that Hodge "became the individual with whom the Princeton theology became most singularly identified well into the early part of the twentieth century." *Princeton Theological Seminary: A Narrative History, 1812-1992* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 47.

⁸ Selden, *Princeton Narrative History*, 57.

⁹ Mark Noll considers Princeton Seminary the most influential of the nineteenth century in America. See *The Princeton Theology 1812-1921*, ed. Mark A. Noll (1983; rpt. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 18-20. He comments elsewhere: "By the time of his jubilee at Princeton Theological Seminary in 1872, Hodge had personally instructed more theological students than had attended any other seminary in the country." Charles Hodge, *Charles Hodge: The Way of Life*, ed. Mark A. Noll (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 1. David W. Bebbington records that "between 1822 and 1878, Charles Hodge trained more than two thousand students." *The Dominance of Evangelicalism* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 137. Calhoun puts the number at 2,700. David B. Calhoun, *Princeton Seminary, Vol. 2: The Majestic Testimony 1869-1929* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1996), 37. Others, including Gutjahr, put the number at

single American professor trained more graduate students in any field than did Hodge during the nineteenth century.”¹⁰ His influence was extended even further by his career in print, since he was a very active scholar, producing not only his three-volume *magnum opus* of systematic theology but also a variety of other books and countless, extensive articles as editor and writer for the *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review*.¹¹ Hodge was also read extensively by others, and had considerable influence well beyond the bounds of Presbyterianism. His journal publications engaged all manner of theological issues, as well as significant cultural and social issues of his time. In his volume on Princeton Seminary’s history, William Selden observes, “No single individual was identified more intimately with the Calvinistic theology of the nineteenth century than Charles Hodge. Nor was anyone in the Presbyterian Church in that era held with such affection, respect, even awe.”¹² More recently, Gutjahr asserts that “in the life of Charles Hodge one finds a stunning panoramic view of nineteenth-century Protestantism,” and that he “towered in the theological circles of his day.”¹³ Significant as he was over his lifetime, he is also important for his ties to a Reformed tradition that extended further into the past before

upwards of three thousand students. “Training more pastors,” Hoffecker notes, “than all other seminaries in his era combined, Hodge extended Presbyterianism’s influence by fleshing out one of the most compelling, coherent worldviews of all his denominational peers.” *Charles Hodge*, 28.

¹⁰ Gutjahr, *Hodge*, 213.

¹¹ In its earliest editions it was called the *Biblical Repertory*, and then briefly the *Biblical Repertory and Theological Review*. Mark Noll comments that these journals “had become the second oldest quarterly review of any kind in the United States and had outlived all of the religious journals in existence when the *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* was first published in 1825.” Hodge, *Way of Life*, 1. He later adds that “no one, not even his closest friends, believed that Hodge emerged the victor in all of these controversies. But by the same token, no religious leader during Hodge’s active years with the *Princeton Review* could merely ignore the polemics that poured forth quarter by quarter in the pages of that formidable journal.” 30.

¹² *Princeton Narrative History*, 71. Elsewhere he writes, Hodge “taught theology to more students than any other professor at Princeton Seminary, and his writings were more widely read than almost any other Protestant theologian of the nineteenth century.” 47. David Calhoun states, “Charles Hodge was widely recognized as the leading spokesman for confessional Calvinism in America and as a figure of international reputation.” *Princeton* vol. 1, 353.

¹³ *Hodge*, 4.

him and has also continued in various forms into the twenty-first century.¹⁴ Thus, his views are in certain respects representative of a living tradition that has continued to engage and influence evangelicalism today. In all these ways, Charles Hodge's importance for this study is undeniable.

Remarkably, until 2011, only one biography of this significant figure existed, prepared by his son two years after his death. Such an oversight among the academy reflects their own biases and interests, because whatever one may think of Hodge, no fair assessment of American religious history can disregard his place in it. After one hundred thirty years with no biographies, two appeared in 2011 to fill the void.¹⁵ Still, Hodge remains understudied, and this section of the dissertation aims to rectify this lack of scholarship in at least one area, providing a better understanding of his thought as it relates to conversion.

One of the difficulties in studying a figure such as Hodge is dealing with the sheer volume of writings he produced. Not only did Hodge write several books and a three

¹⁴ E. Brooks Holifield writes that "Hodge stood, as he repeatedly said, for 'Old Calvinism.' He had in mind chiefly the Calvinism of the late sixteenth- and seventeenth-century confessions, but on occasion he linked Princeton's Calvinism with the Old Calvinist party in eighteenth-century New England – Moses Hemmenway, James Dana, Jedediah Mills, and others." "Hodge, the Seminary, and the American Theological Context," in *Hodge Revisited*, 110. Winthrop S. Hudson and John Corrigan note that "Hodge was deeply influenced by Swiss orthodoxy, and a strong confessionalism became the hallmark of this theology.... His theological system was based solidly on the Westminster Standards and other Reformed confessions which he sought faithfully to expound and defend." *Religion in America*, 5th ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1992), 161. Noll writes that none of Hodge's theological students "doubted Hodge's persistent loyalty to the Reformed theological tradition as defined by classic statements of the sixteenth and seventeenth [sic] centuries. For Alexander and Hodge, John Calvin, the great lights of English Puritanism, the Westminster Confession of Faith, and the influential Calvinistic dogmatists of seventeenth-century Europe were all reliable guides for understanding the Bible." *Way of Life*, 22. For more on the "Princeton Theology" of the nineteenth century that Hodge represented, see Noll, *Princeton Theology*, and Calhoun, *Princeton*, 2 vols.

¹⁵ The first, Paul Gutjahr's *Charles Hodge: Guardian of American Orthodoxy*, was seven years in the making, and provides much detail of his life, if somewhat underwhelming in dealing with theological issues. The second, by Andrew Hoffercker, *Charles Hodge: The Pride of Princeton*, is in some ways the culmination of Hoffercker's work earlier in his career in his groundbreaking corrective on views of Princeton, *Piety and the Princeton Theologians* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1981), and is in some ways more successful in providing an inside view to Hodge's theology, though somewhat less complete than Gutjahr's regarding biographical details.

volume systematic theology for which he is perhaps best known, but as the editor and major contributor to the seminary's scholarly journal he produced masses of articles and oversaw the selection and publication of all others that appeared.¹⁶ He also gave regular sermons or *Conference Talks* on Sunday afternoons to the seminary students, a great many of which are preserved in one form or another. In addition there is an enormous volume of unpublished material also available at the large archives of the seminary and of Princeton University. In the preparation of this chapter I have consulted a wide range of his writings and the archives, but have not read all his works and archive materials comprehensively. I am very confident, however, that the great many materials I have consulted provide an accurate and rich assessment of his views of conversion. In spite of the great mass of materials, Hodge was generally so consistent that one does not find significant changes or development that might be the case with others given such a long and productive career, although one does find Hodge dealing with changing historical circumstances that sometimes produce fresh avenues from which to view his perspectives. Also, I have weighted my description of his views more heavily from his journal articles and *Conference Talks* over his *Systematic Theology*. The latter was produced near the end of his career, and due to its more systematic nature tends to produce a somewhat drier, more rationalistic (at times) account of his views. It also has been overused by many of those who have taken the time to write on Hodge in the past. During his lifetime his occasional writings in the form of journal articles had greater influence, and his sermons provided a more well-rounded picture of his overall understanding of the Christian faith,

¹⁶ At times it is difficult to determine accurately whether Hodge was actually the author of a *Princeton Review* article or only its editor. My working assumption in dealing with *Princeton Review* articles is that, as its editor, there is at the least an implicit endorsement of the content of virtually all of its articles by Hodge and thus all articles contribute to an understanding of his perspective. Thus at times I may use articles that cannot explicitly be identified as authored by Hodge to represent his views.

retaining an emotive aspect not always present in the systematic writings.¹⁷ As these materials, and additional archival materials, have been less explored, I also felt that their emphasis provided a greater contribution to the scholarly field.

Hodge was not concerned with innovation in theology, but rather with conservation of the “faith once delivered,” which he thought was best represented by the historic Reformed faith.¹⁸ Nevertheless, even conservation provokes forms of innovation amidst changing social and theological contexts, and this is true of his view of conversion. Hodge’s view of conversion is complex and multi-faceted. Throughout his writings and sermons he discusses various aspects of conversion, and it is also deeply embedded in his broader theological structure. The Westminster Confession forms a central part of the theological landscape for Hodge (allegiance to it was required of all Princeton Seminary professors),¹⁹ but it would be a mistake to reduce his views to some slightly Americanized version of the confession.²⁰ Due to his background, other theological influences, and a

¹⁷ Mark Noll comments, “As influential as the individual volumes penned by the Princetonians were – the systematic and popular theologies of the Hodges being most important – the impact of their learned quarterlies was even greater.” *Princeton Theology*, 22. And Hoffecker writes that “according to some reports it was the weekly conferences [Conference Talks] held in the seminary oratory on matters of practical religion that provided the greatest impact that these men had on their students.” *Piety*, vii.

¹⁸ In his address to the Seminary on the special celebration of his fiftieth year of teaching he praised Princeton’s first two professors, Alexander and Miller, saying “they were not given to new methods or new theories. They were content with the faith once delivered to the saints. I am not afraid to say that a new idea never originated in this seminary.” CHMC, folder 28:2, 1872. Stewart observes that Hodge certainly “was no innovator in theology, if by that we mean that he transformed or redirected the foundational commitments of Protestant theology.” “Mediating the Center,” 111.

¹⁹ All seminary professors were required to affirm the Westminster Confession and teach nothing that explicitly or implicitly contradicted it. See Hoffecker, *Charles Hodge*, 51.

²⁰ On this point Stewart writes, Hodge “did believe that the Reformed tradition possessed a doctrinal center and, in his case, that core was roughly equivalent with the Westminster Confessions. But he simultaneously believed that such nuclei of beliefs were inevitably contextualized, in his case, by the ‘exceptional’ and particularist issues of American culture.” “Mediating the Center,” 3. He asserts forcefully that “it is patently misleading to suggest, as many historians and theologians have, that Hodge’s thought was a mere re-creation of seventeenth-century Reformed orthodoxy.” He adds, “American cultural movements and crises required Hodge to mediate an *American* Reformed theology with convictions contoured differently than German, English, Scot, or Swiss theologians.” 112. On the other hand, Gutjahr’s evaluation leans in the other direction. “*It is nearly impossible to overstate the importance of the Westminster Confession on Hodge’s thought.* Throughout his later theological development, no single intellectual commitment ever rivaled his allegiance to the truths set forth in the confession. Although he would inflect traditional Calvinism in minor ways as he

changing American context quite different from that out of which the Westminster Confession arose, Hodge's theology – and his view of conversion in particular – takes on a variety of shades. The central thesis of Hoffecker's biography is that "Charles Hodge manifested the attributes associated with Calvinistic confessionalism (strong adherence to creedal religion, liturgical forms, and corporate worship) as well as the characteristics of evangelical pietism (the necessity of vital religion marked by conversion, moral activism, and individual pious practices)."²¹ At least as applied to his views on conversion, I would argue that Hoffecker's thesis largely holds true. As we shall see, Hodge's views do combine certain pietistic concerns and tendencies with a deep-rooted Calvinistic and Presbyterian outlook in ways that produce a view of conversion unique in some respects among the central figures of this study.

More specifically, what we will discover in the pages that follow is that, as for Alexander, so also for Hodge, conversion plays a critical and prominent role in Hodge's theology and outlook. Conversion marks the divide between life and death, between believer and unbeliever, between Christian and non-Christian. It is, at its foundation, utterly a work of God alone, in which one participates only as a result of and subsequent to God's gracious activity. Although it involves no metaphysical change, it is a revolutionary and transformative event in which one's disposition becomes oriented toward God. Although the initial change of regeneration happens in an instance, such a moment is typically largely hidden from human view and conversion is hence best understood more as a process. The primary context of this process may or may not be the church, but the reception of salvific knowledge is central to both its initiation and growth.

applied it to his American setting and combined it with the epistemology of Scottish Common Sense Realism, *this confession provided the line to all Hodge's thinking.*" *Hodge*, 26 (emphasis mine).

²¹ Hoffecker, *Charles Hodge*, 32.

Therefore Hodge, like Alexander, reflects the model of conversion here termed *transformative spiritual knowledge*. Such knowledge does not imply the primacy of the intellect alone, however. One's whole being participates in and is changed intellectually, emotionally, and willfully in the process of conversion. All authentic conversions are permanent and lasting; one is not born again a third or fourth time. Outward appearances, however, may be to the contrary. Hence, the authenticity of conversion is best judged by changed behavior over time, and not in trusting in a specific moment, feeling, profession, or experience. Revivalism can both help and hinder the process of conversion. It can reflect a special work of the Holy Spirit, which should be acknowledged and encouraged. However, it is not the central means to conversion, and can also subvert true conversion by the use of inappropriate means and manipulative practices and the encouragement of trust in particular moments and feelings, instead of a daily and longstanding commitment to and trust in God's grace and ongoing activity in one's life.

It is a difficult and somewhat artificial task to isolate conversion from one's broader theological framework. Views on soteriology and atonement, pneumatology, anthropology, sin, and any number of other theological topics impact one's understanding of conversion and vice versa. Hodge himself wrote, "the relations of truths are part of their nature," and to remove those relations always involves "something either inadequate or defective."²² Given the space limitations, I will not be able consistently to relate conversion to all those other doctrines it touches, but I will make reference to other doctrinal categories at times when necessary for clarity. Also, I employ the term conversion broadly to encompass the entire process or event by which one comes to a saving faith, including regeneration. Hodge, with most Reformed thinkers of his day,

²² CHMC, folder 11:5, "The Study of Theology," 1847.

generally reserved the use of the term “regeneration” to God’s act of renewal in the human heart – the raising to life of that which was spiritually dead.²³ Although at times Hodge used the term in a more general fashion, Hodge’s use of the term “conversion” usually referred to the human response to God’s activity. As he put it, “conversion is the result and evidence of regeneration. It is the action of the person’s own mind and will, in consequence of this prior and fundamental work of the Spirit.”²⁴ There is a sense in which his use of the term “regeneration” was also more general, in the sense that for him particular conversion responses were certain to follow authentic regeneration in some form in a changed heart.

Hodge also believed that conversion was a necessary prerequisite to the proper doing of Christian theology, because its truths are spiritually discerned. He believed that we are so darkened by sin that we must have the Spirit of God in us to understand it properly. “The study of theology is not a mere intellectual process; it is a religious exercise.... Theological truth is living truth.”²⁵ Even though his evidentialist leanings seemed strong at times, all was ultimately done in the frame of faith seeking understanding.

Earlier Princeton’s attitudes generally toward revivalism were discussed. Before examining in more detail Hodge’s view of conversion, we turn to his views on this subject.

²³ Hodge defined it clearly in a journal article from 1870. “Regeneration is the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit, creating anew its subjects in Christ Jesus. It is the planting of ‘the seed of God’ in the soul; the imparting of a divine, spiritual life to one who is ‘dead in trespasses and sins.’... It is the formation of that vital and indissoluble union, between the sinner and the Lord Jesus Christ, in which, as the branch and the vine are one, as the body and the head are one, as the husband and the wife are one, so, by the operation of the Holy Spirit, the renewed sinner and Christ become one.” “The Early Regeneration of Sabbath-School Children,” *BRPR* 42, 1 (Jan 1870), 23.

²⁴ He continues, “It is the sinner himself turning from sin and the world to holiness and God, manifested by a variety of acts and exercises. And there is all the difference between this and regeneration, that there is between the work of the infinite God, and the resulting work of a finite man.” “Sabbath-School Children,” 23.

²⁵ CHMC, folder 11:5, “The Study of Theology,” 1847.

They are noteworthy because of the close relation of revivalism to views of conversion, because Hodge himself was touched by revival both personally and through his mentor, Alexander, and because this is one of the rare areas in Hodge's thinking that demonstrates some change over time, and some discontinuity with his mentor, Alexander.

Hodge addressed the subject of revival relatively often, both directly – with sermons, articles, and portions of books – and indirectly – in his evaluations of various key figures, contemporary and historical, who played major parts in revivals. Living when he did, with the memories of the First Great Awakening still influential, and in the midst of a rash of revivals – later to be known as the Second Great Awakening – that continued to pop up throughout much of the century, it was virtually impossible to ignore the phenomenon.

Hodge's view could perhaps best be summarized by saying that he is very open to the idea of revivals, but less so to the realities involved with them. In 1858, writing in a conference talk, he defines revival as “a sudden change from general inattention to a general attention to religion, to those seasons in which the zeal of Christians is manifestly increased, and in which large numbers of persons are converted to God.” As one would expect, mass conversions are a key characteristic of revivals. In that same talk Hodge writes, “Granting the facts of supernatural divine influence, there is no objection to the *theory* of revivals.” But he later adds, “The question of reality may be viewed in another light.” How does one know a revival is authentic? Hodge says that one cannot assume that every revival excitement is a work of God. Many are purely human works, brought

about by the eloquence of the speaker and/or the elevated emotions of the hearers.

“Much no doubt which passes for revival is more or less of that character.”²⁶

The importance of revivals lies in their capacity to bring about numerous true conversions, and/or to raise the level of piety in the church. Sometimes revivals can only be recognized historically, when looking back on the effects of certain periods like Pentecost, the Reformation, or Whitefield and Edwards. “Estimated by these standards, their importance is incalculable.”²⁷

Those, however, who make revivals the sole or even primary method, for the promotion of religion raise revivals to a mistaken level of importance, as do those who insist on revivals as the best way. Hodge suggests that “a regular normal increase is better than violent alternations.”²⁸

Additional reflections on revival by Hodge will be noted as they arise in relation to the descriptions of Hodge’s views of conversion that follow. Let us now proceed to examine in greater detail various aspects of Hodge’s views on conversion.

Conversion as Supernatural

For Hodge, conversion is a necessity for anyone who would gain God’s favor. The problem is sin. The need for conversion only is sensible when the problem it addresses is appreciated. Hodge certainly understands this, and stresses human sinfulness, fallenness, and depravity. “The history of man is the history of sinners.”²⁹ The natural man is in a

²⁶ CP, CCXXV, “Revivals of Religion” (2/28/1858), 339.

²⁷ CP, CCXXV, “Revivals of Religion” (2/28/1858), 339.

²⁸ CP, CCXXV, “Revivals of Religion” (2/28/1858), 340.

²⁹ CHMC, Sermons, folder 21:28, “By Grace are Ye Saved,” 2/19/1860.

“state of alienation from God.”³⁰ We cannot escape this condition of our own accord. We must be made right. Conversion is the means by which this occurs.

Hodge emphasizes consistently and prominently that the initiation of conversion is a supernatural act. It is a central theme in a conference talk from 1854 where he writes, “regeneration is the work of the mighty power of God. It is thereby declared to be supernatural. It is the effect of the immediate and direct agency of God.” It is completely beyond our own capacity to bring it about. “No man regenerates himself. No man cooperates in his own regeneration.” This is not only known through experience, but is the clear teaching of Scripture, where “regeneration is always referred to God as its author. It is always declared to be a divine and not a human work.” As Ephesians 1 and 2 show, the sinner’s place is analogous to Christ’s after death on the cross. Christ died. His body was put in a tomb. Therefore he was completely powerless. Likewise the sinner is dead in sin and lying in the darkness of the tomb in relation to God’s holiness, completely powerless. Christ was brought from death to a new and greater, glorified life. How great is the difference, Hodge considers, between the dead body taken from the cross and the glorified and living Christ now seated at the right hand of the Father. No less great a change occurs in the conversion of a sinner, who moves from condemnation to reconciliation, from sin to holiness, from separation from God to union. Both changes, Christ’s resurrection and the sinner’s conversion, are accomplished by the mighty power of God alone. Hodge stresses emphatically the importance of this point. Regeneration “is a work entirely beyond the range of natural causes. This is a most significant fact. It touches the very core of the gospel. It determines the very nature of religion, and controls our views of Christian doctrine and experience. There is no truth therefore connected

³⁰ CHMC, Sermons, folder 21:25, “Regeneration,” 4/12/1856.

with the method of salvation of greater practical importance than the one under consideration.” This doctrine “is the vital principle of all evangelical religion and of all just appreciation of the salvation of the gospel.” Its importance “cannot be overrated.” The doctrine “teaches us the true nature of religion. It reveals it as something supernatural and divine. It is the life of God communicated to the soul, produced and sustained by the immediate and continued exercise of the power of God.” This doctrine “determines our views on all those great disputed points concerning sin and grace which have for ages agitated the church. If we hold fast our conviction that regeneration is the work of almighty power we can never waver in our faith concerning the helplessness of man, in efficacious grace, in divine sovereignty [sic].”³¹ This doctrine produces humility, and puts the ground of our confidence in God completely, rather than ourselves.

This talk exemplifies what Hodge expresses consistently throughout his writings and sermons, from early in his career to its end. “Regeneration is not a work of nature, but a supernatural work of the Holy Spirit.”³² “Christianity, subjectively considered, is not nature elevated and refined, it is something new and above nature.” It is “supernatural in its origin.”³³ Regeneration “belongs to the class of supernatural events.”³⁴ Hodge describes regeneration as a powerful, supernatural act of God in his *Systematic Theology*.³⁵ The supernatural nature of regeneration will become even more apparent as we turn to a consideration of the role of the human and the Holy Spirit in conversion.

³¹ CHMC, Sermons, folder 21:22, “That Ye May Know,” 10/15/1854.

³² CHMC, folder 23:37, “Salvation by Grace,” 10/2/1853.

³³ Charles Hodge, “Bushnell on Christian Nurture,” *BRPR*, 19, 4 (Oct 1847), 502-39, 517.

³⁴ *CP*, XCI, “Evidences of Regeneration” (9/22/1860), 138.

³⁵ For example, “Regeneration is an act of God.” *ST* III, 31.

The Role of the Human and the Holy Spirit in Conversion

Closely related to Hodge's view of conversion as supernatural is his understanding of the role of the human and the role of the Holy Spirit. When considering the part that each play in conversion one must distinguish between a narrowly defined notion of regeneration and the broader category of conversion as the total process of coming to saving faith. As should already be apparent from the previous discussion, Hodge makes very clear that the initial, supernatural act of regeneration that produces saving faith, repentance, and conversion in the sinner is one in which the human plays no part. "It is God who regenerates. The soul is regenerated. In this sense the soul is passive in regeneration." This is "a change wrought in us, and not an act performed by us."³⁶ Again he writes, "it is supernatural in its origin, due to no power or device of man, to no resource of nature, but to the mighty power of God, which wrought in Christ when it raised him from the dead; by which power of the Holy Ghost we are raised from spiritual death and so united to Christ as to become partakers of his life."³⁷ As it was for Alexander, for Hodge as well, those who are dead in sin do not raise themselves, but must be raised by the power of God through the Holy Spirit.

The work of the Holy Spirit in conversion does not end with the act of regeneration, however. Once regenerated, the Spirit continues to dwell in the believer. After regeneration, "this life, thus divine or supernatural in its origin, is maintained and promoted, not by any mere rational process of moral culture, but by the constant

³⁶ *ST* III, 31. Elsewhere in *ST* Hodge provides additional clarity on this. "Regeneration does not consist in any act or acts of the soul. The word here, of course, is to be understood not as including conversion, much less the whole work of sanctification, but in its restricted sense for the commencement of spiritual life." *ST* III, 7.

³⁷ "Bushnell on Nurture," 517.

indwelling of the Spirit of Christ, so that it is not we that live, but Christ liveth in us.”³⁸ In one of his first sermons, Hodge describes this indwelling activity of the Holy Spirit as “enlightening the understanding, purifying the affections, and guiding the life.”³⁹ At the other end of his career in his *Systematic Theology*, Hodge suggests that the Spirit opens the individual up to the proper understanding of the truths of Scripture, and that this inward guidance “has an authority second only to that of the Word of God,” suggesting that it has been neglected far too often.⁴⁰ Unlike the initial act of regeneration, here the human plays an active role alongside the Spirit, both in the initial (visible, conversion) response to regeneration, and the lifelong sanctifying process the Spirit undertakes in the convert. As Hodge puts it, “in regeneration the Spirit does everything. In sanctification, he excites and aids and gives efficacy to the means.”⁴¹

In his *Systematic Theology* Hodge compares regeneration to the raising of Lazarus from the dead. The initial act is supernatural and omnipotent and Lazarus is passive. There can be no human cooperation with such a process. After being raised, however,

³⁸ “Bushnell on Nurture,” 517.

³⁹ CHMC, folder 20:2, “Spirit Reap Life,” 12/9/1821.

⁴⁰ *ST II*, 523. “We are clearly taught in Scripture that the truth is not only objectively presented in the Word, but that it is the gracious office of the Spirit, as a teacher and guide, to lead the people of God properly to understand the truths thus outwardly revealed, and to cause them to produce their proper effect on the reason, the feelings, the conscience, and the life. What the Holy Spirit thus leads the people of God to believe must be true. No man however is authorized to appeal to his own inward experience as a test of truth for others.... But this does not destroy the value of religious experience as a guide to the knowledge of the truth.... One great source of error in theology has always been the neglect of this inward guide.” *ST II*, 523.

⁴¹ *CP*, LXXV, “Salvation by Grace” (3/20/1853), 116. Hodge can also stress the contrasting and singular role of the human response to the Spirit’s act of regeneration, such as he does in this article from 1870. “Conversion is the result and evidence of regeneration. It is the action of the person’s own mind and will, in consequence of this prior and fundamental work of the Spirit. It is the sinner himself turning from sin and the world to holiness and God, manifested by a variety of acts and exercises. And there is all the difference between this and regeneration, that there is between the work of the infinite God, and the resulting work of a finite man.” “Sabbath-School Children,” 23. As his other numerous writings related to this make clear, he does not intend by this to deny the continued activity of the Spirit in the believer. Rather in this article he is making a strong distinction between regeneration as God’s initiating act of renewal, and conversion as an individual’s immediate and specific human response to that act. He continues in the same article to describe how only God’s Holy Spirit can make the truth efficacious for salvation in the hearts of its hearers. “The most serious and tremendous truth we can speak is powerless for salvation, apart from this Divine co-operation.” 24.

Lazarus is an active agent. So too, once regenerated, the human becomes an active agent in his or her conversion.⁴² This is always a response to a previous regenerative work of God through the Holy Spirit. Hodge also suggests that the scriptural language of “new birth” is just another way of describing this same notion of regeneration. “At birth the child enters upon a new state of existence. Birth is not its own act. It is born.” One cannot choose to be born, and in birth one comes to an entirely new awareness of that which is around oneself. This scriptural description of new birth “is not consistent with any of the false theories of regeneration, which regard regeneration as the sinner's own act; as a mere change of purpose; or as a gradual process of moral culture.”⁴³

This was a key issue for Hodge, one in which the gospel itself was at stake. It was also not a new issue, since it reflected a fundamental division in church history. As his recent biographer notes, Hodge believed that “from the earliest history of the Christian church, ‘there have been two great systems of doctrine in perpetual conflict. The one begins with God, the other with man.’”⁴⁴ It was also a divide reflected in Hodge’s contemporaries.

Princeton could tolerate New Divinity views, but believed that the New Haven theology of Nathaniel Taylor violated Reformed beliefs in fundamental ways, especially in the different understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration. Calhoun describes this. “The Princetonians distinguished the ‘somewhat modified Calvinism’ of the New Divinity from the more radical recasting of Edwards's thought in the New Haven School. Dr. Alexander and his colleagues saw themselves as traditional Calvinists

⁴² *ST III*, 31-32.

⁴³ *ST III*, 35.

⁴⁴ Gutjahr, *Hodge*, 271. Gutjahr is quoting Hodge from “Prof. Park’s Remarks on the Princeton Review,” *BRPR*, 23:2 (Apr 1851), 308.

but also as true followers of Jonathan Edwards.... They believed that the New Divinity innovations were unnecessary and the New Haven views downright heretical.”⁴⁵

Nathaniel Taylor and the New Haven theology undercut regeneration as the sole responsibility of the Holy Spirit. For Hodge such a suggestion was not only wrong, but non-sensical. It cut at the root of the gospel of grace, and required not only alterations of traditional doctrine regarding regeneration, but also doctrines like total depravity, the sovereignty of God, and salvation by grace alone.

This also explains much of Hodge’s serious opposition to Charles Finney’s approach to conversion. Finney placed the agency for regeneration squarely on human choice and intellect. Regeneration was brought about through persuasion and explication of particular spiritual truths. It was within the power of each person to accept or reject such efforts. Even if the Holy Spirit was involved in the reception of these truths, the final decision to accept or reject them lay within human power. Thus, in Hodge’s view, Finney made “truth or motive the only efficient cause in regeneration and sanctification,” and reduced the role and power of the Holy Spirit to a quite resistible influence. Regeneration ultimately was considered a human power, a decision. Thus for Hodge “the views of ability entertained at Oberlin are Pelagian and not Edwardean.”⁴⁶ As such they were to him intolerable and heretical.

⁴⁵ Calhoun, *Princeton* vol. 1, 215. In the early years of the seminary, even though the professors were all Old Calvinists, the students were split – a majority were Old Calvinists while a minority held to views of the New England theology. Hodge and others at Princeton argued tolerance, believing that New Divinity was compatible with Reformed confessional standards even if they disagreed with their views. 216-17. “In the Princeton view, however, the New Haven teaching did subvert the foundations of the Reformed faith. The important difference between Samuel Hopkins and Nathaniel Taylor, they believed, was that for Hopkins regeneration was solely the work of the Holy Spirit, but Taylor told the sinner that he had the ability to act to escape his damnable condition. Charles Hodge and the Princetonians saw in Taylor’s views a radically different expression of Christianity from traditional Calvinism.” 217.

⁴⁶ “Finney’s Sermons on Sanctification, and Mahan on Christian Perfection,” *BRPR* 13, 2 (Apr 1841), 234. “Not only is truth the sole instrument in regeneration and sanctification, in Mr. Finney’s opinion, but men have the ability to resist it when wielded with the utmost energy of the Holy Ghost.” 234.

The Nature of the Change of Conversion

If conversion is initiated by a supernatural act of regeneration by the Holy Spirit, what is the nature of the change that takes place upon conversion in an individual? It is not reducible to “outward reformation.” It cannot simply be equated with external changes of behavior. The change of conversion is not simply “a change of opinion, an intellectual conversion, nor any kind of merely external reformation, because both of these may occur and leave the essential principles of the character the same.” It is becoming a new creature, and this is more than a change of outward actions, or beliefs or opinions, or changing churches, or a change of outward profession – from being an idolater to being a Christian. Though the term might be intended at times in Scripture to include a changed profession, it is “never to the exclusion of a spiritual change of character and state of which this change in profession was supposed to be evidence.”⁴⁷ It is *transformative*, “an inward, radical change of character.”⁴⁸ Thus this change has both inward and outward aspects, which are inseparable. It reflects “a change not of outward conduct merely, nor of mere acts of the mind, but of the character, *i. e.*, of the inward principles which control the inward and outward life.”⁴⁹

This dual nature of conversion is reflected in a number of other ways as well. It involves both a change in one’s objective standing before God, and in one’s subjective inner state. It reflects a new forensic standing before God – the removal of guilt and the

⁴⁷ CHMC, folder 20:4, “Become as little children...” Matt. 18:3, 4/17/1822 sermon.

⁴⁸ CP, XCIV, “If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature” (1/19/1862), 142.

⁴⁹ CP, LXXXI, “Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven” (11/19/1865), 125. This conference talk, given late in Hodge’s career, is yet another example of the constancy of Hodge’s positions over his life. It is based on the same passage, Matt. 18:3, as the earlier quoted sermon from very early in Hodge’s career in 1822. Both are very similar in their stress of the dual nature of true conversion as inward and outward, and the roots of those changes centered in a changed heart or disposition.

imputation of Christ's righteousness, but also the subjective experience of forgiveness and grace in a renewed heart. It is not merely a "change of external state or relation"⁵⁰ that brings one into the bounds of the visible church, but a union with the living body of Christ. "Union with Christ therefore determines not only our relations, but our subjective state, not only our relation to the law and justice of God, and our external circumstances, but our inward character and life."⁵¹ Authentic conversion involves then both a union with the visible church through outward profession, and union with the invisible church through inner participation in the life of Christ.⁵²

Although Hodge does not claim to be able to explain all metaphysical aspects that may be related to the changes that occur in conversion, he does make some specific arguments about those changes.⁵³ He argues that conversion does not involve a change in the substance of a soul, and that the work of the Holy Spirit in the regenerative act does not violate or override normal human processes or nature. The Holy Spirit's supernatural influence "always acts in a way congruous to the nature of the soul, doing it no violence, neither destroying nor creating faculties, but imparting and maintaining life by contact or communion with the source of all life." It uses what Hodge terms "appropriate means," that is, "means adapted to the end they are intended to accomplish. It operates in connexion with the countless influences by which human character is formed, especially

⁵⁰ *CP*, XCI, "Evidences of Regeneration" (9/22/1860), 137.

⁵¹ *CP*, XCIV, "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature" (1/19/1862), 143. He continues, "This of itself proves that being in Christ cannot be anything merely formal or outward."

⁵² Those who make up the kingdom of heaven are those "who not merely in profession but sincerely recognize Jesus Christ as their king and cordially obey him, that is the company of those who are truly pious, who are everywhere in Scripture represented as a distinct society." CHMC, folder 20:4, "Become as little children..." Matt. 18:3, 4/17/1822 sermon.

⁵³ The "metaphysical nature" of regeneration "is left a mystery." He adds, "It is not the province of either philosophy or theology to solve that mystery. It is, however, the duty of the theologian to examine the various theories concerning the nature of this saving change, and to reject all such as are inconsistent with the Word of God." *ST* III, 6.

with the truth.”⁵⁴ Hodge seeks to retain the integrity of human operation and functioning in all its respects even in the midst of the Spirit’s supernatural work.

This issue of change of substance in regeneration is of importance to Hodge because some (including Finney) are arguing that the Calvinist position requires a change of substance, and that if a change of substance is necessary, this would excuse the sinner from responsibility since it would indicate a physical defect for which the sinner could not be held accountable. Hodge counters that this is a misunderstanding of the Calvinist position, and in a key article on this topic draws on past figures from John Owen to Turretin, documents from the Synod of Dort, and Edwards, all in support of his position.⁵⁵

If there is no substantive or metaphysical change in the soul as a result of regeneration, just what is the nature of what Hodge considers a “radical change” in the regenerated individual? For Hodge the essence of the change of conversion is a changed disposition. Most fundamentally it is a change from a disposition to sin to a disposition to holy living. This is at the root of all the other external and internal changes of the regenerated individual. As he puts it, the nature of conversion “is evidently a change not of outward conduct merely, nor of mere acts of the mind, but of the character, *i.e.*, of the inward principles which control the inward and outward life.”⁵⁶ What he means by

⁵⁴ “Bushnell on Nurture,” 517. Elsewhere he writes that regeneration “takes place without any violence being done to the soul or any of its laws.” “Regeneration, and the Manner of its Occurrence,” *BRTR* 2, 2 (Apr 1830), 261.

⁵⁵ See “Regeneration,” 250-297. Elsewhere Hodge also makes the same point denying that regeneration results in metaphysical or substantive change. See, for example, CHMC, folder 2:12, Lecture Notes, “Regeneration,” from 11/8/1848. See also *ST* III, where he states flatly, “Regeneration does not consist in any change in the substance of the soul.” 6. He later adds, “Regeneration does not consist in a change in any one of the faculties of the soul, whether the sensibility, or the will, or the intellect.” 15. As was seen in the previous chapter on Edwards, there is some ambiguity in how Edwards is to be understood in support of this point.

⁵⁶ *CP*, LXXXI, “Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven” (11/19/1865), 125.

disposition or principle is not “any act or purpose or state of conscious feeling. It is something which is the source of acts, purposes and feelings, and which determines their character.”⁵⁷ It is worth hearing from Hodge a fuller description on this important point.

Besides those acts and states which reveal themselves in the consciousness, there are abiding states, dispositions, principles, or habits, as they are indifferently called, which constitute character and give it stability, and are the proximate, determining cause why our voluntary exercises and conscious states are what they are. This is what the Bible calls the heart, which has the same relation to all our acts that the nature of a tree, as good or bad, has to the character of its fruit. A good tree is known to be good if its fruit be good. But the goodness of the fruit does not constitute or determine the goodness of the tree, but the reverse. In like manner, it is not good acts which make the man good; the goodness of the man determines the character of his acts.⁵⁸

To speak of a changed disposition is to speak of a changed heart, and it is here in this biblical notion that the crucial change of conversion occurs.

The real question for Hodge is not whether one chooses God in conversion, but whether one needs a change prior to this choice to make it, a change in disposition that allows one to perceive God’s holiness and goodness and hence desire to choose him.⁵⁹

Those who see the nature of the change of conversion in an act miss this essential point that for Hodge provides the basis for any holy choice. There is a great divide between the hearts of the unregenerate and those of the regenerate, something “supernatural wrought in the soul in regeneration.” What it is, “in the former case, is a disposition to sin; and, in the latter, a disposition to holy living.”⁶⁰

⁵⁷ *CP*, XCIX, “Mortify the deeds of the body” (11/17, year not given), 150.

⁵⁸ *ST III*, 32-33.

⁵⁹ See Hodge, “Regeneration,” 295.

⁶⁰ Charles Hodge, “Witherspoon’s Theology,” *BRPR* 35, 4 (Oct 1863), 601.

The fundamental reordering of the heart that takes place in conversion then reorders one's priorities, one's affections, and one's desires as it also provides new insight into spiritual truths. This always involves new knowledge, and it is to the role of knowledge and the intellect in conversion that we now turn.

The Role of Knowledge and the Intellect in Conversion

In categorizing materials for the preparation of this chapter, it was this category on the role of knowledge and the intellect in conversion that had the most materials. Hodge constantly speaks of the importance of knowledge, and thus it is vital that we come to a clear understanding of how knowledge and the intellect functioned for Hodge in conversion.

This is all the more true as the "Princeton Theology" of which Hodge is so much a part has often been severely criticized for being overly intellectualist, concentrating on objective over subjective aspects of faith, and confusing and melding their theological positions with the sometimes incompatible views of Scottish Common Sense philosophical thinking so prevalent in their day. This perspective has been almost a given in much scholarship in the past decades regarding Princeton. However this interpretation has more recently not been without its critics. Before moving into a more specific discussion of the role of knowledge and intellect in conversion, it is valuable to consider the role of knowledge and intellect more generally for Hodge and Princeton, addressing some of the issues that have been cause for some controversy and criticism.

Princeton's Supposed Rationalism and Philosophical Dependencies

Princeton's view of the role of knowledge has been a matter of some dispute and criticism. Certain views regarding rationality were common across most of the spectrum of theological and intellectual thought in Hodge's day. There is disagreement about the extent to which Princeton uncritically accepted these views and melded them into its own theological outlook. The common scholarly wisdom of the past few decades has suggested that Princeton broadly and Hodge specifically adopted the Scottish Common Sense philosophy and other intellectual trends of their day to such a degree that their Reformed commitments were compromised and their emphasis on intellect and objectivity was unduly enhanced.

Examples of this interpretive framework abound, from decades past to recent work. One of the most important and seminal examples of this reading came from Sydney Ahlstrom in a 1955 article in *Church History*, "The Scottish Philosophy and American Theology." In it Princeton was a prime example of and promoter of the union of Scottish Common Sense philosophy and theology. He suggested that "for Hodge doctrine became less a living language of piety than a complex burden to be borne,"⁶¹ and that his adopted philosophical commitments ultimately divided him in significant ways from his Reformed tradition.⁶²

⁶¹ Ahlstrom, "The Scottish Philosophy and American Theology," *Church History* 24 no. 3 (Sep 1955), 268.

⁶² "Despite his reiterations of dogmatic formulae, the optimism of the Scottish Renaissance interposes itself and separates his theology from that of John Knox and John Calvin." "The Scottish Philosophy," 266. Regardless of his attacks on theologians straying from his orthodox standard, "the irony remains: Hodge himself is caught up in the anthropocentrism of Scottish Philosophy." 266. He adds, "The adoption of the benign and optimistic anthropology of the Scottish Moderates by American Calvinists veiled the very insights into human nature which were a chief strength of Calvin's theology. This revision, in turn, affected the whole complex of doctrine and infused the totality with a new spirit." 269. He concludes that "the profound commitment of orthodox theology to the apologetical keeping of the Scottish Philosophy made traditional doctrines so lifeless and static that a new theological turn was virtually inevitable." 269.

John Stewart describes a *Princeton paradigm* of science that incorporated epistemology from Scottish Common Sense philosophy, an assumption of continuity between science and religion, and “a growing notion that theology itself was understood and pursued as a science.”⁶³ Tim McConnell questions whether the Old Princeton apologetics are common sense or Reformed. His verdict is the former.⁶⁴

In his biography Gutjahr argues that Hodge “proved inconsistent in his alliances to Calvinist and Scottish Realist thought, depending on one line of reasoning to prove a certain point at a certain time and changing his allegiances later when that suited his purpose.” He concludes that Hodge’s “own theology became a complex and conflicted mix of Calvinist notions of total depravity leavened with the conviction [gleaned from Scottish Common Sense philosophy] that every human held within themselves a moral sense capable of detecting virtue.”⁶⁵

Mark Noll, who has done extensive reading of the Princetonians and Hodge, gives a qualified affirmation to this view, observing that “while their theology was rooted in Scripture and the Trinitarian orthodoxy of the early church, it also participated fully in modern philosophical movements – often without fully considering if the religious and

⁶³ Stewart, “Mediating the Center,” 22. In his preface Stewart does note the “continuing and wide-spread misunderstanding” of Hodge, “compounded by the surprisingly sparse scholarship about this prominent nineteenth-century theologian and influential ecclesial leader.” vi. He suggests that Hodge’s *Systematic Theology* is overemphasized and *BRPR* too often ignored. Nevertheless he does argue for the deep impact of the Scottish philosophy on Hodge. “When Old School Presbyterians like Hodge employed the words ‘facts’ or ‘natural facts’ with reference to scientific inquiry, we should, I contend, interpret their use of those terms in light of these Reidian common sense epistemological assumptions.” 24.

⁶⁴ Although McConnell uses a contemporary of B. B. Warfield, William Brenton Greene, Jr. as his representative figure for Old Princetonian methods, since he occupied a chair of apologetics at the seminary that did not exist in earlier years, he suggests that in placing reason and philosophical commitments on a level prior to Scripture, Greene “continued a theme common in Hodge and Warfield, but inconsistent with Calvin’s notions of the ‘self-authenticating’ nature of Scripture, as well as the preeminent role of the witness of the Holy Spirit in the acceptance of Scripture.” Tim McConnell, “The Old Princeton Apologetics: Common Sense or Reformed?,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 46, no 4 (Dec 2003), 671. He asserts that Old Princeton “accepted Scottish Common Sense Realism as the philosophical basis on which to develop epistemology and apologetics.” 649.

⁶⁵ *Hodge*, 204, 41.

secular sources were compatible.” He concludes that the Princetonians “were among the American intellectuals who most consistently used the language and the categories of this [Scottish Common Sense] philosophy even when, as later observers would contend, its tenets seemed to contradict Princeton commitments to Scripture and Reformed tradition.” However, he does qualify his interpretation, arguing that one cannot simply dismiss the Princeton theologians as Common Sense theologians. Their theology “contains many elements that fit poorly into a scheme dominated by the mechanical categories of Common Sense. Among these elements is the Princeton stress on religious experience.”⁶⁶

The impact of Scottish Common Sense philosophy was widespread across much of the nineteenth century, and Princeton had played a significant role in bringing it to the fore. Witherspoon, who came from Scotland to serve as Princeton College’s (then the College of New Jersey) president in 1768, came to be deeply influenced by it, and its main ideas were promulgated in the curriculum at the college from the time of his presidency for several decades. Through Archibald Alexander it came to Princeton Seminary at its inception. Prominent among the outlook of this philosophy was the notion that all human minds universally had the capacity to perceive truths around them through their senses, given certain inherent structures of the mind such as cause and effect. Moral truths also were thought to be perceptible. These ideas were a response to the philosophical skepticism of Hume and others that questioned the capacity of humans to be confident that their perceptions of reality reflected actual knowledge of that reality. These common sense philosophical ideas were combined with a Baconian inductive method of scientific thinking that sought to collect facts and make sense of them.

⁶⁶ Noll, *Princeton Theology*, 25, 30, 33.

There can be no question that this period's philosophical preferences had an influence on Hodge. He had been educated at the college and then the seminary, both of which instilled common sense views into their students.⁶⁷ But the influence of these ideas was not confined to the institutions at Princeton. These ideas were the prevalent ideas of the times in both theological and intellectual thinking across the spectrum.⁶⁸ Some even wonder if Princeton itself was not so much promulgating these theories as merely moving along with the contemporary currents of intellectual thought.⁶⁹ But whether from Princeton, or from the broader culture, this was the intellectual soup in which Hodge found himself. The question is not so much whether it influenced him, but how much it did, and whether it did so in violation of other express commitments of his Calvinist, Reformed theological heritage.

Hodge did himself no favors on this point in many of his comments in the introduction to his *Systematic Theology*. He wrote, "The true method of theology is, therefore, the inductive, which assumes that the Bible contains all the facts or truths which form the contents of theology, just as the facts of nature are the contents of the

⁶⁷ Gutjahr argues that "the thorough acceptance of Scottish Realism's moral reasoning at Princeton College had a profound effect on Hodge's own theological thinking. Although rigorously tied to the Calvinist beliefs of the Westminster Confession, Hodge came to offer Americans a unique strain of Reformed theological thinking largely based on a notion of a universal moral sentiment." *Hodge*, 40.

⁶⁸ It should be noted that although Ahlstrom sees Princeton as a pivotal disseminator of the Scottish Common Sense philosophy in America, he also finds it across the entire swath of the theological landscape of the early to mid-nineteenth century, from conservative to liberal and even Unitarianism, at Harvard, Yale, and Andover. "The Scottish Philosophy," 262-67. He concludes, "The Scottish Philosophy, in short, was a winning combination; and to American theologians, even if they felt the need for philosophic support only subconsciously, it was the answer to a prayer. It was, moreover, free enough from subtlety to be communicable in sermons and tracts. It came to exist in America, therefore, as a vast subterranean influence, a sort of water-table nourishing dogmatics in an age of increasing doubt." 268.

⁶⁹ Noll writes, "a historical examination of the Princetonians also makes it possible to see more clearly where they spoke distinctly and where their voices merely mingled with those of their contemporaries. Such an investigation reveals at the outset that many of the supposed distinctives of the Princeton Theology were simply the common intellectual affirmations of the day." *Princeton Theology*, 34. Noll considers Princeton's Scottish Common Sense assertions one example of this, as was their notion of doing theology *scientifically*. He concludes that "at least for much of the nineteenth century, the Princetonians' Scottish Realism shows us more how they sailed along with the American intellectual mainstream rather than against it." 35.

natural sciences.”⁷⁰ Sections of this introduction to his *magnum opus* seem to justify this ‘standard’ interpretation of Hodge, stressing ‘facts’ and the science of theology to an extent that the reader is left with the impression that Hodge was overly rationalistic, perhaps naïve as to human intellectual capacities and limitations, and reductionistic. It is worth quoting Hodge himself at length here:

If natural science be concerned with the facts and laws of nature, theology is concerned with the facts and the principles of the Bible. If the object of the one be to arrange and systematize the facts of the external world, and to ascertain the laws by which they are determined; the object of the other is to systematize the facts of the Bible, and ascertain the principles or general truths which those facts involve. And as the order in which the facts of nature are arranged cannot be determined arbitrarily, but by the nature of the facts themselves, so it is with the facts of the Bible... So the facts of science arrange themselves. They are not arranged by the naturalist. His business is simply to ascertain what the arrangement given in the nature of the facts is. If he mistake, his system is false, and to a greater or less degree valueless. The same is obviously true with regard to the facts or truths of the Bible... It is important that the theologian should know his place. He is not master of the situation. He can no more construct a system of theology to suit his fancy, than the astronomer can adjust the mechanism of the heavens according to his good pleasure.⁷¹

It is unfortunate that Hodge chose to write his introduction with such a particular slant toward facts, when the body of his work and thought reflects a much richer and broader view of truth, with a greater balance of subjective and objective elements. But the fact is (pun intended), he did choose to write it this way. Given these kinds of assertions by Hodge, there is some validity to a reading of him as a rationalist, or at least an intellectualist focused almost solely on the objective, propositional, intellectual aspects of Christian faith, lacking appreciation for its more subjective elements, and lacking more

⁷⁰ *STI*, 17.

⁷¹ *STI*, 18-19.

critical awareness of the ways in which knowledge and objectivity functioned and their limits. Noll suggests in one essay that the introduction to Hodge's *Systematic Theology* did incalculable damage to his historical reputation.⁷² I believe this assessment is correct. One continues to see that damage today in how he has been read and interpreted. If all one had was his systematics introduction one might come to some fairly strong conclusions about his views on knowledge and intellect. But the *Systematic Theology* does not tell the whole story, and those who have suggested or written about Hodge as though it represents a complete picture of his thought present a distorted picture.

Hodge himself, at least consciously, rejected outright philosophical systems in approaching scriptural truths. It was in putting philosophy above Christianity that the false teachers of Colossians erred. They “designed to substitute philosophy for Christianity, not by denying the latter, but by explaining it,” but Paul declared philosophy a failure.⁷³ Hodge criticized Edward Amasa Park for a view of redemption that was “characteristically rational. It seeks to explain everything so as to be intelligible to the speculative understanding.” The apostle Paul, on the other hand, taught “not a system of common sense, but of profound and awful mystery.”⁷⁴ But the question is

⁷² Noll gives this assessment of the introduction in Hodge's *Systematic Theology*, and statements such as the Bible being a “storehouse of facts,” and other similar comments. “It is doubtful whether a major American thinker ever published anything that so seriously damaged his intellectual reputation as these pages on method in the *Systematic Theology*.” “Charles Hodge as an Expositor of the Spiritual Life,” in *Hodge Revisited*, 196. Noll adds, “The curiosity that most of Hodge's earlier theological exposition - as well as much of what followed in the *Systematic Theology* - proceeded in blithe disregard of these methodological counsels cannot erase the effect of his words. Although they define a theological method that Hodge himself rarely followed, he was the one who chose to open the summary work of his career in this way.” 196.

⁷³ *CP*, CXXVII, “Ye are complete in him” (10/27/1872), 190.

⁷⁴ Hodge, “Professor Park's Remarks,” 317, 318. Hodge expands on this point. “The Apostle pronounces the judgment of God to be unsearchable and his ways past finding out, as they are specially exhibited in the doctrines of redemption, and in the dispensations of God toward our race. The origin of sin, the fall of man, the relation of Adam to his posterity, the transmission of his corrupt nature to all descended from him by ordinary generation, the consistency of man's freedom with God's sovereignty, the process of regeneration, the relation of the believer to Christ, and other doctrines of the like kind, do not admit of ‘philosophical explanation.’ They cannot be dissected and mapped off so as that the points of contact and mode of union

whether he was consistent in practice with what he argued in theory. It is hard to mesh a view of theology as a “profound and awful mystery” with the suggestion that the theologian’s “relation to the Scriptures is analogous to that of the man of science to nature.”⁷⁵

Some have suggested that a view of a dry, detached, scholastic Princeton can no longer be assumed, and represents a misreading of the Princetonians. In his 1981 book, *Piety and the Princeton Theologians*, Andrew Hoffercker was one of the first to suggest that scholarship was overemphasizing objective and intellectual elements of the Princeton theology. He sought to “provide a corrective,” arguing that “the Princeton theology exhibits both a strong objective doctrinal emphasis and an equally strong subjective strand of piety.”⁷⁶ Even though it allowed that the Princeton theology failed to be consistent in practice to what it expressed theoretically, this study still demonstrated the importance of the piety informing the theology and lives of the Princeton men. He concluded that “not only is this subjective element present, but the omission of it renders the interpretations of their thought as a whole radically incomplete.”⁷⁷ David Calhoun’s two-volume history of Princeton Seminary lent support to Hoffercker’s interpretation.⁷⁸

with all other known truths can be clearly understood; nor can God’s dealings with our race be all explained on the common-sense principles of moral government.” 317-18.

⁷⁵ Hodge, “Bushnell on Vicarious Sacrifice,” *BRPR* 38, 2 (April 1866), 161-94, 185. See also *STI*, 17.

⁷⁶ Hoffercker, *Piety*, 156.

⁷⁷ Hoffercker, *Piety*, 159-60. His 2011 biography, while broader in scope, in some respects builds on his earlier book, clearly demonstrating that Hodge and was far from a dry scholastic, and combined lively piety and confessionalism, neither of which can be ignored. “From his earliest days until he died in 1878, Hodge manifested a piety and belief that reflected a unique combination of Presbyterian New Side piety and confessional belief.” Hoffercker, *Charles Hodge*, 18.

⁷⁸ The Princetonians “stood squarely in the great stream of historic Christianity and orthodox Calvinism. They faithfully, sometimes powerfully, and often winsomely, preached, taught, wrote, argued, and lived the truth as they saw it.” Calhoun, *Princeton* vol. 1, xxv.

More recently, Paul Helseth has issued a direct frontal assault on rationalistic readings of Hodge and Princeton in his book, *“Right Reason” and the Princeton Mind*.⁷⁹ Helseth calls “the prevailing historiographical consensus into question by establishing that Old Princeton's religious epistemology focused much more on the heart than it did on the head.”⁸⁰ While admitting that Scottish philosophy had some impact on the Princetonians, he argues that the theology of Old Princeton as represented by its major figures was not unduly influenced by the Enlightenment and Scottish Common Sense Realism, but instead “stood in the epistemological mainstream of the Reformed tradition.”⁸¹ Their supposed intellectualism moved beyond narrowly defined categories of rational thought. Instead, “subjective and experiential factors play a critical role in Old Princeton’s religious epistemology because Old Princeton's ‘intellectualism’ is moral, not merely rational. It has to do, in other words, with the ‘whole soul’ – mind, will, and emotions – rather than the rational faculty alone.”⁸²

Although Helseth argues that “at their best the Princeton theologians approached the task of theology not as arrogant rationalists would have done, but as biblically faithful Christians have always done,” the phrase, “at their best” is a significant qualifier to Helseth’s argument, and in general Helseth overstates his case. The Princetonians, and Hodge in particular, are not as consistent in this area as one would like. Still, although he

⁷⁹ Paul Kjos Helseth, *“Right Reason” and the Princeton Mind* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2010).

Previous to this book Helseth had also written a variety of articles and a dissertation on related topics.

⁸⁰ *Right Reason*, xxvii.

⁸¹ *Right Reason*, xxvii.

⁸² *Right Reason*, 16. “We may conclude, therefore, that if some conservatives ought to be chastised for rationalistic tendencies that threaten the integrity of evangelicalism's contemporary witness, they ought to be chastised for tendencies that were acquired from some place other than Old Princeton, for at their best the Princeton theologians approached the task of theology not as arrogant rationalists would have done, but as biblically faithful Christians have always done. Indeed, they sought to discern the difference between truth and error not by appealing to the magisterial conclusions of the rational faculty alone, but by hearing the message of the text with ‘right reason,’ which for them was a biblically informed kind of theological aesthetic that presupposes the work of the Spirit on the whole soul of the believing theologian.” 221.

does not give as much heed to the influence of Scottish philosophy as I believe is justified, and taking the body of their texts and sermons as a whole, Helseth is mostly right that characterizations of Hodge and the other Princetonians as rationalistic, philosophically grounded, and detached are misguided.⁸³ This should become more apparent as we turn to a closer consideration of the role of intellect and knowledge in conversion specifically.

Intellect, Knowledge, and Conversion

Regardless of how one comes out in any debate over intellectualism or Scottish Common Sense Realism, there can be no denying that knowledge plays a key role in Hodge's view of conversion. He writes that in Scripture "we are said to be saved through knowledge."⁸⁴ Elsewhere he writes that in Scripture religion "is a form of knowledge," a "spiritual discernment of divine things."⁸⁵ If the change in conversion to a holy disposition is to occur, there must be some knowledge for what is holy, some awareness of the object of our holy desires. With a description that sounds remarkably like Jonathan Edwards, Hodge gives this account in 1830 of the regenerated state. "How can we love that which we do not see. The affections must have an object, and that object must be apprehended in its true nature, in order to be truly loved."⁸⁶ No human presentation of spiritual objects or truths, however, is adequate to reveal the full force of those truths to the human heart.⁸⁷ Until that object is revealed by the work of the Holy Spirit, one cannot have a holy disposition. "It is obvious, therefore, that regeneration, to be of a

⁸³ For a fuller assessment of Helseth's book, see Mark B. Chapman, "'Right Reason' and the Princeton Mind," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 54, 4 (Dec 2011), 870-74.

⁸⁴ "Regeneration," 284.

⁸⁵ "Professor Park's Remarks," 342.

⁸⁶ "Regeneration," 284-85.

⁸⁷ Only God's Holy Spirit can make the truth efficacious for salvation in the hearts of its hearers. As Hodge puts it, "the most serious and tremendous truth we can speak is powerless for salvation, apart from this Divine co-operation." "Sabbath-School Children," 24.

moral character at all, must consist in such a change as brings the soul into a state to see and love the beauty of holiness. It matters not what the change be called; a 'spiritual sense,' or 'a taste,' or 'disposition,' it is as necessary as that an object should be seen in order to be loved."⁸⁸

Right knowledge matters, because knowledge is essential to faith and Christian life. For Hodge there are always two dimensions to faith: assent and trust. Both are required. Intrinsic to the notion of assent is that faith has content. To be a Christian one must believe certain assertions and not other assertions. It is these specific doctrinal assertions that defines what it is to be a Christian.⁸⁹ Specifically, the knowledge necessary for conversion involves knowledge of Christ. Hodge notes that in Paul's conversion, "the truth revealed was the Divinity of Christ," and that "Paul makes conversion consist in this knowledge of Christ."⁹⁰ In another sermon he writes, "in numerous passages of the New Testament the knowledge of Jesus Christ is declared to be essential to the existence of true religion." He adds that "those who have this knowledge have true religion, and those who have not this knowledge have not true religion."⁹¹ Following Christ means to acknowledge that he is the *truth*, and all that this entails. For Hodge this means acknowledging that in Christ "is all truth, religious, moral, and scientific."⁹² It means believing as true God's revealed plan of redemption.

If faith involves content, faith cannot be reduced to content. Assent is not sufficient. Faith also involves trust. Intrinsic to the notion of trust is a willingness to act in the confidence of the object of faith. But both of these aspects require some knowledge as

⁸⁸ "Regeneration," 285. Hodge indeed appeals to Edwards in support of this position throughout this article.

⁸⁹ Those who reject Christianity as a system of doctrine, are unbelievers. They are not Christians." *ST* 1, 177.

⁹⁰ *CP*, XCIII, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" (1/18/1852), 141.

⁹¹ CHMC, folder 21:23, "Excellency of the knowledge of Christ," April 8, 1855.

⁹² Hodge, *CP*, CXXIII, "Ye believe in God, believe also in me" (n.d.), 185.

a starting point. As Christ is the object of faith, this starting point necessarily involves some knowledge of Christ.⁹³

One must be careful in how one understands what it means to Hodge to “know” a truth. One must not assume that to “know” is confined to a certain kind of rational or intellectual knowing, as this is not usually what Hodge has in mind when discussing salvific truths. “In the Scriptures, knowledge is not mere intellectual apprehension. It includes that but more.”⁹⁴ As we saw from the description of the debate over Princeton’s intellectualism, there is a deeper and fuller form of knowing than just knowing with one’s mind, not at all unlike the twofold Puritan form of knowing previously discussed when examining the views of Edwards. Knowledge of Christ, according to Hodge, is both “speculative and experimental. Both forms of knowledge must be united.”⁹⁵ The knowledge that God reveals in the Son, Hodge writes, “is not external acquaintance.” Even those who crucified Christ had that. It is not “familiarity with the facts of history. Nor is it a speculative knowledge of all the truth revealed concerning Christ.” One can be spiritually dead and still have even extensive speculative knowledge of theological truths. Rather, it is “spiritual knowledge, such knowledge as implies just appreciation, and is attended with appropriate affections.”⁹⁶ It moves beyond mere intellectual comprehension of propositions, and “includes also the proper apprehension not only of the object, but of its qualities; and if those qualities be either esthetic or moral, it includes the due apprehension of them and the state of feeling which answers to them.” Such knowledge will then always produce some form of response in the knower, reflecting a

⁹³ “Knowledge is essential to religion, because religion consists in the love, belief, and obedience of the truth.” Hodge, “The Church – Its Perpetuity,” *BRPR* 28 (Oct 1856), 692-93.

⁹⁴ *CP*, CXLIII, “The Excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord” (10/11/1843), 214.

⁹⁵ *CP*, CIX, “Growth in Grace” (10/29/1854), 166.

⁹⁶ *CP*, CXLIX, “It pleased God to reveal his Son in me” (4/19/1857), 223.

transformed heart or disposition. Thus the true knowledge of Christ is not just intellectual knowledge of who he is, but the affective response – “the corresponding feeling of adoration, delight, desire and complacency.”⁹⁷ He stresses this point with his students: “Permit me again to remind you that the study of theology is not a mere intellectual process; it is a religious exercise. Remember that nothing is so offensive as a body to which life belongs but from which it has departed. Theological truth is living truth.”⁹⁸ And such a living, spiritual truth moves beyond some mere cognitive acknowledgement into the whole fabric of an individual’s being, coloring affections, motivating actions, and reorienting priorities. It is this form of truth that is essential to true conversion.⁹⁹

Just how important is knowledge to conversion? How much knowledge is necessary? And what are the possibilities for conversion for those who lack intellectual capacities – whether infants, or those with limited intellectual abilities? Hodge at times uses some very strong language to express the importance of knowledge and intellect for Christianity in general and conversion in particular. His paradigm is often like that used in his discussion of the efficacy of the Lord’s Supper in a conference talk titled, “The Lord’s Supper as a Means of Grace, No. 1” from 1859. Here he suggests that only those Christians with faith “in what the Scriptures teach concerning this ordinance” can take true spiritual nourishment from the Lord’s Supper. Their faith must be grounded in a

⁹⁷ Hodge, *CP*, CXLIII, “The Excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord” (10/11/1843), 214.

⁹⁸ CHMC, folder 11:5 (Lecture notes), “The Study of Theology,” 1847.

⁹⁹ In an 1855 sermon Hodge writes, “By true religion is meant that state of mind which is produced by right apprehensions, or the spiritual discernment of God and of our relations to him. It includes, therefore, reverence, love, and zeal for the divine glory, humility, penitence, faith, and new obedience. It is inward holiness, embracing current knowledge, right feeling, and proper action in relation to the Supreme Being.” CHMC, folder 21:23, “Excellency of the knowledge of Christ,” 4/8/1855. This was at least the second time that Hodge wrote a sermon on this passage. He used the same passage in a sermon from 10/11/1843. This would point again toward the importance of the place of knowledge for Hodge, and specifically the knowledge of Christ.

proper knowledge and understanding of the nature and purpose of the Supper.¹⁰⁰

Knowledge is related to efficacy. It is not just intellectual knowledge, however, but a belief or faith in that knowledge.¹⁰¹ It seems a paradigm that Hodge uses for true conversion as well. Even though Hodge is referring to knowledge in the twofold way described above, still it remains the case that a certain amount of speculative or cognitive knowledge is vital to any saving faith, as well as an intellectual capacity to consider that knowledge. Other statements of his support such a view. “Without reason there is no apprehension of truth.”¹⁰² Knowledge and rationality may not be the end, but they are the beginning of the true heart knowledge of Christ that constitutes Christianity.

Although Hodge does understand this knowledge in a much richer way than some rationalistic objectivity, with moral and affective aspects indissolubly linked, he also prioritizes the relation of an intellectual or cognitive knowledge to other affective and experiential elements. The problem with some, such as Horace Bushnell, according to Hodge, is that they invert the priority of this relation, suggesting that feeling or experience supplies the content of knowledge to which one assents.¹⁰³ We will examine this further later in the chapter.

If knowledge seems to be absolutely necessary to conversion, the degree and clarity of knowledge required by Hodge is more difficult to answer. Hodge insists that

¹⁰⁰ Hodge, *CP*, CCXX, “The Lord’s Supper as a Means of Grace, No. 1” (9/11/1859), 332.

¹⁰¹ See also Hodge, *CP*, CCXX, “The Lord’s Supper as a Means of Grace, No. 1” (9/11/1859), 337.

¹⁰² *CP*, CXCIX, “Meditation” (1/3/1859), 300.

¹⁰³ Gutjahr describes Hodge on Bushnell in this area in the following way: “Bushnell’s reasoning throughout *God in Christ* tended toward a vision of organic wholeness that extended all the way to the unity of all believers, a godly community bound together by central truths arrived at through the heart, not the head. In this way, *God in Christ* was but a natural extension of *Discourses on Christian Nurture*, but focused this time on the entire family of believers rather than the biological family found in the domestic household.” *Hodge*, 248. He adds, “For Hodge, Bushnell’s *God in Christ* was ‘a failure’ on almost every level, a hopeless montage of contradictions and absurdities. He believed that even a casual perusal of the book soon showed that Bushnell’s heart-centered approach to theology made him thoroughly incapable of being able to argue a cogent position. For Hodge, the study of theology involved approaching the Bible’s teachings in a rational, systematic way. Bushnell proved himself utterly incapable of the rigors of such logical thinking.” 248.

errant knowledge is damaging. Just as one ignores the laws of nature at one's peril, so too if one ignores the laws of life. One cannot make or create one's own moral or spiritual laws and doctrines any more than one can natural laws like gravity. "In the spiritual world the doctrines of the Bible have the authority that the laws of nature have in the external world." One who ignores the laws of nature in one's physical life risks death. So too, one risks spiritual death in ignoring – intentionally or unintentionally – the spiritual doctrines of Scripture. "Ignorance is no more an excuse or a protection in the one case than in the other. If a man does not know that arsenic is a poison, it none the less destroys his life if he eats it. If we [sic] do not know that sin deserves the wrath and curse of God, or that murder or blasphemy is sin, he never the less suffers the penalty."¹⁰⁴

However, Hodge is at times disinclined to specify what amount or clarity of knowledge is necessary for conversion. On the one hand, Hodge declares that "an unintelligible proposition, one which conveys no meaning, cannot be an object of faith, for faith is intelligent assent to the truth of some proposition," and "where there is no reason there can be no faith."¹⁰⁵ But on the other hand, he suggests that if one sets a standard of full understanding, one has little in regard to spiritual truths that would qualify. "It is not essential to the existence and exercise of this faith," he writes, "that we should clearly comprehend every truth and fact revealed. The sacred records, like all the other works of God, contain truths too high to be comprehended by human reason, and mysteries too deep to be fathomed by human penetration."¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ CHMC, folder 25:20, "The Truth," 9/29/1861. He adds, "The laws of the moral and spiritual government of God are just as immutable as the laws of nature." "Error," he writes, "never can be harmless."

¹⁰⁵ CHMC, folder 11:14 (Lecture notes), "True Office of Reason," n.d.

¹⁰⁶ CHP, folder 5:16, Manuscripts of Sermons and Lectures, "Nature and Evidences of Faith."

Hodge refuses to declare the extent to which doctrines must be known and properly understood. Though knowledge and belief in key doctrines saves, and rejection of certain doctrines results in being lost, “it does not follow that they must all be clearly known and intelligently received in order to salvation... The scriptures do not warrant us in fixing the minimum of divine truth by which the Spirit may save the soul.”¹⁰⁷ Evidently the Spirit is free to use the slightest of insights into doctrinal truths in a salvific fashion, thus allowing for the possibility of salvation even for those severely limited in their intellectual capacities or knowledge of doctrinal truths. Hodge seems to struggle both to maintain the notion that some knowledge is necessary, and to allow for salvation for those of limited intellectual capacity. This is most obvious when he examines the possibilities for the salvation of children and infants. In an article on “The Early Regeneration of Sabbath-School Children,” he writes that “the degree and kind of the understanding of truth, requisite to the Holy Spirit’s work on a child are beyond our ken. A single seed of truth lodged in his soul in infancy, may be made the occasion and instrument of regeneration. And we do not know but that the effectual work of the Spirit may antedate, in some children, the intellectual apprehension of any truth.” He even suggests that some “may be sanctified from the womb, or from baptism, and qualified by the presence and power of the Spirit for a very early apprehension of the truths of the word of God.”¹⁰⁸ He does, however, distinguish in this article more strongly between regeneration, a preliminary work of God that is quite possible even with infants, and conversion, a human response to God’s activity in which human intellectual and other capacities play a

¹⁰⁷ “Is the Church of Rome a Part of the Visible Church?,” *BRPR* 18, 2 (April 1846), 340.

¹⁰⁸ Hodge, “Sabbath-School Children,” 27.

larger role.¹⁰⁹ Some ask whether children can be converted, or whether such a conversion is lasting. They wonder if children might lack an intellectual and willful capacity for the process, or a time of conviction prior to conversion. But the situation is quite different when considering *regeneration*. Here “the mind dare not limit the power of the Eternal Spirit.”¹¹⁰ Finally only God’s Holy Spirit can make the truth efficacious for salvation in the hearts of its hearers.

If the intellect plays a key role in conversion, it still remains a human capacity that stands *under* the authority of Scripture. Essentially, Hodge argues that although a level of rationality or understanding of gospel content is necessary, one can never make human reason or rationality the standard by which spiritual truths are to be judged. Hodge rejects any notions that truths are to be judged by our capacity to understand them.¹¹¹ Although he argues that the idea of anything “absurd” being true is nonsensical, he also argues that there are mysteries in spiritual truths that cannot be penetrated by human

¹⁰⁹ “The idea of ‘conversion’ when most prominent in the mind of the teacher, takes him to the child, to his intellect, his heart, his will. The idea of ‘regeneration’ when most prominent, takes the teacher to the Holy Spirit, to his sovereign agency, to his almighty power, to his infinite love. The first makes the teacher a worker together with the child; the second, makes him a ‘worker together with God.’ And, as we have seen, the Divine influence is primary, and must be exerted in order to the right mental and moral action of the child.” Hodge, “Sabbath-School Children,” 27.

¹¹⁰ Hodge, “Sabbath-School Children,” 27.

¹¹¹ Hodge makes this point often. Against the Rationalists Hodge teaches “1. That reason is not the source of religious knowledge. 2. That she is not the judge of the truths of those doctrines so as to be authorized to reject what she cannot comprehend or prove to be true. And 3. That the foundation of faith is authority, the testimony of God, and not rational evidence. or demonstration.” CHMC, folder 11:14 (Lecture notes) “True Office of Reason” n.d. Likewise, Hodge writes, “to us the scriptures are the word of God, which we do not judge, but by which we are judged, whence we derive all our religious knowledge. They are at once the source and the rule of our faith.” “Religious State of Germany,” *BRPR* 18, 4 (Oct 1846), 532. Other examples abound. “The intuitive principles of the mind are very few and limited, and therefore gives us only a small amount of truth. God’s word is the great storehouse of truth. To that and to all it contains we are to submit. It contains nothing inconsistent with the laws of our nature, or it would not be his word, and therefore to everything it contains we are to submit our understanding.” *CP*, LXXXVII, “Submission to God” (12/11/1853), 132. Even his *ST* makes the same point. “The effort is not to make the assertions of the Bible harmonize with the speculative reason, but to subject our feeble reason to the mind of God as revealed in his Word, and by his Spirit in our inner life.” *ST* 1, 16.

reason.¹¹² If one makes human reason too prominent, then one falls into the trap of philosophical systems that are foreign to the Bible, or abstract and speculative propositions that destroy the power and truth of scriptural doctrines.¹¹³ This is the result of overreliance on the intellect. In a journal article Hodge takes issue with a proponent of an alternate theory of atonement because it removes the mystery from the atonement and makes it intelligible, it lacks scriptural support, and it “is a theory woven warp and woof out of the understanding.” This is to say that it is not rational but *rationalistic*, “a piece of pure Rationalistic speculation, formed on certain principles of moral philosophy which have nothing to do with the Bible.”¹¹⁴ It is founded independent of Scripture, arbitrary, and opposed to what Scripture actually teaches. There is a danger in reducing spiritual truths to comprehensible propositions, as this may damage their content.

Hodge even suggests that some individuals “know” or believe something to be true intellectually, but live according to a contrary truth. They adopt theoretically with their mind, for example, certain “abstract propositions” of theology counter to Scripture as true, while actually living by a more biblical view.¹¹⁵ It seems that for Hodge one can have mistaken forms of speculative rational knowledge, and yet still have a deeper,

¹¹² “Men indeed often deceive themselves on this point, and pronounce that to be absurd or impossible which is true and actual. But this does not alter the case: nothing that is really true can be absurd; nothing that is absurd can be true.” CHMC, folder 11:14 (Lecture notes), “True Office of Reason,” n.d. He adds, “what cannot be true, cannot by any evidence be proved to be true.” This idea only applies to the impossible, not the strange, etc.

¹¹³ The false teachers in the Colossians account “designed to substitute philosophy for Christianity, not by denying the latter, but by explaining it. They distinguished between faith and knowledge. Faith was for the people, knowledge for the educated few.” CP, CXXVII, “Ye are complete in him,” Col. 2:10 (10/27/1872), 190. The objects of faith were historical events and doctrines; the objects of knowledge were the speculative truths behind the historical/doctrinal accounts. According to Hodge, Paul declared philosophy a failure.

¹¹⁴ “Beman on the Atonement,” BRPR 17, 1 (Jan 1845), 96, 99.

¹¹⁵ In an article discussing an opposing view of the atonement that Hodge considers overly rationalistic and biblically unsound, he suggests that there is not “truth enough in this theory to sustain the life of religion in any man’s heart.” However, it is “very possible for a man, to adopt theoretically such an abstract statement of a scriptural doctrine, as really denies its nature and destroys its power, and yet that same man may receive the truth for his own salvation as it is revealed in the Bible.” “Beman on the Atonement,” 115.

subconscious, heart knowledge that is salvific.¹¹⁶ This is an interesting example that seems to run counter to certain interpretations of Princeton's intellectualism, to the extent that it would seem almost to allow for a certain kind of anonymous Christian belief. It also seems to run counter to some other statements of Hodge that insist that spiritual, heart knowledge requires intellectual knowledge. For example, he writes that "the intellectual may exist without the spiritual; but the spiritual cannot exist without the intellectual. A man may see a thing without seeing its beauty, but he cannot see its beauty without seeing the thing itself."¹¹⁷ What Hodge is most likely suggesting in discussing mistaken speculative knowledge is that one's deeper knowledge – what one believes to be true in one's heart – is finally expressed in one's life and piety, regardless of any conflicting professions of the speculative intellect alone.¹¹⁸ Whatever merit such a notion has, what is very clear is that true, salvific knowledge of God, revealed in Christ, is not merely intellectual affirmation or rational acceptance alone. True knowledge involves the heart and affections. Thus we now turn to a more specific consideration of the place of feelings and 'heart' religion in conversion.

Emotions and the Subjective

Although Hodge and the Princetonians are at times labeled intellectualists who disregard the value of the feelings, anyone who spends any time reading Hodge in depth will quickly discover that emotions and subjective factors, though not without their

¹¹⁶ On this same idea expressed elsewhere, see Hodge, "Professor Park and the Princeton Review," *BRPR* 23, 4 (Oct 1851), 692.

¹¹⁷ *CP*, CXC, "The Word of God as a Means of Grace" (11/30/1856), 287.

¹¹⁸ Further discussion of these ideas is found below in the following section on emotions and subjective factors in conversion.

dangers, play a large role in his theology generally and conversion specifically. As was apparent in our previous discussion of knowledge, true knowledge cannot be mere speculative knowledge, but always involves the heart, and always is accompanied by an affective response. “In the Scriptures, knowledge is not mere intellectual apprehension. It includes that but more. It includes also the proper apprehension not only of the object, but of its qualities.” True knowledge involves feeling. If an object has moral or aesthetic qualities, then knowing that object “includes the due apprehension of them and the state of feeling which answers to them.”¹¹⁹ One cannot know beauty truly and not be affected by it emotionally. One cannot know God truly without a response that involves one’s whole being, including one’s emotions. True religion always brings with it an emotional impact. Conversion, as a transformative event, necessarily involves a change in one’s emotional or affective orientation to God, to Christ, to spiritual truths. When Paul encountered the true knowledge of God in Christ, he became a new man. “*Such also must in all cases be the nature of genuine conversion,*” Hodge writes. One of the essential components of such a transformation is “right affections” or “right feelings.”¹²⁰ One’s confession of Christ as Lord “must be both intelligent [intellect] and sincere [and heart] to consider it any evidence of a renewed state.”¹²¹ Even an accurate and comprehensive intellectual knowledge of Christianity is no evidence of one’s converted state apart from the heart commitment and feelings that properly accompany such wondrous knowledge.¹²² One

¹¹⁹ CP, CXLIII, “The Excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord” (10/11/1843), 214.

¹²⁰ “*Such also must in all cases be the nature of genuine conversion.* 1. Because the Scriptures expressly assert the fact, that the knowledge of God is essential to true religion. Religion consists in the knowledge of God, and in right affections and acts. Religion includes, therefore, three things. (a.) Spiritual cognition. (b.) Right feelings. (c.) Corresponding acts.” CP, CXLIX, “It pleased God to reveal his Son in me” (4/19/1857), 223.

¹²¹ CHMC, Sermons, folder 21:7, “But by the Holy Spirit,” 1/30/1848.

¹²² “The apostle teaches that a man may have the highest intellectual abilities, the largest stores of knowledge, and the greatest amount of power, and yet be a reprobate. Therefore the knowledge of the

does not establish or protect one's faith primarily with greater learning. Rather, Hodge exhorts that "the great thing is to remember that safety is only to be found in a lively and growing state of piety in the heart."¹²³ One needs to enter more deeply, with one's whole being, into one's relationship to the truth through a lively piety.

If it is clear that emotions play a significant role in Hodge's view of conversion, it also needs to be made clear that focusing on the emotions as a means to conversion is in stark contrast to Hodge's approach. For Hodge the emotions represent a necessary accompaniment of the process of conversion. No one can experience the change of conversion without changed emotions, but changed emotions are not what bring about conversion. Conversion is brought about by one's encounter with new knowledge of God through Christ. It is "in the order of nature and of experience" that "discernment precedes the change of the affections, just as the perception of beauty precedes the answering aesthetic emotion." What for Hodge is true generally is also true specifically in conversion. "The glory of God, as it shines in the face of Jesus Christ, must be revealed, before the corresponding affections of admiration, love and confidence rise in the heart." It is the Holy Spirit that brings about this illumination of the truths of Christ in the heart. The reception of this knowledge is key to conversion. "The knowledge consequent on this illumination is declared to be eternal life." Such knowledge involves more than mere rational acknowledgment. "This knowledge is the intuition not merely of the truth, but also of the excellence of spiritual objects."¹²⁴ For Hodge, logically the knowledge precedes the emotional response, but in reality both are required and "inseparably connected."

truth; the ability to present and enforce it, will avail us nothing, without inward piety." *CP*, CIV, "Now abideth Faith, Hope, Charity; but the greatest of these is Charity" (1/26/1862), 157.

¹²³ *CP*, LXXXIII, "Strive to enter in at the strait gate (5/14/1856), 128.

¹²⁴ Hodge, "Professor Park's Sermon," *BRPR* 22, 4 (Oct 1850), 671, 671-72, 672, 672.

The feeling produced as a result of the apprehension of an object or truth “is so intimately united with the cognition, as to be an attribute of it – having no separate existence, and being inconceivable without it.”¹²⁵ Although inseparable, the cognition is “the governing element.” No authentic religious feeling can exist without cognition of spiritual truth.¹²⁶

Thus the legitimacy of religious experience for Hodge is rooted in this spiritual cognition of truth. If one’s feelings are rooted in errant cognitions, the feelings themselves will not be authentic. As Hodge puts it, “religious experience is, and must be the conformity of our inward exercises with our view of truth; and hence if those views are inadequate or erroneous, our religious experience must be in like degree defective or spurious.”¹²⁷ Religious experience “is genuine when it is determined by the truth of God, and it is false so far as it is determined by error.”¹²⁸ Errant knowledge leads to misguided or inauthentic experience.¹²⁹

Although Hodge is accused by some of overstressing the place of the intellect, one can still find other points at which his stress on ‘heart’ religion is quite remarkable and prominent. Even though he typically gives preeminence to a rational comprehension of Christian doctrine as a starting point for the Christian life, at other times he seems to turn this on its head. He seems to allow, as was mentioned at the end of the section above on

¹²⁵ Hodge, “Professor Park’s Remarks,” 343. Hodge expresses the same idea on other occasions as well. For example, “Faith is spiritual knowledge, or includes spiritual discernment. The effect of spiritual discernment is holy affections.” *CP*, XCVII, “Sanctified by faith that is in me” (4/7/1867), 148.

¹²⁶ “In this complex state the cognition is the first and the governing element, to which the other owes its existence; and therefore, in the second place, the Scriptures not only teach that knowledge is an essential constituent of religion, but also that the objective presentation of truth to the mind is absolutely necessary to any genuine religious feeling or affection.” Hodge, “Professor Park’s Remarks,” 343. In another article Hodge writes, “It is true that there is an inward state, answering to the objects of faith; and it is also true that this subjective state is necessary to complete the idea of a Christian... but the inward is due to the objective, and cannot exist without it.” “Inspiration,” *BRPR* 29, 4 (Oct 1857), 693.

¹²⁷ “The Theological Opinions of President Davies,” *BRPR* 14, 1 (Jan 1842), 142.

¹²⁸ CHP folder 4:2, Conference Talks, “Coming Unto Christ,” 4/6/1862.

¹²⁹ Hodge writes elsewhere that it is “an important truth, that no serious religious error can exist, without a corresponding perversion or destruction of religious feelings.” “Lecture to Theological Students,” *Biblical Repertory* 5, 1 (Jan 1829), 90.

knowledge, that one may have certain mistaken speculative understandings of religion unrelated to or in conflict with one's inward and pious religious life. He goes so far to suggest in more than one passage that the theological content of the devotional expression of the inner heart experience is to be preferred over one's intellectual views. Although this appears to elevate feelings over intellect, properly understood it is consistent with Hodge's other statements. One can have speculative beliefs that are not "known" in the deepest spiritual sense, but instead are shallow, merely cognitive or rational propositions in a way detached from reality. As such they do not produce the related affections. However, such a person may have other beliefs more deeply held by the intellect, even though perhaps less articulated. To the extent that these beliefs are indeed rooted in religious truths, they invariably produce affections reflected in one's pious or devotional life. The evidences of those truths expressed in one's emotions then become a better indicator of one's true beliefs and a more reliable guide to faith than the outward but shallow assertions or "nominal" opinions of a rationalistic and errant theology that fail to reflect "the intimate persuasion of his soul."¹³⁰

Some suggest that this emphasis on feelings is largely part of Hodge's earlier writings, and that as his career progressed he moved more toward a stress on intellect and the objective. Whatever the merits of such an argument, and there are some, one can find

¹³⁰ "It is freely admitted, that a man's opinions may be correct, and yet his moral character corrupt. But in this case, these opinions are *merely nominal*, they form no part of *the intimate persuasion of his soul*, and hence, are no expression of his character." Hodge, "Lecture to Theological Students," 90 (emphasis mine). One may have to even guard against the speculative intellect. Hodge suggests as much directly in lecture notes on "Freedom of the Will, or Nature of Free Agency," where he writes that in order to choose wisely, "it is of the highest importance that our souls should be in a healthful moral and religious state, that our moral and religious feelings, which after all are our surest guides, after the Bible, should not be subordinated and tyrannized over by the speculative understanding." CHMC, folder 1:36 (Lecture Notes), n.d. One's feelings and experience actually can be a safeguard against a speculative intellect that can lead one away from truth. Hodge, taken as a whole, clearly means by this not that feelings are more basic to the foundation of faith than the kind of deeper knowing that we have previously discussed, but only that a speculative knowledge can be, in a sense, detached from a person's core beliefs and knowledge of Christ and therefore unreliable.

a very deliberate stress on the place of religious feelings and experience from very early in his career until his crowning achievement of the three volume *Systematic Theology* at its end. In his “Introductory Lecture” to seminary students from 1829 one finds a pronounced emphasis on religious feelings and experience. Here Hodge argues that doctrinal beliefs are tied in critical ways to one’s inner heart, religious experiences and character. “There is no sentiment more frequently advanced, than that a man’s opinions have little to do with his moral character, and yet there is none more fundamentally erroneous. The fact is, that opinions on moral and religious subjects depend mainly on the state of the moral and religious feelings.”¹³¹ Here one’s doctrinal expressions grow out of one’s character and inner being. “A man’s religious opinions are the result and expression of his religious feelings.” Thus “heterodoxy be the consequence rather than the cause of the loss of piety,” and he urges his hearers to guard their hearts against sin. “Holiness is essential to correct knowledge of divine things, and the great security from error. And as you see, that when men lose the life of religion, they can believe the most monstrous doctrines, and glory in them.”¹³²

Although one does find at the other end of Hodge’s career considerable discussion of the “facts” coming out of Scripture and more objective, external aspects of Christian faith and doctrine, he certainly does not leave these earlier ideas behind. As with most aspects of Hodge’s thinking, he portrays in his *Systematic Theology* the same marked

¹³¹ “Lecture to Theological Students,” 89. He continues, “Mere argument can no more produce the intimate persuasion of moral truth, than it can of beauty. As it depends on our refinement of taste, what things to us are beautiful, so it depends upon our religious feelings, what doctrines for us are true. A man’s real opinions, are the expressions of his character. They are the forms in which his inward feelings embody themselves, and become visible.” 89.

¹³² “Lecture to Theological Students,” 94-95, 95, 95. Hodge suggests that one not only check one’s theology against one’s own religious experience, but also against the experience of other mature Christians. He suggests that theological doctrines may be vetted by “the aged children of God” for their truthfulness. “Propose to them your novel doctrines, should they shock their feelings, depend upon it, they are false and dangerous. The approbation of an experienced Christian of any purely religious opinion, is worth more, than that of any merely learned theologian upon earth.” 96-97.

consistency reflected throughout his career. He writes forcefully, “The question is not first and mainly, What is true to the understanding, but what is true to the renewed heart?”

He continues, “The effort is not to make the assertions of the Bible harmonize with the speculative reason, but to subject our feeble reason to the mind of God as revealed in his Word, and by his Spirit in our inner life.”¹³³

Taken as a whole, Hodge seeks to keep a balance between intellectual and affective aspects of Christian life. He rejects both nominal theological speculation not rooted in the heart, and disconnected emotional experiences not grounded in some form of substantive spiritual truth. Both expressions of intellect and of emotions ultimately stand under the authority of Scripture, by which both must be judged.¹³⁴ Essentially the Christian experience produced by doctrinal theology becomes a test of that theology’s legitimacy.¹³⁵

What Hodge will not accept is a view of religion in which one somehow “knows” spiritual truths through one’s feelings apart from any intellectual understanding or

¹³³ *ST* 1, 16.

¹³⁴ Hoffecker writes that for Hodge, “the Scriptures are the ultimate court of appeal. They not only prescribe the doctrines of the Christian faith but also explicitly outline the experience which attends belief. Because believers are still fallible, this may prohibit a correct intellectual interpretation of the Scriptures. In such cases, it may be necessary to turn to the hymns, liturgies, and devotional writings Christians have written throughout the course of church history as reflections of their Christian experiences. These writings not only exhibit a remarkable unanimity but are in the most profound sense thoroughly biblical in their perspective.” *Piety*, 62.

¹³⁵ The role of Scripture and the relationship of intellectual and affective concerns is expressed in this passage from *Systematic Theology*. “The true method in theology requires that the facts of religious experience should be accepted as facts, and when duly authenticated by Scripture, be allowed to interpret the doctrinal statements of the Word of God. So legitimate and powerful is this inward teaching of the Spirit that it is no uncommon thing to find men having two theologies – one of the intellect, and another of the heart. The one may find expression in creeds and systems of divinity, the other in their prayers and hymns. It would be safe for a man to resolve to admit into his theology nothing which is not sustained by the devotional writings of true Christians of every denomination.” *ST* 1, 17-18. The balancing interplay between intellectual and experiential elements is here clearly seen. Also in *ST* he writes, “Although the inward teaching of the Spirit, or religious experience, is no substitute for an external revelation, and is no part of the rule of faith, it is, nevertheless, an invaluable guide in determining what the rule of faith teaches.” *ST* 1, 16. All of these passages come in the same section as the much maligned passages on Scripture as a “storehouse of facts,” etc. Later in *ST*, Hodge confirms again that one’s holiness is also inseparably connected to the objective content of the faith. “The Bible everywhere assumes that without truth there can be no holiness; that all conscious exercises of spiritual life are in view of truth objectively revealed in the Scriptures.” *ST* 1, 177.

content. For Hodge such a view is represented in the views of Friedrich Schleiermacher and those who follow in his shadow. Hodge believes that Schleiermacher and his disciples place subjective feeling at the base of theology. He thinks this wrong because “it proceeds upon a wrong view of religion in general and of Christianity in particular. It assumes that religion is a feeling, a life. It denies that it is a form of knowledge, or involves the reception of any particular system of doctrine.”¹³⁶ He sees this as a growing divide in the theological circles of his day. “The question which lies at the foundation of much of the modern discussions on the nature of theology concerns the relation between feeling and knowledge. According to one view, feelings determine our knowledge; according to the other knowledge determines feelings.” Hodge explains how he understands the former approach. “Those who adopt the former theory deny that religion is a form of knowledge, or that revelation insists in communicating knowledge to the mind.... Religion consists in feeling. The ultimate feeling is a sense of dependence. This exists in all men.” Through this feeling one gains “an intuition of its object.”¹³⁷ The role of the understanding in such a scheme is to organize and interpret these “vague, general, unrelated” truths that have been intuitively apprehended through the feelings. In such a view there is no objective religious knowledge, but only the awakening and interpretation of religious consciousness.

When addressing such alternative approaches to Christian faith and content Hodge tends to be most direct in clarifying how he understands the relationship between subjective and objective aspects of Christianity. “The idea that Christianity is a form of feeling, a life, and not a system of doctrines, is contrary to the faith of all Christians. Christianity always has had a creed. A man who believes certain doctrines is a

¹³⁶ *ST* 1, 176.

¹³⁷ CHMC, folder 11:14, “True Office of Reason,” n.d.

Christian... It is true that there is an inward state, answering to the objects of faith; and it is also true that this subjective state is necessary to complete the idea of a Christian... but the inward is due to the objective, and cannot exist without it.”¹³⁸ Distinctive Christian doctrine is essential to Christian life. “No mistake can be greater than to divorce religion from truth, and make Christianity a spirit or life distinct from the doctrines which the Scriptures present as the objects of faith.”¹³⁹

If Hodge is critical of those who overemphasize religious feelings as the foundation of Christianity, he is likewise critical of those who move too far in the other direction, overemphasizing a rationalistic, intellectually driven view of faith that is divorced from the feelings and affections. This should already be apparent from our previous discussions, but it should be mentioned that Hodge is particularly critical of Charles Finney on just this point. It is rather ironic that Finney, who used all variety of “new measures” and was accused by others of using emotionally driven techniques to bring hearers to a conversion experience, should be accused by Hodge, who so many see as overly intellectualist, of failing to give proper regard to religious emotion and experience. If Hodge is right, then the charge of rationalism or intellectualism so often thrown at Princeton might better be applied to Finney. Hodge’s assessment of Finney in this regard is clear in his review of Finney’s *Lectures on Systematic Theology*, which Hodge reviewed in *BRPR* in 1847. One of Hodge’s fundamental objections to the book is to Finney’s mode of argument, in which

¹³⁸ “Inspiration,” 693. Hodge makes the same point in his lengthy interactions with Edward Amasa Parks a few years earlier. “It is not a matter of indifference what men believe, or in what form right feeling expresses itself. There can be no right feeling but what is due to the apprehension of the truth.” “Professor Park’s Remarks,” 343.

¹³⁹ *ST* 1, 179. Hoffecker suggests that Hodge’s strong critique of experience at times and his at times excessive stress on the objective is a reaction to trends in theology that he desired to counter, including the influence of Schleiermacher. “Hodge countered Schleiermacher’s reinterpretation through omission [of objective theology] by emphasizing to a greater degree the necessity of the objective element in Christian faith. Hodge contended that while it would be incorrect to separate the objective and subjective elements in Christianity, it would be error compounded either to exclude the objective completely or to put the subjective elements in the prominent position.” *Piety*, 63.

Hodge asserts that Finney “gives himself up to the exclusive guidance of the understanding... It is not the informed and informing soul of man, which he studies, and whence he deduces his principles and conclusions. He will listen to nothing but the understanding.”¹⁴⁰ Hodge suggests that Finney does not use reason in some older, transcendental sense, but rather the discursive or speculative understanding is front and center. Hodge argues that it is not the role of the speculative understanding “to speak with authority on questions of religion and morals” because “the understanding, which has neither heart nor conscience, can speak on these subjects only as informed, and guided by the moral and religious susceptibilities” which “belong to a far higher sphere than the speculative understanding.”¹⁴¹ Thus Hodge summarizes his critique of Finney in this regard as follows: “We consider it as the radical fatal error of the ‘method’ of this book, that it is a mere work of the understanding; the heart, the susceptibilities, the conscience, are allowed no authority in deciding moral questions; which is as preposterous as it would be to write a mathematical treatise on poetry.”¹⁴²

In Hodge’s view then, conversion consists of both the objective and subjective, of intellectual and affective aspects. Neither the understanding nor the affections alone are instruments of conversion. Any understanding of conversion, or of evangelistic approaches, that fail to account for both of them will be considered defective by Hodge. In a sermon from 1831 Hodge describes how faith in Christ leads one to a feeling and view of his preciousness. “To have him precious we must endeavor to obtain spiritual and scriptural conceptions of his nature. We must *feelingly believe* that He and his Father are

¹⁴⁰ “Finney’s Lectures on Theology,” *BRPR* 19, 2 (Apr 1847), 245.

¹⁴¹ “Finney’s Lectures,” 247-48.

¹⁴² “Finney’s Lectures,” 248. He continues, “the whole history of the church teems with illustrations of the fact, that when men write on morals without being guided by the moral emotions; or on religion, uncontrolled by right religious feeling, they are capable of any extravagance of error.” 248. For Hodge Finney is just one more example of this.

one.¹⁴³ It is this interesting phrase, to “feelingly believe,” that perhaps serves as a summary statement of the place of emotions and intellect in one who would be converted.

Commonly when describing the components of human existence, in addition to the intellectual and emotional, there is a third component – that of the will. What is the relation of the will to conversion and these other aspects of human existence? It is to this question that we now turn.

The Role of the Will in Conversion

Hodge’s view of the will in conversion is typically Calvinist. That is to say that he affirms the typical five points of Calvinism as oft summarized coming out of the Synod of Dort as they relate to the operation of the will in conversion. Although these points represent an inadequate summary of the whole of Calvinism, they do relate to questions of the will and conversion, and their substance can also be found in the Westminster Confession that Hodge holds dear.

As we shall see, due to total depravity, Hodge sees the will as a capacity in humans broken by sin and therefore unable on its own to carry out the requirements of holiness that God demands. He also sees God’s activity in regeneration as prior to any act of the will in conversion and thereby an irresistible act of grace. We are only willing participants in conversion to the extent that God first provides us the capacity to be such. The natural state of man, standing in opposition to God’s desires, “cannot by any effort of our own be changed.” Thus for Hodge, as was also clear in the discussion of the supernatural

¹⁴³ CHMC folder 20:14, “To you that believe, He is precious” (1/2/1831). Italicized emphasis is mine. The underlined words are underlined in the handwritten original.

character of conversion above, “it is therefore something beyond the power of the will. We cannot regenerate ourselves.”¹⁴⁴

Hodge believes that there is a fundamental schism within the theology of the church historically. “There have been,” he writes, “two great systems of doctrine in perpetual conflict. The one begins with God, the other with man.”¹⁴⁵ Much of this battle is fought over alternative views of the place of the will, and it is a battle in which many are engaged in Hodge’s nineteenth century context.¹⁴⁶

One area in which the battle lines have been drawn deals with just what constitutes the bounds of morality. Some confine the basis of morality solely to one’s acts. They deny that one’s desires or disposition can, apart from one’s acts, have any moral relevance. Only that which follows out of the free and voluntary exercises of a person may be the basis of any moral sense or responsibility. In this view morality demands free choice, and it is only as one’s will is completely free to choose or reject God’s demands on one’s life that one might be held accountable as a sinner before him. Nowhere is this choice more stark than in the fundamental acceptance or rejection of God’s offer of salvation, in conversion.

Those who represent this view insist that only those acts which we are free to carry out carry any moral sense or obligation. There can be no obligation, it is argued, for that which we cannot do. Moreover any idea of a sinful disposition behind one’s choices is denied as incompatible with a true notion of free moral choice. Charles Finney is, for

¹⁴⁴ CHMC, folder 21:25, Sermons, “Regeneration,” 4/12/1856. “Repenting, or turning to God, is a state of mind which a man cannot bring himself into by one mere volition. He cannot repent simply by resolving or saying within himself, *I will repent.*” Charles Hodge [?], “The Means of Repentance,” *BRTR* 2, 1 (Jan 1830), 114.

¹⁴⁵ “Prof. Park’s Remarks,” 308.

¹⁴⁶ Some aspects of this debate can be found in Allen Guelzo’s book, *Edwards on the Will: A Century of American Theological Debate* (Middleton, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1989).

Hodge, a prime example of this viewpoint. Hodge, in a review of Finney's *Lectures on Systematic Theology*, critiques Finney's approach. He argues that Finney's position may "be traced to two fundamental principles, viz: that obligation is limited by ability; and that satisfaction, happiness, blessedness, is the only ultimate good, the only thing intrinsically valuable." Hodge goes on to quote Finney at length in describing these assumptions. He notes that for Finney, "it is a 'first truth' or axiom that freedom of the will is essential to moral agency, moral obligation and moral character." Finney uses the term 'will' in a strict and limited sense as "the power of self-determination." Hodge argues that Finney equates liberty with ability and in doing so moves beyond first truths and argues fallaciously by granting as an assumption what is one of the very points in dispute. "An inability which has its origin in sin, which consists in what is sinful, and relates to moral action, is perfectly consistent with continued obligation," Hodge argues, on the basis of "the instinctive judgment of men," "the testimony of conscience," and "the plain doctrine of the Bible."¹⁴⁷ Hodge suggests that Finney's doctrines here lead to the idea that at any given moment a person is either wholly a sinner or wholly a saint – totally depraved or perfectly holy. For Finney, in each choice we make we are completely sinful or completely holy; one cannot by his principles introduce any other basis for moral judgments.¹⁴⁸ Hodge concludes that Finney's doctrine "rests on a false apprehension of the nature of sin and holiness, and of the grounds and extent of our obligations." We are taught by the requirements of our conscience and of Scripture to conform to God's image, that any non-conformity is sin, and that "the law of God exhibits what rational beings ought to be,

¹⁴⁷ Hodge, "Finney's Lectures," 250, 252, 253, 253.

¹⁴⁸ "If the right end is chosen, the agent discharges his whole duty; he fulfills the single command of law and reason. If he chooses the wrong end, he commits all the sin, of which he is capable." "Finney's Lectures," 273.

not what they can be, not what they have plenary power at any moment to make themselves, but what they would be and would at all times have power to be, were it not for their sinfulness.”¹⁴⁹

In Hodge’s understanding, liberty and inability are indeed compatible. The question is, can we be both helpless and blameworthy? While some of Hodge’s opponents answer this question with a no, Hodge answers with a yes. Far from excusing the sinner, “the two sentiments of complete helplessness, and of entire blame-worthiness, are perfectly consistent, and are ever united in Christian experience. The believer feels them every day.” Even though the believer knows he ought love God with heart, mind, and soul, “he feels that no mere efforts of his own, no use of means, no presentation of motives, no summoning of his powers, will ever enable him to raise his carnal heart to heaven. Does this free him from a sense of guilt? No.”¹⁵⁰ Rather the believer acknowledges his or her sinfulness and pleads for God’s mercy and renewal.

Although the debate is an ancient one, what is new in Hodge’s view is that some of those answering the question with a no are supposedly Calvinists. Finney himself was originally a Presbyterian minister, and there are a growing number of attempts from within Calvinism to defend such ideas. For example, Hodge sees the idea that all morality must be grounded in free and voluntary exercises as a leading feature of the New Divinity, and he attacks their use of leading figures in Reformed history – Augustine, Calvin, Edwards, Bellamy, and others – in defending this perspective. In an article from 1832, “The New Divinity Tried,” Hodge argues that preaching conversion using these ideas is

¹⁴⁹ Hodge, “Lectures on Systematic Theology,” 275.

¹⁵⁰ “Regeneration,” *BRTR* 2, 2 (Apr 1830), 285.

“fatal to religion and the souls of men.”¹⁵¹ This view of conversion, he argues, virtually eliminates the role of the Holy Spirit, and “Christ and his cross are practically made of none effect.” From the perspective of Hodge and his fellow Old School Presbyterians, “this is another Gospel. It is practically another system, and a legal system of religion.”¹⁵² In the article Hodge proceeds to demonstrate in a lengthy manner that Edwards, Dwight, Augustine, Calvin, and others, did not hold to the idea that morality is grounded in voluntary exercises, but instead held that holiness and depravity come from a basic principle or disposition of a given individual.¹⁵³ Elsewhere one also finds Hodge defending this same notion that morality and virtue are grounded not merely in acts but in this prior disposition. In an article on regeneration from 1830 he writes that “the common feelings and judgment of men, therefore, do carry moral distinctions back of acts of choice, and must do so unless we deny that virtue ever can commence.” Hodge sounds just like Edwards in *Freedom of the Will* (although the references so far he has made to Edwards do not include *Freedom of the Will*, but mostly *Original Sin*) when he writes that a sinner has freedom of the will in the sense that “he has unimpaired the liberty of acting according to his own inclinations” and that nothing outside of himself determines his choices.¹⁵⁴ As a sinner’s disposition is depraved, the sinner desires to sin and is free to carry out those desires.

Those who want to define regeneration as beginning with an *act* of loving God must deny that regeneration involves a change in disposition previous to one’s acting. For Hodge, “choice is but the determination of the desire.” If one locates morality in the acts

¹⁵¹ “The New Divinity Tried,” *BRTR* 4, 2 (April 1832), 302.

¹⁵² “New Divinity Tried,” 301.

¹⁵³ “New Divinity Tried,” 279-85.

¹⁵⁴ “Regeneration,” 283.

alone, and not in one's desires and disposition that precede them, then one denies what is commonly understood to account for our moral character. What determines one's choice is either indifference, which has no moral character, or some previous inclination, which Hodge (with Edwards) argues is the basis for how one understands individuals to be moral or not. The real question is not whether one chooses God in conversion, but whether one needs a change prior to this choice to make it, a change in disposition that allows one to perceive God's holiness and goodness and hence desire to choose him. As Hodge puts it, must there be "a holy 'relish,' taste, or principle produced in the soul prior, in the order of nature, to any holy act of the soul itself?"¹⁵⁵ For Hodge a corrupt person with a broken will cannot produce a holy act apart from God's prior activity of regeneration.¹⁵⁶

For Hodge the very providence of God is at stake in these issues. Hodge suggests that a view that does not give God the power to convert people apart from their voluntary assent is a God who cannot really guide the universe, and a God in whom one cannot depend.¹⁵⁷ The irresistible grace of God undergirds the Calvinist understanding of providence. The notion of total depravity (and of original sin) is at stake in his argument against a human capacity to choose God unassisted and his dispositional understanding of sin.

Hodge is deeply concerned with American trends regarding the will and related issues. Writing at mid-century, he comments that "the philosophy, which teaches that

¹⁵⁵ "Regeneration," 291, 296.

¹⁵⁶ In a more technical or precise Reformed sense, for Hodge, the soul is passive in regeneration but active in conversion. It is passive in receiving an impression of God's holiness (only possible by a previous work of the Spirit), and active in choosing God as a result. "All that we say is, that it is perfectly intelligible and perfectly according to established usage, to speak of the mind as passive, when considered as the subject of an impression. If the Holy Spirit does make such an impression on the mind, or exert such an influence as induces it immediately to turn to God, then it is correct to say that it is passive in regeneration, though active in conversion." "Regeneration," 296.

¹⁵⁷ See "New Divinity Tried," 300.

happiness is the great end of creation; that all sin and virtue consists in voluntary acts; that moral character is not transmissible but must be determined by the agent himself; that every man has power to determine and to change at will his own character, or to make himself a new heart; has, as every one knows, extensively prevailed in this country.” The effect of this shift in the theological and philosophical landscape “has been to lower all the scriptural doctrines concerning sin, holiness, regeneration, and the divine life.” It has also promoted an unhealthy individualism in which each person stands alone able to will freely their heart and destiny, outside of any impact of union with Adam or with Christ. “Everything is made to depend on ourselves.”¹⁵⁸

The issues at stake here are serious enough for Hodge to find an unexpected ally in his doctrinal battles, Horace Bushnell. Hodge delivers a surprisingly (though not completely) positive review of Bushnell’s book, *Discourses on Christian Nurture*, in a review from 1847. He finds that “the pillars of this false and superficial system” of individualist, free, and total self-determination “are overturned in Dr. Bushnell’s book.”¹⁵⁹ Bushnell has set out to describe a more organic view of Christian conversion in contrast to the popular revivalist movements focused on a decisive and emotional event that marks conversion. For Bushnell, conversion and character building are processes over time that begin in a Christian family before a child has a will of its own. His view that children are to be raised in the faith, that Christian formation is a result of human relationships and not simply or even primarily human choice, and his denial that adults can simply set their disposition acquired in a non-Christian background aside and *choose* to be regenerated, illustrates a process of regeneration that is essentially passive rather than a human act. His

¹⁵⁸ “Bushnell on Christian Nurture,” 522.

¹⁵⁹ “Bushnell on Christian Nurture,” 522.

view finds a welcome ear in Hodge.¹⁶⁰ Hodge describes Bushnell's book as having "the avowal of most important truths, truths which sound Presbyterians have ever held dear." Of these truths that Bushnell affirms, Hodge lists: "Happiness is not the chief good; virtue does not consist entirely in acts, but is a state of being; men are not isolated individuals, each forming his own character by the energy of his will; moral character is transmissible, may be derived passively on the one hand by birth from Adam, and on the other, by regeneration; when sin enters the soul it is a bondage, from which it cannot deliver itself, redemption must come from God."¹⁶¹ All of these "comprehensive truths" support Hodge's understanding of conversion and the place of the will in it.¹⁶²

There are many times, and not only in regeneration, when Scripture and conscience require of us that which we cannot will. But "inability does not destroy, or even weaken our obligation." Although in these situations we are in a helpless state in which "we cannot change our hearts or in our own strength turn to God, we can acknowledge our weakness and seek help from God, as did the blind and the deaf."¹⁶³ Those who seek conversion are to come to Christ helpless, seeking his healing. "Coming to Christ is essential to salvation.... It is the thing, and the precise, definite thing which the awakened sinner should be exhorted to do. He is not to be directed to submit, nor to

¹⁶⁰ Although Hodge is very critical of Bushnell's notion that this is all an organic, natural, (i.e. not a supernatural) process of regeneration.

¹⁶¹ "Bushnell on Christian Nurture," 524.

¹⁶² Hodge adds that Bushnell is surprised to find himself agreeing with them and wants to distance himself from such Presbyterian viewpoints. Hodge does not know whether Bushnell will venture further into the light, or "go back into thicker darkness," though Hodge fears the latter. "Bushnell on Christian Nurture," 524.

¹⁶³ *CP*, LXXXVI, "My Son, give me thy heart" (10/5/1862), 132.

make choice of God, nor to change his purpose.” To come to Christ is to draw near to him and “apply to him for salvation,” with the expectation of healing and pardon.¹⁶⁴

The Christian life still involves the will and human intentions. It just does not involve them in a salvific manner. Hodge writes more than once on Philippians 2:12 and the meaning of working out one’s salvation. Working out one’s salvation “does not imply that we can merit it,” nor “that we can effect it.” However, we still have an agency in this salvific process. “The work is obedience. 1. To the gospel. 2. To the prescribed means of grace. 3. To all the commands of God.”¹⁶⁵ God helps us in this process. In this relation of divine and human work, “the human is subordinate and instrumental; the divine, controlling and efficient.”¹⁶⁶

Sometimes Hodge, evidently fearful of antinomianism, can word his exhortations to work out one’s salvation in ways that in isolation might even be taken for works righteousness. In one sermon on Philippians 2:12, he writes that “*salvation is to be attained only by working.*” So “it is not a matter of course that men are saved because Christ has purchased redemption for them.”¹⁶⁷ Elsewhere he writes, “If a man called to run a race saunters along and puts forth no effort, he will not win the prize. And just as surely, if we take religion thus easy and make no strenuous exertion, we shall fail of eternal life.”¹⁶⁸ Or again, “we must take an active part” in this struggle between flesh and Spirit. “We must take sides with the one or with the other party. We cannot be neutral; we cannot be

¹⁶⁴ *CP*, LXXXIV, “Coming to Christ” (12/7/1856), 128, 129. A sense of want or conviction of sin, that no one but Christ can save us, and that Christ is willing to save us, is needed before one can come to Christ. 128-29. Making more clear the relation of this coming to God’s activity, Hodge adds, “The Scriptures teach, 1. That all are invited to come. 2. That all the elect do come. 3. That coming is essential. 4. That it is the very thing to be done. 5. That none who come shall be cast out. 6. That the reason why men do not come is their unwillingness. 7. That divine assistance is necessary.” 129.

¹⁶⁵ *CP*, LXXXIX, “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” (9/18/1853), 135.

¹⁶⁶ *CP*, LXXXIX, “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” (9/18/1853), 136.

¹⁶⁷ *CP*, LXXXVIII, “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” (4/6/1856), 133.

¹⁶⁸ *CP*, XCV, “The Christian Race” (3/29/1857), 144.

inactive; we cannot change from one side to the other.... Unless we are successful in actually slaying, putting to death the evil principle, we shall perish eternally.”¹⁶⁹ Later in the same Philippians sermon above, however, he qualifies and clarifies his statement. “Working must be directed to a right end; not to making atonement for our sins; not to meriting salvation by our good works. These are the two great errors of all false religions.” Instead, “the end of our working is to obtain an interest in Christ and to bring our hearts and lives into conformity with the will of God. This is a great work, and one absolutely necessary. If a man thinks it enough to believe in Christ and then live as he pleases, he turns the grace of God into licentiousness, and lays up wrath against the day of wrath.”¹⁷⁰ We do not have a context for what specifically prompts Hodge to address particular concerns in his various conference talks, but it is not a great stretch to think that Hodge is concerned with popular revivalist methods that overemphasize a momentary conversion event (that may or may not be authentic), ignoring a process of Christian growth and sanctification that evidences true conversion.¹⁷¹ Whatever his motivation for stressing an active role in salvation, it is clear from his body of writings that by this is not intended any notion that one’s works or willful acts can of themselves bring one to new life in Christ.

One should remember that for Hodge reliance on God’s activity is not unique to discussions of the will. In every aspect of one’s being a person is to depend on God. “We have no strength in ourselves.... The man who depends on himself, his understanding, his

¹⁶⁹ *CP*, XCIX, “Mortify the deeds of the body” (n.d.), 151.

¹⁷⁰ *CP*, LXXXVIII, “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” (4/6/1856), 134.

¹⁷¹ Hodge’s further clarification of this “working” described above provides some hints of his reasons. “Our working is not only to be directed to the right end, but it must work, not in accordance with natural religion, or asceticism, or *enthusiasm*, but in accordance with the gospel. If God has devised and revealed a plan for saving men, it is only by conforming to that plan we can be saved. Therefore our working must recognize, *a*. The work of Christ, as Prophet, Priest and King. *b*. The work of the Holy Ghost. *c*. The efficacy of all the means of grace, none of which are to be neglected.” *CP*, LXXXVIII, “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” (4/6/1856), 134 (emphasis mine).

will, his efficiency, will fail, whether it be in arriving at truth, in living a holy life, or in doing good to others.”¹⁷² There is a certain artificiality in the above discussions of intellect, emotions, and will, because for Hodge, as for his mentor Alexander, persons are to be understood in a unified sense, rather than as a collection of independent faculties. Some brief elaboration of this notion in Hodge is therefore necessary in drawing the above sections to a close.

The Unity of the Self

Even though Hodge speaks of the will, of the understanding or intellect, of affections and emotions, in distinct terms, it is important to understand that he does not by this intend that one should think of them as separable components of the human person. Like Alexander, Hodge rejects a simple faculty psychology and stresses that these various functions of a person are all indivisible aspects of a human being. Thus although it is necessary at times to speak of these various functions as distinct, one must also remember that they are all interrelated.

Hodge makes this point clear on numerous occasions in his conference talks, his journal articles, and his *Systematic Theology*. In a conference talk from 1843 he writes, “the analysis of our faculties into our cognitive powers, into our susceptibilities and will, thought, feeling and volition, may be important to the understanding and classification of the phenomena of our nature; but these faculties are neither independent nor distinct.” Though at times one may speak as though they are distinct, ultimately even in function they are indivisible. “The exercise of the one includes the exercise of the other. There is

¹⁷² CP, CXXXII, “The Lord is my strength” (9/10/1865), 200.

always an exercise of will in thought, and an exercise of feeling in cognition.”¹⁷³ This view is also found in his 1850 article, “The Theology of the Intellect and that of the Feelings,” (“Professor Park’s Sermon”) where Hodge writes that Scripture “never recognizes that broad distinction between the intellect and the feelings which is so often made by metaphysicians. It regards the soul as a perceiving and feeling individual subsistence, whose cognitions and affections are not exercises of distinct faculties, but complex states of one and the same subject.”¹⁷⁴ In his *Systematic Theology* near the end of his career he writes that the Bible assumes “the unity of our inward life. The Scriptures do not contemplate the intellect, the will, and the affections, as independent, separable elements of a composite whole. These faculties are only different forms of activity in one and the same subsistence.”¹⁷⁵ Thus one can see clearly that even though Hodge at times may refer to the understanding or the feelings or the will as though they are separate, this is an explanatory device only and not a statement of some metaphysical or substantial division of an individual’s makeup.

What Hodge believes is true generally about the unity of human functions he also believes accurate as it relates specifically to conversion. “The intellect and heart are not two distinct faculties to be separately affected or separately renewed. There is a divine operation of which the whole soul is the subject.”¹⁷⁶ If the soul is always described as a unity in Scripture, then all aspects of that soul are renewed at conversion. The soul does not have good parts and bad parts. “Regeneration secures right knowledge as well as right feeling; and right feeling is not the effect of right knowledge, nor is right knowledge the

¹⁷³ *CP*, CXLIII, “The Excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord” (10/11/1843), 214.

¹⁷⁴ “Professor Park’s Sermon,” 671. (The three articles interacting with Professor Park are known by more than one name.)

¹⁷⁵ *ST III*, 16. Later he writes that there are no distinct substances in the operation of our interior life; “this is inconsistent with the unity of our interior life which the Scriptures constantly assume.” *ST III*, 18.

¹⁷⁶ “Professor Park’s Sermon,” 672.

effect of right feeling. The two are the inseparable effects of a work which affects the whole soul.”¹⁷⁷ As was seen earlier in the discussion of knowledge, salvific faith in Christ is not merely propositional assent. “The faith which is required for salvation, is an act of the whole soul, of the understanding, of the heart, and of the will.”¹⁷⁸

Hodge’s thoughts on this subject, as on so many others, often come to light in his interactions with opponents of one form or another. It is clearly seen in his exchange in multiple articles with Edwards Amasa Park. Park argues for two forms of theology, one based on intellect and another on feeling, and suggests that they may not always agree. Figurative scriptural language, for example, may appear false to the intellect and true to the feelings. Hodge argues vigorously against this idea. When figurative language is understood properly “it never expresses what is false to the intellect.” One cannot set feelings and intellect in opposition in this fashion. If the text “presented any conception inconsistent with the truth it would grate on the feelings, as much as it would offend the intellect.”¹⁷⁹ Hodge argues that Park’s theory “seems to us to be founded on a wrong psychology.”¹⁸⁰ He improperly divides the soul of the human into distinct faculties of feeling and intellect instead of addressing a united person. One cannot dice up a person as Park’s theory presumes to do.¹⁸¹ Park’s theology “assumes not that the soul can perceive one way at one time and another way at another time, which all admit, but that

¹⁷⁷ He adds, “The doctrine that regeneration is a change affecting only one of the faculties of the soul has its foundation entirely outside of the Scriptures. It is simply an inference from a particular psychological theory, and has no authority in theology.” *ST III*, 36.

¹⁷⁸ *ST III*, 91.

¹⁷⁹ “Professor Park’s Sermon,” 652. “The feelings demand truth in their object; and no utterance is natural or effective as the language of emotion, which does not satisfy the understanding.” 652.

¹⁸⁰ “Professor Park’s Sermon,” 660.

¹⁸¹ “From the very nature of affection in a rational being, the intellectual apprehension of its object, is essential to its existence. You cannot eliminate the intellectual element, and leave the feeling. The latter is but an attribute of the former, as much as form or colour is an attribute of bodies. *It is impossible therefore that what is true to the feelings should be false to the intellect.*” “Professor Park’s Sermon,” 661 (emphasis mine). “The point which we wish now to urge is that the theory of Professor Park assumes a greater difference in the faculties of the soul than actually exists.” 662.

the feelings perceive in one way and the intellect in another; the one seeing a thing as true while the other sees it to be false.” The resulting contradictions become nonsensical. “You might as well say that we feel a thing to be good while we see it to be sinful.”¹⁸² Hodge counters that “feelings demand truth, i.e., truth which satisfies the intellect, in the approbation and expression of their object.” Even if expressed figuratively, for an emotion to express a truth “it must have the sanction of the understanding. The least suspicion of falsehood destroys the feeling.” As a concrete example Hodge observes that “the soul cannot feel towards Christ as God if it regards him as merely a man.”¹⁸³ For Hodge, “there must be the most perfect harmony between the feelings and the intellect; they cannot see with different eyes, or utter discordant language.”¹⁸⁴

It is precisely such false divisions of faculties and the emphasis on particular divisions that lead some of Hodge’s other opponents astray. This is especially true, in Hodge’s view, of Charles Finney. In reviewing Finney’s *Lectures on Systematic Theology* in 1847, Hodge castigates Finney for his sole reliance on a rational human faculty divorced from the rest of one’s person. “Nothing but error can result from this absolute divorce of one faculty of the soul from the others; and especially from setting the intelligence in a state of perfect isolation, and then making it, in that state, the law-giver of man.”¹⁸⁵ In creating a theology from the result of speculative logic applied to what Hodge considers

¹⁸² “Professor Park’s Sermon,” 663. The word “feeling” here is not being used in a physical, sensory kind of way, but in the emotional sense of the word.

¹⁸³ “Professor Park’s Sermon,” 665. As another example, “It contradicts the laws of our nature as well as all experience, to say that the feelings apprehend Christ as suffering the penalty of the law in our stead, while the intellect pronounces such apprehension to be false.... Professor Park’s whole theory is founded upon the assumption such contradictions actually exist.” 663.

¹⁸⁴ He continues, “What is true to the one, must be true to the other; what is good in the estimation of the one, must be good also to the other.” “Professor Park’s Sermon,” 672. “All religious language false to the intellect is profane to the feelings and a mockery of God.” 665.

¹⁸⁵ Hodge, “Finney’s Lectures,” 249.

false initial assumptions, Finney has created a house of cards.¹⁸⁶ Finney's theology text serves "as an illustration of the abject slavery to which the understanding, when divorced from the Bible, and from the other constituents of our nature, reduces those who submit themselves to its authority." The understanding, according to Hodge, "cannot be divorced from the other faculties, and act alone, and give the law to them, as a separate power."¹⁸⁷ As unified beings at our core, "conscience is intelligent, feeling is intelligent, the soul is an intelligent and feeling agent, and not like a threefold cord, whose strands can be untwisted and taken apart. It is one indivisible substance, whose activity is manifested under various forms, but not through faculties as distinct from each other as the organ of sight is from that of hearing."¹⁸⁸ With what Hodge considers to be such a fundamentally flawed methodology, Finney's book is both misguided and destructive.

If Finney overemphasizes rationality, Hodge finds Schleiermacher and his disciples on the other end of the spectrum, stressing the place of an independent faculty of feeling in guiding theology rather than any objective revelation of God. Hodge again stresses that the feelings and intellect should not be seen as independent entities, nor should the content of the intellect be determined by feelings. "This is becoming a very current opinion, and has been adopted in all its length from Schleiermacher by Morell. Knowledge, or truth objectively revealed is, according to this theory, of very subordinate

¹⁸⁶ "Apart then from the radical error of making theology a science to be deduced from certain primary principles, or first truths, we object to Mr. Finney's work that it assumes as axioms contested points of doctrine; and that it makes the mere understanding, as divorced from the other faculties, the law-giver and judge on all questions of moral and religious truth. The result is that he has produced a work, which though it exhibits singular ability for analysis and deduction, is false as to its principles and at variance with scripture, experience and the common consciousness of men." "Finney's Lectures," 249.

¹⁸⁷ "Finney's Lectures," 276, 248. Elsewhere Hodge writes, "Reason is neither the source nor the standard of divine truth." *CP*, LXXV, "Salvation by Grace" (3/20/1853), 116.

¹⁸⁸ "Finney's Lectures," 248.

importance.”¹⁸⁹ For Hodge, using these false divisions of human existence leads to rationalism on the one hand and mysticism on the other. Finney leans entirely on the intellect of a wrongly divided self, Schleiermacher entirely on the feeling, and Park attempts to work both sides independently.¹⁹⁰ Hodge desires to acknowledge both the place of mystery and of objective content in describing Christianity, a unified view of objective and subjective factors – of intellect, of feeling, of affections, of will, of all the complexity that makes for a whole human being. Whether Hodge is always successful in practice of this integrated approach is another question, but in theory this is where he stands.

The Means of Conversion

Although Hodge clearly sees conversion as rooted in a supernatural act, he still recognizes that there are means which God provides as avenues to conversion. In God’s dealing with humankind generally, he uses means in such a way as not to violate an individual’s natural capacities and processes. As Hodge puts it, “As God does not violate natural laws, so neither does he violate the laws of our rational and moral constitution,

¹⁸⁹ “Professor Park’s Sermon,” 670.

¹⁹⁰ In spite of Park’s emphasis at times on feeling, his emphasis on an independent intellect can, according to Hodge, lead him to rationalism. Thus, for example, Hodge argues that Park’s view of redemption is “characteristically rational. It seeks to explain every thing so as to be intelligible to the speculative understanding. The former is confessedly mysterious. The Apostle pronounces the judgment of God to be unsearchable and his ways past finding out, as they are specially exhibited in the doctrines of redemption, and in the dispensations of God toward our race. The origin of sin, the fall of man, the relation of Adam to his posterity, the transmission of his corrupt nature to all descended from him by ordinary generation, the consistency of man’s freedom with God’s sovereignty, the process of regeneration, the relation of the believer to Christ, and other doctrines of the like kind, do not admit of ‘philosophical explanation.’ They cannot be dissected and mapped off so as that the points of contact and mode of union with all other known truths can be clearly understood; nor can God’s dealings with our race be all explained on the common-sense principles of moral government. The system which Paul taught was not a system of common sense, but of profound and awful mystery.” “Professor Park’s Remarks,” 317-18.

nor does he disregard them.” God uses natural causes to create rain and provide a harvest; he does not simply call them into existence each time. So too, God does not “govern his people by blind impulses,” but rather “he uses appropriate means” in working within them to guide their will and actions.¹⁹¹

Hodge asserts that in conversion, as in God’s dealings with humanity more generally, God does not simply overpower or somehow magically change an individual, but uses means. “This divine, supernatural influence to which all true religion is to be referred, always acts in a way congruous to the nature of the soul, doing it no violence, neither destroying nor creating faculties, but imparting and maintaining life by contact or communion with the source of all life.” This divine influence is given through “the use of appropriate means, of means adapted to the end they are intended to accomplish. It operates in connexion with the countless influences by which human character is formed, especially with the truth.”¹⁹² Hodge makes clear that the means of grace “are not means in the Romish sense, *i. e.*, rites which have the power to confer grace.” Nevertheless, the means of grace “are appointed by God for the purpose of conveying grace, and which he has promised to attend by his divine influence. This supposes that God works by means.”¹⁹³

¹⁹¹ *CP*, CXX, “As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God” (10/18/1874), 181.

¹⁹² Hodge, “Bushnell on Christian Nurture,” 517. Elsewhere Hodge writes that God works in the material world by means in “sustaining and guiding those laws [of matter] to intelligent ends.” *CP*, CXC, “The Word of God as a Means of Grace” (11/30/1856), 286. He works by means “in the intellectual world, in the development and exercise of the minds and character of men; in sustaining, controlling, restraining and guiding their exercises, so that they with perfect freedom work out their own pleasure, and yet the purposes of God.” 286. He uses means “in the world of grace, where also there is a continual agency of God in combination with the agency of man, in the development of the graces of the Spirit, and in attaining eternal life.” 286.

¹⁹³ *CP*, CXC, “The Word of God as a Means of Grace” (11/30/1856), 286.

What does Hodge understand to be the means of conversion? On several occasions Hodge describes these means as those of the word, sacraments, and prayer.¹⁹⁴ Even when Hodge considers the dramatic conversion of Paul on the road to Damascus, he finds that it involved means. Though Paul's conversion was without preparation or human instrumentality, the means of this change was "the revelation of Christ," the living Word.¹⁹⁵

Hodge argues that while it is wrong to depreciate the importance of means, it is also wrong to attribute "an inherent efficacy to these means."¹⁹⁶ The means of grace are not magical. They are not efficacious in and of themselves. They are no guarantor of the reception of grace. "They are not uniformly successful."¹⁹⁷ "Their efficacy," Hodge tells us, "is due to the attending power of the Spirit."¹⁹⁸ Thus even though prayer is "one of the appointed means of supernatural, divine communications to the soul from God," God comes to us in prayer at his option, and we should seek out God in prayer the proper way, "through Christ and the Spirit."¹⁹⁹ No means are effective without God's presence.²⁰⁰

In discussing the conversion of children Hodge seems to make some special allowances. God has a special love for children.²⁰¹ Hodge considers at length Bushnell's book on Christian nurture specifically in part due to this concern for how children are

¹⁹⁴ For example, "The means of grace are the means appointed and employed in applying to men the benefits of redemption. These are the word, the sacraments and prayer; or more properly, the word and sacraments." *CP*, CLXXXIX, "The Means of Grace" (3/6/1853), 285. The means of grace are "the word, sacraments and prayer. There are no others." *CP*, CXC, "The Word of God as a Means of Grace" (11/30/1856), 287. "The means of regeneration are the word and sacraments." *CP*, XC, "Regeneration" (3/12/1854), 136.

¹⁹⁵ *CP*, XCIII, "Lord, What Wilt Thou Have Me to Do?" (1/18/1852), 136. See also *CP*, LXXVII, "The Conversion of Paul" (10/28/1866), 119.

¹⁹⁶ *CP*, CLXXXIX, "The Means of Grace" (3/6/1853), 285.

¹⁹⁷ *CP*, XC, "Regeneration" (3/12/1854), 136.

¹⁹⁸ *CP*, CLXXXIX, "The Means of Grace" (3/6/1853), 285.

¹⁹⁹ CHMC, folder 24:75, "Prayer as a Means of Grace" (9/18/1859).

²⁰⁰ *CP*, CXC, "The Word of God as a Means of Grace" (11/30/1856), 287.

²⁰¹ "Sabbath-School Children," 29.

best brought to conversion. In the article Hodge defends a form of covenantal theology in which promises to believers include their children.²⁰² One of the great truths Hodge finds in Bushnell's book is that "parental nurture, or Christian training, is the great means for the salvation of the children of the church." In writing this, Hodge recognizes "the native depravity of children, the absolute necessity of their regeneration by the Holy Spirit, [and] the inefficiency of all means of grace without the blessing of God." But he also believes that both Scripture and experience demonstrate "that early, assiduous and faithful religious culture of the young, especially by believing parents, is the great means of their salvation."²⁰³ Unlike adults, Hodge argues that, at least for children of the covenant (baptized), they are best brought up as members of the visible family of God and taught God's love for them. He terms this "the appointed, the natural, the normal and ordinary means by which the children of believers are made truly the children of God." As such "consequently this is the means which should be principally relied upon, and employed, and that the saving conversion of our children should in this way be looked for and expected."²⁰⁴ Infant baptism plays a key role in the initiation into this covenantal family, and it is to a consideration of the place of baptism in conversion that we now turn.

²⁰² In his review of Bushnell's book Hodge writes, "There is an intimate and divinely established connexion between the faith of parents and the salvation of their children; such a connexion as authorizes them to plead God's promises, and to expect with confidence, that through his blessing on their faithful efforts, their children will grow up the children of God. This is the truth and the great truth, which Dr Bushnell asserts. This doctrine it is his principal object to establish. It is this that gives his book, its chief value." "Bushnell on Christian Nurture," 509.

²⁰³ Hodge, "Bushnell on Christian Nurture," 509.

²⁰⁴ Hodge, "Bushnell on Christian Nurture," 510. In the same article Hodge writes that "it is a great blessing to be born within the covenant, to be the children of believers—to them belong the adoption and the promises, they are the channel in which the Spirit flows, and from among them the vast majority of the heirs of salvation are taken." 506-07.

The Relation of Conversion to Baptism

Although for Hodge baptism is a sign and seal of a child's entrance into the covenantal community, there is no direct relationship between baptism and conversion. Brooks Holifield notes that Hodge strongly opposes the notion of baptismal regeneration, one of the few areas in which he is critical of Lutheran doctrine.²⁰⁵ Hodge in general opposes high church sacramentalism, and comments on this on several occasions. This sacramentalism forms part of the basis of his opposition to Nevin and the Mercersburg Theology.²⁰⁶ Hodge strongly rejects an *ex opere operato* operation of the sacraments, arguing that such views contradict true Protestant doctrine since they attribute to the sacraments "an efficacy independent of faith in the recipient."²⁰⁷

Hodge suggests that there is a more "plausible" view of baptismal regeneration in which there is not "any mysterious power given to the water, or possessed by the administrator; but that God has so bound himself by covenant with his church and people,

²⁰⁵ See E. Brooks Holifield's essay, "Hodge, the Seminary, and the American Theological Context," in *Hodge Revisited*, 122.

²⁰⁶ Gutjahr writes that "in Hodge's mind, the Mercersburg Theology combined the worst elements of Transcendentalism and Roman Catholicism. It taught a notion of a unifying historical consciousness that bore a haunting resemblance to Emerson's Over Soul, and it deified the sacraments, giving them inherent power that denigrated the role of reason and preaching." *Hodge*, 242.

²⁰⁷ Hodge, "Bushnell on Christian Nurture," 538. Nevertheless Hodge is willing to acknowledge and even defend Roman Catholic baptism as valid against severe criticism from his fellow Presbyterians and beyond. As Gutjahr describes it, "many Presbyterians began to wonder about Hodge's own theological loyalties when, in 1845, he refused to join the General Assembly in denouncing the efficacy of Roman Catholic baptism. Questions concerning Hodge's Catholic sympathies arose just when anti-Catholic sentiment was reaching an all-time high in the United States. His thoughtful and carefully circumscribed defense of Catholicism's sacrament of baptism subjected him to some of the most pointed and aggressive criticism of his career." *Hodge*, 235. He notes, I believe accurately, what this indicates for Hodge's theological method. "Hodge's defense of Catholic baptism stands as a vivid example of just how important historical precedent was to his theological reasoning. Although inevitably influenced by the culture in which he lived and moved, *Hodge never acknowledged that anything other than biblical teaching and established church traditions flavored his doctrinal reasoning*. When it came to the issue of Catholic baptism, he argued almost solely from historical precedent. Hodge was willing to oppose his brethren on this issue not because he loved Catholicism, but because he aligned himself with every orthodox Christian dating back to the patristic fathers in affirming that Catholic baptism was a valid sacramental form." 237 (emphasis mine).

that whenever and wherever this ordinance is properly administered, he changes the heart of the subject by his Holy Spirit.” Hodge considers this view a “far more rational form of belief” than the Roman Catholic view. “But here is the difficulty. The Scriptures do not teach it.”²⁰⁸ Additionally, there are so many who are baptized who later demonstrate no signs of regeneration in their lives.²⁰⁹ Such a view tends “to beget a superstitious confidence in a mere ceremony, ... and to make both parents and children less careful as to training, and less sensible of their dependence on Divine grace.”²¹⁰

For Hodge “baptism does not regenerate—is not always accompanied or followed by regeneration.”²¹¹ Elsewhere he puts it more graphically. “Regeneration is not effected by baptism. The effusion of water on a corpse might as well be expected to restore it to life, as any outward rite to give grace to the soul.”²¹² However baptism does serve as a sign of the covenant, and of the entrance of the recipient into the family of the visible church. Although baptism in and of itself does not effect regeneration, Hodge described four results of infant baptism. First, it connects the child to the visible church and its care and nurture. Second, it connects the church visibly to the child. Third, “it brings the parents into public covenant with God, with his church, and with the lambs of his flock.” Fourth, it brings God “into covenant with his people and his church.”²¹³

Hodge does not elaborate on the place of adult baptism nearly so much as he does that of infant baptism. When he does one finds a similar but modified view of baptism that, just as for infant baptism, is not regenerative. However, unlike its function for

²⁰⁸ Hodge, “A Practical View of Infant Baptism,” *BRPR* 33, 4 (Oct 1861), 687.

²⁰⁹ “In the vast majority of cases, subsequent life shows most plainly that regeneration did not take place at baptism.” Hodge, “Infant Baptism,” 687.

²¹⁰ Hodge, “Infant Baptism,” 687.

²¹¹ Hodge, “Infant Baptism,” 688.

²¹² CHMC, folder 21:22, sermons, “That Ye May Know” (10/15/1854).

²¹³ Hodge, “Infant Baptism,” 689.

children, baptism is not used for adults as an entrance into a process that may lead to conversion, but rather as a confirmation of an adult's reception of faith.²¹⁴ Hodge is much more interested, however, in the nurturing of baptized children as a means to faith. Such a process is almost invariably a gradual one. This leads to the consideration of the timeframe of conversion to which we now turn.

The Timeframe of Conversion

In examining the timeframe of conversion one finds Hodge moving against the rising evangelical current of the nineteenth century. The widespread revivalism of this time often emphasizes a moment of conversion. Hodge counters with an emphasis on gradualist conversion that cuts against some revivalist trends.

For Hodge, conversion, when considered more narrowly as regeneration, is always an instantaneous event. Hodge makes this clear on several occasions. Regeneration, he writes in his systematics text, is “the instantaneous change from spiritual death to spiritual life.”²¹⁵ Elsewhere he writes that “regeneration is an instantaneous and finished product.”²¹⁶

Hodge also allows that conversion as a broader term reflecting coming to saving faith can also be sudden. When moving “from a state of unbelief to one of saving faith, ... the change may, and often does, take place in a moment.”²¹⁷ Faith “may be originated in

²¹⁴ It was part of “the stipulations of that covenant, that his people, so far as adults are concerned, should not receive the saving benefits of that covenant until they were united to Him by a voluntary act of faith.” *ST III*, 104.

²¹⁵ *ST III*, 5.

²¹⁶ “Sabbath-School Children,” 29.

²¹⁷ *ST III*, 70.

a moment.”²¹⁸ Hodge is critical of those “whose theory of religion does not admit of instantaneous or rapid conversions.”²¹⁹ The apostle Paul is an example of such an event.²²⁰ Although Hodge allows that such rapid conversions are possible, he does not insist that all conversion experiences should be of such a timeframe. He only insists that conversion in some form is a necessity for any Christian. Conversion is a process that, “in some form or other, with more or less distinctiveness, more or less gradually takes place in every true believer.”²²¹

If there is a wide range of timeframes possible for conversion, Hodge makes clear that the norm, and the most desirable timeframe, should be gradual rather than an instantaneous point in time. He is forthright about this on more than one occasion. In an 1861 article he writes that “adult conversions among her own children are not so much what the church ought to look for, as sanctification from early life. This corresponds both with the nature of the covenant and with the nature of spiritual life, which is a gradual development.”²²² Hodge’s previously described emphasis on the nurturing of children as a means to conversion illustrates his belief that this is the most desirable process of conversion. Thus, even though in Hodge’s view Bushnell goes too far in disallowing the possibility of instantaneous conversion, a central motivation for Hodge’s praise of Bushnell’s book on Christian nurture is Bushnell’s emphasis on gradual conversion through Christian nurture.²²³

²¹⁸ CHMC, folder 25:1, “What Shall I Do to be Saved?” (9/30/1860).

²¹⁹ *CP*, CCXXV, “Revivals of Religion” (2/28/1858), 339.

²²⁰ Hodge writes that Paul’s conversion consisted essentially in “a sudden and entire change in his views of Jesus Christ.” *CP*, LXXVII, “The Conversion of Paul” (10/28/1866), 119.

²²¹ CHMC, folder 21:7, “But by the Holy Spirit” (1/30/1848).

²²² “Infant Baptism,” 694.

²²³ It is “one of the great merits of Dr. Bushnell’s book, in our estimation, that it directs attention to this very point, and brings prominently forward the defects of our religious views and habits, and points out the appropriate remedy, viz: [f]amily [sic] religion and Christian nurture.” “Bushnell on Christian Nurture,”

In his review of Bushnell's book Hodge describes how such parental nurture should look over the child's development and later deliberate assent to a covenantal faith at maturity. In such a nurturing process there can be no question of a specific moment of conversion. It is indeterminate and hidden. He writes, "it is obvious that in such cases it must be difficult both for the person himself and for those around him, to fix on the precise period when he passed from death unto life." Those children who are raised up in such a process of nurture and later assent to this faith essentially have no real knowledge of a "before" conversion time in their lives. They have been raised as children of God and have continued in it. As Hodge sees it, this should be "the appointed, the natural, the normal and ordinary means by which the children of believers are made truly the children of God."²²⁴ It is sudden conversion, rather than such a nurturing process, which is the aberration.

Yet this is just the opposite of how many revivalists see the situation. Hodge contends that "many of the popular views of religion are one-sided and defective." They may overemphasize the supernatural aspect of conversion and hence ignore those gradual means God has provided to promote the faith. Those of this ilk may assume that only a dramatic or sudden conversion can be effective, and this affects how they raise their children. "We see evidence of this mistake all around us, in every part of the country and in every denomination of Christians. We see it in the disproportionate reliance placed on

521. On the other hand, Hodge rejects Bushnell's insistence on a naturalistic process of conversion and rejection of the possibility of instant conversion. He notes that Bushnell directly contradicts Edwards' notion of miracle in regeneration. According to Hodge, Bushnell denies that God works upon humans in any manner outside the laws of nature. "He therefore disclaims all belief in instantaneous conversion.... The whole tenor of his book is in favour of the idea that all true religion is gradual, habitual, acquired as habits are formed. Every thing must be like a natural process, nothing out of the regular sequence of cause and effect." 533. It is Bushnell's "great mistake" that he does not rest his arguments for Christian nurture "upon the covenant and promise of God, but resolved the whole matter into organic laws, explaining away both depravity and grace, and presented the 'whole subject in a naturalistic attitude.'" 535.

²²⁴ "Bushnell on Christian Nurture," 510.

the proclamation of the gospel from the pulpit, as almost the only means of conversion; and in the disposition to look upon revivals as the only hope of the church.”²²⁵

Hodge does not want to undervalue either gospel preaching or revival. As to the latter, “we avow our full belief that the Spirit of God does at times accompany the means of grace with extraordinary power, so that many unrenewed men are brought to the saving knowledge of the truth, and a high degree of spiritual life is induced among the people of God.”²²⁶ He praises the “great revivals” of the past led by the likes of Edwards and Whitefield and their legacy to the church of Hodge’s day.²²⁷ However, he believes that in his day too many overemphasize revivals “as the only means of promoting religion. So that if these fail, every thing fails. Others again, if they do not regard them as the only means for that end, still look upon them as the greatest and the best.”²²⁸ This promotes a view of the church growing in fits rather than in a more normal steady growth akin to a person’s physical development.²²⁹ One cannot really know at the time that conversions occurring at revivals are authentic and lasting, or even if such apparently dramatic conversions actually reflect the true moment of those truly converted. Hodge suggests that many who seem to come to conversion in sudden fashion at a revival in reality have been

²²⁵ “Bushnell on Christian Nurture,” 518.

²²⁶ “Bushnell on Christian Nurture,” 519.

²²⁷ “We believe moreover that we are largely indebted for the religious life which we now enjoy, to the great revivals which attended the preaching of Edwards, Whitfield, and the Tennents.” “Bushnell on Christian Nurture,” 519.

²²⁸ “Bushnell on Christian Nurture,” 519.

²²⁹ Hodge promotes this idea here and at other times as well. Referring to Hodge’s book, *The Way of Life*, Gutjahr notes that “using his last chapter to once again decry the passing religious fervency found in revivalism, Hodge wrote that genuine sanctified piety was not found where believers ‘pass from convulsions to fainting, and from fainting to convulsions,’ but instead, true religion was ‘steady, active and progressive.’” 205. Gutjahr is quoting from *The Way of Life*, 294.

in the process of conversion for a long time. It is only that they have become more aware of this reality that they are able to respond to the revival at all.²³⁰

It must be observed at this point that Hodge's views here reflect and perhaps somewhat grow out of his own experience. As Hoffecker puts it, "Hodge viewed his conversion not as a spontaneous, stand-alone beginning of his Christian faith but as the culmination of nurture that had begun with his tutelage as a child." Hodge was nurtured in the faith from his earliest youth by his mother, as well as a number of pastors and other individuals. During his college years at Princeton he himself experienced a "conversion" amidst a campus revival. Hoffecker suggests that for Hodge this "was more of a capstone event, culminating all that had preceded and a platform for all that would follow, rather than an initiation into a life radically different from his upbringing."²³¹ Just as Edwards had to come to terms with his experience of conversion not conforming to the specific Puritan stages by which conversion was thought to occur, so too did Hodge consider how to explain the flow of his own life theologically, believing it to be illustrative of the dominant biblical model and Reformed practice.

In his recent biography Paul Gutjahr writes that "while hosts of revival and camp meeting preachers focused on the moment of conversion, Hodge and his Princeton brethren held fast to an emphasis on piety. Conversion—to be true conversion—had to bear certain types of fruit, and this type of harvest could only be judged over a period of

²³⁰ "As a matter of fact, we are persuaded that many of those who make a profession of religion at a particular time, have been born again, and growing under Divine influences long before. The life is only more clearly manifested to themselves and others about the time of their professed conversion." "Infant Baptism," 694.

²³¹ *Charles Hodge*, 44. Hodge's mother and family seemed to view it in similar fashion, the result of a long process of nurture rather than a sudden change. His mother "framed Charles's conversion not as part of an immediate swirl of enthusiasm at Princeton but in the context of his entire life." 45.

time.”²³² Regeneration for Hodge occurs in an instant, but the evidence and self-awareness of that regeneration can only be confirmed over time. The broader processes of growth of faith, of sanctification, and of validation of regeneration are not instantaneous. This suggests the next aspect of conversion to be considered, the role of experience and how conversion is to be authenticated.

The Authentication of Conversion

For Hodge, the question of one’s regeneration is as basic as asking whether one is of God or Satan, of life or death, saved or lost. Thus, rationally speaking, it is an important question and one must not be indifferent to it.²³³ How does one determine whether one’s conversion is authentic? What standards should be used to recognize authentic conversion in others? First it must be noted that for Hodge judgments of authenticity cannot be derived from external standards such as church membership, but must use criteria that reflect the interior of an individual. Conversion must be judged “simply and solely by our inward state.”²³⁴ He also argues that at times it is easier to disprove than to prove the authenticity of conversion, that spiritual *death* is easier to

²³² Hodge, 76.

²³³ CP, XCI, “Evidences of Regeneration” (9/22/1860), 138.

²³⁴ Hodge, CP, CXVI, “To be Carnally-minded is Death; but to be Spiritually-minded is Life and Peace,” (3/6/1865), 176. Elsewhere Hodge suggests that among the people of God there have always been two classes. He contrasts the carnal, those who rely on externals, and the spiritual, those who rely on internals – outward observances versus “the state of the heart.” “The great question between these two classes has ever been and still is, Who are the circumcision? That is, who are the true people of God?” In the Old Testament circumcision had two aspects, the symbol of regeneration, or inward purity of heart,” and a sign of the covenant that identified God’s people. Hodge argues together with Paul that in the New Testament, the true people of God are those that reflect a changed heart – Christians, not those Judaizers who hold to external signs. Philippians argues that the true people of God worship God in the Spirit and “glory in Christ Jesus,” not those who merely carry out ceremonial or ritual service. CHP, folder 4:2, “We are the Circumcision,” 3/2[?]/1860.

determine than spiritual *life*.²³⁵ Clear evidences against authentic conversion include having “a conscious aversion to Christ” or aversion to being a part of his visible church. This is evidence that conversion has not taken place, as is not putting oneself under the rule of God’s law or living for his glory.²³⁶

Another clear evidence against regeneration is the presence of significant heretical beliefs, “the willful rejection of the leading doctrines of Scripture.”²³⁷ As was seen in the previous evaluation of the role of knowledge in conversion, knowledge plays a key role in Hodge’s understanding of conversion. Thus one aspect of the authentication of conversion involves the accuracy of the knowledge of the converted individual regarding Christ and Christianity. Conversely, an indicator that one has not experienced true conversion is the presence of significant heresy. Lacking the fundamental markers of Christian belief, one cannot be considered a Christian. However, Hodge does not simply rest on an evaluation of theological beliefs as verification of conversion and – as we saw above – he insists that accurate knowledge is no conclusive indicator of one’s conversion. It is a necessary but not a sufficient condition to indicate conversion. Furthermore, as we also observed previously, he does not speak of knowing in a narrow, speculative sense but in a much richer and broader way that involves all an individual’s faculties.²³⁸

²³⁵ See, for example, *CP*, CCXXVI, “Evidences of a Work of Grace” (n.d.), 341.

²³⁶ Hodge, *CP*, XCI, “Evidences of Regeneration,” 9/22/1860, 138.

²³⁷ Hodge, *CP*, XCI, “Evidences of Regeneration,” 9/22/1860, 138. In another talk he says, “heresy, or deliberate rejection of any fundamental doctrine of the Scriptures, is declared to be decisive evidence of spiritual death.” *CP*, CCXXVI, “Evidences of a Work of Grace,” (n.d.), 341. By this he means not simply error, but intentional, deliberate rejection of orthodox doctrines.

²³⁸ Confessing to a particular Scriptural truth “without cordial assent to its truth” is “no evidence of a new birth. It is evident that the confession must be both intelligent and sincere to constitute it any evidence of a renewed state.” In all statements of Scripture regarding salvation through confessing Christ as Lord, intelligence and sincerity are “necessarily taken for granted. Verbal invocation, or mere formal confession, can no more save the soul than outward baptism. It is only when the heart corresponds with the language or the act, that the latter has any value in the sight of God.” Such confession cannot be done with natural human powers; it requires the Holy Spirit’s work on the heart. CHMC, folder 21:7, “But by the Holy Spirit,” 1/30/1848. The kind of deeper knowledge Hodge speaks of in the truly converted “is the fruit, and

Hodge often appeals to a general principle that those doctrines that result in the richest devotional life or piety are those that are most true. Those who truly believe particular authentic doctrines as a result will have deeper piety and richer devotional lives than those with flawed doctrines. Conversely, those with the deepest piety and richest devotional lives indicate the possession on some level of the most authentic doctrines. Experience, or what he also at times refers to as the universal consciousness of man, becomes an authenticator of doctrine, or of doctrines truly held.²³⁹ What is true generally for Hodge here is also true specifically as it applies to conversion. Hodge argues that authentic conversion is best verified by its fruits.²⁴⁰ The best evidence of conversion is to be found in the experiences that result from it over time.

Hodge is not here simply suggesting that one's feelings are changed as a result of conversion. Feelings have a decidedly mixed capacity to judge of one's conversion. Hodge himself seems to waffle somewhat as to their value as evidence of conversion. In one talk he lists "the exercise of gracious affections" as one of three prominent characteristics of true conversion.²⁴¹ Yet in what is more typical of his views, in another talk he asserts that

therefore the evidence of regeneration. This knowledge is not speculative. It is not intuitive, but it is spiritual discernment, a divine illumination" regarding sin, Christ, the plan of salvation, the moral law, or eternal things. *CP*, XC, "Regeneration" (3/12/1854), 137.

²³⁹ For example, in arguing against a particular theory of atonement, Hodge suggests that it is untrue as it goes against "the convictions of every man's breast," and the "*universal consciousness of men*," as well as being contradicted by Scripture. "Beman on the Atonement," 88. For someone who is at times vilified as a Biblicist, Hodge has a surprisingly large role allotted to experience in establishing doctrinal positions.

²⁴⁰ "By their fruits ye shall know them.... A good tree bringeth forth good fruit. The only evidence of the indwelling of the Spirit is the fruit of the Spirit." *CP*, CCXXVI, "Evidences of a Work of Grace" (n.d.), 340.

²⁴¹ *CHP*, folder 5:16, "Nature and Evidences of Faith." Hand-numbered page 18. He expands on this. "When this heart is renewed by the grace of God, and brought by faith into immediate contact with the affecting objects of the Gospel, a new impulse is given to all its native sensibilities, and these objects impressively presented by the Holy Spirit naturally awaken in the bosom a train of spiritual emotions and affections, which being frequently exercised, and assiduously cherished, will grow and ripen into the permanent maturity of the 'fruits of the Spirit.'" 19. "These affections and dispositions are the natural productions of the Spirit of Grace in the soul, and in proportion to their distinctness, constancy, and uniformity, will be his evidence of a gracious state, for when he discovers these in vigorous operation in his bosom, he is constrained to acknowledge the finger of God, and acquiesce in them as evidence of that faith, which works by love, which purifies the heart, which overcomes the world." 20-21.

it is difficult to use changes in one's affections or attitudes as evidence of regeneration because these exercises of one's life are often weak, and "because it is so difficult to discriminate between gracious and natural affections, *e. g.*, sorrow for sin may be from fear," etc.²⁴² Elsewhere he adds, "The Scriptures assume that a man may be deceived as to his spiritual condition" and in examining one's own condition the "question cannot be decided by any analysis of our affections." It is too difficult a task to determine whether feelings and affections are genuine or spurious. "Hence those who are always poring over their feelings and affections, to decide whether they are regenerated or not, never get any satisfaction."²⁴³ Ultimately emotions are too uncertain a basis to authenticate reliably one's conversion.²⁴⁴

Those who are truly converted cannot help but be changed. Out of authentic conversion flows sanctification – holiness in the life of the converted, a living piety resulting in changed behaviors. Conversion results in union with Christ, which results in justification, and justification necessarily leads to sanctification. Hodge writes that justification is "inseparably connected" to sanctification. Those who would divide justification from sanctification misunderstand what has taken place in the life of the believer. Only those who are truly part of Christ's body are justified, and "their sanctification is not the ground, but it is the evidence and effect" of one's regeneration and justification.²⁴⁵ True faith results in sanctification.²⁴⁶ It is nonsensical for Hodge to

²⁴² Hodge, *CP*, XC, "Regeneration" (3/12/1854), 136.

²⁴³ *CP*, CCXXVI, "Evidences of a Word of Grace" (n.d.), 341.

²⁴⁴ In another talk Hodge suggests that one does not study one's own emotions or affections to determine one's regeneration, but instead look for "the general and habitual conformity of our mind to the mind of God," for "the habitual conviction that Jesus is the Son of God," and for "the habitual purpose and endeavor to overcome all sin and to live for Christ's service and in obedience to his will." *CP*, XCI, "Evidences of Regeneration" (9/22/1860), 139.

²⁴⁵ Hodge, *CP*, XCVI, "Justification by Faith" (2/10/1867), 146. The objection that justification by faith "leads to licentiousness is declared by the apostle to be self-contradictory. It proceeds on an entire mistake

think that one could be converted and hence justified, and *not* demonstrate fruits of this change in one's life. "What the Apostle argues to prove is not merely the certainty of the salvation of those that believe; but *their certain perseverance in holiness*. Salvation in sin, according to Paul's system, is a contradiction in terms."²⁴⁷ Sanctification cannot be divorced from justification, and both flow necessarily out of authentic conversion. This being the case, "good works are the certain effects of faith."²⁴⁸

While stressing the fruits of conversion for authentication, Hodge also deemphasizes the importance of profession for authentication – either of doctrine (as we have seen above), or of experiences of conversion. He considers narratives of experience to be "comparatively of little account" compared to the fruits of the Spirit demonstrated in one's life.²⁴⁹ He is especially critical of Finney, who was himself very critical of the church and clergy, representing most ministers as "carnal, unfaithful and unworthy of the sacred office." Hodge responds that it is easy to criticize and profess true faith in opposition to others, but that "our piety is to be tested by our fruits and not by our

of our relation to Christ, through which our justification is secured. We are justified by his righteousness only because we are united to him, but if united to him, we are partakers of his life; and if partakers of his life, we live as he lives. It is impossible, therefore, that any unholy person, *i.e.*, any one who determines to live in sin, or who does not strive to die unto sin and to live unto God, can have any scriptural hope of justification. God justifies only the members of Christ's body." 146.

²⁴⁶ Hodge describes sanctification as one of the effects of faith in *ST III*, 108.

²⁴⁷ Hodge, *ST III*, 112 (emphasis mine).

²⁴⁸ Hodge, *ST III*, 110. Hodge makes this point on several other occasions as well. For example he writes, "The effect of faith is union with Christ. The effect of union with Christ is the participation of his life and of his Spirit. We are in him as the branch is in the vine. And this is the indispensable condition of holiness. And not only the condition, but the cause or source of holiness." *CP*, XCVII, "Sanctified by faith that is in me" (4/7/1867), 148. He goes on to insist upon "the active effects of faith; how it acts in promoting our sanctification." 148. Elsewhere he notes that the nature of the union with Christ that results from conversion is that of "partakers of his life." This is "not a mere external or federal union, nor a union of sentiment and feeling, but such a union as exists between the branches and the vine, the members and the head of the body." In such a dynamic and close knit relation, sanctification and its resulting works necessarily follow. Thus Hodge from this infers "the folly of those who profess to be Christians and hope that they are so, if they are servants of sin.... They must not only desire and strive against it, but they must more and more overcome it." *CP*, XCVIII, "They that are Christ's Have Crucified the Flesh with the Affections and Lusts" (11/11/1856), 150.

²⁴⁹ Hodge, *CP*, CCXXVI, "Evidences of a Work of Grace" (n.d.), 340.

professions.”²⁵⁰ Hodge goes on to describe the practical effects of the Oberlin teachings and vilification of the broader church, their censorious spirit, disregard of Sabbath and Lord’s Supper, disregard for conversion, disorderly church conduct, etc., which undermines professions of true faith.²⁵¹ Professions are just another form of external criteria, and are unreliable indicators of authentic conversion. Only the fruits that flow out of the inner person indicate reliably the authenticity of their faith.

The criteria by which one judges the credibility of one’s own conversion are the same by which one might judge the validity of the conversion of others, but there are some factors which complicate such judgments. For example, one cannot really know the hearts of others, or whether evidences of regeneration in their lives are the result of authentic internal change by the Holy Spirit or counterfeit faith. Although one is at times compelled to make such judgments in determining church membership, etc., one should error on the side of grace, since one lacks certainty in knowing another’s inner life. “We are often compelled to extend the hand of Christian charity, and the privileges of Christian communion to men whom God abhors, and will reject as deceivers and hypocrites.”²⁵² Inversely, others may often attribute faith to an individual who is him- or herself very uncertain of his or her standing.²⁵³ But in either case the criteria for judging authentic conversions remain the same; only the degree of knowledge of evidences for that conversion varies.

²⁵⁰ Hodge, “Finney’s Sermons on Sanctification,” 245.

²⁵¹ Hodge, “Finney’s Sermons on Sanctification,” 246-49.

²⁵² CHP, folder 5:16, “Nature and Evidences of Faith,” hand-numbered page 10. “Faith has its counterfeits, which produce effects not easily distinguishable from the genuine fruits of the Spirit.” 10.

²⁵³ Evidence of faith, “though amply sufficient to satisfy others, will furnish in many instances very little evidence to ourselves, and hence it not unfrequently occurs, that satisfactory assurance is given to all around us, while we are waling in darkness and agitated with doubts and fears.” CHP, folder 5:16, “Nature and Evidences of Faith,” hand-numbered page 11.

On more than one occasion Hodge gives lists of evidences for regeneration that describe with slight variations the criteria above.²⁵⁴ In his book, *The Way of Life*, he summarizes these by suggesting that knowledge and piety are the two key determiners of authentic conversion. One who is authentically converted will come to a proper recognition of basic truths regarding Christ and Christianity, and will have outward fruits that reflect a living piety within. It is this latter point of fruits that is the most reliable indicator for Hodge, as it was for Jonathan Edwards before him.

The Permanence of Conversion

Is conversion reversible or does it result in a permanent state? Hodge addresses this question directly and indirectly in a variety of places. He confronts the question of the permanence of conversion directly in a conference talk titled, “Security of Believers,” from 1856. In it he argues that believers are entirely secure in their salvation, and also that there will be a correspondence between the true faith of a believer and the impact of

²⁵⁴ In one example Hodge lists the evidences of regeneration as 1. “the Holy Ghost entering the soul and there abiding as a principle of a new life” which is indicated by “the presence of a source of light, of love, of power, of holiness, peace and joy.” 2. By the soul’s capacity to recognize truth, especially regarding Jesus and his person and work, 3. The power to conquer sin and obey God and live by his will. 4. “Peace and joy.” *CP*, XCI, “Evidences of Regeneration” (9/22/1860), 138-39. Similarly he writes elsewhere of “three great evidences of grace given in the Scriptures.” These are: 1. “The accordance of our inward apprehensions and convictions as to truth with the word of God.” 2. Changes in the purposes of the heart from sin to purposing not to sin and to grow in grace and in service to Christ. 3. “The outward fruits of holiness. If the tree be good the fruit will be good.” This is expressed in kindness, justice, etc., with others, with “strict morality in all that regards our duties to ourselves,” and a religious life – of prayer, Christian fellowship and worship, and promotion of religion. *CP*, CCXXVI, “Evidences of a Work of Grace” (n.d.), 341-42. In another example, he suggests that the fruits of regeneration are evidenced in three areas: knowledge, affections, and a new life purpose. Hodge, *CP*, XC, “Regeneration” (3/12/1854), 137. In the life of the regenerate individual life the guiding purpose is “one whose object is not self, not the world or creatures, but God. The definite fixed purpose is to glorify him.” He adds, “We seek our happiness in new objects” and “find the duties of religion a delight.” 137. In yet another example he lists three prominent characteristics of true conversion: 1. “the interesting light in which he contemplates spiritual objects,” 2. “the exercise of gracious affections,” 3. “his firm purpose to trust the Lord, and live to his glory.” *CHP*, folder 5:16, “Nature and Evidences of Faith.” The pages are hand-numbered, and the above three quotes are from pages 15, 18, and 21.

that faith on their lives, however imperfect. He distinguishes strongly between antinomian notions of security that are merely external forms, versus a security which recognizes God's work on the inner person that can never be separated from true belief. As Hodge puts it, we cannot "live in sin and yet be saved; because *the security of believers is a security from sin*. This is the great distinction between the doctrine of perseverance and Antinomianism. As it is a contradiction to say that God saves the lost, so it is a contradiction to say that he preserves those who indulge in sin."²⁵⁵ The grounds of the Christian's security are in "the covenant of Redemption," "the work of Christ," "the indwelling of the Spirit," and "the fidelity of God."²⁵⁶ These grounds make one's conversion immutably secure. Elsewhere Hodge affirms this. "If we belong to Christ," Hodge writes, "... we are secure, here and hereafter, for time and eternity."²⁵⁷ The special love of God to the redeemed is completely gratuitous, and was given while we were yet sinners. "It is therefore immutable. If founded on anything in us, it would continue no longer than our attractiveness continued. But if perfectly gratuitous, flowing from the mysterious fullness of the divine nature, it cannot change."²⁵⁸ If in conversion a sinner is justified by Christ's righteousness imputed to the sinner, then "there is no more probability of a sinner's being condemned... than that Christ himself should be condemned. It renders the believer, therefore, absolutely and forever secure."²⁵⁹ It would appear from such statements that there is no denying that Hodge sees conversion as a permanent state.

²⁵⁵ CP, CXXVI, "Security of Believers" (9/2/1856), 188 (emphasis mine).

²⁵⁶ CP, CXXVI, "Security of Believers" (9/2/1856), 188.

²⁵⁷ CP, CXXXI, "Ye are Christ's" (3/10/1861), 198.

²⁵⁸ CP, CXXXV, Hope Maketh not Ashamed, Because the Love of God is Shed Abroad in Our Hearts by the Holy Ghost which is Given unto Us" (4/26/1857), 203.

²⁵⁹ CP, CCIII, "The Unity of the Church" (1/13/1866), 306. He adds, "*the third effect of this union to Christ, which pertains to the individual believer and to the Church as a whole, is security*. No man can pluck them out of the hand of Christ. All given to him shall come to him, and he will raise them up at the last day." 307.

However, there are in fact other occasions when Hodge seems to speak in such a manner as to indicate that salvation may be at risk or lost. For example, he discusses the battles that take place in a renewed individual between flesh and spirit, two antagonistic principles that coexist in the life of the believer and battle to the death. “If the flesh triumphs the result is death. If the Spirit triumphs the result is life.”²⁶⁰ He seems to indicate that in such a state of war there may be casualties. He adds that one “must take an active part” in this struggle between flesh and Spirit. “We must take sides with the one or with the other party. We cannot be neutral; we cannot be inactive; we cannot change from one side to the other.... Unless we are successful in actually slaying, putting to death the evil principle, we shall perish eternally.”²⁶¹ Lest one assume that Hodge is describing a state of affairs before conversion takes place, he is in this talk clear in indicating otherwise.²⁶² How can Hodge speak of a battle in the renewed individual that might be won by the flesh and result in death and not deny eternal security – the permanence of the converted state?

In more indirect ways it is also difficult to make Hodge’s position on eternal security consistent with some of his other ideas on the original holiness of humans in creation. In discussing the original state of humanity, Hodge makes the argument that even a holy being could fall or be corrupted. But if an initial human being with a holy disposition chose to sin and thereby lost his or her original holy state, and if, as has been previously described, the nature of the change of conversion involves no change in

²⁶⁰ *CP*, XCIX, “Mortify the Deeds of the Body” (11/17, no year given), 151. He adds, “By death is meant all that is included under the categories of spiritual and eternal death; and by life all that is included under those of spiritual and eternal life.” 151.

²⁶¹ *CP*, XCIX, “Mortify the Deeds of the Body” (11/17, no year given), 151.

²⁶² “In the natural man there is but one principle of life [the flesh]. In the renewed man there are two principles. These in Scripture are called flesh and spirit.” *CP*, XCIX, “Mortify the Deeds of the Body” (11/17, no year given), 150.

substance but only a change in disposition, then what is preventing a regenerated individual with a holy disposition falling again? What is different about the regenerated state over and against Adam's? This is perhaps a rare occasion where Hodge's renowned consistency fails him.²⁶³

These conflicting statements are the exception rather than the rule in examining Hodge's views on the permanence of conversion. They also never arise when Hodge is considering conversion directly. In those instances he invariably affirms the permanence of the change. He does, however, suggest in his *Systematic Theology* that there may be a form of faith that he terms a temporary faith, in which some may be impressed to believe for a time, but later fall away. He considers such a temporary faith to be the result of common grace only, and not a supernatural gift of special grace, and hence a faith that does not result in spiritual renewal. He contrasts it with saving faith, "which secures eternal life; which unites us to Christ as living members of his body..." which "is fruitful in good works," and is founded "on the testimony of the Spirit with and by the truth to the renewed soul."²⁶⁴

Hodge affirms the permanence of conversion because he always points away from the individual and his or her subjective state and toward the objective work of God as the basis for the change, and hence its permanent state.²⁶⁵ He sees such an emphasis as basic

²⁶³ In my readings I never observed Hodge relating this topic to that of eternal security or permanence in conversion, so I can only guess how he might respond. One possible response would be that the work of Christ has paid for all our past and future failings and sins, that we are in an era of grace rather than law, and therefore the ramifications of our sins are now different. Another answer might be that the ongoing presence of the Holy Spirit in regenerate individuals makes a complete fall from grace impossible. But then what was the role of the Holy Spirit in Adam and Eve? How is that different? These are interesting avenues to explore, but take us too far afield of the current topic to meander down at this time.

²⁶⁴ *ST* III, 68.

²⁶⁵ Thus he writes in *ST*, "It will be seen that the Apostle does not rest the perseverance of the saints on the indestructible nature of faith, or on the imperishable nature of the principle of grace in the heart, or on the constancy of the believer's will, but solely on what is out of ourselves. Perseverance, he teaches us, is due to the purpose of God, to the work of Christ, to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and to the primal source of

to Reformed theology, in contrast to Arminian thought. “The doctrine that believers may fall from grace and perish, supposes an entirely different theory of the gospel.”²⁶⁶ Such a theory makes one’s salvation dependent “(a.) on whether he chooses to believe, and (b.) on whether he will persevere in his faith. Both depend upon himself.” By contrast, “the other [Reformed] theory supposes that the work of Christ secures the salvation of his people; that faith is God’s gift, and that its continuance depends simply on God’s fidelity.”²⁶⁷ This represents part of a deep divide that Hodge finds between Arminian and Reformed thinking.

Ultimately for Hodge conversion is rooted in a supernatural work of God. As such, it is not at risk by any actions of the converted. There is no ‘falling away’ from such a change. “God knows his own work. And when he has wrought the great effect, when he has regenerated the sinner, there can be no mistake about it. The gracious result is produced and remains, no matter what the sinner’s thoughts and feelings may be respecting it.”²⁶⁸ In Hodge’s view, there are no backsliders. If one could adopt God’s perspective and see into the hearts of men and women, one would find there only those who have truly been converted and those who have not. There would be none who had been changed and then fallen away from the faith or somehow reversed their conversion.

all, the infinite, mysterious, and immutable love of God. We do not keep ourselves; we are kept by the power of God, through faith unto salvation. (1 Peter i.5.)” *ST III*, 113. He also describes one of the effects of saving faith as “security, or, certainty of salvation.” *ST III*, 110. Hodge refers here not to assurance in a subjective sense, but to the perseverance of the saints. He supports his position with an expansive appeal to Romans 8, in which he finds the permanence of believers’ union with Christ, the principle of eternal life already within believers, their status in the present as sons of God, God’s accomplishment of his designed purposes in saving those who he calls, God’s love as grounds for perseverance, and the immutability of that love. 110-13.

²⁶⁶ *CP*, CXXVI, “Security of Believers” (9/2/1856), 188.

²⁶⁷ *CP*, CXXVI, “Security of Believers” (9/2/1856), 189. He continues, “The one supposes that God loves us because we love him, and so long as we love him. The other supposes that his love is gratuitous and infinite; that we love him because he loved us.” 189.

²⁶⁸ Hodge, “Sabbath-School Children,” 24.

Authentic conversion is a permanent state, and there is nothing that can prevail in overcoming it.

A Morphology of Conversion and the Ordo Salutis

Previously, in discussing Edwards' views on conversion, the Puritan notion of particular steps proceeding to conversion – what was termed a 'morphology of conversion' – was mentioned. Edwards saw those steps as one possible, but not definitive, route to conversion. Like Edwards, Hodge accepts that individuals can come to conversion in a variety of ways. For Hodge conversion can occur quickly, slowly, alone, in church, after much reflection or upon a sudden insight. Unlike the Puritans of earlier centuries, he seems to have no particular "morphology of conversion" or progression of common steps an individual should follow in coming to faith. While, as we have seen, he has some preferences for which processes are best in bringing individuals to faith – a gradual nurturing process is to be preferred over a sudden and emotional one – he acknowledges that the Spirit may use a variety of processes in bringing individuals to renewed life. For Hodge there is even a danger in describing particular steps. "So long as a man considers certain feelings as a necessary preparation for coming to Christ, he considers Christ as offered to none but those that have those feelings. But when he sees that the offer is perfectly gratuitous, that it is no matter whether he has those feelings or not, provided he is willing to be saved by Christ, that the only use of these feelings is to produce this willingness, then the great barrier is taken out of his way."²⁶⁹ There is no preparation

²⁶⁹ Hodge, CHMC, Folder 21:28, "By Grace are Ye Saved," 2/19/1860. He adds, "Men are not saved against their will, but if they are willing to be saved by the righteousness of Christ, they have nothing more

necessary for this gift of salvation; it is a free offer.²⁷⁰ The suggestion that there are required steps potentially undermines such an entirely gracious gift.

In reading across his various writings one can see how theologically Hodge understands the *ordo salutis*, or order of salvation. Much of it can be inferred by our previous discussions above. For Hodge this order of salvation appears something like this:

Election

Regeneration

Faith

Union with Christ

Justification

Conviction of Sin/Repentance/Conversion

Sanctification

These steps are more logical than temporal. The gift of salvation is a supernatural act that is initiated not by human will, but by God's election. Being at its core a work of God rather than humanity is what gives it its security, as has been seen above. It is God who elects and God who through his Holy Spirit supernaturally regenerates the sinner, who, being dead in sin, can in no way contribute to such a change. Regeneration consists

to do or to experience as a preparation for believing. Justification therefore is entirely of grace, not only because the price of our redemption has been paid by Christ, but because we have nothing to do but to submit to his righteousness and consent to be saved through him." Elsewhere Hodge also comments on the idea of particular steps. In the article, "Means of Repentance," Hodge [or an unknown author approved by Hodge] says that the path or steps to repentance are not the same for every person, due to varying circumstances and personality. See 115-16.

²⁷⁰ "Christ has performed all that the law of God demands: if we refuse to put our trust in him we perish, if we confide in his righteousness we are saved." Hodge, CHMC, Folder 21:28, "By Grace are Ye Saved," 2/19/1860.

in “communicating the life of Christ, his substance, to the soul, and this divine-human life comprehending all the merit, virtue, or efficacy belonging to Christ and his work.”²⁷¹

Regeneration brings with it a basic change to the soul’s disposition, and leads directly to a saving faith. Faith is “the first conscious exercise of the renewed soul,” just as “the first conscious act of a man born blind whose eyes have been opened, is seeing.”²⁷² Faith leads directly to union with Christ and the benefits that this entails.²⁷³ Sharing in the benefits of union with Christ, one is then justified by the righteousness of Christ imputed to us.²⁷⁴

Although much or all of this process thus far may be hidden, it comes to the surface with the conviction of sin and repentance and outward conversion that is produced as a result.²⁷⁵ For Hodge the visible signs of conversion are only apparent after much of the process of salvation is already complete. Hodge distinctly insists that faith precedes repentance, in contrast to some others. Faith “must precede repentance.”²⁷⁶ Hodge describes repentance as “the turning of the soul from sin unto God.”²⁷⁷ Unless this

²⁷¹ *ST III*, 25.

²⁷² *ST III*, 41.

²⁷³ “The first effect of faith, according to the Scriptures, is union with Christ. We are in Him by faith. There is indeed a federal union between Christ and his people, founded on the covenant of redemption between the Father and the Son in the counsels of eternity. We are, therefore, said to be in Him before the foundation of the world.” *ST III*, 104. Hodge is thus a supralapsarian.

²⁷⁴ Hodge describes justification in *ST* as the “second effect of faith” (after union with Christ). *ST III*, 105. Earlier in *ST* he writes, “Regeneration consisting in the communicating the life of Christ, his substance, to the soul, and this divine-human life comprehending all the merit, virtue, or efficacy belonging to Christ and his work, – regeneration involves justification, of which it is the ground and the cause.” 25. He argues that some (he lists the German Ebrard as one example) wrongly place repentance and conversion before justification. 23.

²⁷⁵ There is a form of conviction of sin that some may have that is not a part of or evidence for conversion. This conviction of sin “includes a sense of helplessness..., that we can never atone for our sins,” or “cleanse ourselves from pollution.” *CP*, LXXIX, “Conviction of Sin” (11/18/1855), 122. These various forms of conviction “are all natural feelings. They may and often do precede regeneration. They are often experienced by those who never are renewed. They are nothing more than a higher measure of what every sinner from the constitution of his nature more or less experiences.” 122. Such conviction of sin is necessary to conversion, although “no evidence” of it. In this form it is the result of the operation of common, rather than special, grace. The means of gaining conviction of sin is the Holy Spirit. “Even in the unconverted it is the effect of his common grace. He is sent to convince the world of sin.” 123.

²⁷⁶ *ST III*, 41.

²⁷⁷ *ST III*, 41. In a conference paper he likewise describes the “essential act” of repentance as “turning from sin to God.” *CP*, LXXX, “Repentance” (2/26/1865), 124.

turning is “produced by the believing apprehension of the truth it is not even a rational act.”²⁷⁸ Repentance is “a fruit of regeneration, and a gift of the Spirit.”²⁷⁹ In an early sermon on repentance, Hodge notes that many who hear the call for repentance “are at a loss what exactly is to be done. They seem to wait in expectation of some strange work being wrought in their hearts without any exertion on their part: as though it was not an active duty which they are thus solemnly called upon in the word of God to perform.” He suggests that repentance involves first recalling our transgressions. “Secondly we must not only think of our sins, but we must condemn ourselves for them.” Third, we must gain by this a sense of our own deep “moral pollution” as compared to God’s great holiness and goodness. “Finally the command to repent includes the command to turn from our sins unto God.”²⁸⁰ If we know our true wickedness, the last thing we want would be to remain in them. Repentance is directed not only to those outside the church indulging in their sin with indifference, but also to the people of God, who sin daily and need to practice repentance daily. It is an ever-present act of faithful Christian living.

The final step in this process is sanctification. As previously described, Hodge sees sanctification as closely tied to justification and a necessary outgrowth and evidence of regeneration. He calls sanctification at one point “a continued conversion,” adding, “If the sinner in conversion, under a sense of sin, throws himself in the arms of Christ, the

²⁷⁸ *ST III*, 41. This is an interesting comment. The movement of repentance is based on a rational response to the truth as it is encountered in the renewal of the person and the new spiritual knowledge that results in regeneration. The role of knowledge in conversion is again here affirmed.

²⁷⁹ *CP*, LXXX, “Repentance” (2/26/1865), 123. Hodge in this article also notes that the term regeneration can sometimes be used in a wider sense for “the whole process of conversion,” as in everything that follows God’s gracious activity in regeneration. 123-124. Likewise, Hodge often uses the term “conversion,” as previously mentioned earlier, to describe all of the human response that follows God’s act of regeneration in the individual. In this way, “conversion is the result and evidence of regeneration.” Hodge, “Sabbath-School Children,” 23.

²⁸⁰ CHMC, Folder 20:13, “Repent Ye, for the Kingdom of God is at Hand,” Dec 1829.

believer must do it every day.”²⁸¹ We daily take hold of the same grace by which we were converted.²⁸² Although sanctification follows necessarily out of any authentic process of conversion, Hodge argues that it “is not, in this life, perfect, but progressive.” Hodge believes (with his fellow Princetonians) “that the Bible teaches that at regeneration the believer is wholly justified, while in this life he is but partially sanctified.”²⁸³ This puts him directly at odds with Finney, who argues for a form of Christian perfectionism in which a believer becomes wholly sanctified.

The Location of Conversion

By the location of conversion is meant the context in which it typically is obtained. Is it to be sought within the church or outside of it? Is it found primarily within a corporate experience, or is it an individual experience requiring no corporate Christian context? Is it primarily a public or private event or process? One does not find Hodge addressing these kinds of questions directly, but implicit in his various views are some indications of the direction in which his theology takes these questions. Those directions are not altogether consistent.

Hodge is concerned with an overemphasis on revival as a means to conversion, and especially as a sole means. In criticizing revivalism he also criticizes the place of sermons and the pulpit as the sole instrument of conversion. In doing so he is not desirous to move the center of Christian life and conversion to a location outside of the church. He

²⁸¹ Hodge, CHMC, Folder 21:28, “By Grace are Ye Saved,” 2/19/1860.

²⁸² “Spiritual life therefore is not maintained by the strength of any principle of grace communicated in regeneration; much less by any means of moral culture which the wisdom of men can prescribe on their own power as it is maintained by an influence from above, and inasmuch as that influence is graciously and gratuitously imparted.” Hodge, CHMC, Folder 21:28, “By Grace are Ye Saved,” 2/19/1860.

²⁸³ Hodge, “Finney’s Sermons on Sanctification,” 236, 237.

is very committed to the church, and this is clear in many other comments he makes. He is, for example, very critical of Finney and others who criticize the established clergy and question their converted state. Further, along with Princeton generally, Hodge specifically is resistant to some of the democratizing forces at work within the church in his day.

Hodge stresses the importance of a trained clergy against the rise of populist Baptist and Methodist clergy and lay leadership with little or no training.²⁸⁴

Still, Hodge, even more so than Edwards, attempts to emphasize certain other means to conversion which, though closely related to church life, are not always to be identified only with what goes on at the pulpit or within the walls of the church. Hodge has a particular interest in spiritual *formation* and nurture, and believes that this takes place in a number of places and contexts. It certainly takes place under the preaching ministry of the church, but it also takes place in other arenas within and outside of the church. This can be seen especially in Hodge's oft-stated concern for the religious development of children within (and sometimes outside of) the church. This development takes place in the teaching ministry of the Sunday School movement, for example. And within the Christian home Hodge believes that Christian nurture of children is crucial. As we have seen previously, he is even willing to praise the likes of Horace Bushnell on this point, in spite of their many significant differences.

²⁸⁴ Gutjahr writes, "Standing stalwartly against the dangers of democracy run amok was Princeton Seminary with its rigorous standards of Presbyterian clerical training." *Hodge*, 95. During this time the Methodists and Baptists grew enormously with their lower standards for clergy and lay activity. Presbyterianism moved from the second largest denomination (after the Congregationalists) at the time of the revolution to being bypassed by the Baptists, Methodists, and Catholics by 1850. *Hodge*, 95-96. Gutjahr notes that Princeton stood against such democratizing movements by the heritage of its early professors – all from well-established and cultured families, all Federalists of one or another form who believed the elite/educated/experienced were most qualified to lead the nation or the church. Its theology also worked counter to the cultural trend with an emphasis on God's (kingly) sovereignty and providential control despite any actions of the masses.

Thus although Hodge indeed is extremely dedicated to the visible church, one cannot fail to notice that much of what he considers crucial to Christian nurture and development in fact takes place outside of the church's formal ministries. Thus there almost seems to be two competing strains in Hodge's perspective, one dedicated to Presbyterian polity, and a formal and structured ministerial operation, while the other emphasizing the role of nurture in the conversion of individuals in a way that somewhat undermines the centrality of visible church institutions and life as the center of conversion. The Sunday School movement itself is in many respects the seed of a parachurch movement that has blossomed enormously in the second half of the twentieth century. The Sunday School movement was a movement away from formal church structures and oversight. It melds well with the populist and individualistic overtones of American society in the nineteenth century and on into the twentieth. Hodge himself sides with parachurch concerns in his battles with the Southern Presbyterian theologian James Henley Thornwell at the onset of the Civil War. In the General Assembly of 1860 Hodge successfully opposes Thornwell's arguments against any voluntary Christian societies outside of the church.²⁸⁵

Nothing about the process of conversion for Hodge demands an institutional church context. Thus, although he opposes the flattening of church hierarchies by the

²⁸⁵ Thornwell's credo, as quoted in Gutjahr, was "The Bible is our only rule, and that where it is silent we have no right to speak." *Hodge*, 291. Thornwell opposed any organized Christian activities outside of the church, or any views that lacked specific, positive biblical support. After losing his battle with Hodge, Thornwell left the American Presbyterian Church and went to the Presbyterian Church of the Confederate States of America, finding this a church more in line with the supremacy of Scripture and church purity. On their conflict, see *Hodge*, 288-291; Calhoun, *Princeton* vol. 1, 383-84. Unlike Thornwell, Hodge argued that there was not only one legitimate church polity. "As long as congregations held to the value of teaching God's Word and emphasizing the Holy Spirit's role in spiritual renewal, Hodge showed incredible flexibility in conceiving what forms different congregations might take." Gutjahr, *Hodge*, 286. Holifield notes that although Hodge thought Roman Catholic ecclesiology the epitome of bad high church doctrine, he also resisted some powerful anti-Catholic forces, arguing against fellow Presbyterians Thornwell and Breckinridge that Roman Catholics (although not the papacy) could be seen as part of the visible church. "Hodge, the Seminary, and the American Theological Context," *Hodge Revisited*, 121.

onset of Methodist and Baptist polities, and opposes the rise of lay leadership as a primary evangelistic force, there is nothing in how he understands the process of conversion theologically that discourages the rise of all these trends.

Hodge's ecclesiology only exacerbates this issue. Specifically, the ways in which Hodge stresses the invisible over the visible church feeds this same competing vision. For Hodge, much of the shift in the location of conversion away from the institutional church grows out of his strong distinction between the visible and invisible church. Hodge believes that the visible and invisible churches must be differentiated, and that the visible church is a church of the wheat and the tares. The visible church is made up of those who *profess* Christ, while the invisible church is made up of all who are truly *in* Christ. Only the invisible church is pure. Because of this Hodge stands firm against any forms of Romanism or episcopal views of the church as some form of repository of grace to be dispensed to its members, or that equate visible church membership with saving faith.²⁸⁶ To associate salvation with membership in the institutional church involves a confusion of the visible and invisible churches. Only God knows the heart, and thus can distinguish with certainty true believers from unbelievers.²⁸⁷ "The external body of professors is not

²⁸⁶ Hodge is critical of views of the church "represented as a store-house of divine grace; whose treasures are in the custody of its officers, to be dealt out by them and at their discretion." "Unity of the Church," *BRPR* 18, 1 (Jan 1846), 150. The problem is that "the unity of the church, according to this [ritual] theory, is no longer a spiritual union; not a unity of faith and love, but an union of association, an union of connection with the authorized dispensers of saving grace." 150. E. Brooks Holifield discusses Hodge's opposition to high church conceptions of the church as a storehouse of grace or sacraments as a primary means of grace in "Hodge, the Seminary, and the American Theological Context," *Hodge Revisited*, 119-20.

²⁸⁷ Hodge writes, "As God has not given to men the power to search the heart, the terms of admission into this body, or in other words, the terms of Christian communion, are not any infallible evidence of regeneration and true faith, but a credible profession. And as many make that profession who are either self-deceived or deceivers, it necessarily follows that *many are of the church, who are not in the church*. Hence arises the distinction between the real and the nominal, or, as it is commonly expressed, the invisible and the visible church." "The Unity of the Church," *BRPR* 18, 1 (Jan 1846), 141 (emphasis mine). Gutjahr comments that according to Hodge, "the visible church will always be a mixture of believers and nonbelievers, and it is not the duty of the church to discern every person's heart, but to err on the side of inclusion. If a person demonstrated enough outward signs of faith, they could be included in the faith

the body of Christ, which consists only of believers. Transferring to the former the attributes and prerogatives which belong to the latter, is the radical error of Romanism, the source at once of its corruption and power.”²⁸⁸ It is of the essence of Protestantism that “we are in the church because we are in Christ, and not in Christ because we are in the church.”²⁸⁹

Understanding the true church as the Apostles’ Creed defines it, as “the communion of saints,” Hodge turns the typical Catholic argument against Protestantism on its head. He argues that the Protestant church, far from being schismatic, is actually more catholic than that of Rome. Its unity exists across denominational lines, rooted in an inner spiritual unity created by the work of the Holy Spirit in common among all true Christians.²⁹⁰ Protestants thus recognize their Christian brothers and sisters in other

community. Only God could ultimately judge who was a true member of his church and who was not.” *Hodge*, 211.

²⁸⁸ Hodge, “Bushnell on Christian Nurture,” 538. In the same article he warns that “parents and children may come to think that religion consists entirely in knowledge and orthodoxy; that they are safe because baptized and included in the church.” 515.

²⁸⁹ Hodge, “Principle of Protestantism as related to the present state of the Church,” *BRPR* 17, 4 (Oct, 1845), 628. “The great error of Rome” is “that men can only come to God through the church, or through the mediation of other men as priests, by whose ministrations alone the benefits of redemption can be applied to the soul. The reverse of this is true, and the reverse of this is Protestantism.” 627-28. Hodge deals extensively with definitions of the church and the standing of the Roman Catholic Church in his article, “Essays in the Presbyterian by Theophilus on the Question: Is Baptism in the Church of Rome Valid?” *BRPR* 18, 2 (Apr 1846), 320-344. While critical of the Roman Catholic Church, and especially with the papacy, Hodge insists that it be considered part of the visible church, defending his position against some other Presbyterian authors. “We admit that Rome has grievously apostatized from the faith, the order and the worship of the church, that she has introduced a multitude of false doctrines, a corrupt and superstitious and even idolatrous worship, and a most oppressive and cruel government; but since as a society she still retains the profession of saving doctrines, and as in point of fact, by those doctrines men are born unto God and nurtured for heaven, we dare not deny that she is still a part of the visible church. We consider such a denial a direct contradiction of the Bible, and of the facts of God’s providence.” 341. Hodge addresses similar themes of contrasting Protestant and Catholic notions of the church in “The Church—Its Perpetuity,” 689-715. He is more critical of the Roman church in his articles in the 1850s, perhaps in response to very negative feedback and suspicion regarding his position on Roman Catholic baptism in the 1840s. The more critical tone can already be seen in his 1846 article, “The Unity of the Church.” Other key articles on these issues include Hodge’s two part series on “The Idea of the Church, Part One,” *BRPR* 25, 2 (Apr 1853), 249-90, and “...Part Two,” *BRPR* 25, 3 (July 1853), 339-89, and his 1846 article, “Is the Church of Rome a Part of the Visible Church?”

²⁹⁰ Multiple, visible expressions of the universal church are to be expected. But this multiplicity in Protestantism does not violate its catholic nature. “There is nothing, in independent organization, in itself considered, inconsistent with unity, so long as a common faith is professed, and mutual recognition is

denominations. It is those who declare that they are the only one true church that are the schismatics. The unity of the church is not in external forms or organization, but in an inner, spiritual reality.²⁹¹ The visible church is thus merely an imperfect and fallen reflection of the true, universal church. Thus giving primacy to the visible institution of the church and considering membership in it as essential to salvation results in a deeply flawed Christian faith and church.²⁹²

These same ideas are at the root of much of Hodge's criticisms of the Mercersburg theology of Phillip Schaff and John Nevin. In his history of Princeton Seminary David Calhoun notes that although Hodge praised Schaff's views on justification by faith, he "was disturbed... by Schaff's ambiguity on the question of how we become Christians. Is it by faith or is it through the church?"²⁹³ Similarly, Hodge

preserved." "Unity of the Church," 144. "The unity of the church is not violated by such separation." 144. Rather "as all really united to Christ are the true church, so all who profess such union by professing to receive his doctrines and obey his laws, constitute the professing or visible church. It is plain therefore that the evangelical are the most truly catholic, because, embracing in their definition of the church all who profess the true religion, they include a far wider range in the church catholic, than those who confine their fellowship to those who adopt the same form of government, or are subject to the same visible head." 145.
²⁹¹ "The bond of union may be spiritual. There may be communion without external organized union. The Church, therefore, according to this view, is not essentially a visible society." Hodge, "Idea of the Church, Part One," 250. Union with Christ through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit is "an union far more real, a communion far more intimate, than subsists between the members of any visible society as such." 250. He later details the characteristics of this unity. "The unity of the Church is threefold. 1. Spiritual, the unity of faith and communion. 2. Comprehensive; the Church is one as it is catholic, embracing all the people of God. 3. Historical; it is the same Church in all ages. In all these senses, the Church considered as the communion of saints, is one; in no one of these senses can unity be predicated of the Church as visible." 270.
²⁹² "No sprinkling priest, no sacrificial or sacramental rite can be substituted for the immediate access of the soul to Christ, without imminent peril of salvation." Hodge, "Unity of the Church," 156. Wherever the Ritual church has prevailed, "it has perverted religion. It has introduced idolatry. It has rendered men secure in the habitual commission of crime. It has subjected the faith, the conscience, and the conduct of the people to the dictation of the priesthood. It has exalted the hierarchy, saints, angels, and the Virgin Mary into the place of God, so as to give a polytheistic character to the religion of a large part of Christendom." 157. The ritual theory of the church "makes the church so prominent that Christ and the truth are eclipsed. This made Dr. Parr call the whole system Churchianity, in distinction from Christianity." 149-50. An even harsher assessment of the results of Roman ecclesiology is given by Hodge in "The Idea of the Church, Part Two," 384.

²⁹³ *Princeton* vol. 1, 309. Calhoun details Hodge's responses to Nevin and Schaff and the Mercersburg theology on 307-12. Calhoun is mistaken, however, in attributing this ambiguity to Schaff. Hodge was in this regard responding to views of John Nevin (who apparently wrote the introduction and appendix to *The Principle of Protestantism* – as well as translating it), not Schaff. Although he says that Schaff fails to put justification by faith in proper opposition to notions of churchly mediation of grace, he singles out Nevin for

opposes Nevin's high church ecclesiology. As Gutjahr puts it, "Nevin argued that the church itself, not the Bible, was the most important means to accessing God's grace. A Christian could not be a Christian unless they stood within the communion of the church for the simple reason that the church was 'the continuation of the earthly life of the Redeemer in the world.'"²⁹⁴ He adds that in "Nevin and Schaff's view of the church... there was no distinction between the visible and invisible church, running completely counter to Hodge's own thinking."²⁹⁵

Hodge has a high view of the invisible church but is left with a low view of the visible church, in the sense that the requirements that are essential to being a true church do not involve either organization, the ministrations of the clergy, or the presence of the sacraments.²⁹⁶ Even though he himself, with his Presbyterian denomination, holds to a

his lack of clarity regarding becoming a Christian through the church. See Hodge, "Principle of Protestantism as related to the present state of the Church," 628-29.

²⁹⁴ Hodge, 242. Gutjahr is quoting Nevin from his section in Philip Schaff's *The Principle of Protestantism* (1846; rpt. Philadelphia, PA: United Church Press, 1964), 220.

²⁹⁵ Hodge, 243. Gutjahr quotes Nevin. "Christianity and the Church are identical." Hodge, 242, quoting Nevin, "Church" in *The Mercersburg Theology*, ed. James Hastings Nichols (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), 60. Gutjahr notes that "Hodge held to the standard Calvinist belief that all Christians when taken as a whole were bound together and shared fellowship in an invisible, spiritual church.[7] In the eyes of the Mercersburg Theology, the invisible church was nothing but a worthless abstraction." 243. Even in 1845 Hodge is critical of this breakdown between the notion of a visible and invisible church, as is apparent in his review of Schaff's book. There Hodge criticizes part of Schaff's presentation for failing to distinguish properly between the true unity of the church universal (the invisible church that exists across denominations), and the unity of specific corporate bodies that form part of the visible church, such as the Roman church, Church of England, or Lutheran church of Germany. There can be unity in the invisible church across a multiplicity of evangelical denominational expressions of the visible church. "We do not suppose that Dr. Schaf denies this, but he constantly speaks as though he regarded external union, that is, union secured and expressed by outward bonds as far more essential to unity of the church than appears to us consistent with its true nature." "Principle of Protestantism as related to the present state of the Church," 631. For more of Hodge's thoughts on Nevin, see Hodge, "The Mystical Presence," *BRPR* 20, 2 (Apr 1848), 227-78..

²⁹⁶ "It is obvious," Hodge writes, "that the Church, considered as the communion of saints, does not necessarily include the idea of a visible society organized under one definite form." "Idea of the Church, Part 1," 249. Hodge denies that any of these are essential to a church in his article, "Is Baptism in the Church of Rome Valid?," 320-44. There he notes that "organization is not essential to the church." 327 (see also "Idea of the Church, Part One," 277). It does not demand a structure or hierarchy to be valid. Also, even though he considers the ministry "a divine institution," Hodge argues that the ministry (clergy) is not essential to the visible church, partly in reaction to the Roman Church. "We are very far from believing the Popish doctrine that the ministry is essential to the being of a church, and that there is no church where there is no ministry." 330. In support of this position Hodge notes that first a church is formed, and then

more robust view of the visible church and considers clergy and sacraments vital, they are not *essential*, and as such he casts a broad net over what churches must be considered authentic. He insists that the only essential feature of membership in the church can be that which is required for one to become a Christian.²⁹⁷ Otherwise one could somehow be united to Christ in faith and yet be denied membership in the visible church, a clear contradiction of Scripture. In similar fashion, Hodge is compelled to recognize as valid any visible church that holds to “the fundamental doctrines of the gospel.”²⁹⁸ All such churches ought to recognize their brethren in other denominational bodies, regardless of their differences.²⁹⁹

Hodge’s ecclesiological views have significance for the location of conversion in several ways. First, they remove any necessary connection between conversion and the

they call a minister. Are they not a church until they call the minister? 331. Likewise for sacraments, “to make them essential to the church is to make them essential to salvation, which is contrary to scripture.” 332. “It is the doctrine of our church that baptism recognizes [sic], but does not constitute membership in the church.” 332.

²⁹⁷ “It is absurd that we should make more truth essential to a visible church, than Christ has made essential to the church invisible and to salvation. This distinction between essential and unessential doctrines Protestants have always insisted upon, and Romanists and Anglicans as strenuously rejected.” “Is Baptism in the Church of Rome Valid?” 329.

²⁹⁸ “As in the case of the individual professor we can reject none who does not reject Christ, so in regard to churches, we can disown none who holds the fundamental doctrines of the gospel.” Hodge, “Unity of the Church,” 146. He adds, “You cannot possibly make your notion of a church narrower than your notion of a Christian. If a true Christian is a true believer, and a professed believer is a professing Christian, then of course a true church is a body of true Christians, a professing or visible church is a body of professing Christians.” 146. “It is only the plain fundamental doctrines of the gospel which are necessary to salvation,” and hence these same doctrines are the standard by which one judges a particular church body as to membership in the true church. 146.

²⁹⁹ Hodge’s view of the visible and invisible church poses some interesting challenges. If one holds to a strong distinction between the visible and invisible church, must that always result in a low ecclesiology? Could one not make an argument that, although there can be no requirement further than what is necessary to become a Christian for membership in the universal church, in practice specific communities must and will always have further standards for membership? Is this not actually the case? Is what is essential to become a Christian all that is really essential to be a part of a visible, local church body?

What does it mean to say that one is a member of the universal church by virtue of being a Christian, if one is by that same standard not capable of being a member of specific church bodies? Of what value is such a proposition in reality? Even Hodge’s own Presbyterian church would not allow one to enter fellowship as a church member without specific confessions of faith that certainly extend beyond fundamental church doctrines. If Hodge can recognize the Roman Catholic church as a valid visible expression, and the possibility of saving faith in what he considers its corrupt teaching, why is he not compelled to argue that the Presbyterian church should open its membership to those that hold to significantly corrupted views?

visible church. Conversion may occur in a wide variety of visible church contexts, but can just as easily occur completely apart from the church. Second, they result in a view of conversion that is strongly individualistic. “The gospel,” Hodge writes, “is a message from God to individual sinners.”³⁰⁰ The relation of conversion to corporate life and growth is much less definite. Third, and on a related note, they result in the legitimacy of conversion as a completely private affair. As the universal church is invisible, and professing Christians cannot with certainty be known to have experienced true conversion, conversion becomes a private affair of the heart. Whether or not Hodge intends to reinforce these aspects of the location of conversion, by virtue of his various theological emphases they become a readily available avenue in the progression of evangelical understanding of conversion.³⁰¹

Conclusions

In sum, Hodge’s view of conversion is of a process initiated by the supernatural action of the Holy Spirit in regeneration. This regeneration marks the change from spiritual death to life. In this change the Spirit does not violate one’s human nature, but

³⁰⁰ Hodge continues, “The gospel is a message from God to individual sinners. It calls each man to repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. These are personal duties. They cannot be performed by one man for another; by the priest for the people. Every man must repent for himself, and believe for himself. And to all and every one, no matter who, or where he is, in the midst of a Christian community and within the pale of the visible Church, or a benighted heathen poring over the inspired page, with no other teacher than the Holy Spirit, to all, without exception, the divine promise is, ‘Whosoever believeth shall be saved.’” “Idea of the Church, Part Two,” 345. Hodge makes a similar point in part one of the same article series. “Holiness and salvation are promised to every member of the Church.... These are blessings of which individuals alone are susceptible. It is not a community or society, as such, that is redeemed, regenerated, sanctified, and saved. Persons, and not communities, are the subjects of these blessings.” Hodge, “Idea of the Church, Part One,” 282.

³⁰¹ One sees these developments in the location of conversion embodied in the ministry of D. L. Moody, a layperson working typically outside of formal church structures or direction who followed on the footsteps of Hodge in the nineteenth century. As a revivalist Moody was well-regarded and received by Princeton, unlike Finney. Examining his place in changing notions of conversion will be the work of a future chapter.

works through it, changing the disposition of the person to one oriented toward loving and pleasing God. Although the person plays no part in the initial act of regeneration, he or she participates actively in the broader process of conversion and subsequent sanctification by the Spirit, though all of the process reflects the gracious activity of God. Conversion is not solely an activity of the intellect, the emotions or affections, or the will, but involves all of these reflecting the unity of a person's being, though new and true knowledge of Christ is vital to the process. Regeneration is an instantaneous event. However because humans lack the ability to determine precisely when such an event has taken place, it is often, though not always, better described as a process in one's life in which one moves from unbelief to belief, from death to life, from the control of natural man to control by the Spirit. As such, it is a mistake in the evangelistic activity of the church to emphasize or require a point in time for one's conversion, to emphasize revivalistic methods that reinforce such a view, or to emphasize a profession of one's faith, as these often cause individuals to place a false confidence in a particular moment or feeling rather than the authenticating marks of a faith lived over time that reflects a changed person. And while the preaching activity of the clergy is important in bringing on conversion, no less important for children is their nurturing in the faith in Christian homes. Conversion is not confined to the actions of the visible church, but rather can occur in any context. Baptism has no direct relationship to conversion. It is a sign of the covenant for the visible church, but does not confer regeneration by its completion. Conversion involves a powerful, fundamental, and supernatural change to a person that is completely a gracious act of God and is not reversible but permanent. Those who appear to fall away likely did not experience an authentic conversion in the first place. It is God's act of regeneration through the Holy Spirit that always initiates the salvific process. One's

faith and repentance, justification, and ongoing sanctification are only possible because God first works graciously and savingly in the human heart.

When one compares Hodge's views with those of his mentor, Archibald Alexander, one finds that in virtually every significant respect, their respective views of conversion in its many aspects line up in a unified fashion. The only exception would be in their respective assessments of the merits and dangers of revivalism, and even this is more one of degree than substance. Alexander thought Hodge unduly harsh in his judgments of the authenticity or merits of certain periods of revival. He felt strongly enough about it to offer something of a counterpoint in print to that which Hodge had previously published.³⁰² Even here, however, both would agree that some revival activity is the work of the Spirit and some is merely human effort or even manipulation. The disagreement was not about the substance of their views as much as their judgments in application of those views to specific revival activities, but the impact of those differences has the effect of moving Hodge's views further afield from revivalist activity as legitimate means to conversion, which is viewed with some growing suspicion. Hodge also does differ from Alexander, however, in his tendency for more detailed theological exploration of these issues. He fleshes out his views more fully than Alexander, and relates them to a greater number of issues and contemporary figures in his era.

Even though Hodge has provided a robust description of his views on conversion, it seems to me that there are some tensions inherent to his views. How, for example, can conversion be a supernatural occurrence and not in some form violate our human

³⁰² For more on their differences, see Calhoun, *Princeton* vol.1, 253-55. Hodge's more negative assessment is found in his book, *The Constitutional History of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: William S. Martien, 1839, 1840). Alexander's more positive "corrective" assessment can be found in his book, *Biographical Sketches of the Founder, and Principal Alumni of the Log College, Together with an Account of the Revivals of Religion under Their Ministry* (Princeton, NJ: J. T. Robinson, 1845).

nature? As has already been noted, how can one following Hodge's approach preserve a robust commitment to the visible church alongside such a strong contrast with the invisible church? If regeneration is indeed a hidden event that from a human perspective is indeterminable, then why should one attend to it at all in one's evangelistic efforts? Why should one not focus on calling on human decision and response to God's grace in evangelism, and leave the hidden work of the Spirit in the heart in regeneration to God's providence?

The most prominent of these tensions, to my view, involve Hodge's views on the role of knowledge and the intellect in conversion. Hodge insists that knowledge is a necessary component of conversion, but this raises a variety of questions that Hodge has mixed success in answering.³⁰³ Hodge, as we have seen, refuses to stipulate to what extent knowledge is required. Furthermore, the confusion of his notion of knowledge with fact is a near-constant irritation. Hodge has an express desire to describe knowledge in richer ways than merely rational facts and propositions, as a notion of knowledge that includes affective aspects and the will – the whole of a person. But too often he himself reverts to facts and propositions. Is a certain 'head knowledge' required, or only some deeper, but possibly unarticulated knowledge held in the heart of the individual? If one's devotional life is more indicative of the heart knowledge that one possesses than one's intellectual expressions, as Hodge at times suggests, this would seem to thrust a divide between conscious intellectual knowledge and intellectually inaccessible heart knowledge that makes any consideration of knowledge as it relates to conversion difficult.

³⁰³ "No man can have the spiritual discernment of any truth which he does not know. The intellectual cognition is just as necessary to spiritual knowledge as the visual perception of a beautiful object is to the apprehension of its beauty." Hodge, "Professor Park's Remarks," 342.

What is the role of knowledge that one cannot articulate? What is the required level of comprehension, if any, to salvific knowledge?³⁰⁴ We all believe some things that we cannot articulate, or articulate fully. How does one articulate fully the love for one's spouse? Or again, I consent to the laws of physics, and believe them to be true, though I cannot articulate many of them accurately or explain them. I submit to those laws even though I do not understand them. Is comprehension vital to efficacious belief, or only submission? Does a failure to comprehend truths equate to denial of truths? These are, in adopting Hodge's views, often difficult questions to sort out, and may represent weaknesses in his theology of conversion. It remains to be seen whether any other models of conversion overcome these weaknesses without the introduction of other more significant problems.

The critical place of conversion in Hodge's theology should be apparent. The many aspects of conversion are related to most other significant theological concerns (in soteriology, Christology, ecclesiology, pneumatology, anthropology, to name a few) such that changes to one's views on conversion have a critical impact on one's entire theology. It can result, as Hodge himself describes it when considering one of these theological points, in "another Gospel, . . . practically another system."³⁰⁵ This becomes clear in the relation of Hodge's views to those of Charles Finney.³⁰⁶

³⁰⁴ "In this complex state the cognition is the first and the governing element, to which the other [a corresponding feeling] owes its existence; and therefore, in the second place, the Scriptures not only teach that knowledge is an essential constituent of religion, but also that the objective presentation of truth to the mind is absolutely necessary to any genuine religious feeling or affection." Hodge, "Professor Park's Remarks," 343.

³⁰⁵ "New Divinity Tried," 301.

³⁰⁶ Hodge's views on conversion are apparent in his interactions with others of his day. Hodge is delighted to make common cause with as diverse a figure as Horace Bushnell in Bushnell's affirmation of conversion as a gradual process of nurturing over a sudden momentary experience, but Hodge parts company with Bushnell when Bushnell considers that process to be organic and naturalist – outside any special, supernatural work of God. Hodge lambasts Finney over the latter's rationalistic tendencies, his insistence on revival as a result of human activity, the place of human agency, Finney's virtual elimination of the work of

It was suggested in introducing this dissertation that models of conversion have a definitive effect on how one understands evangelicalism itself. Hodge's differences with Finney on the subject of conversion are so stark that it becomes difficult to consider both figures to be representative of evangelical thought of the era. If they are, then there are two rather distinct forms of evangelical Christianity in existence at this time. This only begs the question of what the term "evangelical" can mean in such a context. This question will be revisited in the concluding chapter, as will the relation of Hodge to the other major figures of this dissertation.

the Holy Spirit, and his stress on a moment of conversion. On the other hand Hodge can affirm Moody's revivalism as in a mold more compatible with Hodge's own understanding of conversion.

Conclusion

It should be apparent at this point that there is significant diversity in the conception of conversion among the various figures here considered, all of whom are typically placed within the borders of what is termed evangelicalism. The three models represented here – supernatural affective vision, immediate ongoing human decisionism, and transformative spiritual knowledge, display significant differences in various dimensions of their respective formulations of conversion and the gospel itself. This concluding chapter will first offer some further observations on the similarities and contrasts of the major figures of this study related to conversion, and some of the key issues at stake. After this some ramifications of this study for evangelicalism will be considered, including the significance of these varying models for definitions of evangelicalism, and how what has been learned of these models might relate to contemporary evangelicalism.

In considering the figures of this study and their respective models one must note first some features they hold in common. All of them, certainly, saw conversion as a central and significant feature of Christian faith and doctrine. All of them featured it prominently in their respective theological outlooks, and none of them would have supported any theological framework that failed to do the same.

Furthermore, all of these figures took the idea of sanctification seriously as a key authenticator of true conversion to Christ. If Finney took this to a greater extreme with his perfectionist tendencies, nevertheless all insisted that those truly converted would be

known by their fruits. Therefore a growing holiness was a mark of a Christian, and antinomianism was always seen as undermining any proper understanding of conversion.

Additionally, none of our subjects stressed the importance of linking conversion to baptism, which further undermined what was also another common feature of their models – a relatively weak ecclesiology that often left the location of conversion outside of the church context. Certainly Finney did this most prominently, but weaknesses were present as well in various ways in both Edwards and Hodge. Although Edwards linked conversion to church membership, even finally rejecting the Half-Way Covenant, in his support for various revival practices of the Great Awakening he undercut (albeit not intentionally) this churchly, corporate emphasis. Hodge, even more than Edwards, also weakened evangelical ecclesiology.¹ In spite of stressing the need for trained clergy over lay leaders, and actively supporting his Presbyterian organizational structures, Hodge also undermined the place of the church by his stress on the unity of an invisible church over the visible church. By emphasizing the invisible church so strongly over the visible church, the latter lost significance. Conversion then tended toward private, individualistic forms, or toward parachurch ministries, rather than being linked to visible church structures and ministries. Since most denominational features were not essential to the true identity of the invisible church, inner spiritual realities became elevated over external polity or profession. The weak ecclesiology that is paradigmatic of most of evangelicalism today was certainly encouraged by aspects of all three of these models, which pushed the location of the central event of conversion away from overt churchly contexts.

¹ It is perhaps worth noting that Hodge had planned, but never completed, a fourth volume for his *Systematic Theology* that was to discuss ecclesiology.

All of the models here presented also insisted on no specific and necessary preparatory steps for conversion. Unlike Edwards and Hodge, Finney had no time whatsoever for any preparatory steps. Still, if Edwards and Hodge acknowledged that preparatory steps sometimes were a part of the process leading to conversion, they also would have agreed that none of these steps were vital and necessary to conversion.

If all these models shared some prominent features relative to conversion, they were also separated by significant differences. We have already seen much in the previous chapters that demonstrate the theological separation that existed between Hodge and Finney. Traditional Calvinism in general and Princeton in particular were common targets of criticism for Finney, and Princeton certainly returned fire on several fronts. Unlike their relations to Edwards, these two parties clearly saw themselves as foes, and their theological positions, as will be seen later, largely support that opposition. Almost invariably where one or the other is mentioned, it is in a negative context. Some further comments will be made below. But what of Edwards? The relation of the two to Edwards is a somewhat more perplexing question. First considering Princeton, how should the relationship between Old Princeton and Edwards be characterized?

Historians have given a variety of answers to this question. The relationship between Princeton and Finney is more easily ascertained than that of Princeton to Edwards. Some have suggested that Princeton was largely uncomfortable with Edwards and looked at him with disfavor out of concern for various issues. Brooks Holifield, for example, writes that, among other things, “Hodge disliked Edwards's metaphysical idealism, and he felt wary of the assertion – characteristic of Edwards – that religion consisted in holy affections.” He suggests that although Hodge “could draw on Edwards,”

ultimately Hodge “belonged in a different American tradition.”² Bruce Kuklick asserts that “throughout Hodge’s writings on the will and on faculty psychology, disagreement with Edwards is the primary motivating force.”³ John W. Stewart writes that “Hodge’s common sense and anti-Kantian assumptions were openly dissimilar from those of Jonathan Edwards.” Stewart suggests that “Hodge’s Americanized nineteenth-century Reformed theology was a theological genre of its own.”⁴

Others assert a more positive relation between the two. David B. Calhoun, author of a two-volume history of Princeton Seminary, states that Edwards “was much esteemed by the Princetonians.” He suggests that “Dr. Alexander and his colleagues saw themselves as traditional Calvinists but also as true followers of Jonathan Edwards.”⁵ Andrew W. Hoffercker writes of the dominance of the notion of beauty in the Princeton theology. “For Alexander and Hodge everything that God has made reflects beauty.” It seems to me here that their views are reminiscent of Edwards in holding to a theological orientation where, as Hoffercker puts it, “beauty is perceived not only because God is its Creator but because he has also opened the eyes of the believer to see it.”⁶ James Dahl argues that Hodge finds much to approve of in Edwards’ notions on regeneration.⁷ William Cooper

² E. Brooks Holifield, “Hodge, the Seminary, and the American Theological Context,” in *Charles Hodge Revisited*, John W. Stewart and James H. Moorhead, eds. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 103-128, 108, 110.

³ “The Place of Charles Hodge in the History of Ideas in America,” in *Charles Hodge Revisited*, 63-76, 73.

⁴ “Mediating the Center: Charles Hodge on American Science, Language, Literature, and Politics,” *Studies in Reformed Theology and History*, Vol. 3, No 1 (Winter 1995), 1-114, 113.

⁵ *Princeton Seminary, Vol. 1: Faith and Learning 1812-1868* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1994), 128, 215. He clarifies further, “Although they rejected Edwards’s metaphysical idealism and distrusted some of his theological speculations, they stood with him on the major doctrines of the trinity, the imputation of Adam’s sin, the bondage of the will, and the atonement.” 215.

⁶ *Piety and the Princeton Theologians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1981), 93.

⁷ *Charles Hodge: Defender of Piety*, Ph.D. diss., Trinity Seminary, 1996, 158-60.

considers the Princetonians “perhaps the truest followers of Edwards from a doctrinal stand-point.”⁸

In my own reading of Princeton it is difficult to sustain the view that Princeton held Edwards in a feeling of general animosity. While they had their occasional differences with Edwards, in most circumstances Princeton looked on Edwards with high regard. The comments on Edwards that arise in various writings of Alexander and Hodge are generally favorable. In considering both their stated opinions of Edwards and the similarities between their models of conversion, it seems to me inaccurate to characterize their relation as anything like foes. They must be seen as theological allies, albeit even if, like most allies, they had occasional differences of opinion.⁹

Consider, for example, the following thoughts on Edwards from Archibald Alexander and Charles Hodge. Alexander writes that there were few “who ever lived” besides Edwards, “this great and good man,” who “were better qualified to discriminate between true and false religion.”¹⁰ In *Thoughts on Religious Experience* Alexander suggests that Edwards is not sufficiently Christocentric, but otherwise praises him.¹¹ Again calling him “this great and good man,” he concludes, “few men ever attained, as we think,

⁸ William H. Cooper, Jr., *The Great Revivalists in American Religion, 1740-1944* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., Inc., 2010), 56.

⁹ Holifield is justified, for example, in suggesting that Hodge was uneasy with certain metaphysical notions of Edwards. Hodge was always alert to ways in which philosophical or rationalistic notions might overtake biblical notions in one’s conception of Christianity. But this would not justify characterizing their theological relationship as a whole in the same manner.

¹⁰ *Thoughts on Religious Experience* (1844; rpt. from 3rd ed., London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1967), 67.

¹¹ Regarding Edwards and his clear sense of delight in divine things at his conversion and following, Alexander writes “these views and exercises do not come up to the standard which some set up in regard to Christian experience, because they are so abstract, and have such casual reference to Christ, through Whom alone God is revealed to man as an object of saving faith. And if there be a fault in the writings of this great and good man on the subject of experimental religion, it is, that they seem to represent renewed persons as at the first occupied with the contemplation of the attributes of God with delight, without ever thinking of a Mediator.” *Religious Experience*, 27. Although he considers Edwards’ *Religious Affections* “too abstract and tedious for common readers,” Alexander still terms it “an excellent work.” 27. (He does wish Edwards perhaps had an editor! “His fourteen signs of truly gracious Affections might with great advantage be reduced to half the number, on his own plan.” 27-28. The same might be said of this dissertation.)

higher degrees of holiness, or made more accurate observations on the exercises of others” regarding “experimental religion.”¹²

Alexander views certain aspects of conversion in ways remarkably similar to Edwards. With Edwards he denies a specified order in the process of conversion. He is open to the work of revival, though he realizes that there can be abuses. He demands that some form of knowledge or truth be present for regeneration. But, also like Edwards, he insists that this truth has no efficacy for the regeneration of a person apart from God’s action in making a new heart. Only then do divine truths as revealed in doctrinal knowledge have any power or influence in changing the nature and desires of the person. Apart from this even a person with correct doctrinal knowledge has no accompanying transformation. Knowledge alone is inefficacious apart from God’s transforming work on the inner person in regeneration.

Charles Hodge is also likewise generally quite positive in his assessments of Edwards, and many of his views on conversion bear similarity to Edwards. His view of the disposition, for example, bears much resemblance to Edwards. “There are abiding states,” he writes, “dispositions, principles, or habits, as they are indifferently called, which constitute character and give it stability.” Hodge calls these “the proximate, determining cause why our voluntary exercises and conscious states are what they are, . . . what the Bible calls the heart.” The heart has “the same relation to all our acts that the nature of a tree, as good or bad, has to the character of its fruit.” Just as “the goodness of the fruit does not constitute or determine the goodness of the tree, but the reverse,” so also “it is

¹² *Religious Experience*, 27.

not good acts which make the man good; the goodness of the man determines the character of his acts.”¹³ Edwards could have written this himself.

Elsewhere Hodge explicitly refers to Edwards in a most positive way in reference to regeneration. In his article, “Regeneration, and the Manner of its Occurrence,” Hodge references Edwards extensively and is in strong agreement with Edwards’ argument that a change in disposition is central to regeneration, and that it is one’s previous disposition that determines the moral nature of one’s choices. He writes of Edwards, “We have never met with a stronger, or more formal statement of the doctrine which we are endeavouring to support, than is found in this passage [from *Religious Affections*].” And this is an affirmation of something that Hodge himself recognizes to be at the core of Edwards’ theology. “It is a fundamental principle of his whole theology, as we understand it,” he writes. “Take this away, and his whole theory of original righteousness, original sin, and of the nature of holiness, and the nature of sin, and of the liberty of the will, go with it.”¹⁴

¹³ *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (1871-72; rpt. London: James Clarke & Co., 1960); III, 32-33.

¹⁴ “Regeneration, and the Manner of its Occurrence,” *Biblical Repertory and Theological Review* 2, 2 (Apr 1830), 250-297, 269. Throughout this article Hodge quotes Edwards approvingly. Hodge says that Edwards’ view of original holiness is akin to his, and that a created predisposition does not make the acts flowing out of it less holy. 281-83. Sounding just like Edwards in *Freedom of the Will* he writes further, “The common feelings and judgment of men, therefore, do carry moral distinctions back of acts of choice, and must do so unless we deny that virtue ever can commence.” A sinner, Hodge claims, has freedom of the will in the sense that “he has unimpaired the liberty of acting according to his own inclinations” and that nothing outside of himself determines his choices. 283. He appeals to Edwards again in describing the way in which knowledge is saving. “The affections,” writes Hodge, “must have an object, and that object must be apprehended in its true nature, in order to be truly loved. It is obvious, therefore, that regeneration, to be of a moral character at all, must consist in such a change as brings the soul into a state to see and love the beauty of holiness. It matters not what the change be called; a ‘spiritual sense,’ or ‘a taste,’ or ‘disposition,’ it is as necessary as that an object should be seen in order to be loved.” 284-85. Later in the article Hodge suggests that if one locates morality in the acts alone, and not in one’s desires and dispositions that precede them, then one denies what is commonly understood to account for our moral character. What determines one’s choice is either indifference, which has no moral character, or some previous inclination, which Hodge (with Edwards) argues is the basis for how we understand individuals to be moral or not. 291.

Whatever differences the two have lie on the periphery rather than the center of their theological constructs.¹⁵

The debate over the relation of Princeton to Edwards often turns on the degree to which historians perceive Princeton as intellectualist and/or caught up in the philosophy of Scottish Common Sense Realism. McClymond and McDermott, for example, mention both in contrasting Princeton with Edwards. The more one finds these notions dominant in Princeton, the further one is likely to place them in relation to Edwards. Not surprisingly, then, I find them to be closer allies than some, since, as I have argued in this dissertation, I believe the Princetonians to be voluntarists at their core rather than intellectualists, and that the impact of Scottish Common Sense Realism on them was limited in their understanding of conversion.

When considering Princeton's relation to Edwards, one must also distinguish very carefully between their assessment of Edwards, and their assessment of later 'Edwardseans.' For while it is true that they were allies of Edwards, this was much less the case with those that were identified with the subsequent Edwardsean tradition, and especially the modifications of Edwards' theology that resulted in Nathaniel Taylor's New

¹⁵ Numerous other examples of Hodge affirming Edwards or appealing to him for support could be provided. To list a few, Hodge appeals to Edwards in support of his views on the nurture of children and the supernatural character of conversion in "Bushnell on Christian Nurture," *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* 19, 4 (October 1847), 502-39. He looks to Edwards in opposition to those adopting principles of the New Divinity, such as that morality must be grounded in voluntary exercises. "The New Divinity Tried," *BRTR* 4, 2 (April 1832), 278-304. He also quotes Edwards favorably in support of his explanation of John Witherspoon's theology, countering New School Presbyterian interpretations. "Witherspoon's Theology," *BRPR* 35, 4 (October 1863), 596-610. (This is one of any number of articles in *BRPR* for which the author is not clearly identified. As noted in chapter four, however, it is safe to assume that even if Hodge did not actually write the article, as editor it is at least generally representative of his views.) When Hodge is critical of Edwards, he often qualifies his assessment in ways that limit his disagreement. For example, although he suggests that Edwards' views of necessity and liberty are contradictory, he also suggests that these are largely flaws of definition and word use, and hence correctable, and that in the whole his theory stands. It is not a core disagreement, but only one of semantics. "We are of the opinion that all that is wanted on this subject, is not a new theory, but greater precision in the use of language, and a clear distinction between the will and the other active powers." Charles Hodge (?), "An Examination of President Edwards' Inquiry into the Freedom of the Will," *BRPR* 17, 4 (Oct 1845), 636-39, 639.

Haven theology. Douglas Sweeney notes that “many Old School [Presbyterian] leaders admired Edwards’s Calvinism, but detested what had become of New England Theology.” He points out further that it was “the Princetonians, especially, champions of Old School theology, sought to sever Finney, Park, Taylor, and others from Edwards’s legacy.”¹⁶ David Calhoun points out that although Princeton argued tolerance for the New Divinity views of Samuel Hopkins and the like, believing them to be compatible with Reformed confessional standards even if they disagreed with some of their views, still “they believed that the New Divinity innovations were unnecessary and the New Haven views downright heretical.”¹⁷ Edwards must be held distinct from his later followers when considering these questions.

Some consider Charles Finney to be among those later followers, as perhaps did Finney himself. We now return to the question of Edwards’ relation to Finney. As I mentioned earlier in this study, this relation is debated. Some, like Charles Hambrick-Stowe, tend to tie Finney more closely to Edwards, while others, such as William McLoughlin, suggest a rather broad divide between the two. Here again one must take some care that one compares Finney to Edwards, rather than to forms of ‘Edwardsean’ theology that follow. Certainly Finney does adopt and even extend some of the modifications to Edwards’ theology made by his followers, and notably Nathaniel William Taylor and his New Haven theology and their demand that responsibility requires a free

¹⁶ Douglas A. Sweeney, “Evangelical Tradition in America,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Stephen J. Stein (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 228, 229.

¹⁷ *Princeton* vol. 1, 215. Sweeney quotes Hodge’s successor at Princeton, Benjamin B. Warfield, who quipped, “It was Edwards’ misfortune that he gave his name to a party; and to a party which, never in perfect agreement with him in its doctrinal ideas, finished by becoming the earnest advocate of (as it has been sharply expressed) a set of opinions which he gained his chief celebrity in demolishing.” 229, quoting Warfield as found in *The Princeton Theology 1812-1921* (1983; rpt. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 314.

will. In fact, he extends some of these ideas in ways that even his nineteenth century New School allies cannot accept.

Finney himself likely believed, perhaps even more self-consciously than did any Princetonians, that he was following in the tradition of Edwards. In his view, although certain modifications were needed, on the whole he also held Edwards in high regard, and showed a respect for him that he did not give to the Princeton school. Edwards was, after all, an enormous figure of importance for the history and support of revivals, and this alone would make it difficult for Finney to oppose Edwards strongly. He instead believed he could adapt Edwards' theology to the times.

It seems, however, quite unlikely that Edwards would have seen Finney's theology as anything like Edwards' own. In both their substance and their methodology they were set apart. Their understandings of God's sovereignty and interaction with human activity were quite different. Although they shared a desire for revivals, Edwards certainly never would have dreamed of claiming the kind of control over the means of revival that Finney did, and was far more comfortable with the depth and mystery of spiritual realities than was Finney. Edwards also held high several central and historic Christian doctrines to which Finney gave little heed. Finney did not compare in the depth or creativity of his theology, and was always a practitioner more than a thinker. Finney's uses of reason and persuasion were altogether different from Edwards, who forthrightly denied that persuasion was central to bringing on conversion in preaching. Finney's intellectualist understanding of and belief in the efficacy of reason was in contrast to Edwards. Further, what for Edwards was the *source* of morality – one's character and disposition – is that which for Finney *eliminated* the possibility of moral behavior, since for Finney this meant that consequent choices flowed out of some existing substance or preference in an

individual, instead of being freely chosen. Most essentially, the core doctrines or principles at the heart of Finney's system regarding the nature of moral government and human freedom were in direct opposition to definitive aspects of Edwards' own theological understanding of Christianity. These differences are forcefully present in their respective models of conversion. If Finney considered himself an Edwardsean, he did so while denying what was one of the most cherished and central notions of Edwards' theology. He fundamentally altered Edwards' view of the will. Therefore in whatever other debatable smaller ways Finney adopted Edwardsean language or ideas, this alone makes it difficult to consider him as anything like Edwards' legacy.

The Princetonians certainly did not see Finney as a true descendant of Edwards' theology. Charles Hodge himself suggested that Finney should not be linked closely to Edwards. In his assessment, "the views of ability entertained at Oberlin are Pelagian and not Edwardsean." This was the case, he determined, because Finney's views "avoid all recognition of the distinction between natural and moral ability," and because "not only is truth the sole instrument in regeneration and sanctification, in Mr. Finney's opinion, but men have the ability to resist it when wielded with the utmost energy of the Holy Ghost."¹⁸

In answering the question of whether either Finney or Princeton (or neither) are best seen as following in the tradition of Edwards let us now consider a closer comparison of the three in terms of their models of conversion. Although all three embrace revivals (Hodge with much more reserve), they differ on the nature of revivals. Whereas Edwards and Princeton see it as the work of God, for Finney it is simply the outcome of the correct

¹⁸ Hodge, "Finney's Sermons on Sanctification, and Mahan on Christian Perfection," *BRPR* 13, 2 (Apr 1841), 234-35.

use of means, and as such controllable by humans. This follows from his related view of conversion itself as the human result of means, rather than something necessarily grounded in a supernatural work of God, a view shared by Edwards and Princeton. All three suggest a role for the Holy Spirit in conversion, but for Finney this amounts to a resistible effort at persuasion, whereas for both Edwards and Princeton the Holy Spirit is the *sole* initiator of conversion. Hodge sees the denial of a role for the human in the *initiation* of conversion to be a key theological dividing point (by which he accepts Samuel Hopkins and the New Divinity, and rejects Nathaniel Taylor and the New Haven theology – as well as Finney). Finney believes the nature of the change in conversion consists essentially in a change of mind, of moral choice and intention that is (and can only be) total – but must constantly be maintained or is reversed, whereas both Edwards and Princeton suggest in various expressions the notion of a permanent change of one's disposition or heart, wrought by God, that leads to changes in one's choices and desires. Thus far in all these aspects generally Edwards and the Princetonians display a common Calvinist heritage.

All three consider some form of knowledge critical to conversion, one which moves beyond the intellect and into the heart, causing some form of emotional response, but these emotions are the secondary result, and not the source, of conversion. For Finney this comes via rational affirmations of reason; for Edwards knowledge does not persuade, but can prepare for conversion. Knowing with a sense of the heart is critical and life-changing, but such knowledge cannot be brought about by persuasion, but only revealed by the divine light. Princeton is similar to Edwards. Faith involves embracing truth in transformative fashion, perceiving it affectively as well as intellectually. Some spiritual truths are supra-rational; to deny this leads to rationalism. In Edwards' view the will

cannot be indifferent, but is always oriented more or less toward good or evil. One is free if one can do what one desires, even if one's disposition results in a continual desire to sin. Sinners do not *want* to follow God. There is a primacy of the will over knowledge (voluntarism), although Edwards stresses the inner unity of a person's functioning that make such distinctions somewhat difficult. Finney's view of the will is virtually opposite that of Edwards' view. The will must be indifferent, and a person must be free from both external coercion and internal disposition in choosing sin or holiness. Conversion consists essentially in that choice, founded in knowledge and engendered via persuasion. Finney maintains a strong faculty psychology that distinguishes sharply between internal aspects of a person. Hodge aligns more closely here with Edwards, and believes morality is not judged solely by one's actions, but by one's inclinations or disposition. Both Alexander and Hodge reject strong notions of separate faculties within individuals.

All three agree that the means of grace are natural rather than supernatural, but they differ on how those means operate and which means are to be emphasized. For Edwards the means of grace include reading and hearing the Word of God, prayer, sacraments, and so on, through which God may *choose* to work supernaturally for conversion. Means are *opportunities* for God. Alexander considers the gospel to be the only right means to conversion, and communicating gospel knowledge is key. Hodge looks to Word, sacraments, and prayer as primary means, but also stresses that they have no inherent efficacy. God uses these means, but not in a manner that violates natural human faculties. Finney stresses that means are to ends as causes are to effects. God provides various means, and when humans use them properly they will always bear results. Means are flexible, but the most important means is persuasion by the truth. Good means are those that work. Finney's views are here rather sharply distinguished from the others.

All are similar in writing little of the importance of baptism, nor do any of them maintain a strong tie between it and conversion. Finney minimizes it the most, even suggesting that there are possible substitutes for it such as the anxious bench, but none stress it or suggest any direct link to conversion.

Finney is most insistent of the three in viewing the timeframe of conversion as instantaneous. Conversion is always an immediate option, and there is never reason to delay. Both Edwards and Hodge distinguish between regeneration and conversion, and suggest the former always happens in some particular moment, but that moment is rarely known to us, and thus conversion overall is typically more of a process, though it can appear immediate. Even more than Edwards, Hodge emphasizes a gradual conversion process that runs contrary to some revival practices. Regardless of the timeframe, all agree that the authenticity of conversion is revealed by the fruits of one's life. Signs of sanctified and holy living are the mark of a true Christian, and for Finney not just signs, but complete obedience (perfection) is the expectation since there can be no mixture of sin and holiness in an individual. All three in some form believe that perseverance in faith is the ultimate authentication of true conversion, but Finney suggests that even one truly converted can become lost again, and thus conversion must be both immediate and also ongoing. Justification itself relies on obedience for Finney. Thus when one considers the order of salvation, Finney's places sanctification before justification, a characteristic distinctly outside of all central Reformation traditions. Some suggest that Edwards also places sanctification above or alongside justification in his order of salvation, but because of his stress on supernatural regeneration this dispute becomes less relevant to his overall understanding of conversion. Hodge suggests that repentance follows and is a sign of

regeneration and faith, and offers a typically Reformed view of justification preceding sanctification – the latter of which is never (contra perfectionists) complete in this life.

All three figures, but especially Finney and (surprisingly) Hodge, push the location of conversion away from a distinct church context. Finney's minimalist and somewhat anti-clerical low church ecclesiology is readily apparent to any careful reader. Hodge, however, by virtue of his strong emphasis on the invisible church, tends to disconnect conversion from the visible church, and in this way shifts toward private, individualistic forms of conversion. He does not consider most denominational features to be essential to the church.

In sum, if conversion is definitive of one's understanding of Christianity, then it must be said that there is serious disagreement as to the nature of Christian faith between these figures. Those disagreements are less significant between Edwards and the Princetonians, without question, but when Finney is brought into view the use of conversion as a defining feature does more to divide than to unite these groups under any supposed common conception of evangelicalism. These differences are not minor. In some respects the differences could not be more pronounced.

One might construe Finney's relation to Edwards and Princeton as just another in a long line of Arminian versus Calvinist clashes. However it would not be accurate to call Finney an Arminian. Arminian theology typically exhibits a number of characteristics not present in Finney, most notable among them some kind of notion of a prevenient grace. Finney could be just as dismissive of such a generalized grace as he could some kind of supernatural special grace for conversion. He denies that any general initial grace can be

necessary in responding to the gospel, and considers any such doctrine “an absurdity.”¹⁹ In related fashion Finney altogether rejects any notion of original sin, a doctrine accepted by Wesley, among others.²⁰ Even though Arminian theology, like Finney’s, gives a greater role to the human will than Calvinism, it still often has a different understanding of what happens at conversion, and a greater place for the supernatural action of God through the Holy Spirit in the change of conversion (and previous to conversion) than Finney would accept. Finney’s theology is, in fact, a much more stripped down and lean structure resting on very few central principles, and in this way does not resemble Arminian theology all that much. One could debate how appropriately Arminian and Calvinist traditions could be united meaningfully under one common banner of evangelicalism, but to place a position such as Finney’s under it is to stretch that banner far more thinly. His model is not an appropriate test case for such a question.

Finally there can be no middle ground. Either Finney has misconstrued the heart of the gospel, or the respective forms of Calvinism represented by Edwards and the Princetonians have. Their gospels, in both theory and practice, bear little resemblance to each other. The differences are so basic, so fundamental, to their conceptions of

¹⁹ *Finney’s Systematic Theology: New and Expanded 1878 Edition*, ed. Dennis Carroll, Bill Nicely, and L. G. Parkhurst, Jr. (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1994), 323 (further citations as *LST*).

²⁰ Finney’s rejection of original sin (as well as total depravity) and his denial of any theory of what he terms “gracious ability” are closely related. Original sin renders humanity constitutionally (in some form) inclined to sin, which for Finney is precisely the reason why such a doctrine excuses humanity of moral responsibility. Finney declares that without the atonement, in this view humans would not have the capacity to sin, because they would not be moral agents – since they had not the power to obey. Finney suggests that by this logic fallen angels and even the devil himself are no longer moral agents, and there can be no sin in hell itself. *LST*, 323-25. Acknowledging original sin then requires acknowledging that in some fashion God’s grace must restore the human capacity to respond to God’s goodness and gospel message. Although Arminians and Calvinists have different ways of accounting for how this is done, both insist that some form of grace is necessary. On Wesley’s view of original sin, see his sermon 44 on original sin. He there strongly affirms the doctrine, and considers it a key dividing line between Christianity and heathenism. He writes that “all who deny this, call it original sin, or by any other title, are put Heathens still, in the fundamental point which differences Heathenism from Christianity.” John Wesley, “Sermon 44,” *Sermons on Several Occasions*. <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/wesley/sermons.v.xliv.html#v.xliv-p0.3>. Accessed 5/15/15.

Christianity, that there are whole bodies of supposed believers that each would deny. Finney would term those resting in a Calvinist view of the gospel deceived by a false gospel. Calvinists in the Princetonian cast would find in Finney merely a form of Pelagianism that denies the reality of grace. Given Finney's beliefs about the core of the gospel message, his considerable animosity toward any form of Calvinism is completely understandable if not justified. Their respective versions of the gospel are mutually incompatible.²¹ Having spent considerable time now reading Finney, I find my earlier opinion of Hambrick-Stowe's thesis untenable. It is very difficult to place Finney in the stream of Edwardsean thought or the Reformed tradition. His is not simply a movement within that stream, but a divergence so significant as to leave its banks altogether.

Defining Evangelicalism

Accepting this thesis, how can one define evangelicalism via conversion? What do these three models of conversion contribute to a discussion of how evangelicalism is to be defined? After the in-depth consideration of these models it seems to me that the conceptions of conversion in use in evangelical history describe notions of Christianity more distinct than are Lutherans from Catholics. We have no difficulty recognizing the uniqueness of their traditions, but we seem unable to recognize the distinctiveness of a

²¹ It is true that there was some cooperation, or at least toleration, between Finney and some nineteenth century Calvinists, and one could debate who qualified as a "true" Calvinist among the New School Presbyterians, New Divinity, and Taylorite camps. Calvinism was not a simply unity in nineteenth century America, and certainly Hodge and others were even more greatly disturbed that some who called themselves "Calvinists" could embrace some perspectives similar to Finney. However most of these groups modified more classical forms of Calvinism and Reformed thought, especially regarding their views on free will, which allowed for greater compatibility with Finney. Further, although as an evangelist (who brought success in revivalism) Finney enjoyed the cooperation of some who might be termed Calvinists, as Finney later developed his views on perfectionism more fully, he created a divide with virtually all of these groups as well. Finney himself seems to have this same conscious understanding of opposition to Calvinism as something quite in contrast to his views. He rarely if ever qualifies his criticisms for what he understands as Calvinism, so perhaps he did not view those New School Presbyterians and others with whom he cooperated as true Calvinists either.

variety of theological conceptions all considered to be evangelical, instead opting for an illusory, unified evangelical history.

Perhaps it is no surprise, then, that there has been something of a long-running identity crisis within evangelicalism. It is difficult to overstate this problem. The term *evangelical* is a curious classification, a notoriously slippery word used seemingly everywhere – from the mainstream media to religious publications, in academic scholarship and in church pronouncements, from some of the most conservative to some of the most liberal, across the ecclesial spectrum as well as the political one. In the midst of evangelical growth and attention in the last several decades has come even greater confusion about what evangelicalism is. Almost everyone, it seems, enjoys using the term, but few have any precise notion about that to which it refers, and those who do often have conflicting standards. Whatever unity evangelicalism once possessed (and this dissertation indicates that it may have been less than what one expected), it has diversified into an entity so difficult to define that one might almost give its lack of definition as a central feature of the movement.

So the first order of business for many books and articles on evangelicalism, and for more than one of them the only order of business, has been to define what is meant when speaking about evangelicalism. Pick up any book on evangelicalism from the past few decades and you will find struggles and disagreements about exactly what it is.²² In

²² Even a quick survey of some of the literature of evangelicalism will indicate what a quandary it is to arrive at a definition. One of the first books to confront this crisis of identity was the 1975 edited volume, *The Evangelicals: What They Believe, Who They Are, Where They Are Changing*, in which several essays addressed the question of definition. David F. Wells and John D. Woodbridge, eds. (New York: Abingdon Press, 1975). “No single volume has yet appeared which has sought comprehensively to define what evangelical belief is, from whence it has arisen, what is the numerical strength of its following, what is the sociological makeup of the community adhering to it and how it now relates to the intellectual concerns of the day, to culture, and to society.” From the Introduction by the editors, 17. In his 1983 book Donald G. Bloesch contemplated *The Future of Evangelical Christianity*, but before he could proceed he had to first confront “The Problem of

the first six words of his 2004 book on evangelical theology Roger Olson quips, “*Evangelical* is an essentially contested concept.”²³ James Davison Hunter summarizes the situation. “Perhaps the most fundamental question about Evangelicalism is simply What is it?”²⁴

In fact, the problem has become so great that some argue that the term *evangelicalism* has little or no value, that it obfuscates rather than clarifies American religious and church history, that it distorts any discussion of so-called evangelicals in contemporary Christianity, and that the term should be done away with completely. Notable among these critics is D. G. Hart.²⁵ According to Hart, the term evangelicalism is largely a creation, on the one hand, of the so-called neoevangelicals of the 1940s and 50s who sought to distance themselves from fundamentalism and claim the mantle of a broad Protestant orthodoxy from the nineteenth century, and on the other hand, of the leading evangelical historians of the 1970s and beyond such as George Marsden and Mark Noll, who made a new historiography to suit this growing neoevangelical surge.

Evangelical Identity.” *The Future of Evangelical Christianity* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1983), 8-22. Robert K. Johnston wanted to address the evangelical impasse over biblical authority but first had to pause to answer the question in his opening pages, “Who are Evangelicals?” *Evangelicals at an Impasse* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1979). Carl F. H. Henry asked the same question in a volume of essays on *Evangelical Affirmations*, noting that “confusion persists over precisely what ‘being an evangelical’ means. “Who Are The Evangelicals,” in *Evangelical Affirmations*, eds. Kenneth S. Kantzer and Carl F. H. Henry (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1990) 69-94, 72. (This was not Henry’s first foray into the problems of definition. Among his other efforts, several years earlier this leading evangelical theologian had turned his gaze inward on the movement in his book, *Evangelicals in Search of Identity* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1976).) In that same volume Nathan O. Hatch, in responding to Henry’s efforts at definition, suggested that “in truth, there is no such thing as evangelicalism,” although he then goes on to give advice to this illusory creature. “Response to Carl F. H. Henry,” in *Evangelical Affirmations*, 95-101, 97. Derek J. Tidball pondered the meaning of the term even as he explored its history and diversity in his 1994 volume, *Who Are the Evangelicals?* (London: Marshall Pickering, 1994).

²³ Roger E. Olson, *The Westminster Handbook to Evangelical Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 1.

²⁴ *American Evangelicalism: Conservative Religion and the Quandary of Modernity* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1983), 7.

²⁵ Hart is not alone in suggesting we do away with the term. Donald W. Dayton, for example, suggests that “the category ‘evangelical’ has lost whatever usefulness it once might have had” and that “we can very well do without it.” “Some Doubts about the Usefulness of the Category ‘Evangelical,’” in *The Variety of American Evangelicalism*, Donald W. Dayton and Robert K. Johnston, eds. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1991), 245-51, 245. Carl Trueman also concludes there is no evangelicalism. See 430, fn. 26 below.

Hart sees the movement from church history to religious history that occurred in the same timeframe as well-suited to produce this historiography, because it emphasized broad, informal, personal aspects of faith over institutional, formal, churchly features which were less congenial to the descriptive power of a term like evangelicalism. In his provocative book, *Deconstructing Evangelicalism*, he writes, “instead of trying to fix evangelicalism, born-again Protestants would be better off if they abandoned the category altogether. The reason is not that evangelicalism is wrong in its theology, ineffective in reaching the lost, or undiscerning in its reflections on society and culture. It may be, but these matters are beside the point. *Evangelicalism needs to be relinquished as a religious identity because it does not exist.*”²⁶ Hart argues that it is better to understand the varied streams of evangelicalism in their individual confessional and denominational histories rather than lumping them all together as if they really reflected a common unity that is ultimately a mirage.²⁷

For Hart this combination of various streams of evangelicalism is not only a mistaken effort at a false unity, but a very damaging development for historic Christianity. Evangelicalism is historic Christianity stripped of much of its substance.

This book offers an explanation as to why evangelicalism as currently used became a useful category for journalists, scholars, and believing Protestants. But it is more than simply an account of a specific word’s

²⁶ D. G. Hart, *Deconstructing Evangelicalism: Conservative Protestantism in the Age of Billy Graham* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 16 (emphasis mine).

²⁷ Carl Trueman reaches a similar conclusion in his book, *The Real Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2011). He writes, “When Mark Noll declared that the scandal of the evangelical mind was that there was no mind, he meant to criticize the lack of cultural and theological engagement among evangelicals. I agree there is a scandal involving the evangelical mind, though I understand the problem in the exact opposite way. It is not that there is no mind, but rather that there is no evangelical.” 37. Trueman argues that relating to one another through respective denominational and confessional identities yields a more honest and fruitful dialogue than referring to some supposed common *evangelicalism*, and that evangelicalism is doomed to failure in the coming years due to outside pressures and internal lack of theological identity.

usage. It is also an argument about the damage the construction of evangelicalism has done to historic Christianity. As much as the American public thinks of evangelicalism as the ‘old-time religion,’ whether positively or negatively, this expression of Christianity has severed most ties to the ways and beliefs of Christians living in previous eras. For that reason, it needs to be deconstructed.²⁸

When I first encountered D. G. Hart’s provocative arguments I was skeptical. It seemed ridiculous to dismiss or deny a phenomenon as large and recognized as evangelicalism. I myself, with some caution due to the term’s ambiguity, have identified with evangelicalism for most of my life. It seemed to me that in arguing that the term evangelicalism was essentially manufactured and applied errantly to a diversity of traditions, Hart failed to recognize that it was not the *creation* but the *recognition* of a common or shared religious identity rooted in the historic fundamentals of the Christian faith that made the term meaningful. It was a term that recognized a common unity of faith amidst diversity.

The work of historians seemed to support this conclusion. For example, in his 2005 book on nineteenth century evangelicalism, *The Dominance of Evangelicalism*, David Bebbington writes, “It remained true at the end of the period, as at its beginning, that the main body of the evangelical movement possessed a self-conscious unity.” He adds, “the evangelical denominational groups were but regiments in a single army,” and that “they knew that they shared the same gospel.”²⁹ That notion of a shared gospel largely continues among large groups of evangelicals today, and distinguishes them from a much

²⁸ Hart, *Deconstructing Evangelicalism*, 19.

²⁹ David W. Bebbington, *The Dominance of Evangelicalism: The Age of Spurgeon and Moody* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 262. See also 263. Bebbington notes elsewhere that “the [evangelical] movement possessed a high degree of unity across the world.” (20) and cites the example of the Evangelical Alliance, formed in 1846, in which “The Bible, conversion and redemption were cardinal articles in the evangelical creed.” 22.

more theologically diverse mainline collection of churches, in some of which traditional expressions of Christianity have been modified or jettisoned.

But there is a part of me that, upon further reflection on this project and its implications, thinks perhaps he is right after all. Perhaps here is where we encounter the limits of historically-based definitions of evangelicalism. It seems that the term *evangelicalism* has some utility historically, but much less so as a theological category. So yes, some groups we call evangelicals emphasized conversion, as in talking about it much and insisting on its priority in a way somewhat distinct from other religious or Christian groups, e.g. Unitarians. But that does not end up saying all that much about how these groups might be distinguished theologically. It is clear that for Edwards, Finney, Hodge, and Alexander conversion was important. In this sense Bebbington's definition suffices, but it does not provide much depth in understanding what united or separated these various 'evangelical' traditions. The term reflects a significant loss of the particularities involved. Every generalization does this to some extent, but then the broadest generalizations are often of the least value.³⁰

Whatever its worth as an historical category, as a theological classification the term *evangelicalism* cannot be of much value. Various streams of evangelicalism attach such varied understandings to their notions of conversion that they cannot be considered of a common class. In this regard perhaps D. G. Hart is right. Without a shared common theological core, such evangelical alliances are indeed illusory.³¹

³⁰ Even though I am making a broad generalization in saying so!

³¹ Evangelicalism serves a purpose of classification if for no other reason than that in fact a large segment of American Christians have self-identified with it and have united across denominational lines. As an observation this is accurate, but it finally does not say too much. Today evangelicals are measured as the largest single Protestant category in the United States. How much does that really tell us? What do they all really have in common besides self-identification? Evangelicalism seems to be more about perceived identity than actual reality.

In considering the potential of conversionism as a chief defining characteristic for evangelicalism, one has some choices. One can view evangelicalism through an historical lens alone, abandoning its theological significance. Used in this way one can observe some of the common interests historically of various groups, without expecting the term actually to describe theological realities. Using conversion as a characteristic in this way we can, to a large degree, place all our historical figures, and many present day groups, together under the category evangelical. One can also use a theological lens in wielding the term evangelicalism. In this case, as it relates to conversion, our historical figures cannot be united under the one banner of evangelicalism.

A third way is to strive to do both, to ask what was characteristic of the theology of these historical groups, not merely in external emphasis, but in the structures of their theologies. In this way one might be true to historical realities without ignoring theological realities. But to have significance theologically one must move beyond mere history of ideas and make value judgments. In reality, even the most dedicated historical approaches, if they are to be meaningful, must introduce theological elements, or at least some form of value judgments. Otherwise one is left merely with a running discourse on what happened in history with no interpretive grid or applied meaning. Whether one considers the origins of evangelicalism in the eighteenth century awakenings, seventeenth century pietism, the Reformation, or some other combination of factors, no one would deny that certain biblical notions were believed to be at the heart of the movement for these early evangelicals, and continued to drive the center of the movement over a long period of time. If those elements have now been or are in the process of being lost, can the resulting enterprise still be considered the same movement? Those who would ignore any sense of theological responsibility or oughtness seem to violate essentials that defined

the movement at its roots as that of recovery and reinvigoration of a Reformation and even New Testament faith. Some theological component, and not merely observations of the characteristics of a group over time, is appropriate.

Applying such a theological lens to our figures, one must acknowledge that it is Finney who diverges most from this center, however loosely defined. And he does so not simply because he does not represent Calvinist theology, but because he does not even represent a much broader centrist notion of what has been essential to most forms of what might be termed evangelical theology – whether one turns back to the Reformation, to the Puritans, to Edwards, or to Wesley.³² Thus it is Finney who, from a theological perspective, should be considered outside of the evangelical tradition.

If the differences that come to the fore in analyzing Edwards', Finney's, and Princeton's respective views of conversion fail to provide a basis for maintaining their alliance under any broader definition of evangelicalism based on conversion, some of their theological similarities have been passed on to contemporary evangelicalism. What conversion does reveal in common among our historical figures is a rather low-church ecclesiology, or at the very least a trajectory in that direction. Thus if one would choose to define evangelicalism theologically as a low-church affair, one could find some historical basis for that amidst our figures.³³ Such an ecclesiology does seem to be characteristic of most evangelicals today, together with a high degree of comfort in non-denominational and parachurch activities and organizations. Those evangelicals that hold to a higher

³² David L. Weddle, for example, in the title of his study, approvingly characterizes Finney's approach to be *The Law As Gospel* (Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1985). Such a confusion of law with gospel would be theologically revolting to the reformer Martin Luther. Weddle writes that "Finney was doing nothing less than shifting the basis of theology from mystery to law." 5.

³³ The degree to which conversion has been separated from baptism, both in the figures here considered and in contemporary evangelicalism, is in quite striking contrast to the New Testament accounts in which they were held so closely together, and further reflects a low-church ecclesiology.

church view seem often not to remain in the evangelical camp, instead migrating toward Anglican, Catholic, or Orthodox church bodies. This phenomenon is relatively well-known.³⁴ Meanwhile most typical evangelicals, if after all that has been said we can use the word “typical,” look askance at highly structured or liturgical practices, and those church bodies which would seem to have much in common theologically with evangelicals, for example Missouri Synod Lutherans, seem quite uncomfortable with the suggestion that they be considered part of any evangelical movement. Not coincidentally, these are groups with some degree of sacramental theology and higher-church views.

Hart would be supportive of the low-church view as definitive of evangelicalism. In an earlier book, *That Old-Time Religion in Modern America*, Hart defines evangelicalism as “any Protestant who emphasizes the subjective and ethical aspects of Christianity, rather than its official and churchly characteristics.”³⁵ Thus “what matters most to born-again Protestants is what occurs not inside the church but in their own personal affairs,”³⁶ making evangelicalism “essentially a low-church expression of Protestantism.”³⁷ He adds, “in effect, the evangelical movement of the late twentieth century replaced the church with the parachurch, and it developed forms to match.”³⁸ Evangelicalism is, for Hart, supremely individualistic, since it stresses individual experience over corporate church experience. For Hart no movement with such an individualistic base at its core can be the basis for a shared religious identity. In my view, this low-church perspective has been

³⁴ See, for example, Robert E. Webber and Lester Ruth, *Evangelicals on the Canterbury Trail: Why Evangelicals Are Attracted to the Liturgical Church*. Revised ed. (New York: Morehouse Publishing, 2012); Thomas Howard, *Evangelical is Not Enough: Worship of God in Liturgy and Sacrament* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1984); Todd D. Hunter, *The Accidental Anglican: The Surprising Appeal of the Liturgical Church* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010).

³⁵ D. G. Hart, *That Old-Time Religion in Modern America: Evangelical Protestantism in the Twentieth Century*, (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2002), 9.

³⁶ Hart, *That Old-Time Religion*, 10.

³⁷ Hart, *That Old-Time Religion*, 9-10.

³⁸ Hart, *Deconstructing Evangelicalism*, 30.

characteristic of evangelicals, but it extends even beyond those emphasizing the subjective and ethical. Even those of a confessional orientation can potentially embody this characteristic, as does Hodge to some extent by his emphasis on the invisible church.

In some ways this whole study brings to mind deep difficulties and differences in ecclesiology that cannot be settled here. What kinds of alliances, formal or otherwise, are appropriate across denominations?³⁹ What is the proper role of the parachurch? How should one relate to and prioritize notions of the visible and invisible church? This latter question certainly seems to be a key issue in the discussion, and one in which our historical figures were sometimes less conscious of their positions, which they had often not worked out as clearly as one would hope. John Nevin of Mercersburg seemed most conscious of the depth of ecclesiological differences in the nineteenth century, but he has been largely ignored by evangelicals, and few so-called evangelical bodies have prioritized questions of ecclesiology in the past century, although there are signs that this is changing in some circles.

We began this dissertation with a discussion of the defining features of evangelicalism, and the issue of changing notions of conversion and their impact on the definition of evangelicalism itself. Looking back over its history after this study, one can see that indeed conversion is a legitimate defining feature of the movement in the sense that for every figure considered in this study conversion played a critical role. Yet we have also seen that important features of that conversion varied considerably between the figures. If anything has become apparent after all these pages, it is that conversion has

³⁹ What are the kinds of ties that are proper in uniting Christians across denominational lines? In what ways should/can those bonds be considered in some way definitive? And finally, if we do really confess one holy, catholic, apostolic church, then are we not actually expressing core commitments about what makes one a Christian in forming or refusing those ties?

many dimensions, and views of conversion can be compared and distinguished in a variety of ways – some of which are rarely considered in discussions of conversion. The diversity that the central figures of this study exhibited is emblematic of the diverse meanings attached to evangelicalism. This dissertation supports evangelicalism as a historical category that is, in part, characterized by an interest in conversion. As a theological category, however, locating the identity of evangelicalism by way of conversion is both not useful and misleading, as this dissertation has demonstrated. If we are to arrive at a satisfactory definition of evangelicalism, it does not appear that it will be accomplished through any common understanding of conversion found throughout its history.

Appendix I – Future Research

In moving this research forward there are several gaps that could be filled to describe more comprehensively the theological history of conversion in evangelicalism. When this project was originally conceived I had anticipated including a Methodist figure (Daniel D. Whedon (1808-1885)), famed later nineteenth century evangelist Dwight L. Moody (1837-1899), Billy Graham (b. 1918), and possibly Benjamin B. Warfield (1851-1921). Moody was, along with Finney, the most successful evangelist of his century and by both his theology and practices introduced important modifications to notions of conversion. To the extent that Moody had a theology, it differed from Finney's in important ways, and made for a form of evangelism and a view of conversion also somewhat different, and influential for evangelicals that followed. Whedon represented the explosion of Methodism in the nineteenth century and the modifications it brought to conversion. Warfield completed the nineteenth and began the twentieth century story of Old Princeton, and had several writings – particularly related to perfectionism – of special interest in this history. Graham brings the study into more contemporary focus as the best known evangelist of the twentieth century who played a significant part in the rise of the “new” evangelicals in the 1950s.

As the size of this project grew it became apparent that it would not be possible to explore fully the entire history. The Methodist component was difficult as it was a broad movement without prominent representative figures that could represent that tradition. Whedon seemed like a good candidate, but there was no one repository of his letters and

papers available, which together with space considerations left him outside the final form of the project. But either Whedon or some other Methodist figure(s) would benefit the study. Given the amount of material available on Hodge, Warfield was dropped for space considerations, but would be a beneficial future addition. Moody was the last to be dropped, and I had already begun some research, collecting material from two different archives for his inclusion. His addition in the future would be beneficial, as he does provide some contrasts. It is interesting, for example, to note that while Finney was strongly opposed by Princeton, Moody later gained a fairly warm welcome. Graham was always intended as a kind of bookend to relate the content more directly to recent evangelicalism, but a fuller analysis of his views on conversion would also be valuable and enlightening, especially as so many different groups claim him as one of their own. With whom historically does he most closely align?

Though not a part of the design of this dissertation, I also have anticipated that in a later published form this study would benefit greatly by the inclusion of a chapter on the holiness movement (perhaps Phoebe Palmer), and a chapter on Pentecostalism. Due to its diversity the latter could present difficulties, but it is too significant of a phenomenon at this point to be left out. Finally, a study of views on conversion among leading evangelicals in recent decades might bring home the reality of evangelicalism's varied past to its diverse present as related to conversion.

Appendix II

Summary of Edwards, Finney, Princeton On Each Conversion Category

Category	Jonathan Edwards	Charles Finney	Archibald Alexander and Charles Hodge
Model Name: On Revivals	<i>Supernatural Affection Vision</i> Embraced revivals, albeit more critically as time went by. Revivals a work of God, not in human control. Defended legitimacy of revivals, but extremes of revival, emotionalism to be avoided.	<i>Immediate Ongoing Human Decisionism</i> Embraced revivals wholeheartedly. Necessary for church. Success of revivals predictable if appropriate means applied.	<i>Transformative Spiritual Knowledge</i> Qualified endorsement of revivals. Opposed anti-intellectualism, theological innovation (e.g. new measures), and other abuses, but embraced the outworking of God's grace in revivals. AA more positive in assessment than CH. Revival a supernatural work, not human. For CH, it is hard to judge their authenticity.
Conversion as Supernatural	Revivals and conversions both founded in supernatural activity, and cannot take place without it. Conversion takes place through the saving (vs. common) work of the Holy Spirit on an individual, never the result of elevated natural qualities or human decision. God's divine light reveals true knowledge of him to a person in salvific fashion. The sight of such knowledge is necessarily transformative.	Neither revivals nor conversions are supernatural, but rather the results of properly applied means. They are a work of humans.	Supernatural at core, solely a work of God. Lasting conversions only accomplished through the Holy Spirit, contra <i>enthusiasm</i> – using human means to manufacture religious affections. CH – conversion is initiated by God's supernatural act alone. Regeneration “a work entirely beyond the range of natural causes.” We are dead and helpless sinners before it.
Role of Human and Holy Spirit	The Holy Spirit is the sole initiator of the change of conversion, becoming an “indwelling principle” in the regenerate heart. Human not passive, as regenerative work of Holy Spirit enables faith and works. Works always accompany, but are not a basis for; justification.	Holy Spirit a necessary component of conversion as persuader; and never acts in ways that violate a human's natural faculties nor that change the human constitution, nor its influence irresistible. “Divine moral suasion.” Human agency is indispensable, and we have the power to choose, and to make a new heart. Intellect perhaps even unfallen. Knowledge is basis for action.	God free to work however he chooses in conversion; work of the Holy Spirit is “inscrutable.” No human role in regeneration, and temptation to create it is Pelagian. The dead do not raise themselves. CH – no human part in regeneration. Holy Spirit and human work alongside each other in conversion and sanctification. Giving the human a role in the <i>initiation</i> of conversion is a dividing point between theological perspectives that can be acknowledged (Samuel Hopkins and the New Divinity) and those that cannot (Taylor and New Haven theology, and also CF).
Nature of the Change of Conversion	The core of change is in the disposition of a person, the essence of one's being, becoming oriented toward instead of against God. One is born again, becomes a new person, the divine light illuminates one's heart. There is disagreement whether the nature of this change actually modifies natural capacities and gives a kind of sixth sense (even a new epistemological basis, e.g. Paul Helm), elevates natural capacities for use in a new and different way (e.g. Conrad Cherry), or gives persons a deeper awareness with no tran-	Never substantial or constitutional, of soul or body. A change of moral choice/intention. It is total, all or nothing. It is most fundamentally a choice of voluntary preference of the heart for God.	AA – Principle of holiness implanted that raises human nature without violating it, a new heart, a change in disposition similar to JE. CH – not just external reformation or change of opinion. Outward changes only evidence “an inward, radical change of character,” essence of which is change of disposition. Also a change of one's subjective and objective state before God. CH denies that conversion modifies the soul's substance, or overrides human nature.

	<p>secundal or supernatural change (Perry Miller). I argue some form of supernatural element present in JE (not merely natural). The change is supernatural but perhaps not meta-physical, a change in one's relation to God and/or orientation and use of one's natural faculties.</p>	<p>Rational affirmations of reason are critical. No blind faith aside from what reason can show. Cannot believe without understanding. Assenting vs. heart knowledge. Strong faculty psychology distinctions. Truth an instrument of conversion. More/better knowledge – conversion more likely.</p>	<p>AA – knowledge necessary for conversion, a “belief of the truth.” Faith has an object, which must be known. More than intellectual assent, embracing truth in transformative way, perceiving it not only intellectually but affectively. One cannot say how much knowledge is needed. CH – knowledge necessary for conversion, similar to AA. Faith requires trust and assent, both of which require knowledge – especially knowledge of Christ. Such knowledge more than rational assent, a spiritual knowledge, with moral and affective aspects. Priority is on rational elements, out of which the affective comes (Bushnell inverts this relationship). This knowledge need not be perfect or complete. CH declines to specify exactly how much is needed. His conception stretched most when considering salvation of infants (regeneration can antedate intellectual comprehension). Intellect stands <i>under</i> authority of Scripture. There are supra-rational truths beyond human capacity (but not irrational). Denying this leads to rationalism. It is possible to have heart knowledge/truth one lives out contrary to one's intellectual beliefs. CH not consistent here; at times insisting intellectual knowledge precedes all heart knowledge.</p>
<p>Role of Knowledge/Intellect</p>	<p>Knowledge essential to conversion. Two forms (similar to earlier Puritanism: speculative (notional) and sense of the heart (incorporates affections). Notional knowledge not adequate for divine knowledge (contra deists). Heart knowledge of God is life-changing knowledge, necessitates worship, changes emotions (see next section). Because speculative knowledge is ineffective here, conversion is not a matter of persuasion or moral transformation. Through his Spirit God transforms notions into spiritual, heart knowledge. Notions do not <i>persuade</i>, but may <i>prepare</i> for, conversion.</p>	<p>CF not much of an emotionalist. He does not preach to the feelings, but fully expects feelings to form a part of knowledge truly held in the heart. Knowledge, properly engaged, always moves the heart. Emotions are secondary.</p>	<p>AA – Emotions part of response to true spiritual knowledge, and normal part of corporate worship and revival, but can also deceive some if substituted for true conversion. Focus in revival and other preaching should be on the gospel, not inducement of emotional responses. CH – true knowledge of God involves emotions. Conversion involves change of emotions, but does not occur through them. Accurate knowledge without requisite emotions is not evidence of conversion. Religious affections/experience rooted in cognitions of truth. Wrong knowledge leads to misguided experience/emotions. A lack</p>
<p>Role of Emotions/Affections</p>	<p>True knowledge of God always involves the heart, the affections. The emotions are not the basis of conversion, but evidence of true encounter with the divine. Spiritual knowledge leads to changed affections/worship, and thus these emotions are not irrational. Affections ≠ emotions. The former are primary life passions and desires; they may encompass (or conflict with) but are broader than emotions. Religious affections focused outward, not toward self-interest. Love for God and divine things at core of Christian affections. Affections motivate persons to actions, related to will.</p>		

	<p>Will = choosing. To do as one wills is to do as one pleases, the very moment or act of willing/choosing (no Lockean distinction between willing/desiring). Necessity/certainty not contradictory to liberty. Liberty is the power to do as one wills. Regardless of <i>why</i> we choose what we do, regardless of <i>anais</i>, if we do what we want, we are free. Moral necessity (ability) – factors within agent; natural necessity – factors outside of the agent's control. Freedom of the will is nonsensical. A will <i>wills</i>; it is not free in the sense of indeterminate or neutral (indifference). Indifference undermines the very foundation of how we consider a person morally good or bad. The more inclined/less indifferent one is toward the good, the better that person is, opposite of Arminian position. JE response to Arminianism: the will is never indifferent in the <i>act</i> of willing, and were this possible it would empty the actor of any moral character, even God himself. We act in accordance with who we are and what we want. Sinners do not <i>want</i> to follow God.</p>	<p>Free and unencumbered will at center of his conception of humanity, and central to his ideas on conversion. Conversion consists of human choice. Sin and holiness are voluntary states. No free will = no moral responsibility. Foreknowledge and election compatible with free human will. Denies any distinction between natural and moral ability.</p>	<p>of piety leads to heterodox beliefs. Rejects speculative theological knowledge and ungrounded emotional experiences. Affective heart knowledge needed. Must “feelingly believe.” AA – The will plays no part in one’s initial regeneration. CH – affirms TULIP. In natural state the will is broken/depraved. Cannot <i>will</i> conversion without God’s previous regeneration. For CH, like JE, liberty consists in the power to do as one desires without outside coercion. Inability does not weaken obligation. Morality is not judged solely by one’s actions, but by one’s inclinations or disposition, contra CF. CH willing to ally with Bushnell in affirming the nature of character development over time in community versus an individualistic and decisive moment in which one wills a change to one’s character.</p>
<p>Role of the Will</p>	<p>Stresses essential unity of persons, rather than emphasizing distinctions of will, intellect, etc. The will does not act, the person does, in all of one’s various aspects.</p>	<p><i>Duality</i> of persons, strong faculty psychology distinctions.</p>	<p>AA says little about will directly, but emphasizes unity of individuals in responding to gospel. Rejects faculty psychology divisions as artificial. “The soul is not depraved or holy by departments.” CH – similar; rejects faculty psychology and stresses indivisibility of human persons. Faculties “neither independent nor distinct.” True generally and in regards to conversion.</p>
<p>Unity of Persons</p>	<p>There are means of grace, but these do not imply one can control God’s saving activity. The means of grace are natural such as hearing (preaching) and reading (studying) the Word, sacraments, prayer, etc., through which God may choose to work supernaturally in conversion. Means are an “opportunity,” for grace.</p>	<p>Means to conversion are essential and never to be ignored. Not supernatural. Means to ends like causes to effects. Means of conversion are no different, natural relation of means to ends. God provides the means; humans use the means. Most important means is persuasion by the truth. Other means include preaching, prayer, new measures (means are flexible). Good means are those that work!</p>	<p>AA – The gospel is the only right means to conversion. Communicating gospel knowledge is key to the means. Knowledge essential to coming to faith and to growth in faith. CH – God uses means, but they do not violate natural human capacities. Conversion does not destroy or create faculties. Primary means of conversion are word, sacraments, and prayer. No inherent efficacy.</p>
<p>Means of Conversion</p>			

Relation of Conversion to Baptism	Baptism a means of grace; covenantal understanding as sign of entrance into covenant community and seal of Holy Spirit of God's saving grace to elect infants. Never <i>ex opere operato</i> . No direct link of baptism with regeneration.	Virtually silent on baptism (reflecting low ecclesiology). Baptism even seems to be somewhat interchangeable with other practices like the anxious bench; both insist on a public declaration of faith as a screen for insincere professions of faith.	AA – rarely speaks of baptism in conjunction with conversion. CH – baptism sign and seal of entrance into covenant community, but no direct relationship to conversion. CH opposes both Lutheran and Catholic forms of baptismal regeneration, and high church sacramentalism. Sacraments never operate <i>ex opere operato</i> . CH writes of adult baptism much less often than infant; it also not regenerative, and reflects confirmation of adult reception of faith.
Timeframe of Conversion	From God's perspective regeneration is instantaneous. There is a moment when one moves from death to life. From the human perspective, however, regeneration and conversion appear more as a <i>process</i> , since it is never immediately apparent in the moment when that inner change occurred. One might say that regeneration is instant, conversion a process, and sanctification an ongoing process.	Conversion is immediate and total. There is never a reason to delay, since we all have the capacity to respond.	AA – no set timeframe for conversion, can be sudden or gradual (AA prefers gradual). Sudden conversions can be result of longer hidden process. Although conversion may appear gradual to humans, regeneration is always instant – even if hidden to us. CH – similar to AA. Conversion can be instant, but CH emphasizes gradual conversion process contra many revival methods. Regeneration always instant. Gradual nurture in the faith the normal process for children; they never know a 'before' conversion period. Gradual process mirrors CH's own life.
Experience and the Authentication of Conversion	Authentication a critical question in the context and aftermath of the Great Awakening. JE becomes more skeptical of conversion <i>experiences</i> as time goes by, and more inclined to judge conversions solely by the fruit of one's life over time. There is never certainty from a human perspective in authentication of conversion. JE critiques many false signs of conversion. He insists that any kinds of experiences thought to indicate conversion should be judged by Scripture rather than personal criteria.	Known by one's fruits. True Christians obey, and obey <i>completely</i> , no mixture of sinful with holy states. It is all or nothing. This obedience is reflected in both external actions and internal intention/disposition toward holiness/benevolence. Calvinist notion of inability causes passivity instead of action, misleads people into thinking obedience not needed. Logical conclusion of all this, which CF comes to teach, is perfectionism (entire sanctification). You have the means and capacity to obey; therefore true Christians will in fact obey in all things.	AA – authentication by humans never certain. Experiences never a reliable indicator. Problem with religious enthusiasts is that they trust/seek these experiences. AA more trusting of gradual conversions because they are less susceptible to trusting particular human experiences as evidence of conversion. Best test is in fruit of one's life over time. Those who fall away were never truly converted, and many lasting converts cannot name the time of their conversion. CH – external criteria (church membership, etc.) cannot authenticate conversion. Must judge by inward state. Easier to disprove true conversion than to reliably authenticate it. Best proved in fruits/experience over time. Sanctification always follows true conversion. Cannot authenticate by measuring feelings/affections. Professions also deemphasized as untrustworthy.
Permanence of Conversion	Perseverance is the ultimate authentication of true conversion. Perseverance is a necessary result of true conversion; the change is irreversible. Those who leave the faith were never truly converted initially.	A mixed view. The dominant view, and the one which follows logically from his other teachings is that conversion is not necessarily permanent; it can be lost. Furthermore, it is lost every time a Christian falls into sin. Justification relies on	AA – true conversion always permanent. Inner supernatural transformation is not reversible. CH – likewise, true conversion always permanent. Should correspond with impact of faith on one's life. " <i>The security of believers is a</i>

		<p>obedience. Being in a state of sin is incompatible with faith; therefore a sinning Christian is in same state as an unconverted sinner as concerns salvation. This is why conversion is both immediate and <i>ongoing</i>. CF also argues for perseverance and election, but ultimately any robust notion of perseverance is incompatible with CF's other views.</p> <p>Immediacy means no preparationism, no steps. Most striking feature of his <i>ordo</i> is the ordering of sanctification. Also present/permanent distinction. CF does not address <i>ordo</i> directly; must be deduced from other views. Election is bracketed because although CF puts it in this first position, its necessity in his scheme is questionable.</p> <p>[Election] Repentance Regeneration/Conversion Faith Present Sanctification Permanent Sanctification (Perfectionism) Permanent Justification</p>	<p><i>secundum viam.</i>" Opposes antinomianism. Saving grace not dependent on our actions, but our actions reflect its reality. CH also displays some inconsistencies that seem to indicate the possibility that salvation could be at risk or lost. Elsewhere he terms some faith "temporary faith" based on common, not saving, grace. Salvation secure since grounded in God's actions, not ours.</p> <p>AA – There are typical steps, like conviction, but they are not required or rigid. AA does not discuss <i>ordo salutis</i>, but does indicate that regeneration precedes faith. CH – prefers nurture over sudden, but no certain steps needed for free offer of salvation. CH <i>ordo</i> more in logical than temporal order. He emphasizes repentance as a fruit of regeneration that follows faith. It is faith that gives the impetus to repent. Also Christians in this life wholly justified but only partially sanctified.</p> <p>Election Regeneration Faith Union with Christ Justification Conviction of Sin/Repentance/Conversion Sanctification</p>
<p>Morphology of Conversion and the <i>Ordo Salutis</i></p>	<p>Relation to earlier Puritan preparationism is ambiguous at times, but JE clearly rejects any requirement that one follow certain steps to conversion, and may consider those preparatory works that are part of the experience of some to be wrought as part of the Spirit's supernatural saving work, rather than by the human. Presence of these steps is no certain sign of saving grace, however, even if they are commonly a part of that process. The steps become <i>signs of</i> conversion rather than a <i>path to</i> conversion. In the order of salvation, most important for JE is that conversion is God's gracious act alone. Some dispute relation of justification with sanctification in JE, but below seems most accurate.</p> <p>Election Illumination/regeneration Faith Union with Christ Justification Sanctification</p>	<p>CF moves the location of conversion away from the church context by his low church ecclesiology, anti-clericalism, minimalization of the lay/clergy distinction, individualistic outlook.</p>	<p>AA – no substantial data. CH – stresses trained clergy over rise in itinerant/populist/lay leadership and preaching. Yet CH's emphasis on nurture tends sometimes to move conversion away from formal church ministries, into home and parachurch (e.g. the Sunday School movement). Supports voluntary Christian societies outside of visible church, contra Southern Presbyterian James Thornwell. His view of conversion does not demand institutional church context, nor undermine trends in lay leadership and low church politics which CH opposes on the surface. CH strongly distinguishes visible and invisible church, emphasizing the</p>
<p>Location of Conversion</p>	<p>JE's explicit views on conversion tend toward a corporate, churchly location for conversion, rather than individualistic and isolated locations. Covenantal theology. Also wants to raise standard for church membership to those truly converted (comes to reject Hall-Way Covenant). His support for some revival practices and activity in some ways undercut this churchly, corporate emphasis.</p>		

			<p>latter to such a degree that the former loses significance. Most denominational features not essential to true identity as churches. Protestants more truly unified across denominations than Catholic church due to stress on inner spiritual realities over external polity or profession.</p> <p>Opposes Nevin as putting church above Bible as means to saving grace. High view of invisible church; low view of visible church. Disconnects conversion from visible church, and tends in this way toward private, individualist forms of conversion.</p>
Prominence of Conversion	Conversion central to theology and preaching of JE; perhaps more than any other American figure.	Conversion front and center; and even later emphasis on sanctification/perfection essentially continues the emphasis on conversion as the measure of all things as sanctification and conversion collapse somewhat into each other in CF's framework.	<p>AA – conversion has a central place; AA even more revivalistic in his theology than JE.</p> <p>Conversion is very important to CH as well, but not as prominent as others in this study.</p>

Bibliography

Archives

Archives of the Billy Graham Center. Wheaton College. Wheaton, IL.

Charles Hodge Manuscript Collection, Princeton Theological Seminary Archives.
Princeton, NJ.

Charles Hodge Papers, Princeton University Archives. Princeton, NJ.

Moody Bible Institute Archives. Chicago, IL

Oberlin College Archives. Oberlin, OH.

Primary Sources

Abbott, Lyman. "Snapshots of My Contemporaries: Dwight Lyman Moody – Evangelist."
The Outlook 64 (22 June, 1921), 324-7.

Alexander, Archibald. *Biographical Sketches of the Founder, and Principal Alumni of the Log College, Together with an Account of the Revivals of Religion under Their Ministry*. Princeton, NJ: J. T. Robinson, 1845.

_____. *Evangelical Truth: Practical Sermons for the Christian Home*. 1850; rpt. Birmingham, AL: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2004.

_____. *Evidences of the Authenticity, Inspiration and Canonical Authority of the Holy Scriptures*. 1836; rpt. New York: Arno Press, 1972.

_____. *Thoughts on Religious Experience*. 1844; rpt. from 3rd ed. London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1967.

Alexander, James W. *The Life of Archibald Alexander*. 1883; rpt. Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 1991.

Baird, Robert. *Religion in the United States of America*. Glasgow: Blackie and Son, 1844; rpt. New York: Arno Press, 1969.

Bushnell, Horace. *Christ in Theology*. Hartford: Brown and Parsons, 1851; rpt. American Religious Thought of the 18th and 19th Centuries. Edited by Bruce Kuklick. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1987.

_____. *Christian Nurture*. New York: C. Scribner, 1861; rpt. Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 1994.

_____. *God in Christ*. Hartford: Brown and Parsons, 1849; rpt. New York: AMS Press, 1972.

_____. *Sermons*. Sources of American Spirituality. Edited by Conrad Cherry. New York: Paulist Press, 1985.

Calvin, John. *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Vol. 20 and 21 of *Library of Christian Classics*. Edited by John T. McNeill. Translated by Ford Lewis Battles. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960.

Carroll, H. K. *Religious Forces of the United States: Enumerated, Classified, and Described on the Basis of the Government Census of 1890, with an Introduction on the Condition and Character of American Christianity*. Rev. Ed. 1893; rpt. New York: The Christian Literature Co., 1896.

The Centennial Celebration of the Theological Seminary of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America at Princeton, New Jersey. Princeton, NJ: Princeton Theological Seminary, 1912.

Dana, James. 'The Examination of the late Rev'd President Edwards's Enquiry on Freedom of Will,' *Continued*. New Haven, CT: Thomas and Samuel Green, 1773.

_____. *An Examination of the late Reverend President Edwards's 'Enquiry on Freedom of Will.'* Boston: S. Kneeland, 1770.

Edwards, Jonathan. *Ecclesiastical Writings*. Vol. 12 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*. Edited by David D. Hall. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994.

_____. *Ethical Writings*. Vol. 8 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*. Edited by Paul Ramsey. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989.

_____. *Freedom of the Will*. Vol. 1 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*. Edited by Paul Ramsey. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1957.

_____. *The Great Awakening*. Vol. 4 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*. Edited by C. C. Goen. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1972.

- _____. *A History of the Work of Redemption*. Vol. 9 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*. Edited by John F. Wilson. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989.
- _____. *A Jonathan Edwards Reader*. Edited by John E. Smith, Harry S. Stout, and Kenneth P. Minkema. 1995; rpt. New Haven, CT: Yale Nota Bene, 2003.
- _____. *The "Miscellanies" 501-832*. Vol. 18 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*. Edited by Ava Chamberlain. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000.
- _____. *The "Miscellanies" 833-1152*. Vol. 20 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*. Edited by Amy Plantinga Pauw. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002.
- _____. *The "Miscellanies" 1153-1360*. Vol. 23 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*. Edited by Douglas A. Sweeney. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004.
- _____. *The "Miscellanies" a-500*. Vol. 13 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*. Edited by Thomas A. Schafer. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994.
- _____. *The Nature of True Virtue*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1960.
- _____. *Original Sin*. Vol. 3 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*. Edited by Clyde A. Holbrook. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1970.
- _____. *Religious Affections*. Vol. 2 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*. Edited by John E. Smith. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1959.
- _____. *Sermons and Discourses 1723-1729*. Vol. 14 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*. Edited by Kenneth P. Minkema. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997.
- _____. *Sermons and Discourses 1730-1733*. Vol. 17 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*. Edited by Mark Valeri. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999.
- _____. *Sermons and Discourses 1734-1738*. Vol. 19 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*. Edited by M. X. Lesser. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001.
- _____. *Sermons and Discourses 1739-1742*. Vol. 22 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*. Edited by Harry S. Stout and Nathan O. Hatch, with Kyle P. Farley. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003.
- _____. *Sermons and Discourses 1743-1758*. Vol. 25 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*. Edited by William H. Kinnach. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006.
- _____. *The Sermons of Jonathan Edwards: A Reader*. Edited by Wilson H. Kinnach, Kenneth P. Minkema, and Douglas A. Sweeney. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999.

_____. *Writings on the Trinity, Grace, and Faith*. Vol. 21 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*. Edited by Sang Hyun Lee. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003.

Finney, Charles G. *Finney's Systematic Theology: New and Expanded 1878 Edition*, Edited by Dennis Carroll, Bill Nicely, and L. G. Parkhurst, Jr. Introduction by Rev. L. G. Parkhurst, Jr. Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1994.

_____. *The Heart of Truth [Skeletons of a Course of Theological Lectures]*. 1840; rpt. Minneapolis, MN: Bethany Fellowship, Inc., 1976.

_____. *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*. Edited by William G. McLoughlin. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960.

_____. *Letters to Professing Christians*. 1837; rpt. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1985.

_____. *The Memoirs of Charles G. Finney: The Complete Restored Text*. Edited by Garth M. Rosell and Richard A. G. Dupuis. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1989.

_____. *Principles of Holiness: Selected Messages on Biblical Holiness by One of America's Greatest Evangelists*. Edited by Louis G. Parkhurst, Jr. Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1984.

_____. *Sermons on Important Subjects*. 3rd Ed. New York: John S. Taylor, 1836.

Graham, Billy. *Calling Youth to Christ*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1947.

_____. *The Holy Spirit: Activating God's Power in Your Life*. Waco, TX: Word Books, 1978.

_____. *Hope for the Troubled Heart*. Waco, TX: Word Books, 1991.

_____. *How to Be Born Again*. Waco, TX: Word Books, 1977.

_____. *Just As I Am: The Autobiography of Billy Graham*. New York: HarperCollins, 1997.

_____. *Peace with God*. Rev. Ed. Waco, TX: Word Books, 1984.

Hodge, Alexander A. *The Life of Charles Hodge*. 1881; rpt. New York: Arno Press, 1969.

_____. *Outlines of Theology: For Students and Laymen*. Enlarged Ed., 1879; rpt. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1972.

Hodge, Charles. "Beman on the Atonement." *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* 17, 1 (Jan 1845), 84-138.

_____. "Bushnell on Christian Nurture." *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* 19, 4 (Oct. 1847), 502-39.

- _____. "Bushnell on Vicarious Sacrifice." *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* 38, 2 (April 1866), 161-94.
- _____. "Bushnell's Discourses." *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* 21 (1849), 259-78.
- _____. *Charles Hodge: The Way of Life*. Sources of American Spirituality. Edited by Mark A. Noll. New York: Paulist Press, 1987.
- _____. "The Church – Its Perpetuity." *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* 28, 4 (October 1856), 689-715.
- _____. *Conference Papers*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1879.
- _____. *The Constitutional History of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America*. 2 vols. Philadelphia: William S. Martien, 1839, 1840.
- _____. "The Early Regeneration of Sabbath-School Children." *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* 42, 1 (Jan 1870), 22-33.
- _____. *Essays and Reviews*. New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1857; rpt. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1987.
- _____. "Essays in the Presbyterian by Theophilus on the Question: Is Baptism in the Church of Rome Valid?" *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* 18, 2 (Apr 1846), 320-44.
- _____. "An Examination of President Edwards' Inquiry into the Freedom of the Will." *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* 17, 4 (Oct 1845), 636-39.
- _____. "Finney's Lectures on Theology." *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* 19, 2 (Apr 1847), 237-77.
- _____. "Finney's Sermons on Sanctification, and Mahan on Christian Perfection." *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* 13, 2 (Apr 1841), 231-50.
- _____. "The Idea of the Church, Part One." *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* 25, 2 (Apr 1853), 249-90.
- _____. "The Idea of the Church, Part Two." *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* 25, 3 (July 1853), 339-89.
- _____. "Inspiration." *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* 29, 4 (Oct 1857), 660-698.
- _____. "Is the Church of Rome a Part of the Visible Church?" *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* 18, 2 (April 1846), 320-344.

- _____. "The Latest Form of Infidelity." *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* 12, 1 (Jan 1840), 87-102.
- _____. "Lecture to Theological Students." *Biblical Repertory* 5, 1 (Jan 1829), 73-98.
- _____. "The Means of Repentance." *Biblical Repertory and Theological Review* 2, 1 (Jan 1830), 113-22.
- _____. "The Mystical Presence." *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* 20, 2 (Apr 1848), 227-78.
- _____. "Neander's History." *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* 16, 2 (Apr 1844), 155-183.
- _____. "The New Divinity Tried." *Biblical Repertory and Theological Review* 4, 2 (Apr 1832), 278-304.
- _____. "A Practical View of Infant Baptism." *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* 33, 4 (Oct 1861), 680-696.
- _____. "Principle of Protestantism as related to the present state of the Church." *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* 17, 4 (Oct 1845), 626-36.
- _____. "Professor Park and the Princeton Review" (or "The Theology of the Intellect and that of the Feelings III"). *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* 23, 4 (Oct 1851), 674-695.
- _____. "Professor Park's Remarks on the Princeton Review" (or "The Theology of the Intellect and that of the Feelings II"). *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* 23, 2 (Apr 1851), 306-347.
- _____. "Professor Park's Sermon" (or "The Theology of the Intellect and that of the Feelings I"). *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* 22, 4 (Oct 1850), 642-674.
- _____. "Regeneration and the Manner of its Occurrence." *Biblical Repertory and Theological Review* 2, 2 (Apr 1830), 250-97.
- _____. "Religious State of Germany." *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* 18, 4 (Oct 1846), 514-546.
- _____. *Systematic Theology*. 3 vols. 1871-72; rpt. London: James Clarke & Co., 1960.
- _____. "The Theological Opinions of President Davies." *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* 14, 1 (Jan 1842), 142-69.
- _____. "Transcendentalism." *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* 9, 1 (Jan 1839), 37-101.

- _____. "The Unity of the Church." *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* 18, 1 (Jan 1846), 137-58.
- _____. "What is Christianity?" *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* 32, 1 (Jan 1860), 118-161.
- _____. "Witherspoon's Theology." *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* 35, 4 (Oct 1863), 596-610.
- Machen, J. Gresham. *Christianity and Liberalism*. 1923; rpt. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1985.
- Moody, Dwight L. *The Best of D. L. Moody: Sixteen Sermons by the Great Evangelist*. Edited by Wilbur M. Smith. Chicago: Moody Press, 1971
- _____. *Commending the Faith: The Preaching of D. L. Moody*. Edited by Garth Rosell. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999.
- _____. *The D.L. Moody Collection: The Highlights of His Writings, Sermons, Anecdotes, and Life Story*. Edited by James S. Bell. Chicago: Moody Press, 1998.
- _____. *Great Joy: Comprising Sermons and Prayer-Meeting Talks. Delivered at the Chicago Tabernacle*. New York: E. B. Treat, 1877.
- _____. *Heaven: Where It Is, Its Inhabitants, and How to Get There. The Certainty of God's Promise of a Life Beyond the Grave, and the Rewards That Are in Store for Faithful Service*. Chicago: F. H. Revell 1880.
- _____. *Notes From My Bible: From Genesis to Revelation*. Chicago: F. H. Revell, 1895.
- _____. *One Thousand and One Thoughts From My Library*. Chicago: Bible Institute Colportage Association, 1898.
- _____. *The Overcoming Life, and Other Sermons*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1896.
- _____. *Secret Power: Or, The Secret of Success in Christian Life and Work*. Chicago: F. H. Revell, 1881.
- _____. *Sovereign Grace: Its Source, Its Nature, and Its Effect*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1891.
- _____. *Sowing and Reaping*. New York: F. H. Revell, 1896.
- _____. *Twelve Select Sermons*. Chicago: F. H. Revell, 1880.
- _____. *The Way to God and How to Find It*. Chicago: F. H. Revell, 1884.

- Moody, William R. *D. L. Moody*. New York: Revell, 1900.
- _____. *D. L. Moody*. New York: Macmillan, 1930.
- Nevin, John W. *The Anxious Bench*. Chambersburg, PA: Office of the “Weekly Messenger,” 1843.
- Nichols, James Hastings, ed. *The Mercersburg Theology*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1966.
- Norton, Andrew. *A Discourse on the Latest Form of Infidelity*. 1839; rpt. Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1971.
- Princeton Versus the New Divinity: Articles from the Princeton Review. The Meaning of Sin – Grace – Salvation – Revival*. Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 2001.
- Schaff, Philip. *The Principle of Protestantism*. 1846; rpt. Philadelphia, PA: United Church Press, 1964.
- Sprague, William B. *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*. 2nd Ed. New York: Daniel Appleton & Co., 1833.
- Torrey, R. A., et al. *The Fundamentals: The Famous Sourcebook of Foundational Biblical Truths*. 1958; rpt. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1990.
- Warfield, Benjamin B. *Biblical and Theological Studies*. Edited by Samuel G. Craig. Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1968.
- _____. *Calvin and Augustine*. Edited by Samuel G. Craig. Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1956.
- _____. *Faith and Life: ‘Conferences’ in the Oratory of Princeton Seminary*. New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1916.
- _____. *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*. Edited by Samuel G. Craig. With an introduction by Cornelius Van Til. Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1948.
- _____. *The Person and Work of Christ*. Edited by Samuel G. Craig. Philadelphia, Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1950.
- _____. *The Plan of Salvation*. Rev. Ed. 1935; rpt. Grand Rapids, MI: William. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., [1980?].
- _____. *Selected Shorter Writings of Benjamin B. Warfield – I*. Edited by John E. Meeter. Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1970.

- _____. *Selected Shorter Writings of Benjamin B. Warfield – II*. Edited by John E. Meeter. Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1973.
- _____. *Studies in Perfectionism*. Edited by Samuel G. Craig. Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1958.
- _____. *Studies in Tertullian and Augustine*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1970.
- _____. *Studies in Theology*. Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1988.
- West, Stephen. *An Essay on Moral Agency*. 2nd Ed. Salem: Thomas C. Cushing, 1794.
- Whedon, Daniel D. *Commentary on the New Testament: Intended for Popular Use*. New York: Nelson & Phillips, Carlton & Lanahan, 1860-1880.
- _____. *Commentary on the Old Testament*. New York: Hunt & Eaton, 1873-1901.
- _____. *Essays, Reviews, and Discourses*. New York: Phillips & Hunt, 1887.
- _____. *Freedom of the Will: A Wesleyan Response to Jonathan Edwards*. Edited by John D. Wagner. 1864; rpt. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2009.
- _____. *Statements, Theological and Critical*. New York: Phillips & Hunt, 1887.
- _____. *A Tribute to the Memory of President Fisk, Delivered Before the Young Men's Missionary and Bible Societies at the John-Street Methodist Episcopal Church, New York, May 17, 1839*. New York: T. Mason and G. Lane, for The Methodist Episcopal Church, 1839.
- _____. *Wesley's View of Entire Sanctification*. New York: Tract Society, 1840.
- _____. *What is Arminianism? With a Brief Sketch of Arminius*. Toronto: W. Briggs, 1879.
- _____. *Whedon's Commentary Revised*. Harrisonburg, VA: Christian Light Publications, 1981.

Secondary Sources

- Abraham, William J. and James E. Kirby, eds. *The Oxford Handbook of Methodist Studies*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.

- Ahlstrom, Sydney E. *A Religious History of the American People*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1972.
- _____. "The Scottish Philosophy and American Theology." *Church History* 24, 3 (Sep 1955), 257-72.
- Allitt, Patrick. *Religion in America Since 1945: A History*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2003.
- Asselt, Willem J. van, J. Martin Bac, and Roelf T. te Velde, eds. *Reformed Thought on Freedom The Concept of Free Choice in Early Modern Reformed Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010.
- Barth, Karl. *The Knowledge of God and the Service of God According to the Teaching of the Reformation*. Translated by J. L. M. Haire and Ian Henderson. 1938; rpt. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2005.
- Balmer, Randall. *Encyclopedia of Evangelicalism*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002.
- _____. *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory: A Journey Into the Evangelical Subculture in America*. Expanded Ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.
- Barth, Karl. *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century: Its Background and History*. 1959; rpt. Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1973.
- Bebbington, David W. *The Dominance of Evangelicalism: The Age of Spurgeon and Moody*. A History of Evangelicalism, Vol. 3. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005.
- _____. "Evangelical Conversion, c. 1740-1850." *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 18, 2 (Autumn 2000) 102-27.
- _____. *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s*. 1989; rpt. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992.
- Beeke, Joel R. *What is Evangelicalism?* Darlington, England: EP Books, 2012.
- Beeke, Joel R. and Paul M. Smalley. *Prepared by Grace, for Grace: The Puritans on God's Ordinary Way of Leading Sinners to Christ*. Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2013.
- Bennett, David. *The Altar Call: Its Origins and Present Usage*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, Inc., 2000.
- Bloesch, Donald G. *The Evangelical Renaissance*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1973.

- _____. *The Future of Evangelical Christianity*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1983.
- Blumhofer, Edith L. and Joel A. Carpenter. *Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism: A Guide to the Sources*. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1990.
- Brauer, Jerald C. "Conversion: From Puritanism to Revivalism." *Journal of Religion* 58 (1978), 227-243.
- _____. *Protestantism in America: A Narrative History*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1953.
- Buckser, Andrew and Stephen D. Glazier, eds. *The Anthropology of Religious Conversion*. New York, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2003.
- Bushman, Richard L., ed. *The Great Awakening: Documents on the Revival of Religion (1740 - 1745)*. New York: Atheneum, 1970.
- Caldwell, Patricia. *The Puritan Conversion Narrative: The Beginnings of American Expression*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983.
- Calhoun, David B. *Princeton Seminary, Vol. 1: Faith and Learning 1812-1868*. Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1994.
- _____. *Princeton Seminary, Vol. 2: The Majestic Testimony 1869-1929*. Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1996.
- Carse, James. *Jonathan Edwards and the Visibility of God*. New York: Scribner, 1967.
- Carwardine, Richard. *Trans-atlantic Revivalism: Popular Evangelicalism in Britain and America, 1790-1865*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1978.
- Cauthen, Kenneth. *The Impact of American Religious Liberalism*. 2nd Ed. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1983.
- Chapman, J. Wilbur. *The Life and Work of Dwight Lyman Moody: Presented to the Christian World as a Tribute to the Memory of the Greatest Apostle of the Age*. Philadelphia, PA: J. C. Winston & Co., 1900.
- Chapman, Mark B. "Affective Knowledge: Jonathan Edwards on the Will, the Understanding, and Their Place in Conversion." Master of Theology Thesis, Luther Seminary, St. Paul, MN, 2008.
- _____. "Charles Hodge's Reception of Schleiermacher." In *Schleiermacher's Influences on American Thought and Religious Life (1835-1920)*. Vol. 1. Edited by Jeffrey A. Wilcox, Terrence N. Tice, and Catherine L. Kelsey. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2013.

- _____. "‘Right Reason’ and the Princeton Mind." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 54, 4 (Dec 2011), 870-74.
- Cherry, Conrad. *Nature and Religious Imagination: From Edwards to Bushnell*. Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1980.
- _____. *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards: A Reappraisal*. Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1966.
- Chesebrough, David B. *Charles G. Finney: Revivalistic Rhetoric*. Great American Orators, Number 31. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2002.
- Chester, Stephen J. *Conversion at Corinth: Perspectives on Conversion in Paul's Theology and the Corinthian Church*. New York: T & T Clark, 2003.
- Clebsch, William A. *American Religious Thought: A History*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973.
- Cohen, Charles Lloyd. *God's Caress: The Psychology of Puritan Religious Experience*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986.
- Collins, Kenneth J. *The Evangelical Moment: The Promise of an American Religion*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005.
- _____. *The Scripture Way of Salvation: The Heart of John Wesley's Theology*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1997.
- _____. *Wesley on Salvation: A Study in the Standard Sermons*. Grand Rapids, MI: Francis and Taylor Press, 1989.
- Collins, Kenneth J. and John H. Tyson, eds. *Conversion in the Wesleyan Tradition*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2001.
- Conforti, Joseph A. *Samuel Hopkins and the New Divinity Movement: Calvinism and Reform in New England Between the Great Awakenings*. 1981; rpt. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2007.
- Conkin, Paul K. *The Uneasy Center: Reformed Christianity in Antebellum America*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1995.
- Conn, Walter E., ed. *Conversion: Perspectives on Personal and Social Transformation*. Staten Island, NY: Society of St. Paul, 1978.
- Cooper, John W. *Panentheism – The Other God of the Philosophers: From Plato to the Present*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006.

- Cooper, William H. Jr. *The Great Revivalists in American Religion, 1740-1944*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2010.
- Crawford, Michael J. *Seasons of Grace: Colonial New England's Revival Tradition in Its British Context*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991.
- Crisp, Oliver D. *Jonathan Edwards and the Metaphysics of Sin*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Co., 2005.
- Cross, Whitney R. *The Burned-Over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800-1850*. New York: Harper & Row, 1965.
- Curtis, Richard K. *They Called Him Mister Moody*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1962.
- Dahl, James David. "Charles Hodge: Defender of Piety. A Study of the Relationship of Piety and Theology as Seen Through his Various Writings and his Critique of Schleiermacher." PhD diss., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1996.
- Davidson, Edward H. *Jonathan Edwards: The Narrative of a Puritan Mind*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968.
- Davis, Thomas J., ed. *John Calvin's American Legacy*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.
- Day, Richard Ellsworth. *Bush Aglow: The Life Story of Dwight Lyman Moody, Commoner of Northfield*. Philadelphia, PA: Judson Press, 1936.
- Dayton, Donald W. *Discovering an Evangelical Heritage*. New York: Harper & Row, 1976.
- Dayton, Donald W. and Robert K. Johnston, eds. *The Variety of American Evangelicalism*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1991.
- Dorrien, Gary. *The Remaking of Evangelical Theology*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998.
- Dorsett, Lyle W. *A Passion for Souls: The Life of D. L. Moody*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1997.
- Dowey, Edward A. Jr. *The Knowledge of God in Calvin's Theology*. Rev. Ed. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1994.
- Drummond, Lewis A. *The Evangelist*. Nashville, TN: Word Publishing, 2001.
- _____. *A Fresh Look at the Life and Ministry of Charles G. Finney*. Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1985.

- Edman, V. Raymond. *Finney Lives On: The Secret of Revival in Our Time. A Study in Finney's Revival Methods and Message*. Wheaton, IL: Scripture Press, 1951.
- Engel, J. F. "The Road to Conversion: The Latest Research Insights." *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 26 (1990), 84-95.
- Erdt, Terrence. "The Calvinist Psychology of the Heart and the 'Sense' of Jonathan Edwards." *Early American Literature* 14 (1979-80), 193-204.
- _____. *Jonathan Edwards, Art, and the Sense of the Heart*. Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980.
- Evensen, Bruce J. *God's Man for the Gilded Age: D. L. Moody and the Rise of Modern Mass Evangelism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.
- Farwell, John V. *Early Recollections of D. L. Moody*. Chicago: Winona Publishing, 1907.
- Felton, Gayle C. *This Gift of Water: The Practice and Theology of Baptism Among Methodists in America*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1992.
- Field, Anne. *From Darkness to Light: How One Became a Christian in the Early Church*. Ben Lomond, CA: Conciliar Press, 1997.
- Fiering, Norman S. *Jonathan Edward's Moral Thought and Its British Context*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1981.
- _____. "Will and Intellect in the New England Mind." *William and Mary Quarterly*. Third Series 29, 4 (Oct 1972), 515-558.
- Findley, James F., Jr. *Dwight L. Moody: American Evangelist, 1837-1899*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969.
- Finn, Thomas M. *From Death to Rebirth: Ritual and Conversion in Antiquity*. New York: Paulist Press, 1997.
- Finney, John. *Finding Faith Today: How Does It Happen?* 1992; rpt. Stonehill Green, Westlea, Swindon, England: British and Foreign Bible Society, 1994.
- Foster, Frank Hugh. *A Genetic History of the New England Theology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1907.
- Fraday, Marshall. *Billy Graham: A Parable of American Righteousness*. Boston, MA: Little, Brown, and Company, 1979.
- Gallagher, Eugene V. *Expectation and Experience: Explaining Religious Conversion*. Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1990.

- Ganski, Christopher J. "Spirit and Flesh: On the Significance of the Reformed Doctrine of the Lord's Supper for Pneumatology." Ph.D. diss. Marquette University, 2011.
- Gaustad, Edwin Scott. *Faith of Our Fathers: Religion and the New Nation*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1987.
- _____. *The Great Awakening in New England*. Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1965.
- Gaustad, Edwin S. and Leigh E. Schmidt. *The Religious History of America*. Rev. Ed. 2002; rpt. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2004.
- Gaventa, Beverly R. *From Darkness to Light: Aspects of Conversion in the New Testament*. OBT 20. Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1986.
- Gay, Peter. *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation. The Rise of Modern Paganism*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966.
- George, Timothy, ed. *Mr Moody and the Evangelical Tradition*. New York: T & T Clark International, 2004.
- Gerrish, Brian A. *Tradition and the Modern World: Reformed Theology in the Nineteenth Century*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978.
- Gerstner, John H. *The Rational Biblical Theology of Jonathan Edwards*. Vol. 1. Powhatan, VA: Berea Publications, 1991.
- _____. *The Rational Biblical Theology of Jonathan Edwards*. Vol. 2. Powhatan, VA: Berea Publications, 1992.
- _____. *The Rational Biblical Theology of Jonathan Edwards*. Vol. 3. Powhatan, VA: Berea Publications, 1993.
- _____. *Steps to Salvation: The Evangelistic Message of Jonathan Edwards*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960.
- Gerstner, John H. and Jonathan Neil Gerstner. "Edwardsean Preparation for Salvation." *Westminster Theological Journal* 42 (1979), 5-71.
- Gordon, James M. "Dwight L. Moody and Frances R. Havergal." In *Evangelical Spirituality: From the Wesleys to John Stott*. London: SPCK, 1991.
- Greenman, Jeffrey P. and Timothy Larsen, eds. *Reading Romans Through the Centuries: From the Early Church to Karl Barth*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2005.
- Gritsch, E. W. *Born Againism: Perspectives on a Movement*. Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1982.

- Groupe des Dombes. *For the Conversion of the Churches*. Trans. James Greig. Geneva, Switzerland: WCC Publications, 1993.
- Guelzo, Allen C. *Edwards on the Will: A Century of American Theological Debate*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1989.
- _____. "An Heir or a Rebel? Charles Grandison Finney and the New England Theology." *Journal of the Early Republic* 17, 1 (Spring 1997), 61-94.
- Gundry, Stanley N. *Love Them In: The Proclamation Theology of D. L. Moody*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1976.
- Gura, Philip F. *Jonathan Edwards: America's Evangelical*. New York: Hill and Wang, 2005.
- Gutjahr, Paul C. *Charles Hodge: Guardian of American Orthodoxy*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.
- Hambrick-Stowe, Charles E. *Charles G. Finney and the Spirit of American Evangelicalism*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996.
- _____. *The Practice of Piety: Puritan Devotional Disciplines in Seventeenth-Century New England*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982.
- Hankins, Barry. *American Evangelicals: A Contemporary History of a Mainstream Religious Movement*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2008.
- Hardman, Keith J. *Charles Grandison Finney, 1792-1875: Revivalist and Reformer*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1987.
- Haroutunian, Joseph. *Piety Versus Moralism: The Passing of the New England Theology*. New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1932.
- Harran, Marilyn J. *Luther on Conversion: The Early Years*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983.
- Harris, Harriet A. *Fundamentalism and Evangelicals*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- Harris, James A. *Of Liberty and Necessity: The Free Will Debate in Eighteenth-Century British Philosophy*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Hart, D. G. *Deconstructing Evangelicalism: Conservative Protestantism in the Age of Billy Graham*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004.
- _____. *Defending the Faith: J. Gresham Machen and the Crisis of Conservative Protestantism in Modern America*. 1994; rpt. Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2003.

- _____. *The Lost Soul of American Protestantism*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2002.
- _____. *That Old-Time Religion in Modern America: Evangelical Protestantism in the Twentieth Century*. The American Ways Series. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2002.
- Hart, D. G., Sean Michael Lucas, and Stephen J. Nichols, eds. *The Legacy of Jonathan Edwards: American Religion and the Evangelical Tradition*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003.
- Hatch, Nathan O. *The Democratization of American Christianity*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989.
- Hatch, Nathan O. and Harry S. Stout, eds. *Jonathan Edwards and the American Experience*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1988.
- Haykin, Michael A. G. and Kenneth J. Stewart, eds. *The Emergence of Evangelicalism: Exploring Historical Continuities*. Nottingham, England: InterVarsity Press, 2008.
- _____, eds. *The Advent of Evangelicalism: Exploring Historical Continuities*. Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2008.
- Helm, Paul. *The Beginnings: Word and Spirit in Conversion*. Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1986.
- Helm, Paul and Oliver D. Crisp, eds. *Jonathan Edwards: Philosophical Theologian*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2003.
- Helseth, Paul Kjoss. *“Right Reason” and the Princeton Mind: An Unorthodox Proposal*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2010.
- Henry, Carl F. H. *Evangelicals in Search of Identity*. Waco, TX: Word Books, 1976.
- Hewitt, Glenn A. *Regeneration and Morality: A Study of Charles Finney, Charles Hodge, John W. Nevin, and Horace Bushnell*. Chicago Studies in the History of American Religion. Brooklyn, NY: Carlson Publishing Inc., 1991.
- Hindmarsh, D. Bruce. *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative: Spiritual Autobiography in Early Modern England*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Hodges, Zane C. *Absolutely Free! A Biblical Reply to Lordship Salvation*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1989.
- Hoffecker, W. Andrew. *Charles Hodge: The Pride of Princeton*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2011.
- _____. *Piety and the Princeton Theologians*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing Co., 1981.

- _____. "The Relation between the Objective and Subjective Elements in Christian Religious Experience. A Study in the Systematic and Devotional Writings of Archibald Alexander, Charles Hodge, and Benjamin B. Warfield." PhD diss., Brown University, 1970.
- Holifield, E. Brooks. *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003.
- Holmes, Oliver Wendell. "Jonathan Edwards." *International Review* 9 (1880), 1-28.
- Holmes, Stephen R. *God of Grace and God of Glory: An Account of the Theology of Jonathan Edwards*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2001.
- _____. *Listening to the Past: The Place of Tradition in Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002.
- Holte, James Craig. *The Conversion Experience in America: A Sourcebook on Religious Conversion Autobiography*. New York: Greenwood Press, 1992.
- Hoopes, James. "Jonathan Edwards's Religious Psychology." *Journal of American History* 69, 4 (Mar 1983), 849-865.
- Horton, Michael, ed. *Christ the Lord: The Reformation and Lordship Salvation*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1992.
- _____. *Made in America: The Shaping of Modern American Evangelicalism*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1991.
- Howard, Thomas. *Evangelical Is Not Enough: Worship of God in Liturgy and Sacraments*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1984.
- Howe, Daniel Walker. *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- Hudson, Winthrop S. and John Corrigan. *Religion in America: An Historical Account of the Development of American Religious Life*. 5th Ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1992.
- Hunsinger, George. "Dispositional Soteriology: Jonathan Edwards on Justification by Faith Alone." *Westminster Theological Journal* 66 (2004), 107-20.
- Hunter, James Davison. *American Evangelicalism: Conservative Religion and the Quandary of Modernity*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1983.
- _____. *Evangelicalism: The Coming Generation*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987.

- Hunter, Todd D. *The Accidental Anglican: The Surprising Appeal of the Liturgical Church*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010.
- Husbands, Mark and Daniel J. Treier, eds. *Justification: What's At Stake in the Current Debates?* Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004.
- Hutchison, William R., ed. *American Protestant Thought in the Liberal Era*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1968.
- Jacobson, David. "Jonathan Edwards and the 'American Difference' Pragmatic Reflections on the 'Sense of the Heart.'" *Journal of American Studies* 21 (1987): 377-85.
- Jenson, Robert W. *America's Theologian: A Recommendation of Jonathan Edwards*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.
- Johnson, Gary L. W., ed. *B. B. Warfield: Essays on His Life and Thought*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2007.
- Johnston, Robert K. *Evangelicals at an Impasse: Biblical Authority in Practice*. Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1979.
- Johnston, Thomas Paul. *Examining Billy Graham's Theology of Evangelism*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2003.
- Kallenberg, Brad J. "Conversion Converted: Postmodern Formulation of the Doctrine of Conversion." *The Evangelical Quarterly* 67, 4 (Oct 1995), 358.
- Kantzer, Kenneth S. and Carl F. H. Henry, eds. *Evangelical Affirmations*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1990.
- Kidd, Thomas S. *The Protestant Interest: New England after Puritanism*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004.
- Kling, David W. and Douglas A. Sweeney, eds. *Jonathan Edwards: At Home and Abroad: Historical Memories, Cultural Movements, Global Horizons*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2003.
- Kreider, Alan. *The Change of Conversion and the Origin of Christendom*. Christian Mission and Modern Culture. Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1999.
- Kuklick, Bruce. *Churchmen and Philosophers: From Jonathan Edwards to John Dewey*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985.
- Kyle, Richard. *Evangelicalism: An Americanized Christianity*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2006.

- Lamb, Christopher and M. Darrel Bryant, eds. *Religious Conversion: Contemporary Practice and Controversies*. New York: Cassell, 1999.
- Lane, A. N. S. "Conversion: A Comparison of Calvin and Spener." *Themelios* 13, 1 (1987), 19-21.
- Larsen, Timothy, ed. *Biographical Dictionary of Evangelicals*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003.
- _____. *Crisis of Doubt: Honest Faith in Nineteenth-Century England*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- Larsen, Timothy and Daniel J. Treier, eds. *The Cambridge Companion to Evangelical Theology*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- Laurence, David. "Jonathan Edwards, Solomon Stoddard, and the Preparationist Model of Conversion." *Harvard Theological Review* 72 (1979), 267-83.
- Lee, Sang Hyun. *The Philosophical Theology of Jonathan Edwards*. Rev. Ed. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000.
- _____, ed. *The Princeton Companion to Jonathan Edwards*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005.
- Lee, Sang Hyun and Allen C. Guelzo, eds. *Edwards in Our Time: Jonathan Edwards and the Shaping of American Religion*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999.
- Lescelius, Robert. *Lordship Salvation: Some Crucial Questions and Answers*. Asheville, NC: Revival Literature, 1992.
- Lesser, M. X. *Reading Jonathan Edwards: An Annotated Bibliography in Three Parts, 1729-2005*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008.
- Lewis, C. S. *The Problem of Pain*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1962.
- Lightner, R. R. *Neo-Evangelicalism*. Findley, OH: Dunham, 1961.
- Loetscher, Lefferts A. *Facing the Enlightenment and Pietism: Archibald Alexander and the Founding of Princeton Theological Seminary*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1983.
- Long, Michael G., ed. *The Legacy of Billy Graham: Critical Reflections on America's Greatest Evangelist*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008.
- Lovelace, Richard F. *The Dynamics of Spiritual Life: An Evangelical Theology of Renewal*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979.

MacArthur, John F., Jr. *The Gospel According to Jesus: What Does Jesus Mean When He Says "Follow Me"?* Rev. Ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994.

Maddox, Randy L. *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology*. Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 1994.

_____, ed. *Rethinking Wesley's Theology for Contemporary Methodism*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1998.

Magnuson, Norris A. and William G. Travis. *American Evangelicalism: An Annotated Bibliography*. West Cornwall, CT: Locust Hill Press, 1990.

_____. *American Evangelicalism II: First Bibliographical Supplement, 1990-1996*. West Cornwall, CT: Locust Hill Press, 1997.

Markham, Paul N. *Rewired: Exploring Religious Conversion*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2007.

Marsden, George M. *The Evangelical Mind and the New School Presbyterian Experience: A Case Study of Thought and Theology in Nineteenth-Century America*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1970.

_____, ed. *Evangelicalism and Modern America*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1984.

_____. *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism, 1870-1925*. 2nd Ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.

_____. *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003.

_____. *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1987.

_____. *Religion and American Culture*. 2nd Ed. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2001.

_____. *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1991.

Martin, William. *A Prophet with Honor: The Billy Graham Story*. New York: William Morrow & Co., Inc., 1991.

Marty, Martin E. *Modern American Religion, Volume 1: The Irony of It All, 1893-1919*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986.

_____. *Righteous Empire: The Protestant Experience in America*. New York: The Dial Press, 1970.

- Matson, David L. *Household Conversion Narratives in Acts: Pattern and Interpretation*. Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996.
- Matthews, Arthur H. *Standing Up, Standing Together: The Emergence of the National Association of Evangelicals*. Carol Stream, IL: National Association of Evangelicals, 1992.
- May, Henry F. *The Enlightenment in America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1976.
- McClenahan, Michael. *Jonathan Edwards and Justification by Faith*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012.
- McClymond, Michael J. *Encounters with God: An Approach to the Theology of Jonathan Edwards*. Religion In America Series. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- McClymond, Michael J. and Gerald R. McDermott. *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012.
- McConnel, Tim. "The Old Princeton Apologetics: Common Sense or Reformed?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 46, 4 (Dec 2003), 647-72.
- McDermott, Gerald R. *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods: Christian Theology, Enlightenment Religion, and Non-Christian Faiths*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- _____. *One Holy and Happy Society: The Public Theology of Jonathan Edwards*. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992.
- McDowell, John et al. *What D. L. Moody Means to Me: An Anthology of Appreciations and Appraisals of the Beloved Founder of the Northfield Schools*. E. Northfield, MA: The Northfield Schools, 1937.
- McKnight, Scot. *Turning to Jesus: The Sociology of Conversion in the Gospels*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002.
- McKnight, Scot and Hauna Ondrey. *Finding Faith, Losing Faith: Stories of Conversion and Apostasy*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2008.
- McLoughlin, William G., Jr. *The American Evangelicals: 1800-1900*. New York: Harper, 1968.
- _____. *Modern Revivalism: Charles Grandison Finney to Billy Graham*. New York: The Ronald Press Co., 1959.
- Mead, Sidney E. *The Lively Experiment: The Shaping of Christianity in America*. New York: Harper & Row, 1963.

- Meadows, Philip R. "‘Candidates for Heaven’: Wesleyan Resources for a Theology of Religions." *The Wesleyan Theological Journal* 35, 1 (Spring 2000), 99-129.
- Miller, Perry. *Jonathan Edwards*. 1949; rpt. The American Men of Letters Series. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1973.
- _____. "Jonathan Edwards on the Sense of the Heart." *Harvard Theological Review* 41 (1948), 123-45.
- Minkema, Kenneth P. "Jonathan Edwards in the Twentieth Century." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*. 47, 4 (Dec 2004), 659-687.
- Moody, Josh, ed. *Jonathan Edwards and Justification*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012.
- _____. *Jonathan Edwards and the Enlightenment: Knowing the Presence of God*. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005.
- Moody, Paul Dwight. *My Father: A Biographical Portrait of the Pacesetter in Modern Mass Evangelism*. New York: Macmillan, 1963.
- Moody, William R. *The Life of D. L. Moody*. 1900. Reprint, New York: Macmillan, 1930.
- Moorhead, James H. *Princeton Seminary in American Religion and Culture*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2012.
- _____. "The Quest for Holiness in American Protestantism." *Interpretation* 53, 4 (Oct 1999). 365-379.
- Morgan, Edmund S. *Visible Saints: The History of a Puritan Idea*. 1963; rpt. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1965.
- Morimoto, Anri. *Jonathan Edwards and the Catholic Vision of Salvation*. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 1995.
- _____. "The Reality of Salvation in the Soteriology of Jonathan Edwards." PhD diss., Princeton Theological Seminary, 1991.
- Morris, J. N. *Renewed by the Word: The Bible and Christian Revival Since the Reformation*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2005.
- Mouw, Richard J. *The Smell of Sawdust: What Evangelicals Can Learn from Their Fundamentalist Heritage*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2000.
- Mulder, John M., ed. *Finding God: A Treasury of Conversion Stories*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2012.

- Muller, Richard A. *The Unaccommodated Calvin: Studies in the Foundation of a Theological Tradition*. Oxford Studies in Historical Theology. Gen. ed. David C. Steinmetz. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Murphy, Arthur E. "Jonathan Edwards on Free Will and Moral Agency." *The Philosophical Review* 68, 2 (Apr 1959), 181-202.
- Murphy, Murray G. "The Psychodynamics of Puritan Conversion." *American Quarterly* 31 (1979), 135-47.
- Murray, Iain H. *Evangelicalism Divided: A Record of Crucial Change in the Years 1950 to 2000*. Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 2000.
- _____. *Jonathan Edwards: A New Biography*. Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1987.
- _____. *Revival and Revivalism: The Making and Marring of American Evangelicalism 1750-1858*. Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1994.
- Nash, Ronald. *Evangelicals in America: Who They Are, What They Believe*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1987.
- _____. *The New Evangelicalism*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1963.
- Nichols, Stephen J. *An Absolute Sort of Certainty: The Holy Spirit and the Apologetics of Jonathan Edwards*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing Company, 2003.
- _____. *Jonathan Edwards: A Guided Tour of His Life and Thought*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing Company, 2001.
- Noll, Mark A. *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- _____. *Between Faith and Criticism: Evangelicals, Scholarship, and the Bible in America*. 1986; 2nd Ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1991.
- _____. "Common Sense Traditions and American Evangelical Thought." *American Quarterly*, 37, 2 (Summer 1985), 216-238.
- _____. *The Old Religion in a New World: The History of North American Christianity*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2002.
- _____. *Princeton and the Republic, 1768-1822: The Search for a Christian Enlightenment in the Era of Samuel Stanhope Smith*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989.
- _____, ed. *The Princeton Theology 1812:1921: Scripture, Science, and Theological Method from Archibald Alexander to Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield*. 1983; rpt. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001.

- _____. *The Rise of Evangelicalism: The Age of Edwards, Whitefield and the Wesleys. A History of Evangelicalism*, Vol. 1. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003.
- _____. *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1994.
- Noll, Mark A., David W. Bebbington, and George A. Rawlyk, eds. *Evangelicalism: Comparative Studies of Popular Protestantism in North America, the British Isles, and Beyond, 1700-1990*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Nock, Arthur Darby. *Conversion*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933.
- Oberg, Barbara B. and Harry S. Stout, eds. *Benjamin Franklin, Jonathan Edwards, and the Representation of American Culture*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1993.
- Olson, Roger E. *How to Be Evangelical Without Being Conservative*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008.
- _____. *The Westminster Handbook to Evangelical Theology*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004.
- Opie, John, Jr. "Conversion and Revivalism: An Internal History from Jonathan Edwards through Charles Grandison Finney." PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1963.
- _____, ed. *Jonathan Edwards and the Enlightenment*. Lexington, MA: D. C. Heath and Company, 1969.
- Packer, J. I., and Thomas C. Oden. *One Faith: The Evangelical Consensus*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004.
- Pastoor, Charles and Galen K. Johnson. *Historical Dictionary of the Puritans*. Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2007.
- Pauw, Amy Plantinga. "The Supreme Harmony of All': Jonathan Edwards and the Trinity." PhD diss., Yale University, May 1990.
- _____. *"The Supreme Harmony of All': The Trinitarian Theology of Jonathan Edwards*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2002.
- Peace, Richard V. *Conversion in the New Testament: Paul and the Twelve*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999.
- Pettegree, Andrew. *Reformation and the Culture of Persuasion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

- Pettit, Norman. *The Heart Prepared: Grace and Conversion in Puritan Spiritual Life*. Yale Publications in American Studies 11. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1966.
- Piper, John. *The Pleasures of God*. Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1991.
- Piper, John and Justin Taylor, eds. *A God Entranced Vision of All Things: The Legacy of Jonathan Edwards*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004.
- Pitkin, Barbara. *What Pure Eyes Could See: Calvin's Doctrine of Faith in Its Exegetical Context*. Oxford Studies in Historical Theology. Gen. ed. David C. Steinmetz. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Pollock, John C. *Billy Graham – Evangelist to the World: An Authorized Biography of the Decisive Years*. San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1979.
- _____. “Dwight L. Moody – Grandfather of Ecumenism?” *Christianity Today* 7 (23 Nov, 1962), 29-30 [189-90].
- _____. *Moody: A Biographical Portrait*. New York: Macmillan, 1963.
- _____. *Moody Without Sankey*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1963.
- Quebedeaux, Richard. *The Young Evangelicals: Revolution in Orthodoxy*. New York: Harper & Row, 1974.
- Rambo, Lewis R. “Theories of Conversion.” *Social Compass* 46 (1999), 259-271.
- _____. *Understanding Religious Conversion*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993.
- Rambo, Lewis R and Charles E. Farhadian, eds. *Oxford Handbook of Religious Conversion*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014.
- Rivers, Isabel. *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment: A Study of the Language of Religion and Ethics in England, 1660-1780, Volume 1: Whichcote to Wesley*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991.
- _____. *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment: A Study of the Language of Religion and Ethics in England, 1660-1780, Volume 2: Shaftesbury to Hume*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- Robert, Dana L. *Occupy until I Come: A. T. Pierson and the Evangelization of the World*. Library of Religious Biography. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2003.
- Rosell, Garth M. “Charles Grandison Finney and the Rise of the Benevolence Empire.” PhD diss., University of Minnesota, 1971.

- _____, ed. *Commending the Faith: The Preaching of D. L. Moody*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishing, 1999.
- _____. *The Surprising Work of God: Harold John Ockenga, Billy Graham, and the Rebirth of Evangelicalism*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008.
- Routley, Erik. *Conversion*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1960.
- Sandeen, Ernest. *The Origins of Fundamentalism: Toward a Historical Interpretation*. Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1968.
- Scheick, William J., ed. *Critical Essays on Jonathan Edwards*. Boston, MA: G. K. Hall & Co., 1980.
- Segal, A. F. *Paul the Convert: The Apostolate and Apostasy of Saul the Pharisee*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990.
- Selden, William K. *Princeton Theological Seminary: A Narrative History, 1812-1992*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992.
- Sharkey, S. A. "Peter's Call to Conversion." *TBT* 30 (1992), 84-89.
- Shelley, Bruce. *Evangelicalism in America*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1967.
- Shibley, Mark A. *Resurgent Evangelicalism in the United States: Mapping Cultural Change since 1970*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1996.
- Shuster, Robert D., James Stambaugh, and Ferne Weimer. *Researching Modern Evangelicalism: A Guide to the Holdings of the Billy Graham Center, with Information on Other Collections*. New York: Greenwood Press, 1990.
- Simonson, Harold P. *Jonathan Edwards: Theologian of the Heart*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974.
- Smith, Christian. *American Evangelicalism: Embattled and Thriving*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998.
- Smith, Gordon T. *Transforming Conversion: Rethinking the Language and Contours of Christian Initiation*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010.
- Smith, John E. "The Concept of Conversion." *Mid-Stream* 8, no. 3 (Spring 1969), 12-14.
- _____. *Jonathan Edwards: Puritan, Preacher, Philosopher*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992.

- Smith, Timothy L. "The Doctrine of the Sanctifying Spirit: Charles G. Finney's Synthesis of Wesleyan and Covenant Theology." *Wesley Theological Journal*, 13 (Spring 1978), 92-113.
- _____. *Revivalism and Social Reform: American Protestantism on the Eve of the Civil War*. 1957; rpt. Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1976.
- Smith, Wilbur M., ed. *An Annotated Bibliography of D. L. Moody*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1948.
- _____, ed. *The Best of D. L. Moody*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1971.
- Stein, Stephen J., ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Jonathan Edwards*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- _____. *Jonathan Edwards's Writings: Text, Context, Interpretation*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996.
- Steinmetz, David C. "Reformation and Conversion." *Theology Today* 35, 1 (Apr 1978), 25-32.
- Stephens, Bruce M. *The Holy Spirit in American Protestant Thought, 1750-1850*. Studies in American Religion, Vol. 59. Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1992.
- Stewart, John W. "Mediating the Center: Charles Hodge on American Science, Language, Literature, and Politics." *Studies in Reformed Theology and History* 3, 1 (Winter 1995), 1-114.
- Stewart, John W. and James H. Moorhead, eds. *Charles Hodge Revisited: A Critical Appraisal of His Life and Work*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2002.
- Stewart, Kenneth J. "Does Evangelicalism Pre-Date the 18th Century? An Examination of the David Bebbington Thesis." *Evangelical Quarterly* 67, 2 (2005), 135-153.
- Stone, Jon R. *On the Boundaries of American Evangelicalism: The Postwar Evangelical Coalition*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997.
- Storms, C. Samuel. *Tragedy in Eden: Original Sin in the Theology of Jonathan Edwards*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1985.
- Strobel, Kyle C. *Jonathan Edwards's Theology: A Reinterpretation*. New York: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2013.
- Sweeney, Douglas A. *The American Evangelical Story: A History of the Movement*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005.

- _____. "The Essential Evangelicalism Dialectic: The Historiography of the Early Neo-Evangelical Movement and the Observer-Participant Dilemma." *Church History* 60, 1 (Mar 1991), 60-74.
- _____. *Nathaniel Taylor, New Haven Theology, and the Legacy of Jonathan Edwards*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.
- Sweet, Leonard, I., ed. *The Evangelical Tradition in America*. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1997.
- Sweet, William Warren. *The American Churches: An Interpretation*. New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1948.
- Sweeting, George and Donald Sweeting. *Lessons from the Life of Moody*. Chicago: Moody Press, 2001.
- Taber, Charles R. "God vs. Idols: A Model of Conversion." *Journal of the Academy for Evangelism in Theological Education* 3, 20-32.
- Tidball, Derek J. *Who are the Evangelicals? Tracing the Roots of the Modern Movements*. London: Marshall Pickering, 1994.
- Tinker, Melvin, ed. *Restoring the Vision: Anglican Evangelicals Speak Out*. Eastbourne, Sussex: MARC, 1990.
- Toon, Peter. *About Turn: The Decisive Event of Conversion*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1987.
- _____. *Born Again: A Biblical and Theological Study of Regeneration*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1987.
- Toone, Mark J. "Evangelicalism in Transition: A Comparative Analysis of the Work and Theology of D. L. Moody and His Protégés, Henry Drummond and R. A. Torrey." PhD diss., St. Andrews University, Scotland, 1998.
- Toulouse, Mark G. and James O. Duke, eds. *Sources of Christian Theology in America*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1999.
- Trueman, Carl. *The Real Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*. Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2011.
- Wainwright, William J. *Reason and the Heart: A Prolegomenon to a Critique of Passional Reason*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995.
- Ward, W. R. *Early Evangelicalism: A Global Intellectual History, 1670-1789*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

- _____. *The Protestant Evangelical Awakening*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.
- Watt, David Harrington. *A Transforming Faith: Explorations of Twentieth-Century American Evangelicalism*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1991.
- Webber, Robert E and Lester Ruth. *Evangelicals on the Canterbury Trail: Why Evangelicals Are Attracted to the Liturgical Church*. Rev. Ed. New York: Morehouse Publishing, 2012.
- Weddle, David L. *The Law as Gospel: Revival and Reform in the Theology of Charles G. Finney*. Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1985.
- Wells, David F. *The Courage to Be Protestant: Truth-lovers, Marketers, and Emergents in the Postmodern World*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008.
- _____, ed. *Reformed Theology in America: A History of its Modern Development*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1997.
- Wells, David F. and John D. Woodbridge, eds. *The Evangelicals*. New York: Abingdon Press, 1975.
- Wetering, J. E. van de. "The Christian History of the Great Awakening," *Journal of Presbyterian History* 44 (1966), 122-129.
- Wilcox, Peter. "Conversion in the Thought and Experience of John Calvin." *Anvil* 14, 2 (1997), 113-128.
- _____. "Evangelisation in the Thought and Practice of John Calvin." *Anvil* 12, 3 (1995), 201-217.
- Witherington, Ben III. *The Problem with Evangelical Theology: Testing the Exegetical Foundations of Calvinism, Dispensationalism, and Wesleyanism*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2005.
- Witherup, Ronald D. *Conversion in the New Testament*. Zacchaeus Studies: New Testament. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1994.
- Withrow, Brandon G. *Becoming Divine: Jonathan Edwards's Incarnational Spirituality within the Christian Tradition*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011.
- Wolffe, John. *The Expansion of Evangelicalism: The Age of Wilberforce, More, Chalmers and Finney*. A History of Evangelicalism, Vol. 2. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007.
- Wright, G. Frederick. *Charles Grandison Finney*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1893.

Yarbrough, Stephen R. and John C. Adams. *Delightful Conviction: Jonathan Edwards and the Rhetoric of Conversion*. Great American Orators, No. 20. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1993.

Yates, Timothy E. "Christian Conversion 1902-1993: William James to Lewis Rambo." *Mission Studies* 13, 1 and 2 (1996), 306-19.