

“THEY CANNOT FORBEAR CRYING OUT”

A CRITICAL STUDY OF TRAVAILING PRAYER
AS A PATTERN OF PREPAREDNESS FOR REVIVAL,
EXAMINING IT HISTORICALLY IN THE THEOLOGY AND
PRACTICE OF JONATHAN EDWARDS AND CHARLES FINNEY

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ABSTRACT

While prayer has been commonly considered antecedent to and initiatory of revival, little historical analysis has been given to the correlation between them. And while strenuous intercession is an important prayer genre in Church history, one recurring in its association with Christian revival, much that has been written about it has been of a devotional or hortatory nature. This project examines, inductively and critically, a manner of praying advocated by two seminal leaders in American history—Jonathan Edwards and Charles Finney—seeking to understand a pattern of “travailing prayer” as preparedness for revival.

Travailing prayer was experienced in the Great Awakening of colonial New England and promoted in the Second Great Awakening of antebellum America, exhibiting attributes observable in periods throughout Church history. In this study, twelve of these characteristics are arranged in categories as a tool for detailed analysis of Edwards and Finney in regard to their theology and practice of travailing prayer. Chapter I of the project sets out this trait matrix as a methodology for comparative research.

Looking at Edwards and Finney through lenses of historical theology and Christian spirituality requires some context-setting, which is provided in Chapter II (along with timelines for chronological reference). Chapters III and IV give voice to what Edwards and Finney believed and experienced of travailing prayer across the twelve-point spectrum of its features, with Chapter V interpreting findings from the comparison of the two. Appendices provide extended excerpts from Edwards and Finney, along with two other illustrations of travailing prayer, one ancient and one contemporary.

Exploring how travailing prayer has been the expression of spiritual desperation in a discernible pattern of preparedness for Christian revival is the focus of this project. With Church historians tending to concentrate on particular revivals or their key leaders, this study addresses the need for research designed to synthesize comparative, historical insights into prayer and revival broadly, and the connections between them.

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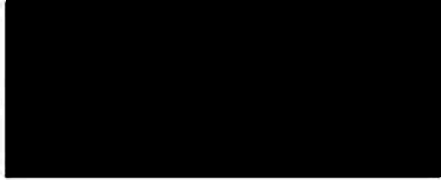
Above all, I am most grateful to God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit who has met me in this project and season of my life like never before.

Soli Deo Gloria

AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the University's Regulations and Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes and that it has not been submitted for any other academic award. Except where indicated by specific reference in the text, the work is the candidate's own work. Work done in collaboration with, or with the assistance of, others, is indicated as such. Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author.

Signed:



Date: June 2015

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FORMS OF CITATION

All forms of citation for Edwards and Finney references in this dissertation were developed and authorized in collaboration with respective library and research centre archivists and staff. Unless otherwise noted, all references comply with the following:

References to Edwards' writings published in the twenty-six volume Yale University Press Edition of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* are cited with the abbreviation "WJE" followed by the volume and page number, separated by a colon. For purposes of conciseness and consistency, volume, document, and editors' names are not included.

References to Edwards' writings published in digital form and accessed online from The Jonathan Edwards Center of Yale University (<http://edwards.yale.edu/>) are cited with the abbreviation "WJEO." Digitized sermons are referenced according to the original Schafer number, named for Thomas A. Schafer, who first arranged the sermons and put in chronological order the early, undated ones. Each sermon number is followed by Scripture text and online volume reference. Page references for digitized sermons indicate Edwards' leaf markings ["L"] on his duodecimo manuscripts, with "r" standing for "recto," or the page to the right of the fold, and "v" standing for "verso," or the page to the left of the fold. These marginal notations are provided in each online transcription. All URL addresses for digitized resources are provided in the bibliography.

References to Edwards' sermons published outside of the Yale edition provide the publication date and editor's name.

References to Edwards' unpublished and previously untranscribed materials are cited with reference to the Schafer number, Scripture text, original date, and the abbreviation "Gen. Mss. 151," indicating the Jonathan Edwards Collection of Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

Citations from Finney's *Lectures* refer to *Lectures on Revivals of Religion* [1835], McLoughlin, William G. (ed.), (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press), 1960.

Citations from Finney's *Memoirs* refer to *The Memoirs of Charles G. Finney* [1876], Rosell, Garth M., and Dupuis, Richard A. G. (eds), (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Academie Books of Zondervan Publishing House), 1989.

References to Finney's sermons published in *The Oberlin Evangelist*, digitized by Oberlin College Archives, cite volume, issue, and page numbers, with date of original publication. All URL addresses for digitized resources are provided in the bibliography.

Citations from handwritten, unpublished sermon outlines or "skeletons" in The Charles Grandison Finney Papers of Oberlin College Archives are referenced according to a numbering system based on the chronology of Finney's preaching developed by Roy Alan Cheesebro in his 1948 PhD dissertation (Yale), *The Preaching of Charles G. Finney*. Sermon numbers are followed by Finney's title, Scripture text, and original date.

Richard DuPuis, co-editor of the definitive edition of Finney's *Memoirs* and avid personal archivist of Finneyana, bequeathed his entire collection to the Oberlin College Archives. All references to rare publications and unpublished materials in this collection cite The Richard DuPuis Papers, Oberlin College Archive.

Capitalization, italicization, and spelling in Edwards and Finney citations, as well as those from all secondary material, are the author's.

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INTRODUCTION

CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF TRAVAILING PRAYER AS A PATTERN OF PREPAREDNESS FOR REVIVAL

A Story from the Hebrides

In his analysis of evangelical revivals in Scotland from 1880 to 1940, Tom Lennie notes how the Hebridean islands of Lewis, and to a lesser extent Harris and Skye, have had “a fascinating and unique history of evangelical awakenings, a legacy unparalleled anywhere in the world—especially from the 1820s to the mid 1900s.”¹ In the late fall of 2010, I spent six days on these remote, barren islands meeting with eleven persons who were first-hand witnesses² of what became one of the more well-known of the Hebridean revivals.³ These persons described the events of 1949-52, which were set in motion from the Barvas Church of Scotland where my interviews were conducted, as an “outpouring of the Holy Spirit” they sensed to be extraordinary, even historic, within the first days of its beginning.

Richard Lovelace, in *Dynamics of Spiritual Life: An Evangelical Theology of Renewal*, has characterised this period of the late 1940s as a time when a “harrowing depression and a war ended by weapons which seemed like a foretaste of the end of the world” had joined together in turning “the hearts of men to cry out to God in prayer.”⁴ Many young people had left the Hebrides to serve in World War II, returning with bewilderment at what they had seen across Europe and elsewhere, finding it difficult to settle again into what they had been taught as children.⁵ Andrew Woolsey notes the spiritual decline by the end of this decade among young people who would speak of conversion as “the plague”—something

¹ Lennie 2009, 456. In what is considered the “official” biography of Duncan Campbell, principal evangelist during the Hebridean Revival of 1949-52, Andrew Woolsey concurs with Lennie’s recognition of the unique nature of the Hebrides, and Lewis in particular, as fertile ground for revival, describing it as “perhaps the most favoured spot in Scotland, as far as sound evangelical witness was concerned.” (Woolsey 1982, 112)

² One of these, Agnes Morrison, claimed to be the sister of the very first convert in the Hebridean Revival of 1949-52.

³ The greater recognition of the Hebridean Revival of 1949-52 has been due in part to extensive documentation by Colin and Mary Peckham in their book, *Sounds from Heaven: the Revival on the Isle of Lewis, 1949-1952*. The Peckhams’ personal background in the region and knowledge of its people enhanced their access to sources, which include twenty-four eyewitness testimonies transcribed in the book.

⁴ Lovelace 1979, 53.

⁵ Woolsey, *op. cit.*, 112-13.

to be avoided at all costs.⁶ Church leaders began to be “greatly exercised in spirit” over the deteriorated “state of the church and the growing carelessness toward the Sabbath observance and public worship.”⁷

Deep concern grew into desperation among a few who began to engage in fervent petitionary prayer for spiritual awakening. While most accounts highlight the prayers of two sisters, Peggy and Christine Smith, and Revd James Murray MacKay,⁸ Lennie has suggested that such prayer was more broad-based:

A study of the famous revival of 1949-52 reveals that its outbreak in Barvas was preceded by numerous small groups of believers throughout the parish—not just the two Smith sisters that are singled out in many narratives—pleading with God together in cottages for another outpouring of His Spirit.⁹

This groundswell “in Barvas [as] God’s people agonized in prayer for hours and hours and sometimes all through the nights”¹⁰ was corroborated by Agnes Morrison, one of those I interviewed, who spoke of two men she had known at that time, Donald Saunders and Peter MacKenzie, who were well-recognised in the community for prayer. They would pray on their knees, and the floor would be wet from their tears, she recalled. One of them was known for praying with his arms outstretched.

The key leader of the Hebridean Revival of 1949-52 was Duncan Campbell,¹¹ an itinerant evangelist¹² affiliated with the Faith Mission, headquartered in Edinburgh, whose

⁶ *ibid*

⁷ Campbell 2010a, 13.

⁸ Brian Edwards, who wrote the foreword to the Peckhams’ book, explains that “Peggy was eighty-four and blind; Christine was eighty-two and crippled with arthritis. They prayed until they knew God was going to send revival. For months James Murray MacKay and his church leaders prayed for an outpouring of God’s Spirit.” (Edwards 1994, 82-83) One of these leaders praying with Revd MacKay was John Smith, father of Donald John Smith, whom I interviewed in Barvas.

⁹ Lennie, *op. cit.*, 463.

¹⁰ Duewel 2002, 27. In a phone interview on September 30, 2010, Wesley Duewel described his close personal relationship with Duncan Campbell and their many conversations during which Campbell recounted the events of the 1949-52 revival.

¹¹ In appreciation to Duncan Campbell for supplying the Foreword of his *In the Day of Thy Power*, Arthur Wallis wrote, “He is one of the very few in these Islands who have laboured in the midst of a general outpouring of the Spirit.” (Wallis 1956, xii)

¹² In his study of the 1858-62 revival in northeastern Scotland, Kenneth Jeffrey argues that three basic models of revival have appeared in Scottish Church history, one of which is those developing with the “increased itinerant travels of ... preachers among the ... people of the remote Highlands and Islands.” (Lennie, *op. cit.*, 27 [Jeffrey,

“pilgrims” had, since 1886, launched many localised awakenings in Scotland from the starting point of intense, soul-searching intercession. “Time and again,” according to Lennie, “reports tell of pilgrims wrestling in deep heartfelt prayer for days, whole nights and even entire weeks from a spiritually dark location before at last a breakthrough was reached.”¹³ In their account of the revival, Colin and Mary Peckham depicted this priority and quality of prayer as the seminal catalyst of what happened during Campbell’s itinerancy in the region:

Why have these places been so favoured? ... Because they have come to know the secret of humility, of seeking the Lord, of depending on Him to work, of importunately laying hold of Him, of passionately pleading with Him, God heard from heaven and came to them, forgiving their sin and healing their land. They had known revival and they knew how it came. It came, not by organizing, by programmes, by games evenings but by prayer—and they prayed; it came by soul travail—and they travailed.¹⁴

Campbell himself, whose original ten-day engagement in Lewis stretched to nearly three years, seemed never to completely get over the praying that had preceded him and that he had witnessed in the Hebrides,¹⁵ what had led, unmistakably in his mind, to the period of renewed religious interest remembered so vividly and fondly by persons I met:

Here is a scene witnessed during the first days of the movement: A crowded church, the service is over: the congregation, reluctant to disperse, stand outside the church in a silence that is tense. Suddenly a cry is heard within: a young man, burdened for the souls of his fellow men, is pouring out his soul in intercession. He prays until he falls into a trance and lies prostrate on the floor of the church. But Heaven had heard, and the congregation, moved by a power that they could not resist, came back into the church, and a wave of conviction of sin swept over the gathering...¹⁶

Kenneth S., *When the Lord Walked the Land: The 1858-62 Revival in The North East of Scotland* (Carlisle, England: Paternoster) 2002.]

¹³ *ibid*, 464. This dedication to fervent prayer had been known broadly among Scottish evangelical pastors before the launch of the Faith Mission. In one of a series of important addresses by evangelical leaders in 1840 in Glasgow, Revd Alexander Cumming, minister of Dunbarney Parish, said, “Blessings of great magnitude are associated with ardour and perseverance in prayer... It is the invariable constitution of the kingdom of heaven that blessings of great magnitude are not imparted except to prayers of the deepest urgency.” (Cumming 1984 [1840], 134)

¹⁴ Peckham 2004, 127.

¹⁵ “I think again of those people in the Hebrides. How they longed and how they prayed and how they waited and how they cried, ‘Oh God, rend the heavens and come down,’ and all the time God was handling them; all the time God was dealing with them...” (Campbell 1962, 28-29)

¹⁶ Campbell 2010a, 7. Woolsey writes that when the Barvas minister visited Peggy and Christine Smith on the day following the outbreak of revival, “they told how they had been battling in prayer the previous night reminding God again of his promise. ‘We struggled through the hours of the night refusing to take a denial. Had He not promised and would He not fulfill. Our God is a covenant-keeping God and he must be true to his covenant engagements.’” (Woolsey, *op. cit.*, 118)

This “pouring out [one’s] soul in intercession” Campbell refers to is the key interest of my research: spiritual desperation leading to and expressed in prayer for Christian revival, what nineteenth-century American and British revivalists and devotional writers referred to as “travailing prayer.”

Crux of this Project

These encounters with direct observers of what took place in the Hebrides illustrate the continuing relevance of the topic. But research also reveals how the Hebridean Revival of 1949-52 could be representative of other episodes in Church history in which travelling prayer has been perceived as a preparatory or initiatory manifestation of Christian revival,¹⁷ a sequence which introduces an important range of critical issues meriting historical and theological examination.

For example, research such as this into an aspect of the origins of revival brings forward the tricky question of causality, around which no scholarly consensus exists.¹⁸ For some, travelling prayer could be viewed as one part of a recipe of conditions God requires and which, if met, He is bound to reciprocate. Robert Coleman sums up this formulaic line of thinking:

The responsibility for revival rests with us. Moreover, the conditions are clear. We must lay hold upon the surety of God’s Word. We must confess our sin and turn from our deceitful ways. We must pray in the faith that God answers according to His will. ... These conditions are merely different ways of saying the same thing, namely, that Christ must be exalted on earth as He is in heaven. When this condition exists, there is revival.¹⁹

¹⁷ It should be acknowledged that revival and renewal movements can occur and have been studied in various contexts outside of Christianity. One influential example of this is the work of anthropologist Anthony F. C. Wallace who examined several hundred “revitalization movements”—ancient and modern, cultural and religious, all over the world—and reported his findings in a 1956 essay entitled “Revitalization Movements: Some Theoretical Considerations for Their Comparative Study.” (*American Anthropologist* 58, April 1956, 264-65). For the purposes of this project, research has focused on Christian revival and renewal movements.

¹⁸ “Among scholars,” writes Michael McClymond, editor of the *Encyclopedia of Religious Revivals in America*, “there is no consensus as to why revivals occur. Some have noted that the causes of revivals are complex and cannot be reduced to a single causal factor.” (McClymond 2007, xxvii.) Kathryn Long observed this variance of explanation for the 1857-58 Revival: “Depending on the perspectives of their authors, the early histories offered different explanations of the cause and spread of the revival.” (Long 1998, 13)

¹⁹ Coleman 1969, 43. See also McGavran 1970, 180.

Lennie counters, however, citing revivals that have sprung up with little or no evidence of travelling prayer accompanying them:

It would appear that the connection between fervent, continual prayer by a group of believers in a community, and resultant revival in that locality has often been overstated. ... In such cases it is impossible to prove or disprove any cause and effect pattern. And it must be noted that in some places faithful believers have prayed for decades for a spiritual outpouring, with no evidence of any resulting blessing.²⁰

This project acknowledges at the outset that Christian revival movements are complex events and, thus, have complex antecedents.²¹ Having jettisoned the idea of travelling prayer as cause or guarantee of revival, my research has been aimed inductively at a more subtle analysis²² of how this form of prayer may operate in correlation with and as an influence in revival.

Another related example of the interpretive considerations this study comprises is that of human instrumentality in revival: the centuries-long Calvinist-Arminian debate over the effect of human efforts in promoting spiritual awakening. Much has been written about how this difference is expressed throughout the major awakenings and revivals in American history: the rift between nineteenth-century Old School clergy and their counterparts favouring “new measures,” between a view of revival as often occurring “as the surprising work of God” and those who recognise ways in which it may be prepared for and even predicted. Students of trans-Atlantic renewal movements have sometimes viewed eighteenth-century Calvinist “revivals,” for which Jonathan Edwards (1703-58) was the preeminent theologian, as shifting into nineteenth-century Arminian “revivalism,” with Charles Finney

²⁰ Lennie, *op. cit.*, 463-64. During a phone interview upon my return from the Hebrides in December 2010, Steve Taylor, author of *The Skye Revivals*, commented that he had “come across very little” evidence of corporate travelling prayer as a factor of preparation for renewal in his research.

²¹ Martha Howell and Walter Prevenier assert this as basic to all historiography, how historical interpretation should proceed with “provisional causal statements” which “must take account of that complexity.” (Howell and Prevenier 2001, 128)

²² Richard Cawardine demonstrates this nuanced treatment of causality as he tracks various periods of economic depression and Church renewal to vindicate, in part, “Whitney Cross’ verdict that ‘the revival cycle had long been inclined to an inverse conformity with the business cycle, rising with hard times and falling with good.’ ... But, equally there was no mechanical or wholly predictable relationship between economic and religious phenomena.” (Cawardine 1978, 54) See Cross 1950, 12.

(1792-1875) as a key figure in this transition.²³ However, “too sharp a contrast should not...be drawn between ‘worked up’ and ‘prayed down’ revivals,” Richard Cawardine warns in *Transatlantic Revivalism: Popular Evangelicalism in Britain and America*.²⁴ McClymond, editor of the *Encyclopedia of Religious Revivals in America* agrees: “It is hard to draw a clear and clean line of division between ‘revival’ and ‘revivalism.’ Calvinists, who wait on God to bring revival, exert themselves to cause it to happen. Arminians, who exert themselves to cause revival, also have to wait on God. These two theologies of revival may be closer in practice than they are in theory.”²⁵ Strenuous, petitionary prayer was a pattern of preparedness for revival acknowledged as crucial by Edwardsians²⁶ and Finneyans²⁷ alike: prayer as human action allowing for supernatural cause of revival. This project steps into that intersection and proposes to drill down at the crossroads.

With these and other interpretive issues in view, the crux of my research, then, is this: **the critical study of travailing prayer as a pattern of preparedness for revival, examining it historically in the theology and practice of Jonathan Edwards and Charles Finney.** A trait-matrix of travailing prayer, described beginning on p. 41, has been used for in-depth comparison of what Edwards and Finney emphasised in the content, form, practice, and context of travailing prayer. Carefully examining their work in this way, as well as that of their critics, then and now, we discover how Edwards and Finney understood and gave priority to one or more of these categories, to some of the traits within them, and to how these accents may have changed over time. Such a study assumes that many, though not all,

²³ McClymond 2007, xix. See also Cawardine, *op. cit.*, 17.

²⁴ Cawardine, *op. cit.*, 5.

²⁵ McClymond 2007, xix.

²⁶ “During the 1720s and 1730s, pastors regularly reminded their hearers that they should ask God to send the Holy Spirit, especially on special days of prayer and fasting. According to Daniel Baker, people should use the prayer days to ‘plead for the out-pouring of the Spirit, and the Grace of God on this People.’” (Kidd 2004, 28 [Baker, Daniel, *Two Sermons* (Boston, 1728)].)

²⁷ “When this drives Christians to their knees in prayer to God, with strong crying and tears, you may be certain there is going to be a revival.” (Finney, *Lectures*, 29)

revival and renewal movements exhibit recurring patterns²⁸ with phases transpiring before, during, and after the movement. And my research is not the first to pay attention to the opening stage of preparedness for revival. Allan Story has explored how instances of preparation for revival bore theological and practical resemblance to the “New England preparationism” influencing Jonathan Edwards.²⁹ In his *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*, Charles Finney catalogued seven indicators for recognising “when a revival of religion is needed” and several more signs of when a revival may be expected.³⁰ However, while for both Edwards and Finney, and for most practitioners and students of revival, prayer has been posited as fundamental to anticipation of revival,³¹ little academic work has been done on the relationship of the two, or what pattern that prayer might take—an observation confirmed in every conversation I have with scholars of Church history or Christian spirituality. Acknowledging how revival leaders, past and present, have identified prayer as anticipatory of revival, this project has been curious to understand what they may have really meant by that: at a deeper level, what pattern of “prayer” for revival has been sought? Particularly with Edwards and Finney, was there any patterning between them, revealed from recurring

²⁸ Commenting on Lovelace, Snyder writes: “Without going into a discussion of all the elements Lovelace suggests as factors in renewal, one can at least affirm that successive renewal movements often do follow discernible patterns.” (Snyder 1980b, 126. See also Shaw 2010, 27) I would agree with Snyder in viewing these patterns as descriptive rather than prescriptive. Some scholars, however, are critical of a patterning or cyclical interpretive framework of religious revivals. See a summary of “four main lines of attack” upon Joseph Tracy’s (1842) “cyclical theory of Great Awakenings” in William G. McLoughlin, “Timepieces and Butterflies: A Note on the Great-Awakening-Construct and Its Critics,” *Sociological Analysis* 44, 2, Summer 1983, 103-10. See also Michael Barkun, “The Awakening-Cycle Controversy,” *Sociological Analysis* 46, 4, Winter 1985, 425-43.

²⁹ “Preparationism was a form of using means in hoping to prepare men for conversion. There are important parallels between preparationism and preparation for revival. Preparationism is related to conversion in a way similar to the way preparation for revival is related to revival. Both conversion and revival are sovereignly bestowed by God. But both preparationism and preparation for revival make use of means in striving toward these goals of conversion and revival even while recognizing that they are sovereignly granted by God. Indeed, both preparationism and preparation for revival insist on the necessity of means.” (Story 1994, 98.)

³⁰ Finney, *Lectures*, 24-26, 28-36.

³¹ Viv Grigg’s suggestion from research on contemporary renewal movements in New Zealand is typical: “Beginning with the united prayer of Acts 2 and Acts 4, revival literature confirms the pre-existence of prayer movements. ... It would be difficult to cite any book that did not begin with this presupposition.” (Grigg 2009, 134.)

historical criteria, in the manner of petition they believed was requisite and efficacious for revival?

In tightening the focus for in-depth research, extensive reading has surfaced the particular genre of travailing prayer—expressed in varied forms and diverse cultures over time, embraced in the Great Awakening of colonial America, and advocated in the Second Awakening of the expanding United States. This opening chapter aims at providing context for interpreting the travailing prayer tradition and proposes a tool and strategy for drawing comparisons from how Edwards and Finney experienced and wrote about travailing prayer. The overall project, a work of historical theology, incorporates biblical study and theological reflection but emphasises history as the essential material and primary approach to interpretation. What has resulted is a critical, historical assessment of travailing prayer as a correlative influence in Christian revival, hopefully laying groundwork for future research.

Key Concepts and Terms

Revival and Revivalism In *Global Awakening: How 20th Century Revivals Triggered a Christian Revolution*, Mark Shaw contends that revivals have become the “delivery system” of a range of powerful factors producing a global resurgence of Christianity in the last century.³² However, origins of “revival” as he uses the word³³ are often though not exclusively associated with Great Britain and North America beginning from the eighteenth century. And while the revival tradition found expression in Roman Catholicism through “parish missions” in nineteenth-century America,³⁴ and through the global charismatic renewal more recently,³⁵ it has primarily been perceived as a Protestant

³² Shaw, *op. cit.*, 12.

³³ “A typical definition describes a revival as ‘the work of the Holy Spirit in restoring the people of God to a more vital spiritual life, witness and work by prayer and the Word after repentance in crisis for the spiritual decline.’” (Shaw, *op. cit.*, 15 [Moreau, Scott, ed., “Revival,” *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books)].)

³⁴ Dolan 1978, 40-41.

³⁵ Hocken 1981, 36-41.

evangelical³⁶ phenomenon. Iain Murray has suggested that the word “revivalism” emerged through the camp meeting movement, propelled following the Cane Ridge, Kentucky, meeting in early August, 1801, and spreading across the southern states in the first decades of the 1800s.³⁷ Historians typically link Arminian “revivalism” of the Second Great Awakening with a variety³⁸ of human endeavours and methods for promoting revivals, and Calvinist “revival” of the First Great Awakening with the unplanned, sovereign outpouring of the Spirit of God in a church or locality. Finney’s idea of divine-human cooperation in revival as “not a miracle” but the “purely philosophical result of the right use of constituted means”³⁹ carries negative connotations, now as then, among Calvinists for its risk of manipulation, insincerity, and emotionalism.⁴⁰ Found in both streams, however, are emphases on prayer and the role of the Holy Spirit, consideration of which is important to this project.

Desperation This study originated in personal curiosity about an aspect of the human side of revival, a pursuit bearing the imprint of my background in the Arminian tradition, with its “spirituality of seeking” and distinctive revival zeal.⁴¹ Interest in the role of human desperation in revival is indigenous to the Wesleyan-Arminian legacy that was born from a climate of desire for God, has recognised value in intensified spiritual urgency, and has been marked historically by exertion in pursuit of spiritual renewal. These dynamics can

³⁶ Out of a 2002 conference at King’s College, London, was published a set of papers entitled *On Revival: A Critical Review*, in which Meic Pearse writes, “‘Revival’ is a category that belongs to the thought forms and behaviour patterns of Evangelicals, rather than to Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox or even to Protestantism broadly understood.” (Pearse 2003, 159)

³⁷ Murray 1996, 190.

³⁸ Nigel Scotland has examined the impact of ten different forms of American revivalism upon British Christianity in *Apostles of the Spirit and Fire: American Revivalists and Victorian Britain* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock) 2009.

³⁹ Finney, *Lectures*, 13. In a series of short “Letters on Revivals” which appeared in *The Oberlin Evangelist* from January 29, 1845, through June 24, 1846, Finney placed greater emphasis on God’s grace and sovereignty, calmness of mind, and the normal life of the church in revival. See p. 40, note 213.

⁴⁰ Lovelace has pointed to this “replacement of the old comprehensive concept of *revival* with the post-Finneyan machinery of *revivalism* as being at the root of evangelicalism’s decay in America.” (Lovelace, *op. cit.*, 51)

⁴¹ “Self-described Arminian and Wesleyan Christians have been more consistently positive in their attitude toward revivals than Calvinistic Christians. To a remarkable extent, Calvinistic or Reformed Christians have been historically prominent for arguing for both pro-revival and anti-revival positions.” (McClymond 2007, xxix, note 6)

be thought of as elements of Christian spirituality, a crucial⁴² and potentially fruitful resource in developing a taxonomy for the historical study of revival, and one that has frequently been passed over out of preference for social science methodologies.⁴³

Spiritual desperation as a possible factor in revival is defined in this project as radical reliance upon and availability to God, acknowledged and felt in circumstances of need or taken up and sustained by choice. The word “desperation” does not appear in the Bible, but the idea can be traced in biblical images of hunger⁴⁴ and thirst,⁴⁵ in the events and effects of wild and liminal locations,⁴⁶ and above all in Scripture’s prayers of distress:⁴⁷ from Israel’s cry for deliverance from Egyptian slavery,⁴⁸ and the pathos of psalms of dereliction⁴⁹ and lament,⁵⁰ to the desperate calls of the infirm in healing stories of the gospels.⁵¹ History seems to indicate that desperation is not always present in a pattern of preparedness for revival.⁵² However, in his survey of revivals around the world during the twentieth century, arguably the most globally generative period of revival ever, Shaw observes “the soil⁵³ into which the

⁴² With “awareness of the holiness of God and the depth of sin” described as primary among eleven *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, Lovelace (1979, 75) builds his model of continuous renewal on the idea that “spiritual dynamics are the most important ones in understanding revival.” (Shaw, *op. cit.*, 15)

⁴³ “Social and psychological standpoints add a range of possible understandings of revival,” writes William Kay. But, “in the nature of the case, it is not easy for these disciplines to be rigorously applied. This is a methodological limitation stemming from the fact that revivals are such undisciplined, ephemeral and various events.” (Kay 2003, 201)

⁴⁴ Lk 6:21

⁴⁵ Ps 42:1-2

⁴⁶ Belden Lane has observed, in *The Solace of Fierce Landscapes: Exploring Desert and Mountain Spirituality*, how in the Bible God “repeatedly leads people into hostile landscapes, away from society and its conventions, to invite them into something altogether new.” (Lane 1998, 45)

⁴⁷ Ps 18:6

⁴⁸ Ex 2:23-25, 3:7-8

⁴⁹ “The one word that seems best to embrace these various aspects is that used at the beginning of Psalm 130, namely ‘depths’: ‘Out of the depths I cry to thee, O Lord!’ The psalmist has hit rock bottom in this life; to sink any lower must be to sink into Sheol. He is helpless to raise himself...” (McKay 1988, 6-8)

⁵⁰ Biblical lament is very similar to travailing prayer as it is studied in this project, with one distinctive difference: travailing prayer fervently anticipates God’s involvement, while “lament is a cry over a relationship in crisis.” (Ellington 2008, 10) See Brueggemann 1986, 57-71.

⁵¹ Lk 9:38, 17:12

⁵² Commenting on the prosperity accompanying “the revival under Asa” in 2 Chr 15, C. E. Autrey writes, “As a rule men seek God only when their physical needs are extreme. This has been the case so many times in history that we often think revival cannot come apart from hardships and depression. The revival under Asa refutes this idea.” (Autrey 1960, 99-100) Similarly, McClymond asserts: “Eras of religious revival do not seem to correspond to periods of social strain or turmoil in American history.” (McClymond 2007, xxvii-xxviii)

⁵³ Effects of dynamics analogous to the “soil of volatility” have been explored in other disciplines such as “the edge of chaos” and “burning platform” in economics (Pascale, Milleman, and Gioja, 2000), extremity and hope

seed of revival is sown is one of discontent, uncertainty, and volatility.”⁵⁴ These factors may be thought to parallel the operation of desperation as it is being defined in this project according to five patterns emerging from my research:

1) catastrophic events and economic hardship

Circumstances such as natural disaster, disease, war, or financial trouble have sometimes appeared in history to foster spiritual hunger and fervent prayer for revival.⁵⁵ Finney believed catastrophe and societal adversity could be revelatory: these kinds of “peculiar and alarming events” and “the state of public health” could be means by which “God may indicate His will to a people” that revival is possible and imminent.⁵⁶

2) concern over spiritual declension in church and society

While periodic calamity may affect a widespread swath of a regional or national population, concern over declension in church and society as a pattern of desperation preceding renewal appears primarily to disturb Christian believers, especially those in leadership. From his research on prayer in American revival movements, 1740-1860, Lyrene observes: “One of the prominent characteristics of all periods of awakening was a widespread concern over the decay of religious vitality and biblical standards. ... It may be concluded that before Christians will pray earnestly for revival, they must be deeply concerned.”⁵⁷

3) deep seriousness about sin and the judgement of God

As frank assessment of circumstances gains substance and gravity, recognition deepens in regard to the seriousness of sin and personal responsibility before God’s judgement. Penultimate to God’s final judgement, in Edwards’ view, would be the renewal and increase of the Church, which could be drawn nearer through fervent prayer⁵⁸ in anticipation of that day when the promises we have pled will be fulfilled, and even Christ Himself “shall see of the travail of his soul, and be satisfied.”⁵⁹

4) the burden of fervent prayer as a charism⁶⁰ or spiritual gift

Many revival leaders also speak of a kind of spiritual desperation given by God to some independently from personal circumstances. Desperation in one’s context is not as determining as

in philosophy (Steinbock, 2007), panic in sociology (Blum, 1996), and despair in psychology (Hendin, *et al.*, 2007).

⁵⁴ Shaw, *op. cit.*, 23. “As historical movements, revivals begin with problems. Their soil is often that of social volatility and the failure of older forms of the faith or traditional religion to deal with that volatility. Out of the ashes of the old springs the new.” (*ibid*, 29) Shaw draws a correlation between “volatility” and the operation of “stress” in Anthony F. C. Wallace’s model of revitalisation movements. (*ibid*, 25-26) See note 17.

⁵⁵ “From the reports of the Scriptures to those of pastors, missionaries, and historical figures down through the centuries, we are told of those times when ordinary praying is not enough. Crises, periods of danger, or times of great sin compel God’s people to seek God for the glory of his name.” (Bakke 2000, 31)

⁵⁶ Finney, *Lectures*, 29.

⁵⁷ Lyrene 1985, 225-26.

⁵⁸ “It is the expressly revealed will of God, that his church should be very much in prayer for that glorious outpouring of the Spirit that is to be in the latter days, and the things that shall be accomplished by it.” (WJE 5:348)

⁵⁹ *ibid*, 344 (Isa 53:11 [KJV]).

⁶⁰ “Charism” (Greek *charisma*, χάρισμα) is derived from the Greek word *charis* (χάρις), meaning grace. It refers to a gift of the Holy Spirit to Christians equipping them to “assume various works and offices, for the renewal and upbuilding of the church.” (Cunningham 2000, 279 [Dogmatic Constitution of the Church, *Lumen Gentium* no. 12]) As a biblical word, broadly used from the patristic period until the Reformation (O’Donnell 1996, 88) and recently rediscovered (*ibid*, 89), “charism” refers here to travailing prayer as a spiritual gift or empowerment, what revival leaders referred to later as the “spirit of prayer,” and the petitioner’s sense of related vocation or office. See also McBrien 1995, 299-300.

is one's sense of receiving the "spirit" or "burden" of travailing prayer by God as an appointment or calling, aimed at the conversion of sinners as the centrepiece of revival.⁶¹

5) persecution

Edwards recognised a possible link between persecution and prayer for revival, commenting in *An Humble Attempt* on how the Jacobite rebellion (1745-46) and the persecution of French Huguenots (1715-74) "may well give occasion to the people of God, to renewed and extraordinary earnestness in their prayers to him, for ... that liberty and glory of his church that shall follow."⁶² This final aspect of spiritual desperation as a pattern of preparedness for revival is one that could receive greater attention in future research on a case study coming from a context outside of the West.

Recognising the multi-causal nature of revivals, I have been interested to explore how these patterns of spiritual desperation may layer and interact in multiple feedback loops—experientially, chronologically, theologically, or otherwise—as one contributes to a deeper or more penetrating experience, bringing persons or groups to the "tipping point" of entering into the nadir of travailing prayer. Inductive research correlating these five streams of desperation with the milieus of the First and Second Awakenings has led me to theorise travailing prayer as an expression of the farthest extremity of desperation, a spiritual posture often resisted and usually reached only with mounting pressure.

Of crucial importance within the limits of this project is the way travailing prayer expresses **an action in response** to the experience of spiritual desperation. Becoming able, through historical research, to understand how people may have perceived themselves as desperate could more likely result from observing their actions rather than from only analysing their or others' descriptions of surrounding circumstances or inner motivations. In *From Reliable Sources: An Introduction to Historical Methods*, Howell and Prevenier discuss how

scholars such as Robert Berkhofer have developed an analysis that focuses on what people in the past did rather than on what they thought or felt. The argument here is that the historian cannot re-create the mental world of the past except by means of studying what these people did, since historians bring too much of themselves into interpretations of what another age thought or felt.⁶³

⁶¹ "A Christian who has this spirit of prayer feels anxious for souls. It is the subject of his thoughts all the time, and makes him look and act as if he had a load on his mind. ... Sometimes this feeling is very deep; persons have been bowed down so that they could neither stand nor sit." (Finney, *Lectures*, 30)

⁶² WJE 5: 358-59

⁶³ Howell and Prevenier, *op. cit.*, 93.

Analysing travelling prayer from this viewpoint—as an *expression or action in response* to the experience of spiritual desperation preceding revival—could help mitigate some of the empirical challenges associated with research into an aspect of subjective experience.

Prayer Despite these and other research challenges,⁶⁴ Roy Hammerling asserts in his introduction to *A History of Prayer: The First to the Fifteenth Century* that an historical examination of prayer such as I propose here can be a worthy enterprise, for

by studying prayer, the scholar studies the world, both physical and metaphysical, as the people of old saw it. As a result, modern scholars have little hope of understanding their forbears if they cannot understand that act which was at the core of their consciousness, namely prayer.⁶⁵

According to Lyrene, “Prayer is the central phenomenon of religion and ‘the very hearthstone of all piety.’ [It] is ‘religion in the making.’”⁶⁶ But while prayer is the bedrock of spirituality, “the very soul and essence of religion,”⁶⁷ it is not stationary or monolithic. For example, we can attempt to track the travelling prayer tradition over time, as this chapter does in its next section, because prayer has always been unfolding in response to need. So, Hammerling adds, “to observe the evolution of Christian prayer is to see the dynamic development of Christianity itself.”⁶⁸ Prayer, in its Christian sense,⁶⁹ is this dynamic,

⁶⁴ “The difficulty of developing a comprehensive academic definition of prayer lies partly in the fact that prayer itself is at one and the same time a very simple and remarkably complicated concept. ... Prayers are not only as diverse as the people who utter them, but they exist in a myriad of contexts, forms, and practices, which if ignored will cause confusion and lead to erroneous scholarly analysis.” (Hammerling 2008, 3) An analytical tool for historical study of the travelling prayer tradition based on Hammerling’s model of content, form, practice, and context is described beginning on p. 41.

⁶⁵ *ibid*, 27

⁶⁶ Lyrene, *op. cit.*, 18 (Heiler 1932, xiii).

⁶⁷ Whittington and Scher 2010, 59 (James, William, *Varieties of Religious Experience* [New York: Modern Library] 1902, 1994).

⁶⁸ Hammerling, *op. cit.*, 16.

⁶⁹ Intense emotion like that in travelling prayer is not unique to Christianity or to the West, as can be seen in a sampling of chapters in *Holy Tears: Weeping in the Religious Imagination* (Patton, Kimberley Christine, and John Stratton Hawley [eds], [Princeton: Princeton University Press] 2005): “The Poetics and Politics of Ritualized Weeping in Early and Medieval Japan”; “Productive Tears: Weeping Speech, Water, and the Underworld in Mexican Tradition”; “Weeping in Classical Sufism”; and “A Love for All Seasons: Weeping in Jewish Sources”. Commenting on the desperate praying of heathen sailors upon whose ship Jonah is found evading God’s call, Moshe Greenberg, Professor of Bible at the Hebrew University, Jerusalem, writes, “Every human being is capable of formulating a petitionary prayer to his need, not only such heroes as Moses and Jacob, but even such roughnecks as Samson, and even pagans.” (Greenberg 1983, 17.) See Chapter II, note 231; Chapter III, notes 179-80; Chapter IV, notes 99-102. While fervour and emotion can be found in the prayer of

personal link people may have with God⁷⁰ from the depths of human personhood. Petitionary prayer—the genus of which travailing prayer is a species,⁷¹ considered by some “the heart and centre of prayer”⁷²—is premised upon the biblical conviction⁷³ that prayer is efficacious, that God does some things because we pray for them and leaves other things undone because they were never requested.⁷⁴

Survey of Scholarship and Importance of this Project

This project may be envisioned as a dialectic of two fields of historical research in the areas of revival and prayer (see next page). The work of historian William G. McLoughlin (1922-92) of Brown University, “the acknowledged leader in the study of American revivals”⁷⁵ among scholars of the last century, provides a foundation to my study, particularly as he edited the standard version of Finney’s *Lectures on Revivals of Religion* (1960). Research also draws from the work of J. Edwin Orr, who produced a series of narratives chronicling global revivals of the last two centuries. His analysis emphasised revival as the restoration of New Testament forms of Christianity in the repetition of the phenomena of the book of Acts of the Apostles, particularly preaching and prayer. However central these were, Richard Lovelace’s work suggested more than this was going on in revival. He unfolded eleven elements of spiritual renewal at the heart of

other major world religions, which may be mentioned hereafter referentially, my research concerned itself only with the study of Christian prayer.

⁷⁰ “For there to be prayer in the Christian sense of the word a specifically personal relationship has to be established with the living God.” (Clément 1995, 181.)

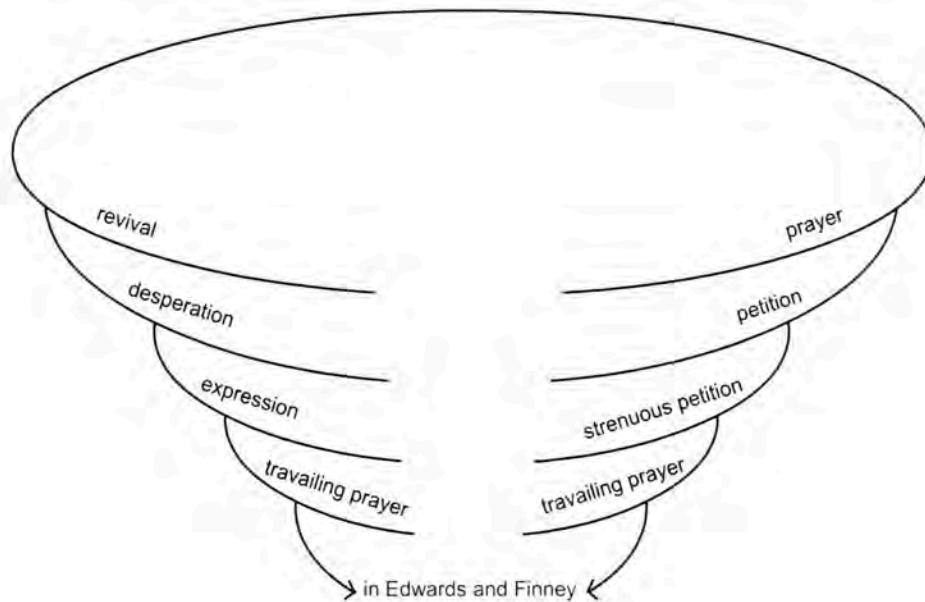
⁷¹ Travailing prayer as a subgenre of strenuous petition will be defined and illustrated (pp. 33 and 43) more fully in a later section of this chapter.

⁷² Bloesch 1980, 19 (Farmer, Herbert H., *The World and God* [London: Nisbet] 1936, 134).

⁷³ The archetypal prayer in the New Testament, the Lord’s Prayer, is principally petitionary. Of the numerous examples of petition in the Old Testament, Lam 3:55-57 offers a sample of the primary material for this project: “I called on your name, LORD, from the depths of the pit. You heard my plea.”

⁷⁴ “The Father’s unfolding plans for the world, and our part in those plans, may develop *in more than one direction* depending, in part, on how we pray. Whereas certain events are necessary occurrences, others never move beyond the realm of possibility. The future has options.” (Crump 2006, 290-91)

⁷⁵ McClymond 2007, xxvii.



evangelical revivals in *Dynamics of Spiritual Life* (1979), building on a Reformed theology of revival and the deep influence of Jonathan Edwards. From a Wesleyan/Arminian view, the foremost current historian of revival and renewal movements has been Howard Snyder, a supervisor of this project, whose synthesising examination of the Pietist, Methodist, and Moravian movements in *Signs of the Spirit: How God Reshapes the Church* (1997) provided an even more expansive breakdown of seven interpretive frameworks⁷⁶ and five dimensions of renewal (i.e., personal, corporate, conceptual, structural, and missiological).⁷⁷

Turning to research on prayer, critical historical study of various prayer traditions, particularly from the 1500s onward, remains somewhat underdeveloped, which is ironic in light of the immensity and pervasiveness of the topic. Friedrich Heiler's *Prayer: A Study in the History and Psychology of Religion* (1932) is an early benchmark in the field.⁷⁸ But *A History of Prayer: The First to the Fifteenth Century* (2008), edited by Roy Hammerling,

⁷⁶ Snyder 1997, 31-63.

⁷⁷ *ibid*, 285-94

⁷⁸ See also Balthasar, Hans Urs von, *Prayer*, Littledale, A. V. (tr.), (New York: Sheed and Ward) 1961; Gallen, John (ed.), *Christians at Prayer* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press) 1977; Salmon, Pierre, *The Breviary Through the Centuries* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press) 1962; and Wright, John H. A., *A Theology of Christian Prayer* (New York: Pueblo Publishing Co.) 1988.

may be one of the first projects attempting to bring different prayer traditions under historical scrutiny.⁷⁹ And when the focus narrows to the confluence illustrated above—the experience of prayer and its relation to revival—possibilities for original research open up even more broadly.⁸⁰ Beyond select articles⁸¹ and references in Rick Ostrander’s interesting work in *The Life of Prayer in a World of Science* (2000) on tendencies in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to “mechanize” petitionary prayer as a means of refuting scientific attack against historic Christian faith, I have found only one scholarly (PhD) study of the relationship of prayer and revival: Edward Lyrene’s project (1985), *The Role of Prayer in American Revival Movements, 1740-1860*, mentioned earlier.⁸² Though Peter Beck recently published the only academic book on Jonathan Edwards’ theology of prayer,⁸³ to my awareness no scholarly book has been written on Finney’s. And David Weddle’s PhD (1973) on Edwards and Finney⁸⁴ is the only advanced comparative research on the two I have been able to identify.

Obviously, potential for fresh contributions abounds in this project. Historical research into a particular revival, a specific individual, or a selected prayer text is more common. But the methodology of this project has introduced a unique opportunity for synthesising original discoveries drawn from comparing two time periods, revival movements, theological traditions, and key leaders, considered from the perspective of a distinctive stream of Christian prayer. My research indicates that, while travelling prayer is a

⁷⁹ See also Stevenson, Kenneth W., *The Lord’s Prayer: A Text in Tradition* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press) 2004; and Wright, David F., “What Kind of Bread?: The Fourth Petition of the Lord’s Prayer from the Fathers to the Reformers,” in Emidio Campi, Leif Grane, and Adolf Martin Ritter (eds) *Oratio: Das Gebet in patristischer und reformatorischer Sicht* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht) 1999, 151-62.

⁸⁰ McClymond comments that “a handful of scholars did superb work on North American evangelicalism during the last generation... Yet, by and large, their works focused on intellectual and cultural aspects of evangelicalism and they paid less attention to experiential issues.” (McClymond 2007, xxvi)

⁸¹ Most helpful has been Kidd, Thomas S., “‘The Very Vital Breath of Christianity’: Prayer and Revival in Provincial New England,” *Fides et Historia* XXXVI, 2, 2004, 19-33.

⁸² See p. 11, note 57.

⁸³ *The Voice of Faith: Jonathan Edwards’s Theology of Prayer* (Guelph, Ontario: Joshua Press), 2010. This was based on his 2007 PhD dissertation (Louisville, Kentucky: Southern Baptist Theological Seminary).

⁸⁴ *The New Man: A Study of the Significance of Conversion for the Theological Definition of the Self in Jonathan Edwards and Charles G. Finney* (Harvard University, unpublished PhD dissertation).

prayer tradition in Church history and one recurring in its association with Christian revival, much that has been written about it is of a devotional or hortatory nature. Very little critical, historical research has been done on this topic. The historical overview and definition of travelling prayer which follow in the next section of this chapter, as well as the methodology and tool developed here for comparative, historical examination, I offer as original starting points, not only for further research by me and others, but also hopefully for new understandings that may benefit the Church.

TRAVAILING PRAYER IN CHURCH HISTORY

The purpose of this section is to begin to understand the traveling prayer tradition within the broader streams of Christian spirituality in order eventually to examine its correlation with revival. Few seasons of Church history have passed that do not appear to give evidence of some expression of traveling prayer. Wesley Duewel has commented that “the phrases ‘wrestling in prayer,’ ‘agonizing in prayer,’ and ‘working hard in prayer’ were common in the vocabulary of the early church,”⁸⁵ and it is there where our survey can begin.

Early Church

“From the earliest days of Christianity,” Sandra McEntire observes, “weeping and mourning were central to the daily spirituality of the saints, East and West.”⁸⁶ The source of this tradition was, first of all, the Scriptures⁸⁷ which, with their accompanying commentaries⁸⁸ and other early sources,⁸⁹ formed the basis of the doctrine and practice of compunction. This was the experience of becoming “inwardly pierced” in prayer or receiving “the gift of tears,” summarised beginning on page 32.

In addition to the Bible, the traveling prayer tradition was shaped by early church thinkers such as Tertullian (c160-c220),⁹⁰ Origen (185-254),⁹¹ and Augustine (354-430), who

⁸⁵ Duewel 1990, 227.

⁸⁶ McEntire 1987, 77.

⁸⁷ E.g., Ps 6:6-7 and Lam 2:18.

⁸⁸ “The tradition finds its earliest expression in the Scriptural commentaries of Jerome, Ambrose, Augustine and Cassiodorus, the *Conferences* of Cassian, and the *Rule* of St Benedict, as well as translations of Basil and Chrysostom.” (McEntire, *op. cit.*, 77)

⁸⁹ The prayer language of extremity and endurance may have also been shaped by the legendary prayers of the early martyrs, such as Polycarp (69-155) whose anguished praise and petition as he was burned was exemplary in “that there is no request to be delivered from the flame, nor even to have his pain cut short. Moreover the tone of Polycarp’s prayer is not to be set down to mere ill-regulated enthusiasm...” (Barnes 1925, 111)

⁹⁰ “Tertullian contended that prayer involves ‘a kind of holy violence to God,’ because it consists in fervent and unceasing supplication.” (Bloesch, *op. cit.*, 132 [no reference provided].)

⁹¹ “The mighty Christian thinker Origen, ultimately rejected as a patristic authority, makes my central point, one repeated by many canonical writers of the Church. ... Tears produce mercy, and there is hope of salvation. *To weeping, and weeping alone, God will pay attention.*” (Patton 2005, 262 [Origen, *In Jeremiah* (c240), 3:49])

perceived his journey to faith as having been charted through the passage of his mother's⁹² and his own agonising prayers.⁹³ Contemporaneous with Augustine, Jerome's (347-420) comprehensive inventory of the Scriptural theme of tears in prayer⁹⁴ led to wider relevance of the practices of fervent prayer "when many of [these biblical texts] ... were given a prominent place in the liturgy of both Eastern and Western traditions."⁹⁵ Celtic disciplines of ardent petition on missionary frontiers further supplement the developing conventions of travelling prayer during the first centuries of Christianity.⁹⁶

However, Timothy Ware notes how the spiritual significance of tears in prayer unfolds into greater "prominence with the emergence of monasticism in fourth-century Egypt and Syria."⁹⁷ And in the Christian West, a generation after John Cassian's (359-c440)

⁹² Augustine's mother, Monica, approached a bishop asking him to speak with her son. "'Leave him alone,' he advised. 'Simply pray for him to the Lord.' ... She pleaded all the more insistently and with free-flowing tears that he would consent to see me and discuss matters with me. A little vexed, he answered, 'Go away now; but hold on to this: it is inconceivable that he should perish, a son of tears like yours.' In her conversations with me later she often recalled that she had taken these words to be an oracle from heaven." (Augustine 1997 [397-400], 91)

⁹³ "Within the house of my spirit the violent conflict raged on... I was groaning in spirit and shaken by violent anger because I could form no resolve to enter into a covenant with you, though in my bones I knew that this was what I ought to do, and everything in me lauded such a course to the skies." (*ibid*, 199-200)

⁹⁴ In his "Letter to Rusticus," fourth-century church father, St. Jerome, combed both the Old and the New Testaments for references to weeping and tears, presenting a comprehensive survey of the theme in Scripture that became a short reference work on the topic for later generations. This tradition of weeping prayer "was manifested strongly in Jerome's contemporaries, the fourth-century Desert Fathers," Santha Bhattacharji notes, "whose stories circulated widely in the West in the Latin text *De Vitis Patrum*. For example, one Desert Father, Arsenius, kept a cloth on his chest because of the tears that streamed from his eyes." (Bhattacharji 2005, 236 [Ward, Benedicta (tr.), *The Desert Fathers* (London: Penguin Books) 2003, 13. Migne, J-P, Latin Text of *De Vitis Patrum* (book V of *Verba Seniorum*), (Paris: *Patrologia Latina*, Paris) 73:855-1022].)

⁹⁵ "The desirability of actual tears of repentance was emphasized in the votive mass '*Pro petitione lacrimarum*,' which could be offered at any time, specifically to ask for the gift of abundant physical tears. Its prayers include the following petitions: '*educ de cordis nostri duricia compunctionis lacrimas*' (draw forth from the hardness of our hearts tears of compunction); '*produc de oculis nostris copiosa lacrimarum flumina*' (produce from our eyes abundant rivers of tears); '*pro peccatis nostris compunctionem cordis et luctum fluminaque lacrimarum nobis semper largiaris*' (may you ever grant us compunction of heart and mourning for our sins and rivers of tears)." (*ibid*, 234 [Legg, J. Wickham, *The Sarum Missal Edited from Three Early Manuscripts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press) 1916, 402].)

⁹⁶ One example of this is early Celtic monastic movements about which Ian Bradley has observed: "The rules for the Irish monasteries in particular have a severity not found in those associated with the Continental orders: 'Thy measure of prayer shall be until thy tears come; ...or thy measure of work of labour or of thy genuflections until thy perspiration often comes, if thy tears are not free.'" (Bradley 2000, 17 [The Rule of Columcille as printed in the appendix of Stone, S., *Lays of Iona and Other Poems* (London: Longmans, Green & Co.) 1897, 112].)

⁹⁷ Ware 2005, 243-44. Luke Dysinger concurs (2005, 614).

Conferences,⁹⁸ Benedict (480-547) ensconced tearful prayer in his *Rule* as part of provisioning the optimal environment for life together in monastic community, requiring that brothers “everyday with tears and sighs confess your past sins to God in prayer.”⁹⁹ Burgeoning application of the Benedictine Rule together with the work of other theologians and church leaders in the West¹⁰⁰ fed steady expression of tearful prayer continuing into the Middle Ages.

Medieval Mysticism

The transition from patristic to medieval periods brought with it shifts of emphasis in the expression of anguished prayer: from monk to layperson, from quiet to louder, and from personal to intercessory. Each of these will be explored briefly here.

While monastic life¹⁰¹ was the original seedbed for the spiritual disciplines of compunction, tearful prayer became popularised through new openings in spiritual expression among the laity, such as in numerous orders of poor men (*pauperes Christi*) that formed on the eve of the first Lateran Council (1123).¹⁰² Sermons and devotional texts appearing in vernacular languages had similar effect.¹⁰³ As a married, uneducated Norfolk laywoman, Margery Kempe (1373-1438), whose *Book* is considered by some the first autobiography in

⁹⁸ Credited by some as introducing monasticism in the Western Church, Cassian describes in the *Conferences* the “fiery prayer” of Jesus: “Our Lord also similarly anticipated this condition by the form of those entreaties which He is said to have poured forth silently when He withdrew alone into the mountain; when set in an agony of prayer He even shed drops of blood in an inimitable example of purpose.” (Cassian 2006 [c420], 27)

⁹⁹ Benedict 1981 [c530], 28. Around the buildings of the monastery, especially near the chapel, Benedict encourages monks simply to “go in and pray, not in a loud voice, but with tears and heartfelt devotion.” (*ibid*, 72-73)

¹⁰⁰ “Other western spiritual writers who recommend tearful prayer include: ... Peter Damian (d. 1072); Bernard of Clairvaux (d. 1153); Ruysbroeck (d. 1381); and Ignatius of Loyola (d. 1556).” (Dysinger, *op. cit.*, 614)

¹⁰¹ Ware comments on how early monks treated tears as essential—“not just *a* way but *the* way.” (Ware, *op. cit.*, 245)

¹⁰² Chenu has observed how the renewal impulse of these brotherly bands of chosen desperation “was the force of a believing witness which ignored any distinction between clergy and laity.” (Chenu 1968, 256)

¹⁰³ “Not only the Latin texts, but the vernacular texts as well, reveal the importance of compunction for the contemplative’s progress. Furthermore, the vernacular texts and sermons brought the doctrine out of the confines of the monasteries into the lives of the faithful.” (McEntire, *op. cit.*, 88)

the English language, exemplifies how the desirability of tears was transmitted “through the channels of pulpit and vernacular devotional materials.”¹⁰⁴

McEntire has also noted how, particularly in England, vernacular texts “attest to the evolution of the doctrine from its traditional patristic foundations to a more enthusiastic, personalized spirituality in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.”¹⁰⁵ In late medieval Europe, Bhattacharji observes, the travelling prayer tradition took on a distinctive form:

...that of loud and violent sobbing, shouting, screaming, and even falling over and writhing on the ground. This contrasts with the older and quieter tradition of tears developed in the Eastern Orthodox churches, where weeping seems to have been envisaged as gentle and silent, however abundant the tears.¹⁰⁶

This more passionate, strident manifestation of agony in prayer may have been brought about, in part, with the increase of pilgrimage to the holy sites in Jerusalem during this period.¹⁰⁷ It is upon visiting the shrines of Christ’s sufferings that Margery is overcome with her most noisy experience of compunction, a form of bellowing, not uncommon among men and women of the day, that she herself calls “roaring.”¹⁰⁸

Prayers of compunction in this period also move from being primarily expressive of personal repentance to including a vicarious, intercessory purpose.¹⁰⁹ As with anticlericalism, increased sensitivity among laity toward the distress of sinners had been building in this period.¹¹⁰ From a vision of St. Jerome while on pilgrimage in Jerusalem and

¹⁰⁴ *ibid*

¹⁰⁵ *ibid*, 77

¹⁰⁶ Bhattacharji, *op. cit.*, 229.

¹⁰⁷ “On Mount Calvary, [Margery fell] to the ground, and wallowed and wrestled with her body, stretching out her arms, and cried out with a loud voice as though her heart would burst asunder. She emphasizes that this was the first [great] cry that she cried out in any act of contemplation, and thus this incident in Jerusalem is a key moment in the development of her whole spirituality of weeping and screaming.” (*ibid*, 232)

¹⁰⁸ *ibid*, 235

¹⁰⁹ Bhattacharji explores how Margery Kempe embodies this transition in the spirituality of her day: “[An] inner, more hidden contrition then rapidly widens to encompass sorrow for sin in general. She can weep two hours at a time, sometimes for her own sins, sometimes for the sins of the people in general, for the souls in purgatory, and for all those in any kind of physical distress in this life. ... Margery’s weeping thus takes on an intercessory character; even more strongly, her weeping in a sense ‘ordains’ her, giving this lay woman a sacred, if unofficial, role in the church.” (*ibid*, 230)

¹¹⁰ “The most telling and most characteristic trait of this poverty (see note 102) was sensitivity to the distress of sinners, the poor among the poor before the Lord, for such sensitivity, too was an integral part of the evangelical life.” (Chenu, *op. cit.*, 244)

Rome, Margery embraced this burden in prayer as a “singular and special gift”¹¹¹ from God, a kind of charism and calling to the life of travailing in prayer for others. Both of these instances of agonised prayer in the medieval period—as intercession and vocation—are of relevance to the current project.

Eastern Orthodoxy

Though this tradition of weeping in prayer continued up to and beyond the Reformation in the Christian West, but now is “all but forgotten,” Kimberley Christine Patton writes, “tears remain powerful and precious in Eastern Orthodoxy.”¹¹² Travailing prayer can be generative of the Kingdom of God in Eastern Orthodox spirituality, for “with these [tears],” John Chrysostom (349-407) wrote, “souls are planted.”¹¹³ So we should yearn for these life-giving tears, as Gregory of Nazianzus (328-90) prayed that God would “make my stony and petrified heart gush forth fountains of tears.”¹¹⁴ The prayer of weeping we yearn for may take one of three forms in Eastern Christian spirituality: first, as the “gift of tears,” the quiet, ceaseless, gently flowing, even passionless condition of spiritual weeping that was the hallmark of personal sanctity in many saints.¹¹⁵ Second are tears shed in prayer out of sorrow for the fallen state of the world. As such, Patton comments, “this weeping is paradoxically both a universal indictment of the sin-ravaged human community and an

¹¹¹ Bhattacharji, *op. cit.*, 232.

¹¹² Patton 2005, 257-58. Ware agrees regarding “the central place tears occupy in the spirituality of the Christian East.” (Ware, *op. cit.*, 251)

¹¹³ Patton 2005, 257-58 (Chrysostom, St. John, “Homilies on Colossians,” Homily XII, on Colossians 4:12-13, Broadus, John [trans.] in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Schaff, Philip [ed.], [Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers] 1994, 13:316-17 *passim*).

¹¹⁴ *ibid*, 258-259 (St. Gregory the Theologian, “A Prayer of Supplication and Compunction to Our Lord Jesus Christ,” *Voices in the Wilderness: An Anthology of Patristic Prayers*, Hatzinikolaou, Nikolaos S. [trans. and ed.], [Brookline, Massachusetts: Holy Cross Orthodox Press] 1988, 41-42). Gregory, revered in the Eastern Church as one of the Three Holy Hierarchs along with Basil the Great and John Chrysostom, is also a saint in Western Christianity.

¹¹⁵ These tears are often experienced as “sweeter than any laughter” (Gregory, *ibid*), the weeping that springs “from the awareness of and desire for the eternal beauty and glory of God.” (McEntire, *op. cit.*, 82) See note 185.

expression of universal compassion for it.”¹¹⁶ A third expression of weeping prayer signifies repentance, the bitter tears of *penthos*, that “both *precipitate* and *indicate* a true softening of the hardened heart”¹¹⁷ and effect absolution, just as the lavish, self-abasing tears of a sinful woman upon Jesus’ feet provokes His pardon: “Then he said to her, ‘Your sins are forgiven.’”¹¹⁸ In all its varied expressions, the devotional vehicle of tearful prayer operates in Eastern Orthodox spirituality as “the ‘catalytic converter’ into new life.”¹¹⁹

The Reformation and Puritanism

The second aspect of compunction in Eastern Orthodoxy just described, that of “tears shed in prayer out of sorrow for the fallen state of the world,” bears resemblance to the travailing prayer voiced by Girolamo Savonarola (1452-98), a Dominican friar in Florence, Italy, who became controversial for his denunciation of moral corruption among much of the clergy of his day. Savonarola is venerated in devotional literature for how he “would kneel and pray before the altar in the church for hours, until it was wet with tears, a practice continued throughout his lifetime.”¹²⁰ The principal target of Savonarola’s jeremiads was Pope Alexander VI, who eventually excommunicated Savonarola before ordering that he be burned at the stake. Martin Luther (1483-1546) called him a Protestant martyr.¹²¹

Less than twenty years after Savonarola’s death, Luther entered into his experience of justification by faith through the portal of wrestling, even raging prayer.¹²² For Luther, the

¹¹⁶ Patton 2005, 261. Here may be another strand of agony in prayer foreshadowing travailing petition for the renewing work of God.

¹¹⁷ *ibid.* See p. 34ff for consideration of *penthos* and the doctrine of compunction.

¹¹⁸ Lk 7:49

¹¹⁹ Patton 2005, 263.

¹²⁰ Duewel 2002, 147-148. “His hours of weeping intercession prepared God’s way for the Reformation.” (*ibid.*, 148) “His followers were called ‘weepers’ as they wept over the sins of the people.” (*ibid.*, 152)

¹²¹ Lawson 1911, 73.

¹²² “Though I lived as a monk without reproach, I felt that I was a sinner before God with an extremely disturbed conscience. I could not believe that he was placated by my satisfaction. ... Thus I raged with a fierce and troubled conscience. Nevertheless, I beat importunately upon Paul at that place, most ardently desiring to know what St. Paul wanted.” (Luther 1961b, 11)

most powerful praying was “prayed with sobs and tears”¹²³ for these “groans are, indeed, ineffable but not without great fruit.”¹²⁴ His exertion in prayer was not mere anger or grumbling. Instead, “in my judgment,” Luther writes, “prayer is indeed a continuous violent action of the spirit as it is lifted up to God,”¹²⁵ like what Luther had experienced travelling in prayer for the health of his friend, Philip Melanchthon.¹²⁶

Comparable was the view of prayer held by English Puritan theologian, Richard Sibbes (1577-1635), born thirty years after Luther’s death, who held that prayer is a kind of “wrestling [with God that] will prevail at length, and we shall have such a sight of him.”¹²⁷ A Christian, Sibbes believed, “when he is driven out of all comforts below...can wrestle and strive with God by God’s own strength, fight with him with his own weapons, and plead with God by his own arguments.”¹²⁸

American and British Revivals, Devotional Literature, and Missions

The example of travelling prayer set by “the old Puritans” like Sibbes and others was viewed as a benchmark by John Fletcher (1729-85), an early systematiser of Methodist theology and the man Wesley had hoped would succeed him as leader of the movement upon his death.¹²⁹ Fletcher was bothered by how few Methodists knew

what it is to “cry out of the deep,” to pray and believe, till in the name of Jesus we force our way beyond flesh and blood, come within the reach of the eternal world, conflict in an agony with the powers of darkness, vanquish Apollyon in all his attacks, and continue wrestling till

¹²³ Luther 1965 [1535-45], 375. Luther adds here: “Ah, if we could believe and pray this way, we would obtain all we need for the welfare of body and soul! ... Indeed, the hearing of the prayer would not even be deferred when a prayer so earnest came to the ears of God.”

¹²⁴ Luther 1970 [1535-45], 156.

¹²⁵ Luther 1961a [1515-16], 346.

¹²⁶ “This time I besought the Almighty with great vigor. I attacked him with his own weapons, quoting from Scripture all the promises I could remember, that prayers should be granted, and said that he must grant my prayer, if I was henceforth to put faith in his promises.” (Hoffman 1976, 196 [no reference provided].)

¹²⁷ Sibbes 1973, 228. Edwards’ Puritan inheritance is referenced throughout Chapter III. See Chapter II, notes 1-17; Chapter III, note 381.

¹²⁸ *ibid*, 198. Elsewhere Sibbes adds, “Where trust is rightly planted, it gives boldness to the soul in going to God.” (*ibid*, 223)

¹²⁹ Fletcher predeceased Wesley by a bit more than five years. Wesley’s text at Fletcher’s funeral was Ps 37:37 [KJV]: “Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright.”

the day of eternity break upon us, and the God of Jacob “bless us with all spiritual benedictions in heavenly places.”¹³⁰

The prayer intensity Fletcher speaks of was something of what John Wesley (1703-91) observed visiting the Herrnhut settlement of the Moravian Brethren shortly after his Aldersgate experience.¹³¹ Wesley soon began having opportunities for putting into practice such boldness and determination in prayer, sometimes doing so reluctantly.¹³² But as the renewal movement he led took form, Wesley personally observed the effects of traving prayer¹³³ and occasionally recommended it to Methodists. For example, similar to the counsel Monica received for Augustine, Wesley

called on one who was sorrowing as without hope, for her son who was turned again to folly. I advised her to wrestle with God for his soul. And in two days he brought home the wandering sheep, fully convinced of the error of his ways.¹³⁴

It appears that Wesley himself, though disciplined in a warm-hearted devotional life,¹³⁵ did not frequently express agonising, ardent petitionary prayer. Nevertheless, owing to his

¹³⁰ Fletcher 1889, 119.

¹³¹ Wesley excerpted in his journal from their Constitution that “in the year 1727 four-and-twenty men, and as many women, agreed that each of them would spend an hour in every day in praying to God for his blessing on his people... [They] pour out their souls before God, not only for their own brethren, but also for other churches and persons that have desired to be mentioned in their prayers. And this perpetual intercession has never ceased day or night since its first beginning.” (Wesley 1988, 295)

¹³² An instance of this is a request to Wesley for prayer against demonic influences: “In the evening, being sent for to her again, I was unwilling, indeed afraid, to go, thinking it would not avail unless some who were strong in faith were to wrestle with God for her. I opened my Testament on those words, ‘I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth.’ I stood reprov’d, and went immediately.” (*ibid*, 110) A positive outcome may have built his confidence: “She began screaming before I came into the room; then broke out into a horrid laughter, mixed with blasphemy, grievous to hear. ... This was repeated two hours together, with spitting and all the expressions of strong aversion. We left her at twelve, but called again about noon on Friday, 26. And now it was that God showed he heareth the prayer. All her pangs ceased in a moment. She was filled with peace, and knew that the son of wickedness was departed from her.” (*ibid*, 110-11)

¹³³ On one evening in December of 1744, “as I was at prayer, one that was kneeling by me cried out (like a woman in travail) ‘My Redeemer! my Redeemer!’ which continued about ten minutes. When he was asked what was the matter, he said he had found that which he had often heard of, that is, an heaven upon earth. And some others had much ado to forbear crying out in the same manner.” (Wesley 1991, 45)

¹³⁴ Wesley 1990, 260. On another occasion, when some protested their expulsion from the Band Society in Kingswood, Wesley “exhorted them to wait a little longer and wrestle with God, that they might know his will concerning them.” (*ibid*, 185)

¹³⁵ Wesley’s devotional life had been influenced by William Law’s *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life* which, along with Isaac Watts *Guide to Prayer* and other writings, had become popular in Britain and America before the awakenings in each nation. Kidd posits that due to these books, “as New England moved into the awakenings of the 1730s and 1740s, believers sensed a greater need for frequent and fervent public prayer. This increased sense of urgency resulted largely from one of the most distinctive theological developments of the period: an increased emphasis on the Holy Spirit’s workings.” (Kidd 2004, 27)

experimental attitude, the movement Wesley stewarded was open and responsive to traveling prayer in varied forms.

Wesley's peers and progeny also exhibited affinity for the practices of traveling prayer. Letters from some of his partners in ministry as George Whitefield (1714-70) prepared to sail from England to America "made me weep, and caused me to throw myself prostrate before the prayer-hearing and promise-keeping God."¹³⁶ And as the Evangelical Awakening in eighteenth-century England continued beyond the generation of its founders, new leaders took up the burden of prayer.¹³⁷ John Smith, born three years after Wesley's death and described by Duewel as "early Methodism's holy wrestler in prayer,"¹³⁸ wrote in 1818, "We want the faith that cannot ask in vain; a holy panting, laboring, hungering, thirsting; and this constantly."¹³⁹

The Wesleyan renewal movement unfolded during a period of flourishing transatlantic revival in which core concepts of traveling prayer, as it is being examined in this project, were elaborated. In October of 1744, a number of Scottish ministers issued a call to prayer that God would send "an abundant effusion of his Holy Spirit on all the churches, and the whole habitable earth, to revive true religion in all parts of Christendom."¹⁴⁰ Jonathan Edwards believed this introduced an opportunity for fulfilling the prophecy of Zech

¹³⁶ Tyerman 1876, 340 (see also 323-24). "George Whitefield frequently spent whole nights in meditation and prayer, and often rose from his bed in the night to intercede for perishing souls. He says: 'Whole days and weeks have I spent prostrate on the ground in silent or vocal prayer.'" (M'Intire, *op. cit.*, 94 [no reference provided].)

¹³⁷ Another leader in early nineteenth-century American Methodism noted for his experiences of traveling prayer was John Wesley Redfield (1810-63), who shared with B. T. Roberts (1823-93) in the founding of the Free Methodist Church. Redfield would "groan as if in the throes of death as he wrestled in prayer; then victory would come." (McLeister 1920, 364) Duewel also cites Richard Watson (1737-1816), who entered the Methodist itinerancy in 1797 and began to publish his *Theological Institutes* in 1823, which became an early standard of Methodist doctrine: "Prayer without fervency is no prayer; it is speaking, not praying. Lifeless prayer is no more prayer than a picture of a man is a man." (Duewel 1990, 74 [no reference provided].)

¹³⁸ Duewel 2002, 167.

¹³⁹ Kulp 1909, 69 (no reference provided).

¹⁴⁰ WJE 5:321. "Edwards hoped that the transatlantic union might introduce the last great dispensation of God's Holy Spirit and the spirit of prayer, and interpreted the correspondence for the Concert that had gone out from Scotland to Massachusetts and all the mainland colonies as a harbinger of such an eschatological movement." (Kidd 2004, 31)

8:20-22, the primary text of his *Humble Attempt*,¹⁴¹ by great numbers of Christians “taking up a *joint resolution*, and coming into an express and visible *agreement*, that they will, by united and extraordinary *prayer*, seek to God that he would come and manifest himself.”¹⁴²

Though the label “travailing prayer” appears not to have come into currency for another century or so, the kind of praying Edwards advocated bore many of its features. For example, calamity and spiritual decline¹⁴³ were at its source, making “all that believe God’s Word, and love mankind, earnestly long and pray for that day.”¹⁴⁴ Importunate prayer¹⁴⁵ was needed, Edwards believed, interpreting Isa 62:6-7 as a loud “call to the church of God, to be fervent and incessant in their cries to him for this great mercy!”¹⁴⁶ In *Some Thoughts Concerning the Revival*, Edwards also connected fasting¹⁴⁷ with prayer for revival, what “all professing Christians should practice, and frequently practice”¹⁴⁸ as a way of promoting and demonstrating sincerity and urgency. Urgent, unceasing prayer with fasting, “when aimed at that revival that ushers in Christ’s kingdom,” Story has summarised, was for Edwards “the highest prayer of all, and when done in concert with God’s people and in the manner that God prescribes, it is a fit method of promoting revival.”¹⁴⁹

¹⁴¹ WJE 5:317.

¹⁴² *ibid*, 314. Edwards was convinced of the ultimate importance of prayer in bringing about renewal, as he wrote to a correspondent in Scotland: “I should have more hope from the union, fervency and unfailing constancy of the prayers of God’s people, with respect to the religious affairs of the present day, than anything else; more than from the preaching and writings of the ablest and best friends to the work of God’s Spirit.” (*ibid*, 446)

¹⁴³ See pp. 11-12.

¹⁴⁴ WJE 5:357. Edwards believed his times were utterly desperate: “Wickedness of almost every kind is well nigh come to the utmost extremity in the nation; and if vice should continue to prevail and increase for one generation more, as it has the generation past, it looks as though the nation could hardly continue in being, but must sink under the weight of its own corruption and wickedness.” (*ibid*)

¹⁴⁵ See pp. 57-59.

¹⁴⁶ “I know of no place in the Bible, where so strong an expression is made use of to signify importunity in prayer, as is used in Is. 62:6-7 where the people of God are called upon to be importunate for this mercy: ‘Ye that make mention of the Lord, keep not silence, and give him no rest, till he establish, and till he make Jerusalem a praise in the earth.’ How strong is the phrase!” (WJE 5:348) In the conclusion of the *Humble Attempt*, Edwards reminded his readers that God tests “the faith and patience of his people, when crying out to him for great and important mercy, by withholding the mercy sought, for a season.” (*ibid*, 435-36)

¹⁴⁷ See p. 55.

¹⁴⁸ WJE 4:521. See Chapter III, note 317.

¹⁴⁹ Story, *op. cit.*, 152.

Edwards' writings on prayer were later circulated at the beginning of the Second Great Awakening to validate urgent petition as a method of promoting revival, in a way similar to how he had abridged and published the diary of David Brainerd (1718-47) as an inspiration for such praying.¹⁵⁰ Charles Finney, for example, included in his *Lectures on Revival* a lengthy description by Jonathan Edwards of the burden of prayer "to show that this thing was common in the great revivals of those days."¹⁵¹ Travailing prayer was the experience of Finney.¹⁵² And promulgated in his pulpit and from his pen and others', it became an important feature of spiritual experience on the vanguard of Christian expansion in nineteenth-century America.¹⁵³

This was an era of heroic praying, abounding in examples of passionate, sacrificial intercession that were recounted in contemporary and more recent hagiography¹⁵⁴ and woven together by devotional writers like E. M. Bounds (1835-1913) and R. A. Torrey (1856-1928).¹⁵⁵ Their writings were representative of hortatory literature intended to dare and

¹⁵⁰ Brainerd was a missionary to native Americans from 1743 to 1747 who kept a journal of daily events until the week before he died, at the age of twenty-nine, in Edwards' home. About the inspiration he took personally from Brainerd, which he hoped others also would receive, Edwards wrote: "I confess that God's giving so much of a spirit of prayer for this mercy to so eminent a servant of his, and exciting him in so extraordinary a manner and with such vehement thirstings of soul to agonize in prayer for it from time to time through the course of his life, is one thing, among others, which gives me great hope that God has a design of accomplishing something very glorious for the interest of his Church before long." (WJE 7:532)

¹⁵¹ "It was so in the great revivals in Scotland, and multitudes used to be overpowered, and some almost died, by the depth of their agony." (Finney, *Lectures*, 60-63.) See Appendix III for the full text of this excerpt.

¹⁵² "As I returned to my room..., I felt almost as if I should stagger under the burden that was on my mind. I went to my room, and there I struggled, and groaned, and agonized; but could not frame to present the case before God in words, but only in groans and tears." (Finney, *Memoirs*, 41-42)

¹⁵³ "More than any other person or movement, Finney institutionalized revivalism by making it part of the church system of the 'western frontier' (that is, western New York State) and eastern cities." (McCauley 1995, 128)

¹⁵⁴ William Allen later recounted how "William Booth was on fire for God and souls. While he was studying for the ministry he was often in an agony of prayer for souls." (Allen 1951, 39) R. B. Jones looked back on the last years of the nineteenth century when many younger ministers in Wales were meeting together to pray for revival: "This fellowship but intensified their hunger, bringing it at last to a pitch near to desperation. ... One of them recalls how...there would come upon him such a power as would crush [him] to tears and agonizing praying." (Jones 1950, 27)

¹⁵⁵ "In the hour of darkest portent, when the case of the church, local or universal, has seemed beyond hope, believing men and believing women have met together and cried to God and the answer has come. It was so in the days of Knox, it was so in the days of Wesley and Whitefield, it was so in the days of Edwards and Brainerd, it was so in the days of Finney, it was so in the days of the great revival of 1857 in this country and of 1859 in Ireland, and it will be so again in your day and mine." (Torrey 1900, 30)

inspire others¹⁵⁶ to more intense, vigorous petition for salvation and renewal. Illustrative is Bounds' reference to Adoniram Judson (1788-1850), the first Protestant missionary from North America in what is today Myanmar:

A travailing spirit, the throes of a great burdened desire, belongs to prayer. A fervency strong enough to drive away sleep, which devotes and inflames the spirit, and which retires all earthly ties, all this belongs to wrestling, prevailing prayer. The Spirit, the power, the air, and food of prayer is in such a spirit.¹⁵⁷

As with Judson, this period also saw travailing prayer extending to the mission field. John Hyde (1865-1912) was a Presbyterian missionary in India who became convinced that just as Jacob wrestled with God for his family, the same was needed for spiritual harvest in the Punjab: "I determined to ask God to give me one real Israel, a wrestler with God, a prince prevailing,"¹⁵⁸ the role "Praying Hyde" eventually came to believe was his own primary vocation.¹⁵⁹ With little to show for his efforts among the Lisu people of southwestern China, J. O. Fraser (1886-1938) wrote his prayer partners: "I do not intend to be in too much of a hurry, and yet I will cry to God for a blessed work of grace among the Lisu as long as He lends me breath."¹⁶⁰

Contemporary Revival Movements

One of the critical interests of this project is to begin considering how we may account for what appears to be a waning of interest in and expression of travailing prayer in

¹⁵⁶ Inspiration has not always been the effect. For example, an oft-repeated hero story is of "Praying Payson" of Portland, Oregon, "one who prevailed mightily in prayer. After his death he was found to have calloused knees. By the side of his bed, where he wrestled in prayer day after day, were two grooves worn into the hard boards as he moved back and forth on his knees in prayer." (Duewel 1990, 222) See also M'Intyre (1964, 94) and Ravenhill (1962, 102-3). About Duewel's reference, Crump writes: "If the author intends for us to read the story paradigmatically, as an illustration of all proper prayer, what are its implications? God grants the petitions of those who pray with continual groans. What, then, are we to conclude when our petitions seem empty? ... My experience tells me that books about prayer are often better at conjuring guilt than motivating piety." (Crump, *op. cit.*, 75)

¹⁵⁷ Bounds c1929, 59 (no reference provided). See also Duewel 1990, 74.

¹⁵⁸ Basil Miller 1943, 36.

¹⁵⁹ Duewel 2002, 93. "At the 1906 [Sialkot] convention..., over and over John would begin to weep over the sins of India and the world. The vision of souls going to hell without Christ broke the hearts of Indians missionaries. At times the whole assembly wept as they interceded for the lost in the all-night meeting." (*ibid.*, 96)

¹⁶⁰ Crossman 1994, 84.

its many forms during the last century, particularly in the West. Brueggemann believes, for example, that the church's affluence obligates it "to re-enforce and consolidate the political-economic monopoly of the status quo,"¹⁶¹ which is preserved best in the calm, celebratory mood¹⁶² that lament destabilises. A second possible explanation for a perceived drop-off in travelling prayer could be the way in which it clashes with the Western cultural instinct toward self-sufficiency, "the self-help, I-can-do-it, lift-myself-up-by-my-own-boot-straps mentality of Western societies that chaffs at the forthright admission of helplessness inherent in lament."¹⁶³ Dave Butts has critiqued the church's programmatic activism, how leaders are always "going to this conference and that conference trying to find the right sort of thing that will get our people going again," which is tacit resistance to travelling prayer: "in the life of the church today in America we have not yet come to the point of desperation."¹⁶⁴ Thirdly, agonised prayer may also be out of vogue for doctrinal reasons. Ellington suggests, for example, that an emphasis within the rapidly growing Pentecostal and charismatic movements on God's manifest presence and power has had the effect of making urgent prayer seem less appealing or relevant.¹⁶⁵

Nevertheless, historian Peter Hocken has asserted that the first Pentecostals, sensing the uniqueness of their movement, believed "this move of the Spirit was an answer to years

¹⁶¹ Brueggemann 1986, 60. See also Ellington, *op. cit.*, 11.

¹⁶² Billman and Migliore have reviewed studies of the *Lutheran Book of Worship*, the *Episcopalian Book of Common Prayer*, the *Lectionary for Mass: The Roman Missal*, the *United Methodist Hymnal*, and the *Presbyterian Hymnal* to conclude "that the psalms of lament are poorly represented in the worship books of most mainline denominations." (Billman and Migliore 1999, 13)

¹⁶³ Ellington, *op. cit.*, 11. "Lament requires that we freely admit our helplessness and that we embrace uncertainty. It believes, but cannot know for sure, that God will answer."

¹⁶⁴ Butts 2010, 3. This view of the polarity of prayer and self-reliance is exemplified in the preaching of Leonard Ravenhill: "Now I say very often—and people don't like it—that God doesn't answer prayer. He answers *desperate* prayer! ... The more self-confidence you have, the less you pray. The less self-confidence you have, the more you *have* to pray." (Ravenhill 2010)

¹⁶⁵ "For some it is difficult to reconcile a God who heals, responds to prayer, and is experienced as present with a God who can also be experienced as hidden, absent, and silent." (Ellington, *op. cit.*, 12) In a phone interview on March 10, 2010, Peter Hocken, a historian of the Catholic charismatic and global Pentecostal movements, commented how, on the whole, these had been associated less with anguish and desperation than with freedom and joy in an experience with the Holy Spirit. See also Dolan, *op. cit.*, 199.

of importunate prayer for a Pentecostal outpouring.”¹⁶⁶ In mid-April of 1906, “a 10-day period of fasting and prayer prior to Easter resulted in dramatic instances of speaking in tongues” among participants in revival meetings at the Apostolic Faith Mission at 312 Azusa Street in Los Angeles, California, the event to which many North American Pentecostal Christians trace their origins.¹⁶⁷ Patti Gallagher Mansfield was a student participant in the famous 1967 “Duquesne Weekend,” considered by many the beginning of the Roman Catholic charismatic renewal.¹⁶⁸ In her account of this experience, she reflected on the Azusa Street Revival and how those “who were instrumental in bringing to birth that outpouring of the Holy Spirit at the turn of the century spent much time ‘on their faces’ before God, literally groaning under a burden of prayer for revival.”¹⁶⁹ Charismatic Catholics have interpreted this as expression of the essential humility necessary to prepare for God’s renewing work.¹⁷⁰

Some segments of the charismatic renewal have portrayed its impetus more as dissatisfaction¹⁷¹ than desperation: a sense of spiritual dryness and inadequacy in the context of cultural upheaval. Spiritual dissatisfaction and societal angst reached a point “somewhere in the late 1960s,” Richard Lovelace has written, that “another anguished cry of prayer went up from Middle-American Christianity to be answered by a fresh effusion of the Holy Spirit,”¹⁷² an impulse comparable with that of revival movements in other parts of the world where travailing prayer may be observed as a pattern of preparedness for revival, particularly

¹⁶⁶ Hocken, *op. cit.*, 32.

¹⁶⁷ Dorries 2007, 38. A severe earthquake and fire in San Francisco only days later on April 18, which took more than 10,000 lives, added intensity to what was being experienced on Azusa Street, correlating with what has been mentioned already about the role catastrophic events may sometimes have in contributing to spiritual desperation as a factor in revival (see p. 11).

¹⁶⁸ Mansfield 1992, viii.

¹⁶⁹ *ibid.*, 97

¹⁷⁰ *ibid.*, 96. “Renewal has been described very correctly as ‘giving the power back to God,’ so it is obvious why humility is urgently necessary in the renewal of the Spirit.” (Cantalamessa 2005, 34)

¹⁷¹ Burns 1960, 33. Arthur Wallis (1922-88), a former leader in charismatic “restorationism” in England, captures this idea: “A sure mark of impending revival is where this spirit of dissatisfaction becomes apparent among believers. ... Here are the birth pangs of that new thing that God is about to do, the travail out of which revival is born.” (Wallis, *op. cit.*, 206-7)

¹⁷² Lovelace, *op. cit.*, 54. “When voices within the church announced in the late 1960s that God was dead, many Christians must have duplicated the reaction of Hezekiah to the Assyrian challenge in 2 Kings 18, laying the matter before the Lord and doing the modern equivalent of rending their garments.”

among the young.¹⁷³ Some students today are becoming involved in groups such as the International House of Prayer in Kansas City, Missouri, and others that are reinterpreting historical attributes of traveling prayer in fresh ways with growing momentum.¹⁷⁴ Contemporary trends point to the merit of further research into the extent to which “true revival and soul-birth still demand travail.”¹⁷⁵

Recurring Themes and Critical Questions

This cursory sampling from Church history can only offer a backdrop to current research, with each section of the survey deserving of much more extensive treatment. Nevertheless, even such a brief review is sufficient for observing themes and surfacing critical questions about how traveling prayer appears to have found expression at most stages in the story of Christianity. Three of these themes, illustrated in the broad framework of Christian prayer on the following page, and an initial consideration of critical issues for ongoing research are posited here as this section concludes.

Traveling Prayer in Devotional and Mystical Experience A first theme observable in history may be summed up in the experience of **compunction**—formed during the patristic period, thriving within early monastic communities, and elaborated by medieval mystics. Compunction was a doctrine of devotional and mystical practice originating in the experience of tearful prayer¹⁷⁶ as the language of being “cut to the heart”¹⁷⁷ by regret for sin and deep

¹⁷³ Grigg cites a contemporary description of what was happening in the 1960s among the young in New Zealand: “The 60’s decade was a decade of discovery... An insatiable appetite dawned upon groups of young people especially, to seek God in ways that were not taught; unstructured spontaneous prayer times, calling out to God expecting response, lying on the floor and sometimes banging on the floor with hands, weeping and praying.” (Grigg, *op. cit.*, 124) See also Lovelace, *op. cit.*, 54.

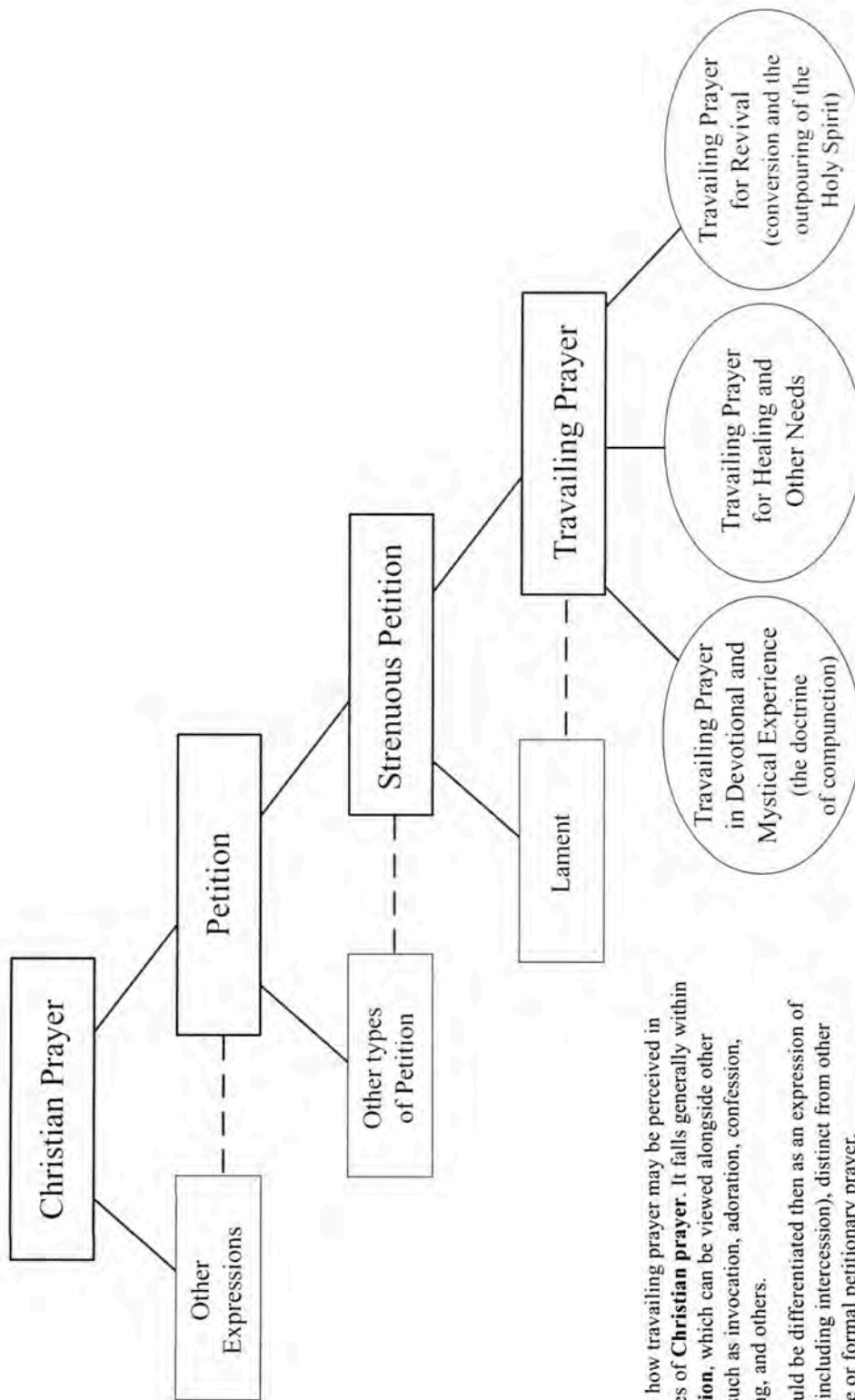
¹⁷⁴ Inspired by Herrnhut (<http://ihop.org/Publisher/Article.aspx?ID=1000045365>), IHOP began a prayer meeting on September 19, 1999, that is still continuing, attracting hundreds of students. A similar, ongoing vigil began in 1999 among young people in Chichester, England, spreading now to over one hundred nations, according to its website (<http://www.24-7prayer.com/about/what>). (Websites accessed in August 2011.)

¹⁷⁵ Ravenhill 1959, 135.

¹⁷⁶ “Tears are the signs of *penthos* (πένθος), which shares the same etymology as *pathos*; it is affliction, but it bears a special meaning: ‘compunction,’ ‘regret that is felt in the depths of the heart for having grievously sinned.’” (Patton 2005, 262)

¹⁷⁷ Acts 2:37

TRAVAILING PRAYER AS A SUBGENRE OF CHRISTIAN PRAYER



This chart illustrates how travelling prayer may be perceived in relation to other types of **Christian prayer**. It falls generally within the category of **petition**, which can be viewed alongside other prayer expressions, such as invocation, adoration, confession, thanksgiving, blessing, and others.

Travailing prayer could be differentiated then as an expression of **strenuous petition** (including intercession), distinct from other types of more routine or formal petitionary prayer.

Within the classification of strenuous petition, **travailing prayer** is similar to biblical lament except, primarily, for the extent to which the petitioner's relationship with God is experienced to be in jeopardy (see note 50).

For the purposes of this project, travelling prayer appears to have manifested itself historically in three primary streams: 1) in devotional and mystical experience, 2) for healing and other needs, and 3) **for revival**, which is the topic of current research.

repentance. What was for many desert fathers “the central and all-encompassing act of purifying and restoring the soul, “the effects of the tears are efficacious in a baptismal way.”¹⁷⁸ Contemplative, personal experiences of compunction mainly among monks expanded in the Middle Ages to involve more vividly expressive and intercessory manifestations among lay men and women. However, in all its iterations and stages, the tearful, travailing prayer of compunction was consistently understood as a gift of God,¹⁷⁹ the experience of a charismatic imposition that could be sought¹⁸⁰ and stewarded¹⁸¹ but never manufactured or dramatised.

There is the *penthos* of “repentance that leads to salvation” described by Paul,¹⁸² personal sorrow that overflows in anguished “weeping for **one’s own sins**.”¹⁸³ This is tearful prayer that gushes “from our heart when it has been pricked with sorrow by the spines of sins,” says Abba Isaac in Cassian’s *Conferences*.¹⁸⁴ A second facet of compunction is tearful prayer that pours forth from contemplation of Christ’s agony and exaltation, tears of **yearning for the eternal glory** being prepared for Christians. In this way, weeping prayer may be almost simultaneously both bitter and sweet,¹⁸⁵ as Pope Gregory I (540-604) captures

¹⁷⁸ McEntire, *op. cit.*, 83. “To indicate this liminal role of tears, as marking transition and new birth, the Christian East habitually speaks of spiritual weeping as a baptism.” (Ware, *op. cit.*, 250) Foster advises his readers: “Follow the counsel of Saint Theodore the Studite: ‘Let us go in the Spirit to the Jordan ... and let us receive baptism with him, I mean the baptism of tears.’” (Foster 1992, 45 [St. Theodore the Studite, *Great Catechesis* 27, Papadopoulos-Kerameus (ed.), (St. Petersburg, Russia: n.p.) 1904, 191, as quoted in Heuscherr, *Penthos*, 131-32].)

¹⁷⁹ Travailing prayer, Ware writes, involves “tears that are not simply the consequence of our natural feelings or of our human effort but that are conferred upon us by God as a gift of grace. It is to this ... category alone that, in the strict sense, the phrases ‘spiritual weeping’ and ‘gift of tears’ are rightly applied.” (Ware, *op. cit.*, 248) See p. 60ff.

¹⁸⁰ This God-given nature of travailing prayer echoes centuries later: “Be silent and look up to God to send His Holy Spirit, according to His promise, to move your heart to prayer and to awaken and create real earnestness in your heart in prayer: and He will send Him and you will pray with intense earnestness, very likely ‘with groanings which cannot be uttered.’” (Torrey 1955, 92) See also 1 Cor 14:1 and Doty 1901, 82.

¹⁸¹ “We can pray God to implant it. It is ours, then, to nourish and cherish it, to guard it against extinction, to prevent its abatement or decline.” (Bounds c1929, 59)

¹⁸² 2 Cor 7:10

¹⁸³ McEntire, *op. cit.*, 80.

¹⁸⁴ Cassian 2006 [c420], 28.

¹⁸⁵ “Climacus for his part makes a clear distinction between two kinds of tears, those that are ‘bitter’ and those that are ‘sweet.’ There is, however, no sharp and rigid line of demarcation between the two, for the first type of tears can gradually and insensibly evolve into the second. Tears that begin by being ‘painful’ become in the course of time ‘painless’; tears of fear are changed into tears of gladness.” (Ware, *op. cit.*, 247)

succinctly in his *Dialogues*: “The penitent thirsting for God feels the compunction of fear at first; later on, he experiences the compunction of love. ... Now the same person who wept out of fear of punishment, sheds abundant tears because his entrance into the kingdom of heaven is being delayed.”¹⁸⁶

Paul’s experience of being “grieved over many who have sinned earlier and have not repented”¹⁸⁷ is the nub of a third dimension of compunction, explained in Cassian as “another kind of tears which are engendered, not by one’s own conscience, but by the recalcitrance and **sins of others**.”¹⁸⁸ This cause of tearful prayer comes from a deep awareness of God’s justice,¹⁸⁹ the fervent cries that proceed “from the fear of hell and the remembrance of that terrible judgment.”¹⁹⁰ The echo of compunction’s intercessory voice recurs through history, from Augustine’s travailing prayer over the condition of humanity,¹⁹¹ to Margery’s tearful pleading on behalf of penitents,¹⁹² but also continuing in the fervent prayers of radical identification¹⁹³ with the “soul danger” of others promoted by revival leaders and devotional writers in recent centuries.¹⁹⁴ Here is a dimension of *penthos* most germane to this project, a feature recurrent over time and useful for examination as a factor of preparedness for revival.

¹⁸⁶ McEntire, *op. cit.*, 78 (Saint Gregory, *The Great Dialogues*, Zimmerman, Odo John [tr.], Fathers of the Church 39 [New York] 1969, 173-74).

¹⁸⁷ 2 Cor 12:21

¹⁸⁸ Cassian 2006 [c420], 29. “It was this kind of tears that Samuel is described as having wept for Saul [cf. 1 Kings 15:35], and both the Lord in the Gospel [Luke 19:41 ff] and Jeremiah in earlier times for the city of Jerusalem...” (*ibid*)

¹⁸⁹ McEntire, *op. cit.*, 82.

¹⁹⁰ Cassian 2006 [c420], 29. God’s judgement as a source of spiritual desperation to which travailing prayer may give expression was mentioned on p. 11.

¹⁹¹ “Now that my heart is healed of that wound (*i.e.*, the death of his mother, Monica), in which I was perhaps guilty of some carnal affection, I pour out to you tears of a very different kind for this servant of yours, O our God; they come gushing forth from a mind struck by the perils besetting every soul that dies in Adam.” (Augustine 1997 [397-400], 233-34)

¹⁹² See note 109.

¹⁹³ An example of the profound de-centring and vicariousness associated with travailing prayer is nineteenth-century Methodist John Smith (see p. 26) who believed, “When you are with people in distress on account of their sins, you must not only pray for them, but you must throw yourself into their circumstances; you must be a penitent, too; they must pray through you, and what you say must be exactly as if they knew how.” (Kulp, *op. cit.*, 89-90) See also Duewel 1990, 73.

¹⁹⁴ Jonathan Edwards likened the “deep concern and distress” Christians can feel “for the souls of others” to the response toward those “drowning, or being burned up in a house on fire.” (WJE 4:305 [Appendix II].) Finney, too, believed that the fires of fervour within us should be matched by concern over the fires of hell waiting for the unconverted around us, stirring urgency in our prayers: “When sinners are careless and stupid, it is time

prayer for revival, while being the focus of this project, is only one of a variety¹⁹⁵ of petitionary concerns with which this praying tradition has been associated historically and in the Bible. Travailing prayer may touch people at any point of desperate need,¹⁹⁶ from healing and pregnancy to intervention in war or weather. Revival leaders and devotional writers, while sometimes drawing from these Scriptural petitions as metaphors¹⁹⁷ to illustrate elements of travailing prayer, would distinguish travailing prayer prompted by “the Holy Spirit in almost any needful direction” from that which is specifically “designed for the bringing of a soul into the family of God.”¹⁹⁸ Regardless of what summons it, extreme vulnerability in conditions like these can produce prayer that is vehement and forceful.¹⁹⁹ But what appears to connect the assorted intentions of travailing prayer is what makes it the voice of desperation as defined in this project.²⁰⁰ This prayer is a pouring out of the heart that reveals “our absolute dependence on God, our total helplessness apart from God”²⁰¹—as in the refrain of Ps 107: “Then they cried out to the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress.”²⁰²

Christians should bestir themselves. It is as much their duty to awake as it is for the firemen to do so when fire breaks out in the night in a great city. The church ought to put out the fires of hell which are laying hold of the wicked.” (Finney, *Lectures*, 26)

¹⁹⁵ “I would like to offer the following as a definition of spiritual travail: ‘Releasing the creative power or energy of the Holy Spirit into a situation to produce, create or give birth to something.’ ... I use the words ‘produce’ and ‘create’ because travail is not only spoken of in the Scriptures in the context of someone being born again, but of bringing forth other things. For example, when the Holy Spirit was hovering through Peter, he was bringing forth healing (see Acts 5:15). Through Elijah it was rain (see I Kings 18:45); through Paul it included maturity (see Galatians 4:19).” (Sheets 1996, 127-28.)

¹⁹⁶ Augustine’s experience of the healing of Innocentius is a stunning illustration of this (Appendix I).

¹⁹⁷ Ravenhill’s interpretation (1959, 136) of Rachel’s cry in Gen 30:1 (“Give me children, or I’ll die!”) is a good example of how travailing prayer for revival may be incited through the allegorical interpretation of a biblical narrative that involves travailing prayer for a different type of need (in this case, pregnancy).

¹⁹⁸ Doty 1932, 79.

¹⁹⁹ As Richard Foster notes, “This is not anger. It is not whining. ... We are engaging in serious business. Our prayers are important, having effect with God. We want God to know the earnestness of our heart. We beat on the doors of heaven because we want to be heard on high. We agonize. We cry out. We shout. We pray with sobs and tears. Our prayers become the groanings of a struggling faith.” (Foster, *op. cit.*, 225-26)

²⁰⁰ See pp. 10ff for a discussion of desperation as “a radical reliance upon and availability to God, acknowledged and felt in circumstances of need or taken up and sustained by choice.”

²⁰¹ Bloesch, *op. cit.*, 75.

²⁰² Ps 107:6 (13, 19, 28)

rendered as a fugue—introduced in the quiet, monastic tones of the patristic period; echoing in the quasi-sacramental sounds of Eastern Orthodoxy; adding the expressive, contrapuntal lines of laymen and women in the Middle Ages; and inserting a deep, combative timbre from the Reformation—then at full crescendo travelling prayer might have reached its climax in the First and Second Great Awakenings. It was during these momentous centuries of transatlantic renewal that travelling prayer as a factor of preparedness for revival seems to have been given its fullest, most central expression in the Western Church.

Little was original about travelling prayer in the revival movements of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As will be detailed in the next section of this chapter, the brokenness and earnestness, the desire and agony, the boldness and contending, the pneumatology of travelling prayer in these revival movements is traceable to previous times. There are correlations in the role of tears and gender, of posture and relationality as this praying tradition is expressed during various periods of history.²⁰³ Always travelling prayer vocalises intense emotional motivation. Never is it acceptably simulated or contrived.

But what becomes distinctive about travelling prayer in the 1700s is its centrality²⁰⁴ to a movement believed by its leaders to be potentially the final call urged upon God's people as the ushering in of Christ's return. This was a summons to urgency and unity. And what was

²⁰³ Reappropriation of compunction is a good example. Thomas Shepard (1605-49) was a prominent Puritan colonist whose writings Jonathan Edwards cited more than anyone else in his *Religious Affections*. (Story, *op. cit.*, 103) In his book, *The Sound Believer*, Shepard wrote of a "fourfold act of Christ's power, whereby he rescues and delivers all his out of their miserable state," the second phase of which is "compunction of sin." (Shepard 1967 [1853], 116-17) This "pricking of the heart" seated primarily "in the affections and will" (*ibid*, 136) is desirable for Christians, therefore we should "labor for this sense of misery, for this spirit of compunction." (*ibid*, 173) But Shepard insisted it is "wrought by the Spirit of Christ, not the power of man to prepare himself thereby for further grace." (*ibid*, 162) Evident here are ancient themes of prayerful agony—its worthiness, its penetrating effect, its origin in the initiative of God—being sounded again by Puritanism for application by New England evangelicals.

²⁰⁴ Kidd has noted how, in his 1739 *The History of the Work of Redemption*, Jonathan Edwards observed that "prayer accompanied all great historic outpourings of the Holy Spirit." (Kidd 2004, 19) His colleagues "believed that their churches needed the Holy Spirit to bring revival, and they considered prayer the key to the Spirit's coming." (*ibid*, 32) In his 1747 *Humble Attempt*, Edwards took notice that it was as He was praying that the "Spirit of God was poured out upon Christ himself" (WJE 5:355 [Lk 3:21-22]), one of many indications in Scripture that "it is the expressly revealed will of God, that his church should be very much in prayer for that glorious outpouring of the Spirit that is to be in the latter days." (*ibid*, 348)

central in the First became that and more—something programmatic—in the revivalism of the Second Great Awakening of the 1800s as preachers and leaders in rural communities, growing American cities, and on wild American frontiers sought credibility for their “new measures” in the legacy of travelling prayer history had handed down.

Critical Questions Alongside these themes, research has also been revealing that, in travelling prayer, history has handed down a tradition characterised by questions of change and complexity over time. For example, how are we to interpret the variance in expression of travelling prayer at different points in history, from the quiet, modest tears of Benedict²⁰⁵ to the roaring, shameless sobs of Margery Kempe? In what ways were the practices of compunction—based on dogma that saw agonised prayer as endued with power to which sin was subject, even to the point that one’s tears could effect forgiveness for another²⁰⁶—expressive of a pre-Reformation “salvation by works” dynamic? To what extent can it be determined that travelling prayer has actually resulted in revival, or that revival it has accompanied was of a more far-reaching or otherwise productive nature than revival in which other expressions of prayer were in evidence? How could travelling prayer during the Second Great Awakening be interpreted, along the lines of McLoughlin’s critique, as an unleashing of human, spiritual energy against the “desiccated state of theology in this period” in which Calvinism had “hardened into a series of arid formulae that produced endless quibbling among the clergy and increasing tedium, frustration, and skepticism among the churchgoers?”²⁰⁷

²⁰⁵ See note 99.

²⁰⁶ McEntire, *op. cit.*, 83.

²⁰⁷ Finney, *Lectures*, xiii. McLoughlin notes the significance of this shift: “The truth of the matter is that the breakdown of Calvinism was one of the two or three great intellectual revolutions in American history.” (*ibid*, xii) Related to this is Cawardine’s idea that British theology rejected “high Calvinism” largely as a result of the Wesleyan revivals (Cawardine, *op. cit.*, 60) and Nigel Scotland’s corresponding argument that “the influence of the Wesleys had prepared and made British Christians more open to receive the revivalism which was emerging in the wake of the Second Great Awakening.” (Scotland 2009, xviii)

It seems fair to say that from the 1700s on, travelling prayer was perceived by many revival leaders and devotional writers in America as an essential catalyst in revival, if not the most important factor of preparedness for it. But what nineteenth-century Finneyan revivalism added was confidence in travelling prayer operating as an immutable law of the spiritual world, given by God as a condition²⁰⁸ of His renewing work.²⁰⁹ Our sources suggest this was the heyday of travelling prayer, when preachers were extolling its effects, devotional writers were exhorting and equipping petitioners—and when many historians believe travelling prayer for another’s conversion became institutionalised²¹⁰ as a necessary ingredient²¹¹ in the standard recipe of revival. As spiritual principles became formulaic from ongoing application, some scholars have suggested that travelling prayer came to function almost as a cog in the mechanics of revival, with preachers turned to for inciting urgency, even fear, as a matter of routine. Dolan has observed this dynamic in nineteenth-century Catholic revivalism:

Over the course of time the revival was systematically organized and became an integral part of the church’s devotional crusade. In established parishes it was a regular feature of their religious activity promoted to achieve the best possible results. At this level, revivalism was less an urgent response to unusual religious malaise and more a periodic spiritual overhauling. ... The preachers had been called in to tune up the body religious, and after an interval of time had elapsed they would reappear ready to repeat their performance. Thus, what had begun as an urgent response to an unusual condition, a form of mass evangelization, became a special routine that took place at regular intervals.²¹²

In time, Finney himself questioned whether the principles and measures of revival had become overemphasised:

²⁰⁸ “[Finney] emphasized that any company of Christians can have a revival if they will fulfill the necessary conditions: agonizing prayer, and a balanced presentation of the truths of the Gospel.” (Allen, *op. cit.*, 32)

²⁰⁹ “As I have explained, the connection between the right use of means for a revival, and a revival, is as philosophically sure as between the right use of means to raise grain, and a crop of wheat. I believe, in fact, it is more certain, and that there are fewer instances of failure. ... Probably the law connecting cause and effect is more undeviating in spiritual than in natural things, and so there are fewer exceptions.”

(Finney, *Lectures*, 33)

²¹⁰ “No longer was a revival understood to be the result of a quickening of the Holy Spirit in a movement of grace... Now revivals were promoted as a product of human initiative and God’s cooperation, of organizational advance planning that set the time and place for God’s work in revival—a view that would clear the path for Finney’s successors in Dwight L. Moody, Billy Sunday, and Billy Graham.” (McCauley, *op. cit.*, 127)

²¹¹ “In the actual work of salvation, there are four principal agencies employed, namely: the Quickening Spirit, the Interceding Christ, the Travailing Life, and the Willing Sinner.” (Doty 1901, 65)

²¹² Dolan, *op. cit.*, 62.

Efforts to promote revivals of religion have become so mechanical, there is so much policy and machinery, so much dependence upon means and measures, so much of man and so little of God, that the character of revivals has greatly changed within the last few years.²¹³

However, even as nineteenth-century revivalists were bold in urging travailing prayer as causal²¹⁴ and normative in revival, they might have concurred with their critics in drawing back from categories of “guarantee” in characterising its effects, eschewal of which is a presupposition of this project. But they would press into what travailing prayer reveals about how much we trust God and really want what we ask for in prayer. Could we get along without revival? Do we have some other plan if God doesn’t come through? Finney and those he influenced²¹⁵ insisted these challenges had to be addressed before God’s renewing work would become possible, and that any biblical, historical, and logical answer would lead to travailing prayer. Assertions like these, compared with prayer as it functioned in other revival movements, merit in-depth examination and case-study analysis, further definition of which we turn to next.

²¹³ Finney 1979, 102. Finney’s reflections here come from his “Letters on Revivals” mentioned on p. 9, note 39, published a decade after his *Lectures*.

²¹⁴ “Prayer is an essential link in the chain of causes that lead to revival... The very idea of *effectual* prayer is that it effects its object.” (Finney, *Lectures*, 53-54. See also Hambrick-Stowe 1996, 157-58.)

²¹⁵ An example of Finney’s influence comes from the journal of a twenty-year-old J. O. Fraser: “Tuesday, Jan. 4[, 1916]. Finished Finney’s autobiography; much help received from it. Finney’s strong point is the using of *means* to an *end*. My own leading is not a little along that line also. I do not intend to be one of those who bemoan little results, while ‘resting in the faithfulness of God.’ My cue is to take hold of the faithfulness of God and *use the means* necessary to secure big results.” (Fraser 2004, 4)

CORE TRAITS OF TRAVAILING PRAYER AS A TOOL FOR COMPARATIVE RESEARCH

In order to probe beneath broad themes and queries, a strategy for detailed study of the travelling prayer tradition is needed. Roy Hammerling, whose work has been mentioned²¹⁶ as innovative in the historical study of prayer, posits a four-fold model for this kind of in-depth analysis. The **content** of prayer is an appropriate place to begin, revealing “the true hearts of the lives and theologies of those who pray.”²¹⁷ But content alone, Hammerling continues, “is not enough for the scholar. Often when prayers are removed from their **contexts**, **forms**, or **practices** they become ambiguous with regard to what their content means.”²¹⁸ All four of these facets are integral as “content...interacts with form and practice to create an identifying prayerful experience, or perhaps better yet we might say prayerful consciousness, in a particular context and time.”²¹⁹

This project adapts Hammerling’s model to develop a trait-matrix of travelling prayer as a tool for comparative research. Traits discovered in Church history, which appear to cluster into three attributes under each of Hammerling’s four categories, will be described in the pages to come. It has become apparent that monastic, mystic, and revivalist themes, informed by Scripture, have been particularly important to the development of the travelling prayer tradition over time, so this material is drawn from for illustration in the section that follows. Added emphasis is given to the work of revival leaders and devotional writers, particularly Edwards and Finney, as a gesture toward the crux of the project, unfolding in subsequent chapters. What emerges is a template of **twelve essential, interrelated traits of**

²¹⁶ See p. 13.

²¹⁷ Hammerling, *op. cit.*, 12.

²¹⁸ *ibid*, 12 (emphasis mine).

²¹⁹ *ibid*, 13

travailing prayer, illustrated on the next page. These features, as will be shown, overlap²²⁰ in certain ways but are remarkably disparate in others, making them useful for in-depth comparison. For example, while expressions of travelling prayer Edwards and Finney advocate may look similar in form or practice, their content can be observed to be meaningfully different. In terms of the context for prayer, Edwards had much to say about the importance of meetings embodying corporate unity while Finney emphasised the advantages of people in rural settings, over urban, in the experience of travelling prayer. It is the detection of these differences and changes over time—some striking, some slight—and their interpretation that is the fundamental work of historical research²²¹ and a principal objective of this project.

Content

Neediness and Brokenness People tend to pray what they truly believe. “Pleas offered to God,” Hammerling writes, “expose the self-perception of petitioners, their world views, and their particular outlooks on the divine.”²²² This is the content of prayers, a first category we examine for mapping traits of travelling prayer. And the content which sets the stage for travelling prayer is a shattering sense of **neediness**,²²³ an awareness of reality freighted with logic bound to persuade the honest person to pray.

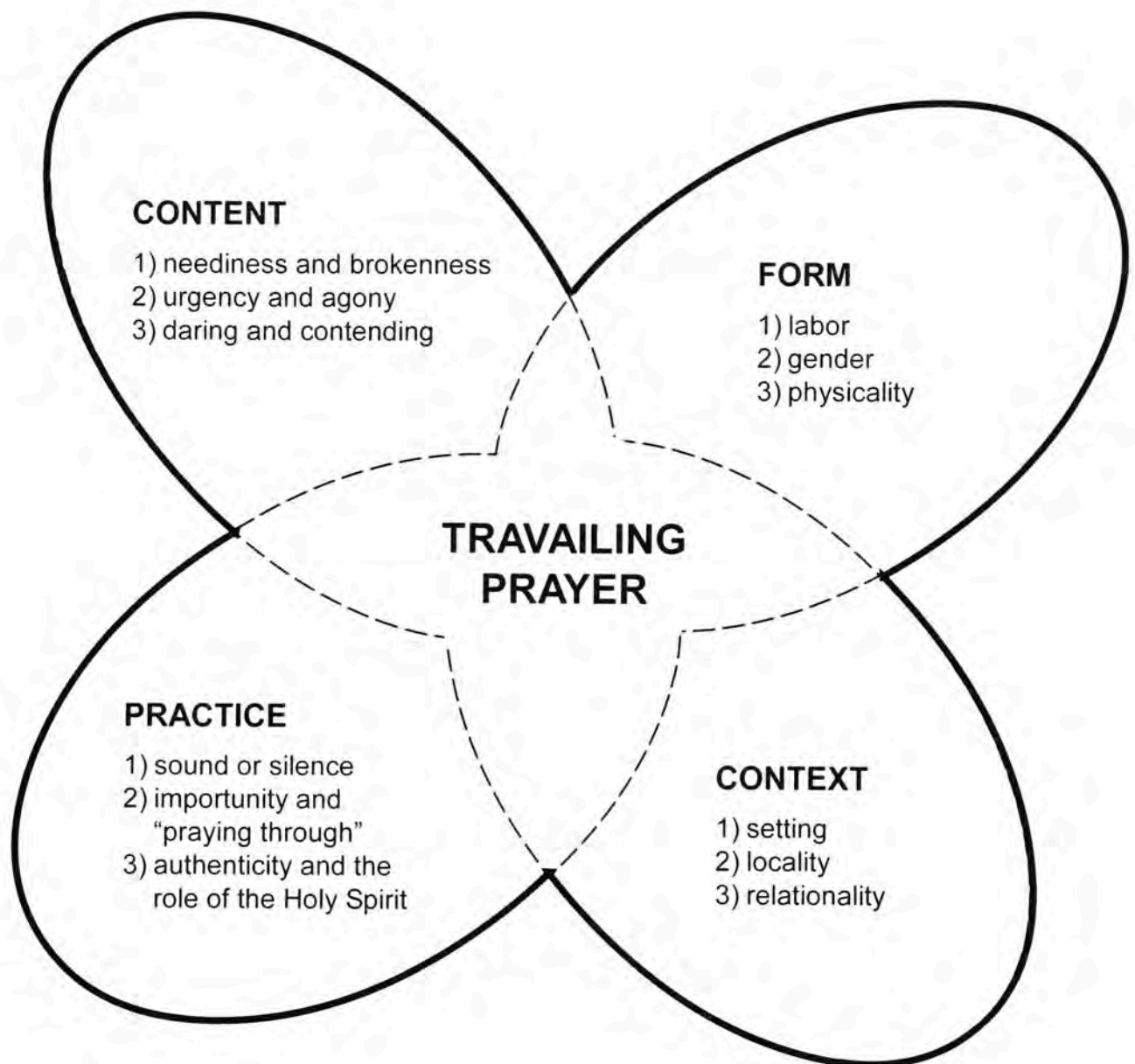
²²⁰ See p. 69; *e.g.*, Chapter IV, note 170.

²²¹ “No matter how much they may differ in the kinds of events they study, the precise kinds of questions they pose, the research methods they employ, or the reading strategies they use, all historians are in one way or another involved in studying change over time.” (Howell and Prevenier, *op. cit.*, 119-20)

²²² Hammerling, *op. cit.*, 12.

²²³ Duncan Campbell describes the matter-of-fact recognition of need that had prepared the way in prayer for the Hebridean Revival of 1949-52: “This is where and how it began: A number of men and two elderly women there were made conscious of the desperate need of their parish; all human effort had failed and had left them baffled. They realized that their one resource was to fall back upon God.” (Campbell 1962, 59)

RECURRING TRAITS IN THE TRAVAILING PRAYER TRADITION



Travailing prayer speaks of what has been found out and agreed to in the grips of brutal empiricism and candour.²²⁴ For revival leaders and devotional writers, it is this blunt realism and heartrending concord with God's intentions that comprise the inner breaking necessary for pride to be disabled,²²⁵ for thinking to become sober and humble, and for right judgement to be possible. Scripture portrays such personal dismantling as sometimes being entwined with the painful prayer of repentance, as "when Jonah's warning reached the king of Nineveh"²²⁶ or when Ezra led the Israelites in confession of sin: "While Ezra was praying and confessing, weeping and throwing himself down before the house of God, a large crowd of Israelites—men, women and children—gathered around him. They too wept bitterly."²²⁷ Like the prodigal son in Jesus' parable, **brokenness** is often what causes persons to come to their senses²²⁸ and call out to God. Prayerlessness in this condition would be a sanctioning of denial or indifference.²²⁹ This point where it is finally given utterance²³⁰ may be the lowest trough of desperation, that moment mentioned earlier²³¹ when people "really *feel* these inward pantings"²³² as the result of mounting pressure and put their need into the words of prayer, even if spoken only as a whisper.²³³ No suffering is wasted, Finney believed, if it brings people to this preparation for prayer:

If Christians are made to feel that they have no hope but in God, and if they have sufficient feeling left to care for the honour of God and the salvation of the souls of the impenitent, there will certainly be a revival. Let hell boil over if it will, and spew out as many devils as there

²²⁴ "Let us be honest in the presence of God and get right into the grips of reality. Have I a vision of my own desperate need? Oh, for a baptism of honesty, for a gripping sincerity that will move us." (*ibid*, 61-62)

²²⁵ Ironically, while capacities for thought and reasoning may lead to recognition of need, they may also produce "the pride of learning and self-sufficiency," Bounds wrote, "and these ought to be offended and rebuked in a ministry that is so derelict as to allow them to exist." (Bounds 194-?, 4)

²²⁶ "When Jonah's warning reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust. This is the proclamation he issued in Nineveh: 'By the decree of the king and his noble...: Let everyone call urgently on God.'" (Jon 3:5-9)

²²⁷ Ezr 10:1

²²⁸ Lk 15:17-20

²²⁹ "The remembrance of our indifference and negligence has sometimes also aroused a saving fervour of spirit in us." (Cassian 2006 [c420], 27)

²³⁰ "I am feeble and utterly crushed; I groan in anguish of heart." (Ps 38:8-9)

²³¹ See p. 12.

²³² Bounds c1929, 46. "Fervency has its seat in the heart, not in the brain, nor in the intellectual faculties of the mind. ... Fervency is the throb and gesture of the emotional nature." (*ibid*, 57)

²³³ "Lord, when your people were suffering...they could barely whisper a prayer." (Isa 26:16)

are stones in the pavement, if it only drives Christians to God in prayer—it cannot hinder a revival.²³⁴

Urgency and Agony Felt need is more than supportive data for travailing prayer. It is the basis for heartbreak that strips away all casual pretense and leads to “praying more earnestly.”²³⁵ Revival leaders and devotional writers appear to describe an intensifying nature to travailing prayer, as aspects of this experience combine into a hotter core²³⁶ of expression.²³⁷ This is a deepening from honest appraisal to burning²³⁸ **urgency** as travailing prayer voices a fervent “craving, an intense longing, for attainment.”²³⁹

In that God hears desire,²⁴⁰ “there is a sense,” Duewel writes, “in which your deep, holy desire is in itself prayer.”²⁴¹ Here is the longing in Jesus looking out over Jerusalem,²⁴² the aching desire of Paul for the Jews,²⁴³ a “heaven-given appetite”²⁴⁴ to thirst²⁴⁵ for God’s

²³⁴ Finney, *Lectures*, 29.

²³⁵ “Earnestly crying to God” is how Jonathan Edwards referred to travailing prayer in *An Humble Attempt*, offering ourselves to pray in a manner that “represents the earnestness of those that make the proposal, their great engagedness in the affair.” (WJE 5:317-18) Devotional writers looked to an instance of Jesus praying as the archetype of this earnestness, when on the night before His crucifixion, “being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly” (Lk 22:44)—the praying of a “soul being stretched out toward God in intense earnestness of desire.” (Torrey 1955, 85) This word “earnestly” shares the same root (ἐκτενῶς) with that used to describe the church’s intense intercession at the moment when “Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him.” (Acts 12:5) Later in the New Testament James describes the prophet Elijah as being a human being like us who “prayed earnestly” (προσεύχομαι προσευχή), and his requests were given. (Ja 5:17 [That Elijah prayed may be assumed from 1 Kgs 17:1, 18:41-46].) See Chapter III, notes 153-59.

²³⁶ Cassian recognised escalating force in the Lord’s prayer, as “it leads His familiars through a loftier grade to that fiery prayer which is known or experienced by very few, but (that I may speak more precisely) is ineffable.” (Cassian 2006 [c420], 27) See also Spencer, William David, and Aida Besançon Spencer, *The Prayer Life of Jesus: Shout of Agony, Revelation of Love, A Commentary* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America) 1990, 9-38.

²³⁷ This observation parallels the possibility, mentioned previously (p. 12), of layering in the interaction of patterns of desperation as each one leads to a deeper experience.

²³⁸ Burning and fire are recurrent images to render the effect of urgency in prayer. Travailing prayer is a “glowing warmth, which may intensify into a vehement heat of spirit.” (Wigle 1900, 254) “No erudition, no purity of diction, no width of mental outlook, no flowers of eloquence, no grace of person, can atone for lack of fire. Prayer ascends by fire.” (Bounds c1929, 50)

²³⁹ Bounds c1929, 43.

²⁴⁰ “You, LORD, hear the desire of the afflicted; you encourage them, and you listen to their cry.” (Ps 10:17)

²⁴¹ Duewel 1990, 68. He quotes Andrew Murray: “Desire is the soul of prayer, and the cause of insufficient or unsuccessful prayer is very much to be found in the lack or feebleness of desire.” (69 [Murray, Andrew, *The Ministry of Intercession* (New York: Revell), 1898, 104].)

²⁴² Mt 23:37

²⁴³ “I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel.” (Rom 9:1-4)

²⁴⁴ Bounds c1929, 45.

²⁴⁵ Ps 42:1-4

renewing work as “in a dry and parched land where there is no water.”²⁴⁶ Jonathan Edwards idealised the efficacy of such urgency in prayer in his *Life of David Brainerd* as stimulation to such praying for restoration of the church.²⁴⁷ In his journal, Brainerd frequently described himself as being “enabled to cry with great ardency... for myself, for Christian friends, and for the Church of God.”²⁴⁸ It was only with this divine enablement that Brainerd could travail in prayer with such fervour and passion: “I may tell you freely, without vanity and ostentation, God has of late given me great freedom and fervency in prayer.”²⁴⁹ Edwards published Brainerd’s example of God-given intensity in prayer to kindle imitation of him in the hope of “extensive revival of religion” to come.²⁵⁰ Urgent longing was essential to stoking such hope, Edwards believed, for “when God once sees his people much engaged in praying for this mercy, it shall no longer be delayed.”²⁵¹

Sometimes, but not always,²⁵² urgency escalates into **agony**, when travailing prayer becomes a matter of life and death.²⁵³ Augustine describes an episode of agonising prayer for healing cried out by Innocentius whose manner of prayer, “his passion, his agitation, his flood of tears, his groans, and the sobs which shook his whole frame” were such “that he could go no further, unless it was to breathe his last in prayer.”²⁵⁴ Finney writes of ministers who “have had this distress about their congregations, so that they felt as if they could not live unless they saw a revival.”²⁵⁵ And he referred more than once to a layman, Mr Abel

²⁴⁶ Ps 63:1. Cassian recounts Abba Isaac commending prayer in “which even richer springs of tears burst forth from unbearable joy and unbounded keenness, whilst our soul thirsts for the mighty living God.” (Cassian 2006 [c420], 28-29)

²⁴⁷ See note 150.

²⁴⁸ WJE 7:171, 226.

²⁴⁹ *ibid*, 490

²⁵⁰ *ibid*, 532. “As Mr. Brainerd’s desires and prayers for the coming of Christ’s kingdom were very special and extraordinary; so, I think, we may reasonably hope that the God who excited those desires and prayers will answer them with something special and extraordinary.” (*ibid*)

²⁵¹ WJE 5:354.

²⁵² “Sometimes, that we may prevail in prayer, fervency arises to an agony. Agony in prayer is not always a condition of prevailing prayer, though fervency is.” (Wigle, *op. cit.*, 256)

²⁵³ “There must be the spirit of *supplication*, a *pouring out of the soul*, a spiritual cry, a vehement strife, a powerful wrestling, an irrepressible: ‘I *must* be answered or *die!*’” (*ibid*, 257)

²⁵⁴ Augustine 1981 [c413-26], 1035-37. See Appendix I.

²⁵⁵ Finney, *Lectures*, 31.

Clary, whose “burden of soul would frequently be so great that he was unable to stand, and he would writhe and groan in agony.”²⁵⁶ Mr Clary never, “that I could learn, appeared in public but gave himself wholly to prayer,”²⁵⁷ crying out to God, day and night.²⁵⁸ Such agony, Edwards had earlier declared, should not be perceived as curious or excessive, but merely the fitting replication of²⁵⁹ and sharing in²⁶⁰ Christ’s agony for souls:

At the same time that He offered up His blood for souls, [he] offered up also, as their High Priest, “strong crying and tears” [Heb. 5:7], with an extreme agony, wherein the soul of Christ was as it were in travail for the souls of the elect; and therefore in saving them he is said to “see of the travail of His soul” [Isa. 53:11]. As such a spirit of love to, and concern for souls was the spirit of Christ, so it is the spirit of the church; and therefore the church...is represented, Rev. 12:2, as a woman crying, “travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered.”²⁶¹

Daring and Contending Agony can lead travailing prayer a step inside the risky territory of protest and argument with God: “I pour out before him my complaint; before him I tell my trouble.”²⁶² This is a common characteristic of both travailing prayer and biblical lament,²⁶³ the uneasy voice of refusing “to accept things as they are, ... and press[ing] God for deliverance.”²⁶⁴ Despite its hazards, Brueggemann finds in such “expectant imperative” and accusation of God “a form of active hope.” Renewal can begin in the utterance of such a bold and **daring** prayer:

Where the cry is not voiced, heaven is not moved and history is not initiated. And then the end is hopelessness. Where the cry is seriously voiced, heaven may answer and earth may

²⁵⁶ Finney, *Memoirs*, 316-18. See Appendix III. Finney was knowledgeable of “many others among the men, and a large number of women, [who] partook of the same Spirit, and spent a great part of their time in prayer.”

²⁵⁷ *ibid*

²⁵⁸ “LORD, you are the God who saves me; day and night I cry out to you.” (Ps 88:1)

²⁵⁹ “It is Christlike to be so burdened in prayer,” Duewel writes. (Duewel 1990, 76). “As we purposefully commit ourselves to take up our cup and give ourselves to prayer wrestling, as we take up deliberately our cross, the cross of prayer travail, we become most like Jesus, our mighty Intercessor.” (*ibid*, 224)

²⁶⁰ This mutuality is not unlike what Paul sought from Christians in Rome when he asked them to “join me in my struggle (συναγωνισασθαι, literally “agonize with me”) by praying to God for me.” (Rom 15:30)

²⁶¹ WJE 4:305-06. See Appendix II.

²⁶² Ps 142:2. See also Ps 13:1-2. Brueggemann summarises the logic of the lament psalms as “a complaint which makes the shrill insistence:

- 1) Things are not right in the present arrangement.
- 2) They need not stay this way but can be changed.
- 3) The speaker will not accept them in this way, for it is intolerable.
- 4) It is God’s obligation to change things.” (Brueggemann 1986, 62)

²⁶³ Boyce posits the centrality of such protest in the metanarrative of the Old Testament: “In a fundamental sense, the Old Testament is a story of a relationship—a relationship rooted in the crying out of God’s people on the one hand and God’s hearing these cries on the other.” (Boyce 1988, 1)

²⁶⁴ Ellington, *op. cit.*, xi.

have a new chance. The new resolve in heaven and the new possibility on earth depend on the initiation of protest.²⁶⁵

Scripture explains that God welcomes our assertions and is willing to be reminded of His promises to respond to our striving in prayer.²⁶⁶ Finney offered testimony and assurance that those who chance entry into uncharted audacity in prayer will find great blessing within its bounds:

Such prayer is often offered in the present day, when Christians have been wrought up to such a pitch of importunity and such a holy boldness, that afterwards, when they looked back upon it, they were frightened and amazed at themselves, to think they should dare to exercise such importunity with God. And yet these prayers have prevailed, and obtained the blessing. And many of these persons, that I am acquainted with, are among the holiest persons I know in the world.²⁶⁷

Nevertheless, anticipation of good outcomes from challenging God does not make travailing prayer safe. God may take us on, and a real **contending** can ensue. “True prayer involves not simply pleading with God but also wrestling with God in the darkness,”²⁶⁸ Bloesch has written, refusing to pull back until the blessing has been received.²⁶⁹ To the Colossians, Paul depicted Epaphras, “who is one of you,” as “always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured.”²⁷⁰ Revival leaders and devotional writers understood from biblical examples that we are never fighting against God in travailing prayer, as though, Torrey writes, “we have to wrestle with God to make God willing to grant our prayer.”²⁷¹ Instead it is on the basis of our closeness with God

²⁶⁵ Brueggemann 1986, 65-66.

²⁶⁶ “Remember your word to your servant, for you have given me hope.” (Ps 119:49) Brueggemann comments on Ps 39:12 [ESV]: “Yahweh is reminded that he is responsible for such a sojourner and is called to accountability on their behalf, because ‘I am a sojourner with you.’” (Brueggemann 1986, 66)

²⁶⁷ Finney, *Lectures*, 58.

²⁶⁸ Bloesch, *op. cit.*, 76.

²⁶⁹ Frequently referenced in revivalist and devotional literature is the story of Jacob, whose identity was redefined by his wrestling for survival with God. (Gen 32:22-28)

²⁷⁰ Col 4:12

²⁷¹ Torrey 1955, 88. Torrey continues, “No, ‘our wrestling is...against the...spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places’ (Eph 6:12)... Sometimes when we pray it seems as if all the forces of hell swept in between us and God. What shall we do? Give up? No! ... Fight the thing through on your knees, wrestle in your prayer to God, and win.” Prayer as spiritual warfare could be examined as another dimension of travailing prayer for revival (see note 132), looking, for example, at a nineteenth-century revival that occurred in the Black Forest town of Möttlingen where Johann Christoph Blumhardt (1805-80) was pastor. He became engaged in an extended period of prayerful battle with evil spirits tormenting persons in their village, deliverance from which led to a revival which has been recounted in *The Awakening*, by Friedrich Zuendel.

that we contend “so that his justice may be overcome by his mercy.”²⁷² Wrestling in prayer, Brainerd believed, was fighting on God’s side:

[I] was enabled to wrestle with God by prayer in a more affectionate, fervent, humble, intense, and importunate manner than I have for many months past. Nothing seemed too hard for God to perform; nothing too great for me to hope for from him.²⁷³

Just as people are willing to contend for those they love and what they care about, wrestling with God is the height of travailing prayer and the fullest expression of its content.

Form

Labour

Though travailing prayer might be thought of as mostly extemporaneous, its content finds functional expression in a second category of physical forms,²⁷⁴ one of which is toilsome **labour**. Arduous work as a form or framework of this praying aligns closely with the essential meaning of the word “travail”, defined as “a painful or laborious task” or “the product or result of toil or work.”²⁷⁵ Travailing prayer is about getting down to the grind of really doing business with God, labouring in prayer²⁷⁶ with intense focus on a particular goal,²⁷⁷ and doing so with costly exertion.²⁷⁸

²⁷² Foster, *op. cit.*, 225-226.

²⁷³ WJE 7:225. See also 170, 171, 181, 258, and 402.

²⁷⁴ “Prayers exist in an almost endless variety of forms,” Hammerling observes. “Often the physical forms of prayers ... determine how prayers will be practiced and ultimately how they should be interpreted.” (Hammerling, *op. cit.*, 6)

²⁷⁵ Brown 1993, 3377.

²⁷⁶ John Smith records in his diary on April 24, 1827: “The work is sure to go on, for God and we are agreed. Labor, labor (prayer) is absolutely necessary.” (Duewel 2002, 172 [no reference provided].)

²⁷⁷ “Desire is intense, but narrow; it cannot spread itself over a wide area. It wants a few things, and wants them badly...” (Bounds c1929, 52) Brueggemann recognises this feature of particularity in the strenuous petitions of the Hebrews, noting that while, in the Old Testament, “every dimension of Israel’s life is lived before YHWH ... in regularized liturgical usage,” penetrating this stylisation is the “remarkable particularity of the ... prayers of lament and complaint.” (Brueggemann 2008, xx)

²⁷⁸ Lyrene has highlighted how the idea of labouring in prayer was extended in the Second Great Awakening to the point of petitioners offering their own ‘exertions’ as answers to their prayers: He attributes much of the original impulse for mission to William Carey who proposed to the Northampton Baptist Association ‘that they should get up and go forth and enable God to respect and answer their pleadings.’” (Lyrene, *op. cit.*, 113 [Carey, S. Pearce, *William Carey: D.D., Fellow of Linnaean Society* (London: Hodder and Stoughton) 1923, 52].) Carey wrote in *An Enquiry Into the Obligations of Christians To Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens* (1961 [1792], 81): “We must not be contented however with praying, without exerting ourselves in the use of means for the obtaining of those things we pray for.”

Expectedly, the strain²⁷⁹ of travailing prayer has sometimes led to physical exhaustion and broken health. For Finney, the spark of the 1825-26 revival in Oneida County, New York, was struck by a woman “in feeble health” who “kept praying more and more, till it seemed as if her agony would destroy her body.”²⁸⁰ By its very nature, travailing prayer is the language²⁸¹ of extremity.²⁸² Revival leaders and devotional writers know this praying to be demanding, exhausting work. But they are careful not to construe it as a form of “works” that could earn salvation or God’s blessing. Neither, Finney believed, should physical manifestations and exertions be considered normative in travailing prayer:

These effects of the spirit of prayer upon the body are themselves no part of religion. It is only that the body is often so weak that the feelings of the soul overpower it. These bodily effects are not at all essential to prevailing prayer...²⁸³

Instead, whatever greuelling labour prayer calls for is simply the outlay revival work necessitates and deserves.

Gender Though perhaps “not at all essential,” as Finney asserts, the bodily effects of travailing prayer warrant critical study, particularly for interpreting the function of **gender** in the forms of this praying tradition. For example, we have already observed how

²⁷⁹ Finney illustrated his *Lectures* with examples of petitioners he knew who had completely spent themselves in prayer: “The apostle Paul speaks of it as a travail of the soul. Jesus Christ, when he was praying in the garden, was in such an agony that ‘His sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground’ (Luke 22:44). I have never known a person sweat blood but I have known a person pray till blood started from his nose. And I have known persons pray till they were all wet with perspiration, in the coldest weather in winter. I have known persons pray for hours, till their strength was all exhausted with the agony of their minds. Such prayers prevailed with God.” (Finney, *Lectures*, 60)

²⁸⁰ Finney, *Lectures*, 32. This story is quoted in its entirety by Torrey (1955, 122-23) and Wallis (*op. cit.*, 127). In like manner, John Smith publicly travailed in prayer to the point that it seemed it would also destroy his body. On one occasion, “his agony was so extraordinary that Mrs. Smith, though accustomed to witnessing his exertions, was unable to endure the sight and withdrew from the room.” (Dewel 2002, 177) Smith’s friends frequently feared he was overdoing physically, sometimes begging him to be more careful or even restraining him and urging him to stop. But he could not, owing to his irrepressible concern for the spiritual condition of others: “God has given me such a sight of the value of precious souls, that I cannot live if souls be not saved. ... Oh, give me souls, or else I die!” (Kulp, *op. cit.*, 89) Smith died at the age of thirty-seven. He echoes here the cry of Rachel (Gen 30:1; note 197) and the plea attributed to John Knox which is often cited by those writing about travailing prayer: “Give me Scotland, or else I die!”

²⁸¹ “God has chosen the best word to express it,” Finney wrote; “it is travail—travail of the soul.” (Finney, *Lectures*, 65)

²⁸² “It is clear that Israel’s speech toward God expressed in the regularities of the Psalter is the *speech of extremity* that pushes beyond rational, explanatory discourse out into its ecstasy and its agony.” (Brueggemann 2008, xvii) “The church’s extremity has often been God’s opportunity for the magnifying his power, mercy and faithfulness toward her.” (WJE 5:360)

²⁸³ Finney, *Lectures*, 67.

wrestling with God supplies core content to this praying, a very physical and characteristically male image of praying. Travailing prayer embodies a heaving, muscular engagement with God. Illustrative of this might be the desperate plea of Samson, a paragon of masculine strength in Old Testament,²⁸⁴ who upon facing death, travailed for help in retribution, praying with literally physical force.²⁸⁵ Samson's physical bearing here resembles that of Celtic monks who spent long hours in prayer with arms outstretched in the cross vigil, up to their waist or chest in the sea reciting psalms, or genuflecting before the altar.²⁸⁶ The "quickened vigor" and physical exertion of a "long exhaustive season of importunate prayer"²⁸⁷ would leave David Brainerd recounting how "God enabled me so to agonize in prayer that I was quite wet with sweat, though in the shade, and the wind cool."²⁸⁸ Soldiering is another typically male image and form of travailing in prayer that revival leaders and devotional writers underscore:

Like a brave soldier, who, as the conflict grows sterner, exhibits a superior courage than in the earlier stages of the battle; so does the praying Christian, when delay and denial face him, increase his earnest asking, and ceases not until prayer prevails.²⁸⁹

Women,²⁹⁰ too, may take heart in travailing prayer because of God's pattern of responding to it, as He did to Hagar's yearning for a child: "And the Angel of the LORD said

²⁸⁴ "Strenuous prayer will help us recover the masculine type of religion—and then our opponents will at least respect us." (Forsyth 1960, 81)

²⁸⁵ "Then Samson prayed to the LORD, 'Sovereign LORD, remember me. Please, God, strengthen me just once more, and let me with one blow get revenge on the Philistines for my two eyes.' Then Samson reached toward the two central pillars on which the temple stood. Bracing himself against them, his right hand on the one and his left hand on the other, Samson said, 'Let me die with the Philistines!'" (Jdg 16:28-30)

²⁸⁶ Bradley, *op. cit.*, 204. "Ray Simpson, one of the few leading figures in the contemporary revival [of Celtic Christianity] ... points out that it is essentially (although not exclusively) manly, inheriting and affirming from pre-Christian Celtic society the male image of warrior and hunter." (205)

²⁸⁷ Bounds 1974, 46.

²⁸⁸ WJE 7:162 (also 163). Oswald Smith (1933, 30) and Wallis (*op. cit.*, 163) highlight this particular passage from Brainerd's journal.

²⁸⁹ Bounds c1929, 77. This is the trait exhibited in King Jehoshaphat's desperate prayer facing an onslaught of Moabites and Ammonites: "We have no power to face this vast army that is attacking us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you." (2 Chr 20:12) See also Gideon (Jdg 6:15).

²⁹⁰ Bhattacharji observes that, beyond Margery Kempe in England, "when we look at the rest of Europe, we find many women embodying this tradition of compassionate weeping," such as Marie d'Oignies, Angela of Foligno, and others. (*ibid*, 235) See also Dickman, Susan, "Margery Kempe and the Continental Tradition of Pious Women", in Marion Glasscoe (ed.) *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer) 1984, 150-68.

to [Hagar]: ‘Behold, you are with child, and you shall bear a son. You shall call his name Ishmael, because the LORD has heard your affliction.’”²⁹¹ Birthing is a prominent and uniquely female representation of travailing prayer among revival leaders and devotional writers who refer to the Church as the wife of God and mother of the converted. Here the Holy Spirit is depicted as hovering over the Church to conceive new life in persons, churches, and communities. Travailing prayer is the necessary agony of bringing forth this new creation.²⁹² Two Scripture references, one each from the Old and New Testaments, recur in revival and devotional literature as touchstones of this form:

Before she travailed, she brought forth; before her pain came, she was delivered of a man child. Who hath heard such a thing? who hath seen such things? Shall the earth be made to bring forth in one day? or shall a nation be born at once? for as soon as Zion travailed, she brought forth her children.²⁹³

My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you, how I wish I could be with you now...²⁹⁴

Personifying the principles of these passages is the character of Hannah, a travailing woman ostensibly intoxicated with anguished yearning for pregnancy. The narrative of Hannah’s longing for childbirth is repeatedly elevated by revival leaders and devotional writers²⁹⁵ as a distinctively female yet broadly applicable basis for employing travailing prayer: “I am a woman who is deeply troubled. I have not been drinking wine or beer; I was pouring out my soul to the LORD.”²⁹⁶ Human conception and delivery as structural images of travailing prayer are traceable in church history, from patristic writers²⁹⁷ to medieval mystics²⁹⁸ to

²⁹¹ Gen 16:11 [NKJV]

²⁹² “In the work of bringing sinners to the Eternal Life, the Church (and so, at times, some of its members) bears a relationship which is at least strongly akin to that of mother. This is ‘Travail of Soul,’ or, the Travailing Life.” (Doty 1901, 72) See also Doty 1932, 78.

²⁹³ Isa 66:7-9 [KJV]

²⁹⁴ Gal 4:19-20

²⁹⁵ Leonard Ravenhill, for example, devoted chapter 4 of his *Revival Praying* (1962) to the story of Hannah as a model of travailing prayer for renewal.

²⁹⁶ 1 Sam 1:15

²⁹⁷ Augustine spoke of himself being reborn by his mother’s anguished praying as a “son of tears” nearly three centuries before Isaac the Syrian was reflecting on what happens when “the moment of the birth of the spiritual child is now at hand, and the travail of childbirth becomes intense.” (Ware, *op. cit.*, 250 [Isaac, *Homily* 14, Wensinck (trans.), 85; Miller (trans.), 82-83].)

nineteenth-century missionaries.²⁹⁹ In *Some Thoughts Concerning Revival of Religion in New England*, Edwards acknowledged the natal character of travailing prayer:

When Christ is mystically born into the world, to rule over all nations, it is represented in the 12th chap. of Rev. as being in consequence of the church's crying and travailing in birth, and being pained to be delivered. One thing here intended, doubtless, is her crying and agonizing in prayer.³⁰⁰

Finney goes on to extend the "mother of the converted" symbolism to the period following spiritual birth:

This travailing in birth for souls creates also a remarkable bond of union between warm-hearted Christians and the young converts. ... To those who have experienced the agony of wrestling, prevailing prayer, for the conversion of a soul, you may depend upon it, that that soul, after it is converted, appears as dear as a child is to the mother who has brought it forth with pain.³⁰¹

Interestingly, however, gender boundaries apparently may be traversed in travailing prayer.³⁰²

Just as women can sweat in athletics and serve with bravery and sacrifice in the military, men can know "great sorrow and unceasing anguish"³⁰³ in their petitions to the point of being, as was Paul, "in the pains of childbirth."³⁰⁴

Physicality Some have wondered if it could have been anguish like the pain of childbirth that characterised the posture of Elijah's desperate prayer for rain after a long season of drought: "Elijah climbed to the top of Carmel, bent down to the ground and put his

²⁹⁸ Ware cites fourteenth-century mystics who seem to speak of the sexual sense of spiritual tears in prayer that spring from the divine *eros*, "generated by an intense and unrestrained longing for the Lord Jesus Christ" leading the heart to "cry out in ecstasy." (*ibid*, 248 [Xanthopoulos, Kallistos and Ignatios, *On Those who Choose the Life of Stillness* 58 (*Patrologiae cursus completus, Series Graeca* 147:741A)].)

²⁹⁹ J. O. Fraser (see p. 29) wrote to his prayer-partners, calling on them to join him in travailing prayer after the pattern of Hannah: "How much of our prayer is of the quality we find in this woman's 'bitterness of soul', when she 'prayed unto the Lord'? ... Oh, for such desires! Oh, for Hannah's earnestness...!" (Fraser, *op. cit.*, 14-15)

³⁰⁰ WJE 4:517.

³⁰¹ Finney, *Lectures*, 68-69. Finney also compares the Church's praying to the concern of a loving mother for her ailing child. (*ibid*, 59)

³⁰² Bhattacharji has noted from "the most detailed account of a pilgrimage to Jerusalem to have come out of [the medieval] period, that of the Dominican friar Felix Fabri," that when pilgrims reached the church of the Holy Sepulchre, "they uttered groans, sighs, laments, and sobs, and some fell to the ground. ... Men and women abandoned themselves equally to these behaviors; but in particular, he adds, the women screamed as though in labor." (Bhattacharji, *op. cit.*, 235 [Fabri, Felix, *Evagatorium in Terrae Sanctae, Arabiae et Egypti Peregrinationem*, Hassler, C. D. (ed.), (Stuttgart: Societas Literaria Stuttgardiensis) 1843, 1:238-239. English translation: Stewart, Aubrey (tr.), *Felix Fabri (c. 1480-1483 A. D.)*, (London: Palestine Pilgrims' Texts Society) 1892, 1:283ff].) "In the tradition of the Christian East outward and visible weeping is not on the whole considered weak and unmanly, and it is not associated particularly with women." (Ware, *op. cit.*, 245)

³⁰³ Rom 9:2

³⁰⁴ Gal 4:19

face between his knees.”³⁰⁵ Revivalists and devotional writers have believed that posture, like tears and fasting, can give physical form to the anguished substance of travailing prayer as petitioners squat, lie prostrate³⁰⁶ on the ground, or kneel.³⁰⁷ **Physicality** cannot mimic or manufacture this intensity, Duewel points out: “Prayer passion is not produced by lifting the hand, waving the arm, standing, kneeling, lying prostrate on the floor, walking back and forth, or any other form of prayer posture or action.”³⁰⁸ Yet, in another sense, when communication to God has become desperate beyond what words can convey, our bodies can pray, as with tears,³⁰⁹ the psalmist understood: “the LORD has heard my weeping.”³¹⁰ “Tears flow like a river day and night”³¹¹ through various forms of Old Testament prayer.³¹² And in the New Testament, Jesus, who was described as praying with “fervent cries and tears,”³¹³ gave assurances to those who weep³¹⁴ like what Monica clung to for her son:

You stretched out your hand from on high and pulled my soul out of these murky depths because my mother, who was faithful to you, was weeping for me more bitterly than ever mothers wept for the bodily death of their children. ... And you heard her, O Lord, you heard her and did not scorn those tears of hers which gushed forth and watered the ground beneath her eyes where she prayed.³¹⁵

³⁰⁵ 1Kgs 18:42. Sheets comments: “We are told in this passage that the posture he maintained while praying was the position of a woman in that day giving birth. The symbolism is clear. Elijah was in travail. He was birthing something. Without any question, the posture of Elijah is to symbolize this for us. ... *Even though it was God’s will to bring the rain and it was also God’s time for the rain, someone on earth still had to birth it through prayer.*” (Sheets, *op. cit.*, 132) This “squatting posture with the head between the knees” (Gray 1964, 359; Jones 1984, 324) does approximate a position of childbirth publicised in 1883 by George Julius Engelmann in his seminal work entitled *Labor Among Primitive Peoples* (Engelmann 1883, 61-139). At the least it appears that “Elijah assumes the posture of humble, intense prayer.” (Nelson 1987, 118).

³⁰⁶ Duncan Campbell considered the attitude of prayer embodied in prostration to be the key to revival: “It ... is one thing to talk about revival, but give me a people on their faces, seeking to be rightly related with God, and when that happens, we will soon know the impact of God-realisation in our country.” (Campbell 1962, 29) This is what he had experienced in the Hebrides: “Here, as in other districts, there were men who, on their faces before God, cried for an outpouring of His Spirit.” (Campbell 2010a, 13) See also note 136.

³⁰⁷ John Smith was famous for kneeling: “Where the results which he desired did not attend his ministry, *he would spend days and nights almost constantly on his knees, weeping and pleading before God...* He was, at times, when he perceived no movement in the church, *literally in agonies*, travailing in birth for precious souls, till he saw Christ magnified in their salvation.” (Kulp, *op. cit.*, 77-78)

³⁰⁸ Duewel 1990, 77-78.

³⁰⁹ See pp. 22 and 32ff for earlier discussions of the role of tears in travailing prayer.

³¹⁰ Ps 6:8-9

³¹¹ Lam 2:18

³¹² See Joel 2:17, Jer 9:1, and Ps 42:3a, among many others.

³¹³ Heb 5:7

³¹⁴ “Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.” (Lk 6:21)

³¹⁵ Augustine 1997 [397-400], 89.

These are not anxious tears, as if from a lack of faith. This is not melodrama. This is the weeping of burdened discernment when “streams of tears flow from my eyes, for [God’s] law is not obeyed.”³¹⁶

Such disobedience, Nehemiah believed, had led to the ruin of Jerusalem in 586 BC, news of which plunged him into travailing prayer that added fasting to other physical forms: “When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven.”³¹⁷ First-generation Christians adopted as customary the alloy of prayer and fasting in matters of discernment and faith.³¹⁸ Fasting with travailing prayer appears a few centuries later in the Lenten and Advent devotions of St. Cuthbert (c634-87), recounted by the Venerable Bede: “At this place it was ever his wont, at the time of the forty days’ fast before Easter, and again for the forty days before Christ’s nativity, to live in great abstinence, fervent prayer and outpouring of tears.”³¹⁹ Likewise, David Brainerd frequently refers in his journal to days spent in “secret fasting and prayer,” as at the end of 1744: “Thursday, December 13. Endeavored to spend the day in fasting and prayer, to implore the divine blessing, more especially on my poor people.”³²⁰ Whether for personal renewal, as with Cuthbert, or for the conversion of sinners, as Brainerd saw it, devotional and revival writers seem to have long identified fasting as an aspect of the physicality of travailing prayer. The volitional discomfort of fasting “is part of the birth pangs we endure in order to see new life come forth.”³²¹

³¹⁶ Ps 119:136

³¹⁷ Neh 1:4. See also Joel 1:13-14, Dan 9:3, and Ezr 10:1-6.

³¹⁸ “While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.” (Acts 13:2-3) See also Acts 14:23.

³¹⁹ McEntire, *op. cit.*, 79 (Miller, Thomas [ed.], *The Old English Version of Bede’s Ecclesiastical History of the English People* [London: Early English Text Society], Original Series 95, 96, 110, 111, 1890-98, 376, 11, 9-12, 377, 11, 7-10). See Bede 1999 [731], 168.

³²⁰ WJE 7:277.

³²¹ Foster, *op. cit.*, 226.

Practice

Sound or Silence Whereas form encompasses what are the more physical³²² or outwardly visible aspects of travailing prayer, a third category of practice is understood here as comprising traits that may be of a more internal nature. The practices of prayer involve a spectrum of choices, sometimes imperceptible to onlookers,³²³ which can nevertheless affect prayer's expression³²⁴ and effectiveness.³²⁵ This is observed, for example, in the level of **sound** or vocalisation in travailing prayer. There can be the wordless, silent praying Cassian describes when "the mind is hidden in such silence within the secrets of profound stillness that the astonishment of sudden illumination completely restrains all sound of the voice."³²⁶ Revival leaders and devotional writers point out how travailing prayer "is not fuss, not heat [or] noise"³²⁷ but can be practised even in **silence**:³²⁸

Holy prayer groanings are probably more often in the silent depths of our soul than sounding from our lips, and they are often expressed in deep sighs of burden or longing. ... Words do not need to be spoken orally or groans be expressed vocally for God to hear, understand, and answer the deep inner groaning.³²⁹

³²² "The varieties of prayer forms can at times be characterized as belonging to particular physical styles. Form styles at times flow out of content, and at times the content visibly requires that a prayer take on a form, which can be talked about apart from or in conjunction with the individual content of prayers." (Hammerling, *op. cit.*, 8)

³²³ Sheets has pointed out that "*we can never ever judge what is happening in the spirit by what we see in the natural*. This is also true with travail. ... Most of us who have been associated with travailing prayer have made what happens physically the focal point, thereby missing the spiritual point that something is being born of the Spirit." (Sheets, *op. cit.*, 114-15)

³²⁴ Hammerling observes how "the spirit (i.e. devotional mood or attitude) in which prayers are offered can profoundly affect the context, form, and practice of prayer. Similarly the actual practice of praying also can deeply alter the meaning of prayers." (Hammerling, *op. cit.*, 9)

³²⁵ "Within inappropriately offered prayers," Hammerling notes, "there remains the possibility of the danger that God will reject prayer put forth in pride or any other unacceptable sinful manner" such as "praying like hypocrites standing and seeking recognition in public before all (cf. Mt 6:5-6)." (*ibid.*, 11-12)

³²⁶ Cassian 2006 [c420], 28. Ware notes that in some Orthodox patristic texts, "it is said that there can also be an inner weeping that is not accompanied by any actual tears." (Ware, *op. cit.*, 245)

³²⁷ Bounds c1929, 56. The virtually soundless practice of travailing prayer can be illustrated in evangelist Wilbur Chapman's account of meeting John Hyde: "He came to my room, turned the key in the door, dropped on his knees, waited five minutes without a single syllable coming from his lips. I could hear my own heart thumping and his beating. I felt the hot tears running down my face. I knew I was with God. Then with upturned face, down which tears streamed, he said, 'Oh, God!' Then for five minutes at least he was still again..." (Basil Miller 1943, 125)

³²⁸ "This wrestling in prayer may not be boisterous nor vehement, but quiet, tenacious and urgent. Silent, it may be, when there are no visible outlets for its mighty forces." (Bounds c1929, 63)

³²⁹ Duewel 1990, 222-23. Earlier he comments how "many a person has prevailed so silently in the night hour that others sleeping nearby knew nothing about it." (*ibid.*, 77)

Opposite this, on the noisy end of this decibel range, might be the travailing prayer of two blind men as Jesus was leaving Jericho who, upon being rebuked by the crowd for their disruptive pleas, “shouted all the louder.”³³⁰ In practices paralleling those of medieval mysticism,³³¹ high volume was also what marked the travailing prayer of Daniel Nash, Sr. (1775-1831), called by those who knew him “Father Nash,” the “praying man,” who was Finney’s constant companion during the revivals in and around the small towns of Jefferson and Oneida Counties, New York, from 1825 to 1827.³³² When Father Nash prayed privately, “he prayed in a loud voice, as many, many mountain people continue to do today,” Deborah McCauley points out from her study of *Appalachian Mountain Religion: A History*. “Some claimed you could hear Father Nash half a mile away when he was ‘alone in secret prayer.’”³³³

Importunity and “Praying Through” Travailing prayer is also characterised by practices of “**importunity**,”³³⁴ a word unfamiliar to many today, but a descriptor preferred by many revival leaders and devotional writers to classify a cluster of traits that can be understood collectively as repetition³³⁵ and insistence in prayer. This is travailing prayer that will not stop asking, but cries out to God “day and night” with “an energy that never tires, a persistence which will not be denied, and a courage that never fails.”³³⁶ When healing comes to the daughter of the Canaanite woman as a result, at least in part, of her humble pushback to

³³⁰ Mt 20:29-34 (Mk 20:46-52; Lk 18:35-43)

³³¹ See pp. 20-22.

³³² Deborah McCauley has described “Father Nash” as “the key figure in helping to lay the foundation for Finney’s larger reputation in the history of revivalism...in terms of the revival practices that initially drew attention” to him.” (McCauley, *op. cit.*, 129) See Chapter II, 81-82; also Cross, *op. cit.*, 278.

³³³ *ibid*, 130 (Perkins, Ephraim, *A “Bunker Hill” Contest, A. D. 1826, etc.* [Utica, New York: Hastings and Tracy] 1826, 65).

³³⁴ “I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth.” (Lk 11:8 [KJV])

³³⁵ Jesus’ well-known stories of a friend at midnight seeking bread from a neighbour (Lk 11:5-8) and a widow seeking justice from an insolent judge (Lk 18:1-8) were often interpreted by revival leaders and devotional writers as justification and charge for the practice of making repeated, indefatigable requests in prayer.

³³⁶ Bounds c1929, 76. “God loves the importunate pleader, and sends him answers that would never have been granted but for the persistency that refuses to let go until the petition craved for is granted.” (Bounds 1974, 50)

Jesus,³³⁷ and when Bartimaeus gains his sight because he could not be silenced but “shouted all the more,”³³⁸ revival and devotional writers take this as evidence of how travailing prayer is to be practised as a “throwing of the entire force of the spiritual man into the exercise of prayer.”³³⁹ It is this willingness to resist³⁴⁰ and return, again and again, that defines importunity.

However, importunity has an “endgame,” whether realised visibly in circumstances or as an inner witness that God’s answers are on the way. The latter, a personal confidence in what God will eventually bring to pass, results from a corresponding practice of travailing prayer referred to in revival and devotional literature as “**praying through**.”³⁴¹ This is the practice of travailing to the point of being able to declare the work done,³⁴² praying “into full faith”³⁴³ and assurance of “receiving, by firmest anticipation, and in advance of the event, the thing for which one asks.”³⁴⁴ It becomes possible, then, for the repetition of importunity to rest, for “to continue in prayer for that object will now seem the height of folly and unbelief, since the heart is assured that the decree granting the request has gone forth from the Throne, and will shortly be fulfilled.”³⁴⁵

³³⁷ Mt 15:21-28; Mk 7:24-30.

³³⁸ Mk 10:48

³³⁹ Bounds c1929, 73.

³⁴⁰ P. T. Forsyth suggests that “resisting [God’s] will may be doing His will. ... When we resist the will of God we may be resisting what God wills to be temporary and to be resisted, what He wills to be intermediary and transcended.” (Forsyth, *op. cit.*, 82, 87-88)

³⁴¹ “Praying through” may be an innovation of the period of the Second Great Awakening. I have not found any prior correlating practice or precedent for it. See Chapter IV, 238-40; Chapter V, 281-82. Arthur Wallis acknowledges that the phrase, “praying through,” is not found in Scripture yet conveys something of “the paradox of Mark 11:24, ‘All things whatsoever ye pray and ask for, *believe that ye have received* them, and ye shall have them.’” (Wallis, *op. cit.*, 126) He seems to have identified this practice from observation: “When believers have an intolerable burden upon them so that they pray with strong crying and tears, and with groaning which cannot be uttered, as is often the case preceding a revival, it is very common for such intercessors to know beforehand that they have prevailed.” (*ibid*, 127)

³⁴² “We arrive at the point where there is such a hold on God for the very object sought, that we declare, in the fullest confidence, that the dead shall be brought to life.” (Doty 1932, 78.)

³⁴³ Wallis, *op. cit.*, 126. Wallis elaborates: “When in prayer we are brought to that point of faith where we believe that we have received, in spite of there being nothing outward to confirm it, then we have prevailed with God, or ‘prayed through’.” (*ibid*, 126)

³⁴⁴ *ibid*

³⁴⁵ *ibid*

Finney recounts a vivid case of this practice of “praying through” in his *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*. A woman in poor health and inexperienced in renewal nevertheless became burdened and fretful for the spiritual condition of people all around her to the point of travailing in prayer.

She kept praying more and more, till it seemed as if her agony would destroy her body. At length she became full of joy, and exclaimed: “God has come! God has come! There is no mistake about it, the work is begun, and is going over all the region.” And sure enough the work began, and her family were all converted, and the work spread all over that part of the country. Now, do you think that woman was deceived? I tell you, no. She knew she had prevailed with God in prayer.³⁴⁶

Sometimes, the practice of “praying through” may be accompanied by a private, confirmatory vision³⁴⁷ or come to light in a corporate setting.³⁴⁸ However it is expressed, this practice of travailing prayer benefits only those who reach the finish line of importunity. For, as Torrey summarises, “God does not always give us the things we ask the first time we ask them, but then we should not give up; no, we should keep on praying until we do get. We should not only pray, but we should PRAY THROUGH.”³⁴⁹

Authenticity and the Role of the Holy Spirit

Though practices of travailing prayer are diverse, its practitioners share consensus around the belief that practice alone is not enough. Travailing prayer cannot be self-generated by activity or sheer force of will; the **authenticity** of a supplicant’s agony in petition must not be artificial or routinised. Ancient mystics, early American revivalists, and devotional writers, like Torrey, appear to agree that

³⁴⁶ Finney, *Lectures*, 32.

³⁴⁷ Duncan Campbell recounts from the origins of the Hebridean Revival of 1949-52 how spiritual assurance of imminent renewal in the village of Barvas came to the Smith sisters (see notes 8 and 16): “One night God gave one of the sisters a vision. ... In the vision she saw their church crowded with young people. And so moved was she that she turned to her sister and said, ‘I believe that revival is coming to the parish, and I’m going to send for the Minister in the morning.’ She sent for the Minister, and told her story, that she believed God was going to visit the parish in revival and the youth of the community would be swept into the churches again. At that time there wasn’t a single young person attending public worship.” (Campbell 2010b, 4-5)

³⁴⁸ Jim Cymbala has recently popularised the sense of confidence and completion that can eventuate from travailing prayer in his description of corporate intercession for his wayward daughter, Chrissy. See Appendix IV.

³⁴⁹ Torrey 1955, 170.

“there are two ways of having earnestness in prayer, a right way and a wrong way. The wrong way is to work it up in the energy of the flesh.”³⁵⁰

In his *Conferences*, Cassian’s older friend, Germanus, who accompanied him into the monastic life in Bethlehem and the Egyptian desert, advises that tears should not be “squeezed out of dry eyes when the heart is hard. ... Nor should the weeping of the ‘outward man’ be attempted with great labour.”³⁵¹ Eastern Orthodox Bishop Kallistos Ware has commented that “the early monks were well aware of the difficulties that arise from an exaggerated weeping, artificially induced by willful straining and self-conscious exertion.”³⁵² The futility of working up³⁵³ desire and urgency was David Brainerd’s experience on December 9, 1744. Bereft of “any warmth of affectionate longing for souls,” he “got alone in the bushes and cried to God” but found he could not gain this “divine temper...as of myself any more than I could make a world.”³⁵⁴ Torrey sums up this point: “The earnestness that counts with God is not the earnestness that you or I work up; it is the earnestness that the Holy Spirit creates in our hearts”³⁵⁵

It is the Holy Spirit’s intercessory purpose and empowerment of persons that revival leaders and devotional writers emphasise. The **Holy Spirit** prays, and His intercessions are of the character of travailing prayer. Paul describes the prayers of God the Spirit as being too deep for words, voiced only in unspeakable groans.³⁵⁶ Lockyer has pointed out that the only recorded prayer of the Holy Spirit is the urgent cry, “Come!”³⁵⁷ which, when united with the prayer of the Church, is addressed to Jesus enforcing His thrice repeated promise, “I come

³⁵⁰ *ibid*, 91

³⁵¹ Cassian 2006 [c420], 29-30.

³⁵² Ware, *op. cit.*, 244.

³⁵³ About this, Samuel Chadwick later wrote, “God hates strange fire. We must never try to work up an emotion of intensity. Avoid all that is mechanical and perfunctory.” (Chadwick 1931, 74)

³⁵⁴ WJE 7:276.

³⁵⁵ Torrey 1955, 92.

³⁵⁶ “Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. ... We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans.” (Rom 8:23, 26)

³⁵⁷ Rev 22:17

quickly.”³⁵⁸ To travail in prayer, then, is to pray as the Spirit prays. It is the praying of the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit gives His prayers to people for vocalisation.³⁵⁹ Human articulation of the Spirit’s prayers is what is meant by the petitioner receiving the “spirit of prayer,”³⁶⁰ a charism that can come unexpectedly, Duewel explains, as “a direct gift of God at a moment He wants to use you in prayer.”³⁶¹ It can function as an “office” or specialty vocation in the Church, a unique calling given to some. In the Eastern monastic tradition, Ware has pointed out that, while a spirit of sorrow for sin is indispensable for everyone, “outward weeping [is regarded] as a *charisma* granted to some but not all.”³⁶² Margery’s tears in intercessory prayer supplied something of an unofficial ordination³⁶³ in the church and appointment as a sign to others “first of the power of God to forgive, then as a mirror in which others can see reflected the repentance that should be within themselves.”³⁶⁴ Similarly, Father Nash “was very clear about his widely recognized, extraordinary gift of prayer as a gift of the Holy Spirit: ‘[I]t is nothing in me, aside from the Holy Ghost.’”³⁶⁵ Weaving through these traditions is the idea of travingling prayer as a spiritual expertise known at times by only a few³⁶⁶ yet with potentially far-reaching effects, as Torrey describes: “It is not necessary that

³⁵⁸ Rev 22:7, 12, 20. Lockyer 1959, 277.

³⁵⁹ At the beginning of his ministry, Billy Graham wrote that “earnest travail...is what is termed ‘praying in the Spirit.’ ... That ‘the Spirit Himself maketh intercession’ indicates that it is actually God pleading, praying and mourning through us.” (Graham 1955, 25-26) Church fathers believed the tears of compunction to be a “divinely originating gift.” (Patton 2005, 264) See note 180.

³⁶⁰ For Edwards, prevalence of a “spirit of prayer” in the Church was indication of impending revival: “As there is so great and manifold reason from the Word of God, to think that if a spirit of earnest prayer for that great effusion of the Spirit of God which I am speaking of, prevailed in the Christian church, the mercy would be soon granted...” (WJE 5:356) Finney believed the same: “A revival may be expected when Christians have a spirit of prayer for a revival.” (Finney, *Lectures*, 30)

³⁶¹ Duewel 1990, 77-78. See Appendix III as an example.

³⁶² Ware, *op. cit.*, 246.

³⁶³ Margery was scorned as a hypocrite and her tears ridiculed as self-aggrandising so that she “is also acutely embarrassed [by the public nature of her weeping], but Christ exhorts her to accept her effect on others as an integral and important strand in her particular vocation.” (Bhattacharji, *op. cit.*, 236) See note 109.

³⁶⁴ *ibid.*, 230

³⁶⁵ McCauley, *op. cit.*, 132 (no reference provided). See Chapter IV, note 409.

³⁶⁶ “Oh, if we wait until the whole Church moves, it will never happen. It will never move. Do not worry about that. God’s way is to take hold of individuals and to use them and then eventually the majority will be affected.” (Lloyd-Jones 1987, 170)

the whole church get to praying to begin with. Great revivals always begin first in the hearts of a few men and women whom God arouses by his Spirit...”³⁶⁷ This was what catalysed the Hebridean Revival of 1949-52, Duncan Campbell concluded: prayer meetings made up of “the parish minister and his faithful few pleading the promises, with a consciousness of God, and with a confidence in Him.”³⁶⁸

Context

Setting The gathering of a minister with devoted intercessors typifies one possible context of prayer, which is a fourth coordinate, together with content, form, and practice, in plotting the traits of travelling prayer for comparative study. “The content of prayer requires that it be analyzed in its own habitat,” Hammerling writes. Prayer does not exist and, accordingly, cannot be studied historically outside of its milieu and locality, for “whether the context is a cathedral or cloister, a mountain top or cavern, or an arena filled with deadly animals or a closet—the context clearly matters.”³⁶⁹ My research has been observing how the *Sitz im Leben* of travelling prayer ranges in Scripture from the desert³⁷⁰ to the royal court,³⁷¹ from the field of war³⁷² to the altar of yearning for childbirth.³⁷³ Desperate petition is heard in variegated **settings** of the Israelites’ mistakes and cycles of repentance³⁷⁴ and is embedded in the teaching³⁷⁵ and miracles³⁷⁶ of Jesus. Travailing prayer has been observed in the context of the beginnings³⁷⁷ and missionary expansion³⁷⁸ of the church. Even in the circumstances of heaven, travelling prayer continues:

³⁶⁷ Torrey 1900, 130. See also Wallis, *op. cit.*, 211.

³⁶⁸ Campbell 2010b, 5.

³⁶⁹ Hammerling, *op. cit.*, 3.

³⁷⁰ See note 46.

³⁷¹ Est 4:16

³⁷² See note 289.

³⁷³ See notes 197, 292-95.

³⁷⁴ See note 317.

³⁷⁵ Mt 7:7-8; Lk 18:1

³⁷⁶ Lk 9:38, 17:12

³⁷⁷ Acts 1:13-14; 4:23-24, 31

³⁷⁸ Acts 13:2-3; 14:23

When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they maintained. They called out in a loud voice, "How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?"³⁷⁹

This is the cry of martyrdom and persecution, one of many desperate circumstances³⁸⁰ and historical settings of travailing prayer under consideration in this project.

Regarding prayers offered by those facing hostility or sacrifice, Hammerling notes how "only later were these prayers written down by those who either witnessed or reported on the event," a pattern increasing into the Middle Ages as "prayers were fixed not only in writing but also in the particular types of contexts."³⁸¹ Consideration of written contexts for travailing prayer brings us into the setting of liturgy and worship. For example, in Orthodox vespers before the Sunday of Forgiveness, tearful prayers of compunction are still sung in the liturgy of Adam's lament over being evicted from paradise.³⁸² Ed Phillips has suggested that exorcism rites, often associated with baptismal preparation, could be a body of material for further research.³⁸³ Written settings, however, are only one of the historical contexts in which prayer may be examined,³⁸⁴ and one that may exclude the oral and experiential nature³⁸⁵ of travailing prayer as it was chiefly expressed during the period under consideration in this project. The worship setting also introduces other important critical issues for research. An example of this could be the interplay of music and singing with prayer. Nigel Scotland has examined the successful "singing revivalism" of Amanda Berry

³⁷⁹ Rev 6:10. See Chapter III, notes 235, 461-67; Chapter IV, notes 169, 466.

³⁸⁰ See pp. 11-12.

³⁸¹ Hammerling, *op. cit.*, 6-7.

³⁸² Patton 2005, 262.

³⁸³ In a phone interview, November 11, 2010. Phillips is Associate Professor of Worship and Liturgical Theology at Candler School of Theology, Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia, USA.

³⁸⁴ Hammerling breaks down prayer context into three categories. Alongside 1) the use of prayer in different historical periods and in 2) different physical spaces is 3) "the historical context of the time the prayer was first composed—whether it was uttered, written, sung, or experienced." (Hammerling, *op. cit.*, 4)

³⁸⁵ "Oral records can complement the written," Howell and Prevenier note, "a realization that was for too long lost on most professional historians." (Howell and Prevenier, *op. cit.*, 26) In *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony*, Richard Bauckham sees this adjustment as recognition by scholars that oral, narrative testimony of an experience need "not be treated as credible only to the extent that it can be independently verified" (Bauckham 2006, 5) in social and juridical documents preferred by some in the academic community, a claim that is of value to my project.

Smith as an influence on British Christianity during the Second Great Awakening.³⁸⁶ Finney, however, deemed singing an impediment to travailing prayer:

*A great deal of singing often injures a prayer-meeting. The agonizing spirit of prayer does not lead people to sing. There is a time for everything; a time to sing, and a time to pray. But if I know what it is to travail in birth for souls, Christians never feel less [like singing], than when they have the spirit of prayer for sinners.*³⁸⁷

Locality Circumstantial or liturgical dynamics like singing and others highlight the possible influence and variance of cultural and socioeconomic factors related to **locality**, *i.e.*, whether travailing prayer is being experienced in urban, rural, or frontier situations. D. L. Moody made “prayer gatherings a vital ingredient in all revival campaigns”³⁸⁸ in American and British cities, and my research has revealed recent examples of travailing prayer in large urban settings.³⁸⁹ But McCauley has explored how the relationship of travailing prayer and revival, symbolised in the partnership of Nash and Finney, “embodied the historical relationship of Appalachian mountain religion with what became the dominant religious culture of the United States.”³⁹⁰ Preaching in both small towns of upstate New York and large cities along the eastern seaboard, Finney had seen the difference locality could make in fostering or hindering openness to the burden of prayer. He elevated the humility of countryside Christians and dared urban believers to follow their example:

I tell you, it is not at all because you are so much wiser than Christians are in the country, or because you have so much more intelligence or more enlarged views of the nature of religion, or a more stable and well-regulated piety. I tell you, no; instead of priding yourselves in being free from such extravagances, you ought to hide your heads, because Christians in New York are so worldly, and have so much starch, and pride, and fashion, that they cannot *come down* to such spirituality as this. I wish it could be so.³⁹¹

³⁸⁶ Scotland, *op. cit.*, 187-98. Scotland also comments on how D. L. Moody “revolutionised the traditional evangelical prayer meeting. People were urged to sit close together and the prayers were interspersed with lively singing of new songs.” (156)

³⁸⁷ Finney, *Lectures*, 133. Interestingly, those I interviewed on Lewis and Harris in December, 2010, recall much robust singing during the 1949-52 Hebridean Revival, likely building on their longstanding tradition of Gaelic Psalm-singing in worship. Many recounted the unique beauty of singing during the revival and that people were spontaneously composing hymns and songs, inspired by the Holy Spirit.

³⁸⁸ Scotland, *op. cit.*, 156. Scotland profiles Moody as the champion of “urban revivalism.”

³⁸⁹ Viv Grigg makes several references to fervent prayer in his study of revival movements in New Zealand, *The Spirit of Christ and The Postmodern City* (see note 173). Jim Cymbala describes his personal experience of travailing prayer at Brooklyn Tabernacle in New York City (see Appendix IV).

³⁹⁰ McCauley, *op. cit.*, 47.

³⁹¹ Finney, *Lectures*, 67.

Similarly, Colin Peckham pondered the importance of physical locus in reflecting on the out-of-the-way context of travelling prayer that led to the Hebridean Revival of 1949-52.³⁹²

Prayer meetings occurred in barns;³⁹³ rustic homes shook with the presence of God as people travailed.³⁹⁴

Relationality Remote locality, however, may contribute to isolation, whether in Barvas, Isle of Lewis, or Crossweeksung, New Jersey, where David Brainerd focused his missionary work among the Delaware Indians. Here he travailed in secret prayer: "I have generally found that the more I do in secret prayer, the more I have delighted to do, and have enjoyed more of a spirit of prayer."³⁹⁵ But the hardships of four years as a lone missionary among Native Americans took their toll,³⁹⁶ leading to paralysing self-examination and psychological challenges.³⁹⁷ Perhaps because of how partnership makes desperation more tolerable, travelling prayer can also take a more interpersonal expression, voiced in the

³⁹² "Barvas finds itself in a treeless, flat countryside surrounded by peat bogs. And God comes to this island which faces the brunt of the savage Atlantic gales, and to Barvas." (Peckham, *op. cit.*, 125)

³⁹³ "The Minister called his elders and for several nights they waited upon God in prayer. They met in a barn, got on their knees among the straw..." (Campbell 2010b, 5-6)

³⁹⁴ "It happened in Arnol, just two miles south of Barvas. The meetings were hard at the beginning, so increased prayer was required and the praying men of the district rallied round. ... Sometime after midnight, Duncan Campbell asked John Smith, the blacksmith, to pray. He had not prayed all night. He rose and prayed for some time and then said: 'Lord,...you have promised to pour water on him that is thirsty. If You don't do it, how can I ever believe You again. Your honour is at stake. You are a covenant-keeping God. Fulfil Your covenant engagement.' It was a prayer from a man who was walking with God. At that moment the house shook. Someone next to Mr. Campbell said to him, 'Mr. Campbell, an earthquake.' The next day we were to discover that no other house shook." (Peckham, *op. cit.*, 113) I visited the village of Arnol and met John Smith's son who corroborated this story during my time on the Isle of Lewis in November 2010.

³⁹⁵ WJE 7:211. See also entries on Tuesday and Wednesday, July 29-30, 1746 (*ibid.*, 415-16).

³⁹⁶ Desperation plus isolation is the lethal concoction of suicide, verified in the research of Hendin, *et al.*: "Therapists for 36 patients who died by suicide while in treatment completed questionnaires and wrote detailed structured narratives. Nine affects—desperation, hopelessness, rage, anxiety, feelings of abandonment, loneliness, guilt, humiliation, and self-hatred—were evaluated as to their intensity in the patient before suicide. Comparable information was obtained on 26 depressed, nonsuicidal patients treated by the same therapists. ... The affect that most distinguished the two groups was desperation, which was intense in 30 (83%) of the suicide patients but in none of the comparison patients." (Hendin, Maltzberger, and Szanto 2007, 363) Brainerd came to this brink more than once, as did Fraser: "Day after day and night after night, he wrestled with doubt and suicidal despair. Suicidal? Not once, but several times he stared over the dark ravine into the abyss. Why not end it all? The powers of darkness had him isolated; if they could get him now they could put an end to the work." (Crossman, *op. cit.*, 67-68)

³⁹⁷ Norman Pettit, editor of the Yale edition of the *Diary*, writes, "On the matter of depression Edwards was uneasy with the example that Brainerd had set, and with the psychological problems that even the edited diary reveals. He disliked the excessive introspection in which Brainerd engaged. Morbid introversion, he believed, endangered one's state of mind and disrupted the spiritual life." (WJE 7:19)

Psalms as a “liturgy of communal lamentation”³⁹⁸ or expressed in a collaborative alliance such as that which Paul experienced while “kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him.”³⁹⁹ Though worlds apart from his partners, Fraser staked his missionary success among the Lisu on this kind of joint venture of travailing prayer:

I am not asking you just to give “help” in prayer as a sort of sideline, but I am trying to roll the *main responsibility* of this prayer warfare on you. I want you to take the *burden* of these people upon your shoulders. I want you wrestle with God for them. ... The Lord Jesus looks down from heaven and sees these poor, degraded, neglected tribespeople. “The travail of His soul” was for them, too. He has waited long. Will you not do your part to bring in the day when He shall “be satisfied”?⁴⁰⁰

Effort by Christians “visibly to unite, and expressly to agree together” was for Jonathan Edwards a crucial ingredient in the extraordinary prayer needed to receive the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.⁴⁰¹ Finney, too, was confident in the consequences of unity, focusing his sixteenth Lecture on “The Necessity and Effect of Union.”⁴⁰² After having devoted three lectures to “secret prayer,” he gives an account of the design and manner of prayer meetings for “social prayer, or prayer offered in company, where two or three are united in praying.”⁴⁰³ Whether private or corporate, however, **relationality** in travailing prayer is what revival leaders and devotional writers also believed petitioners must be willing to relinquish, embracing a kind of relational independence, an unselfconscious freedom from the opinions of fellow-petitioners or bystanders. Because, by its nature, travailing prayer has dispensed with decorum, onlookers may find its uninhibited comportment disruptive and off-putting.⁴⁰⁴ Those taking up the burden of travailing prayer should count the relational price,

³⁹⁸ Boyce, *op. cit.*, 76.

³⁹⁹ Acts 12:5. Similar prayer partnership in desperate conditions is detectable in Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians: “He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us, as you help us by your prayers.” (2 Cor 1:10-11) See also Eph 6:19.

⁴⁰⁰ Fraser, *op. cit.*, 8, 11-12.

⁴⁰¹ WJE 5:365-66.

⁴⁰² “When a church has been united in prayer, and really felt the importance of a revival, they never have failed of having one.” (Finney, *Lectures*, 316)

⁴⁰³ Finney, *Lectures*, 124.

⁴⁰⁴ Doty warns against disparaging travailing prayer: “It is sad to see anyone finding fault with the Travailing Life, and its joyful yet painful manifestations. ... John Fletcher well says: ‘Beware of vilifying the spiritual agonies of the children of God, by calling them mad-fits’ (*Checks to Antinomianism*). God is intensely interested for the sinner, and He requires an intense co-operation.” (Doty 1932, 84-85 [no reference provided].)

for it “may cost you misunderstanding, even suffering. You may be considered an extremist or even a fanatic.”⁴⁰⁵

⁴⁰⁵ Duewel 1990, 72. Norman Smith, a local historian I interviewed on the Isle of Lewis, Scotland, in December, 2010, validated Duewel’s point here from personal experience: “The spirit of prayer is greater in private than in public. It would be a very private thing to travail in prayer. You might be concerned for how others would think of you. But in private it is easier to lose sight of everything else but the Holy Spirit.”

Critical Analysis through In-depth Comparison

Extremism or fanaticism could be among the interpretive tracks some might follow in reflecting upon these twelve attributes of travailing prayer. There are other psychological factors,⁴⁰⁶ besides those already mentioned,⁴⁰⁷ that could be taken into consideration, as in the bottoming-out related to the brokenness of travailing prayer's content⁴⁰⁸ or the link of groaning, tearful prayer to pilgrimage sites of Christ's suffering among medieval men and women.⁴⁰⁹ Such a reaction suggests an almost iconographic dimension to travailing prayer, bringing up a question of how imagination feeds this praying. Exhorting petitioners to see in their mind's eye the unconverted in an eternal peril, analogous to but many times more dangerous than drowning or being caught in a burning house, revivalists seemed to understand how imagination could fuel urgency in prayer for spiritual rescue.⁴¹⁰ There are also obvious cultural and socioeconomic dynamics to be taken into account in using this trait-matrix of travailing prayer as an analytical tool. How Father Nash's loudness was expressive of frontier culture;⁴¹¹ the degree to which screaming and writhing in anguished prayer may have been expressive of social class in late medieval Europe; how the elevation of women and female imagery in travailing prayer may have reflected cultural trends during the Second Great Awakening; even the possible influence of cultural mores upon an apparent waning of this prayer tradition in the post-modern West⁴¹²—these could plausibly be factors, contributing to the dynamism of the model, that justify further examination.

⁴⁰⁶ "It should be borne in mind that the frequency with which tears accompany prayer or any other spiritual practice may be heavily influenced by social and psychological factors." (Dysinger, *op. cit.*, 614)

⁴⁰⁷ See notes 396-97.

⁴⁰⁸ See p. 42ff.

⁴⁰⁹ See note 302.

⁴¹⁰ See notes 193-94; Chapter IV, notes 151, 386.

⁴¹¹ See note 333.

⁴¹² Travailing prayer is scarce in old Christendom, Kimberley Christine Patton suggests, because "cultural prohibitions against tears, particularly in public settings, even religious ones, remain powerful indeed. The

Overlap is observable among several attributes of travailing prayer, as with insistence in importune practice and daring content, or with tears in physical form and liturgical setting. And the apparent tension among different features has also been evident.⁴¹³ Commonality and contrast are evidence that what we have here is a flexible, interactive categorisation of traits that appear historically in the travailing prayer tradition. Though both Edwards and Finney respect and draw from revival history, neither they nor any other revivalist or devotional writer from the period under examination seem to exhibit awareness of the full historical expanse of this tradition. Clustering the core attributes of travailing prayer as I have according to Hammerling's rubric is not to suggest conscious connections among the theologians and leaders whose writings and habits inform these traits. It is simply to work out a tool for making empirical observations that can support critical, historical interpretation,⁴¹⁴ looking at revival through the lens of prayer and at travailing prayer from the vantage point of Edwards and Finney.

This trait-matrix, as I noted on p. 6, is used as a theoretical framework for in-depth comparison of what Jonathan Edwards and Charles Finney emphasised in the content, form, practice, and context of travailing prayer. Rigorously filtering their work and that of their critics through this prism has revealed a spectrum of insights that offer fresh contribution to the scholarship of prayer, revival, Edwards, and Finney. For example, while both Edwards and Finney exhibited a robust pneumatology, Finney seemed to stress the charism of travailing prayer as a specialty or expertise more than Edwards did. Edwards apparently based his theology of prayer more squarely on God's nature and character⁴¹⁵ while Finney

reasons are complex but probably have to do with their association with a loss of personal control, a surrender to the still devalued world of emotion." (Patton 2005, 257)

⁴¹³ See page 38.

⁴¹⁴ "All history—meaning all that historians write, all historiography—is an inextricable combination of fact and interpretation, the empirically observable and the intuited or constructed meaning." (Bauckham, *op. cit.*, 3)

⁴¹⁵ "A proper understanding of God forms the heart of Jonathan Edwards's theology of prayer. ... God's holiness and justice drive his every thought, desire and deed. To that end, Edwards's theology of prayer depends upon God's gracious and perfect character, his infallible knowledge of man's situation and his ability to remedy that situation according to his own sovereign desires." (Beck 2010, 2, 5)

developed ideas of spiritual laws or principles,⁴¹⁶ bringing us back to the issue of how travailing prayer operates as a posture of preparedness for *revival* or as a “means” and method of *revivalism*. What both believed petitioners should be travailing *for*—Edwards for outpouring of the Holy Spirit and Finney for individual conversions—and how each understood the unique efficacy of travailing relative to less “extraordinary” prayer are notable distinctions meriting critical analysis. Though oversimplified here for the purposes of introduction, these points illustrate the trajectory of the project as in-depth research in historical theology aimed at interpreting travailing prayer as a pattern of preparedness for revival.

Why Edwards and Finney

Several options have been considered for case study analysis in this project, many of which could be fruitful topics for further research. But an Edwards-Finney comparison is the optimal springboard for originating critical study of travailing prayer. Their two centuries are the period when this praying tradition proliferated in North America in its association with revival. Their leadership was a determining factor in that.⁴¹⁷ In both their similarities and differences, Edwards and Finney bring strategic substance to examination of travailing prayer as a pattern of preparedness for revival, in at least four ways I will highlight here.

⁴¹⁶ See note 209. Duncan Campbell believed that we “have only to regard those laws and limits within which the Holy Ghost acts, and we shall find his glorious power at our disposal.” (Campbell 1962, 53) These principles interpret God’s hearing of and response to travailing prayer as fulfillment of His “covenant engagement” (see notes 16 and 394) with His people. This operates as the basis for reminding God (note 266) of what He has committed to when His conditions are met in prayer in a way similar to the enforcing of a juridical “claim filed in court” upon God which Brueggemann has observed in Old Testament prayers of lament. (Brueggemann 1986, 62-63)

⁴¹⁷ As we have seen, often with travailing prayer “it is upon the hearts of the few that the agony falls.” (Burns, *op. cit.*, 70-71) Travailing prayer appears to preponderate near and be urged by revival leaders. From observing revival globally, Shaw has posited the emergence of leaders “coming out of an experience of brokenness” as one of its earliest manifestations. (Shaw, *op. cit.*, 211, 26) Selecting Edwards and Finney for comparative research takes into account the importance of this leadership dynamic.

First is the unparalleled influence of both men. George Marsden has called Edwards “the most brilliant of all American theologians,”⁴¹⁸ one of history’s revival heavyweights whose gravitas Finney frequently marshaled for support: “Do you think now, that there are no such things [as the burden of prayer] in the experience of believers? I tell you, if I had time, I could show you from President Edwards, and other approved writers, cases and descriptions just like this.”⁴¹⁹ But in his day, according to Rick Ostrander, Finney himself rose in prominence to become “antebellum America’s foremost revivalist and most famous Christian.”⁴²⁰ Both men are bridge figures in revival and in American history—complex, pivotal persons whose teaching and practice of prayer warrant in-depth comparative study.

A second reason for selecting Edwards and Finney for this project is simply the decisive priority that each of them gave to prayer. In what they wrote and did, both assigned high theological and practical value to prayer. “When I speak of moving God,” Finney wrote,

I do not mean that God’s mind is changed by prayer, or that His disposition or character is changed. But prayer produces such a change *in us* as renders it consistent for God to do as it would not be consistent for Him to do otherwise.⁴²¹

Here is one of many statements regarding prayer with which Edwards, in the main, might find agreement. On other points, both fine and broad, the two took differing views, but their conviction regarding prayer brings some balance to the scales of comparison.

Third, Edwards and Finney have come to be seen as two poles of a well-established axis in historical study of revival. Their legacies mark out the broad Calvinist-Arminian

⁴¹⁸ Marsden 2003, 1. Beck elaborates: “While interpretations of Edwards’s influence and influences vary, no theologian since the days of the Reformers, save perhaps Friedrich Schleiermacher and Karl Barth, has so imposed his thoughts upon the minds of those who followed as has Edwards. For a quarter of a millennium, Jonathan Edwards has stood alone as America’s premier religious thinker.” (Beck, *op. cit.*, xxi)

⁴¹⁹ Finney, *Lectures*, 67. See Chapter IV, notes 8-14. My dissertation title, “They Cannot Forbear Crying Out,” comes from a lengthy excerpt of Edwards by Finney in Lecture IV on “Prevailing Prayer”: “And why then should persons be thought to be distracted, when **they cannot forbear crying out** at the consideration of the misery of those that are going to eternal destruction?” (Finney, *Lectures*, 62-63 [emphasis mine]) See WJE 4:305-06, or Appendix II, and compare with Wesley’s remark in note 133. The purpose and manner of Finney’s treatment of Edwards will be under examination in this project.

⁴²⁰ Ostrander 2007, 8. McLoughlin believed Finney’s *Lectures on Revival* marked “the acceptance of pietistic evangelicalism as the predominant faith of the nation.” (Finney, *Lectures*, vii)

⁴²¹ Finney, *Lectures*, 52.

contours of interpretative debate, with Finney usually understood as a dividing line between the two.⁴²² I want to probe this model, reflecting carefully from a fresh, comparative angle of travailing prayer, but also acknowledging conventional perspectives developed from prior research. These include negative views among scholars of Finney as a man of his age, mechanising revival. My interest is not in “rehabilitating” Finney or being an apologist for either him or Edwards. I am focused, instead, on looking inductively beneath standard interpretations, letting both men speak in ways that allow us to ascertain and critically assess the full force of their concerns.

Lastly, and most practically, examination of the relationship of travailing prayer to revival begins best with Edwards and Finney because of the ample and well-indexed material available for critical study. The originality of my project has been heightened by new and rare resources seldom, and in some cases never before, accessed by researchers. For example, a series of first-ever transcriptions of unpublished Edwards sermons were commissioned by the Jonathan Edwards Center of Yale University for use in this project. Analysis of these sermons, never before receiving academic examination (except by the few worldwide who are fluent in Edwards’ nearly inscrutable handwriting), was in addition to a broad use of digitised transcriptions of Edwards’ unpublished sermons often sidestepped by researchers. And with Finney, my work drew deeply from his handwritten sermon “skeletons,” a multi-decade collection of full-sentence outlines he preached from which also have rarely been referenced in revival scholarship. Additionally, access in the Oberlin College Archives to the personal collection of Richard A. G. Dupuis, one of the coeditors of the definitive edition of Finney’s *Memoirs*, yielded important rare resources. One of these, for example, was a transcription (along with Dupuis’ meticulous notes) of an eighty-minute retrospective on revival prayer delivered by Finney in Glasgow on September 4, 1859, of

⁴²² The possibility that “these two theologies may be closer in practice than they are in theory” has already been acknowledged and will be taken into account as this project unfolds. See pp. 5-6.

which no copies of the American pamphlet publication are extant. All this is in addition to definitive editions of both men's published primary works and other personal papers, which together have abundantly provisioned the level of academic detail to which I have aspired. My hope has been that peering deeply into these corpora through the lens of travelling prayer can help us understand it, as well as both Edwards and Finney, in new ways.

Assumptions and Limitations

In many other choices besides those of case studies, any scholarly project is unavoidably affected by the historical point of view and interpretive concerns of the researcher. This work is no exception: my work here is informed by commitment to critical history as well as to a religious tradition in which experiences under consideration are of more than theoretical importance. Nevertheless, this project is, as Hammerling writes in his introduction, "an attempt at distance, an effort at looking intimately, carefully, and in a pointedly scholarly manner"⁴²³ at travelling prayer in relation to Christian revival movements. As has been mentioned throughout this chapter, my research is guided by values of inductive, comparative analysis, exploring travelling prayer in correlation to rather than as a cause of revival. The proposed trait-matrix of travelling prayer (41ff), as an aspect of Christian spirituality,⁴²⁴ serves as the primary interpretive lens and history as the primary material of the project, referencing biblical material throughout.

Hammerling goes on to posit that, as a result of how it permeates every aspect of society, "modern scholarship requires a broad-based interdisciplinary approach to the study of prayer."⁴²⁵ This project values ways in which travelling prayer can be productively scrutinised with the tools of psychology, anthropology, economics, and other social sciences, some of which have already been referenced. Phenomenological categories of interpretation,

⁴²³ Hammerling, *op. cit.*, 26.

⁴²⁴ See notes 42-43 and 426 regarding accent in this study on categories of Christian spirituality alongside the social sciences as framework for historical interpretation of revival.

⁴²⁵ Hammerling, *op. cit.*, 27.

however, introduce challenges of availability, appropriateness, and manageability of resources that are, at many points, beyond the scope of this project.⁴²⁶ Within these limits, interdisciplinarity remains an assumption for thinking systemically about both the interior and exterior dimensions of human desperation and its expression in travelling prayer.

This study, while limited to examination of Christian prayer⁴²⁷ and Christian revival,⁴²⁸ does not attempt to formulate a comprehensive theology of either. Wide-ranging analysis of the theology of Edwards or Finney in these areas would also be beyond the threshold and focus of this work. Nevertheless, the larger historical and theological structure within which both of these men were formed and out of which they articulated their understanding of travelling prayer is a crucial underpinning for all aspects of this project. It is to consideration of this background for critical comparison that we turn next.

⁴²⁶ Howell and Prevenier identify three risks in allowing the reach of social science methodologies to overextend in historical studies: 1) Anachronism: using social-scientific terms to describe a group or process in the past that the people of that period did not use; 2) Overdose of conceptualising, to the point that empirical detail is suppressed; and 3) Gross generalisation: too much model building on too narrow a database. (Howell and Prevenier, *op. cit.*, 96) See note 53.

⁴²⁷ See note 69.

⁴²⁸ See note 17.

BACKGROUND FOR CRITICAL COMPARISON

Both Jonathan Edwards and Charles Finney were men of notable intentionality. They did not drift into their understandings of travailing prayer as a pattern of preparedness for revival. They built it, instead, on underpinnings of important personal influences in their lives, broader theological commitments they embraced, and the fierce criticism they constantly endured. Here we consider how Puritanism, family, and friends shaped Edwards, and ways in which Finney's experience and key clergy, including Edwards, moulded Finney. While they promoted earnest petition based on sharply contrasting views of the meaning of conversion and the return of Christ, both were men of deep spirituality who shared a remarkably comparable understanding of prayer. Both also found their principles of travailing prayer purified in the furnace of unmitigated opposition, producing clarity this project aims to reveal. First, however, we consider this crucial background.

INFLUENCES ON AND FORMATION OF EDWARDS' AND FINNEY'S UNDERSTANDINGS OF PRAYER FOR REVIVAL

Influences on Jonathan Edwards

Jonathan Edwards' understanding of prayer for revival was firmly established on the foundations of **Puritanism**.¹ And a cornerstone of Puritan life, Robert Naeher has argued in *Prayerful Voice: Self-shaping, Intimacy, and the Puritan Practice and Experience of Prayer*, was petitionary prayer, felt and expressed "in response to experiences of profound distress and personal need."² Scholars have highlighted various facets of the "affectionate piety"³ or "passionate mysticism"⁴ found at the heart of Puritanism (emphases mine):

¹ See Chapter III, note 381.

² Naeher 1999, 24. "Perhaps the heart of puritan prayer lay in the stage of supplication and petition, in which saints entreated God to provide for their needs and to work in certain ways in their lives." (*ibid*, 35)

³ Walton notes that William Haller, "in his classic study, published in 1938, defined puritanism *principally* in terms of its tradition of 'affectionate' and 'experimental' piety." (Walton 2002, 37)

⁴ Knight 1994, 2. See Chapter III, 1.

The Puritan insisted that the primary principle of the Reformation was adherence to the Word of God. It had been thoroughly applied in doctrinal matters by the fathers of the Church of England. Naturally and inevitably the second stage of the Reformation in England was the application of the same criterion to the unreformed worship of the church. Puritanism in England was, therefore, of necessity a **liturgical movement**.⁵

Whatever else it may have been, and whatever social changes it may have brought in its wake, Puritanism must first be considered as a **devotional movement**. ... **Personal religious experience** was at the heart of Puritanism. Everything in church and state was intended to serve this primary end.⁶

Between 1600 and 1640, there was a tremendous efflorescence of Puritan literature, most of it focused on the development of a **distinctively Protestant spirituality**.⁷

It is possible to define Puritanism as a **style of piety**, an emotional and ideological style...⁸

Other historians have cast the scope of the Puritanism's influence more broadly, depicting it as a "comprehensive life system"⁹ linking God, self, church, and society in a vision¹⁰ to complete a Reformation Puritans believed had stalled in the Elizabethan settlement.¹¹ But under the canopy of covenantal theology,¹² Naeher suggests, "the puritans themselves saw extemporaneous,¹³ heartfelt, and scripture-based prayer as the very essence of their experience, and that which most set them apart."¹⁴ And in this respect¹⁵ and others, historians

⁵ Davies 1997, 8.

⁶ Hambrick-Stowe 1982, 53; see also vii-viii, 23-24; Pettit 1966, 6.

⁷ Lovelace 2004, 299.

⁸ Lake 1993, 4.

⁹ Noll 2002, 31.

¹⁰ "New Englanders thought of themselves as the germ of a new order that God would soon establish throughout Christendom and the world." (Hambrick-Stowe 1982, 23)

¹¹ Lake 1982, 1. "Puritanism is most accurately defined as the outlook that characterised the radical Protestant party in Queen Elizabeth's day, who regarded the Reformation as incomplete and wished to model English church worship and government according to the Word of God." (Davies 1997, 1, 98-108) See also Lake 1993, 3; Lloyd-Jones 1996, 348.

¹² The covenantal system, which for the Puritans "transformed the revealed Word from an exaction arbitrarily imposed by conqueror into a treaty of mutual obligation" (Miller 1968, 39), was of critical importance to New England theology in two ways, Noll explains: "It first provided biblical language for the basic doctrines of faith. ... Second, it also provided an expansive vocabulary for embracing large-scale social, political, and even economic realms. ... The reach of covenantal language—from the individual through the church to society as a whole—constituted the Puritan canopy for theology narrowly defined." (Noll 2002, 39) It was this covenantal language that shaped the Puritans' practice of incorporating "biblical promises into their prayers in order to force God's hand by calling him to be faithful to his own word." (Naeher, *op. cit.*, 6) Chapter III, note 25.

¹³ "The ultimate, ideal form of prayer was extemporaneous and 'from the heart,' not static, repeated prayers that were composed for an occasion wholly separate from the immediacy of each individual puritan's prayer session." (Sleeper 2006, 510) See also Bremer 2009, 8; Hambrick-Stowe 1982, 50, 53, 105; Hambrick-Stowe 2008, 200; Moore 2005, 30-33.

¹⁴ Naeher, *op. cit.*, 3. "It was their distinctive practice of prayer that in many ways transcended social status and gender and gave puritan culture its coherence. ... Prayer became the primary means of self-expression and self-definition in the puritans' life-long course of spiritual pilgrimage." (*ibid*, 2, 13) "Surprisingly, however, prayer, the most readily accessible means of spiritual expression, and that most often mentioned by the puritans themselves, has received little attention." (*ibid*, 1)

have tended to agree, as Lovelace states, that “Edwards was the apex of the Puritan movement,”¹⁶ or in Perry Miller’s dictum, “Puritanism was what Edwards is.”¹⁷

This influence of Puritanism was, foremost, a family legacy, descending from “the venerable **Stoddard**,”¹⁸ Edwards maternal grandfather, “the pope of the Connecticut River Valley.”¹⁹ Edwards later departed from Solomon Stoddard’s (1643-1729) practice of terror preaching,²⁰ and it was his repudiation of Stoddard’s half-way covenant²¹ that eventually precipitated Edwards’ dismissal from his grandfather’s former pulpit in Northampton.²² But Stoddard’s emphasis there on revival prayer²³ through five “harvests” was an inheritance Edwards retained and stewarded. This heritage was amplified in his marriage²⁴ to **Sarah Pierpont Edwards** (1710-1758), whose personal piety Edwards believed to be the epitome

¹⁵ “In so many ways, Jonathan Edwards held fast to his Puritan heritage, and nowhere is this more evident than in his view of prayer.” (Haykin 2005, 137-38)

¹⁶ Lovelace 2004, 307.

¹⁷ Miller 1959, 194. Hutch concurs: “Jonathan Edwards embodies all that is best about the culture of Puritanism. To understand the Puritans is to understand Edwards.” (Hutch 1978, 124) Lloyd-Jones echoes that “in Edwards we come to the very zenith or acme of Puritanism... Puritanism reached its fullest bloom in the life and ministry of Jonathan Edwards.” (Lloyd-Jones 1996, 351)

¹⁸ WJE 4:268. In his introduction to *Religious Affections*, John E. Smith notes that next to Thomas Shepard, Stoddard, who “exerted the most powerful influence on Edwards’ personal life ... appears at greater length in Edwards’ notes that any other writer” in that work. (WJE 2:57-60)

¹⁹ Nichols 2001, 90. Perry Miller considered Stoddard “the first great ‘revivalist’ in New England” who “inaugurated the era of revivalism on the American frontier.” (Miller 1943, 316, 319)

²⁰ See Chapter III, notes 177, 202.

²¹ In order to preserve the reach of the Puritan vision while substantially encouraging personal holiness, a 1662 synod provided for a “half-way covenant” in New England by which baptised adults who did not relate a personal experience of salvation, and therefore could not participate in the Lord’s Supper, could nevertheless bring their children for baptism, thus continuing to participate in ecclesiastical and social covenants. “By keeping most of the rising generation officially in the church, the sacredness of society survived.” (Noll 2002, 41) Perhaps because Stoddard’s own conversion had occurred during communion, he “was led to think, that the place where the soul was likely to receive spiritual light and understanding was at the Lord’s table” (Tarbox 1884, 625). Finding no scriptural barrier, Stoddard opened communion in Northampton in 1677, proclaiming by 1700 “that all ordinances instituted in the church were *intended* by Christ to be used as the means of regeneration.” (Clebsch 1973, 30). Northampton was firmly accustomed to the imprecision of open communion when Edwards succeeded Stoddard in 1729, and for almost twenty years Edwards made no sharp distinction between the converted and the unconverted. (Pettit 1966, 208) “Edwards later confessed that he had been too young and inexperienced to foresee ill consequences in the Stoddardeanism he embraced in the late 1720s.” (Tracy 1980, 72-73; see also Holifield 2003, 126)

²² See Chapter III, note 380.

²³ Thomas Schafer highlights a 1713 sermon by Stoddard in which “he stirs up the congregation to pray for a new season of revival and addresses himself to the awakening of those left unconverted in previous outpourings” as evidence that “evangelism was the heart and soul of Stoddard’s ministry.” (Schafer 1963, 335)

²⁴ Samuel Hopkins, Edward’s biographer and a frequent visitor to the Northampton parsonage, said of Jonathan and Sarah’s marriage that “no person of discerning could be conversant in the family without observing and admiring the great harmony, and mutual love and esteem that subsisted between them.” (Hopkins 1804, 100; see also Karlsen and Crumacker [eds] 1984, 7; McCulley and Baker [eds] 2005, xvii)

of earnest prayer at its best.²⁵ Though Edwards had recognised her extraordinary spirituality from the start²⁶ and observed in her a “sweetness and ravishment of soul, that has been altogether inexpressible,”²⁷ he did not consider Sarah an “enthusiast” as their world understood that term. Nevertheless, “if such things are enthusiasm,” Edwards described her spiritual experience in *Some Thoughts Concerning the Present Revival of Religion in New England*,²⁸ “and the fruits of a distempered brain, let my brain be evermore possessed of that happy distemper! If this be distraction, I pray God that the world of mankind may be seized with this benign, meek, beneficent, beatifical, glorious distraction!”²⁹ Similarly “remarkable for his piety”³⁰ was an “adopted”³¹ member of the Edwards household, **David Brainerd** (1718-1747), whose missionary journal Edwards edited³² and published in 1749 to commend the younger man as a model of earnest petition.³³ Edwards appeared to find in Brainerd a passionate idealist who resonated with his own youthful yearnings³⁴ and both typified and vindicated true religious experience.³⁵ Virtually every trait of travailing prayer in this study finds embodiment in the experience of Brainerd, as will be demonstrated throughout Chapter III.

²⁵ See Chapter III, notes 255-56.

²⁶ *ibid*, note 489

²⁷ WJE 4:339.

²⁸ See Chapter III, notes 176, 205.

²⁹ WJE 4:341.

³⁰ WJE 16:185. See Chapter III, note 148.

³¹ See Chapter III, note 206.

³² *ibid*, note 174

³³ See Chapter I, notes 150, 250.

³⁴ Ola Winslow has observed how Brainerd’s melancholic reflections were “strangely similar to [Edwards’] own agonizing after assurance of salvation in his younger days.” (Winslow 1940, 238) Tracy conjectures that “whatever his actual personal relation to David Brainerd, the tone of Edwards’ loving memoir encourages us to imagine what he might have learned from as well as taught to the exemplary Indian missionary.” (Tracy 1985, 36)

³⁵ Edwards believed Brainerd’s experience of prayer was evidence “that there is indeed such a thing as true experimental religion, arising from immediate divine influences, supernaturally enlightening and convincing the mind, and powerfully impressing, quickening, sanctifying, and governing the heart; which religion is indeed an amiable thing, of happy tendency, and of no hurtful consequence to human society.” (WJE 7:520; see also Hambrick-Stowe 2003, 92-93; Taves 1999, 50)

In November 1742, a year after meeting Edwards, Brainerd was appointed a missionary by the Society in Scotland for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge,³⁶ one of many interesting Scottish links with Edwards. Three months earlier, at the Cambuslang parish near Glasgow,³⁷ a throng of 30,000 had gathered for a communion season marking some of the highest days of the evangelical awakening in Scotland.³⁸ The minister of the Cambuslang parish since 1731, William McCulloch (1691-1771),³⁹ became one of six **Scottish clergy** whose correspondence with Edwards provided constructive camaraderie to him personally and strategic partnership in revival prayer.⁴⁰ A second of these ministers, John McLaurin (1693-1754), was the chief organiser of prayer societies for spiritual awakening in Scotland and initiated the idea of a concert of prayer,⁴¹ to which Edwards gave momentum through the publication of his *Humble Attempt* in 1747.⁴² Some scholars assert that another of Edwards' key works related to prayer,⁴³ *Religious Affections* (1746), may have been prompted⁴⁴ by his reading of **John Locke** (1632-1704), whose effect on Edwards was considered by Miller to be "the central and decisive event of his intellectual life."⁴⁵ While other historians dispute Locke's influence,⁴⁶ both Edwards' resonance with and motivation to

³⁶ Fawcett 1971, 216-17.

³⁷ See Chapter III, note 11.

³⁸ Schmidt 2001, 41-42.

³⁹ Arthur Fawcett has speculated regarding McCulloch's views of fervent prayer: "We have hinted at the probability of Robert Fleming's book, *The Fulfilling of Scripture*, being in the manse at Cambuslang; in it there was much to inspire, with its record of previous similar awakenings. ... One thing at least was certain; in these former classic examples of powerful movements of the Spirit, prayer was central in each situation. Fleming had instanced John Welsh, associated with M'Culloch's own native south-west, as giving eight hours out of every twenty-four to prayer, spending days and nights in fasting and intercession." (Fawcett, *op. cit.*, 53-55) Ten of Edwards' letters to McCulloch have been preserved.

⁴⁰ See Chapter III, notes 521-22, 524.

⁴¹ Batzig 2011, 84. Edwards drew hope from knowing "that God hath lately stirred up so many of his people in Scotland, and some other places, to enter into such a Concert for united prayer for the fulfillment of the glorious promises God has made of an abundant outpouring of his Spirit in the latter days." (WJE 16:209)

⁴² Batzig, *op. cit.*, 86.

⁴³ See Chapter III, note 70.

⁴⁴ Nichols 2001, 35.

⁴⁵ Miller 1959, 52-53.

⁴⁶ Citing works by William Morris (1955), Leon Howard (1963), and Wallace Anderson (1964), Fiering claims "Edwards himself was no Lockean. On hardly any single point in moral philosophy does he follow Locke, and in logic and metaphysics his differences from Locke are fundamental." (Fiering 1981, 37)

rebut⁴⁷ Locke's ideas⁴⁸ were likely contributors to the development of Edwards' keen empiricism and the stress he gave, Ted Campbell notes in *The Religion of the Heart*, to "the notion of religious experience as a grounding for the theological enterprise."⁴⁹

Influences on Charles Finney

Though lacking a Christian family background and eschewing formal theological training,⁵⁰ Finney, too, was a keen observer of religious experience, both of those around him and of his own. McLoughlin notes how Finney's chief critic, Princeton mathematician Albert Dod, "was not far wrong when he said that through Finney's 'experiments' with the 'efficacy of different measures ... the house of God [became] transformed into a kind of laboratory.'"⁵¹ Indeed, what he saw work in the school of his own experiences and deductions was a decisive influence upon his revival practices. In regard to prayer, Finney's writings are peppered with phrases such as "I have often noticed,"⁵² "I have witnessed much of this myself,"⁵³ or "our experience in prayer reveals this,"⁵⁴ so that Lyrene is right in surmising that "much of [Finney's] theology of revival prayer was wrought in the crucible of **personal experience and observation**."⁵⁵ The shaping power of what Finney could notice and infer began in serious self-scrutiny of his own conversion⁵⁶ and continued in early reflection on his

⁴⁷ "Despite his eager appropriation of Locke ... for his own purposes, [Edwards] was not a man of the moderate, rational English Enlightenment of his day. Indeed he was the most powerful enemy of that way of thought." (May 1976, 49)

⁴⁸ See Chapter III, note 169.

⁴⁹ Campbell 1991, 64. "[Edwards] was attracted by Locke's emphasis on sense... Unlike other theologians of the time, Edwards did not identify religion primarily with the holding of correct doctrine or with dogmatic confessions; instead he sought after those who had 'spiritual sensation' or what he came to call the 'sense of the heart.'" (Smith 1974, 169)

⁵⁰ "Refusing to attend Princeton Theological Seminary—as a good nineteenth-century Presbyterian ministerial candidate should never do—he was, for all practical purposes, a self-taught man." (Drummond 1985, 22)

⁵¹ McLoughlin 1959, 84 (no reference provided).

⁵² Finney, *Lectures*, 68.

⁵³ Finney, "How to Prevail with God", *The Penny Pulpit* [London: J. Paul, c1853], May 22, 1850, 116, The Richard DuPuis Papers, Oberlin College Archive.

⁵⁴ Finney, "On Persevering Prayer for Others", *The Oberlin Evangelist* XVII, 2, January 17, 1855, 10.

⁵⁵ Lyrene 1985, 179.

⁵⁶ See Chapter IV, notes 144, 288, 317, 475.

participation in prayer groups and revival meetings.⁵⁷ Much of this formative ruminating was guided by **George Washington Gale** (1789-1861), minister of the Presbyterian Church in Adams, New York, who was instrumental in Finney's conversion and entry into preaching ministry.⁵⁸

It was Gale who later remarked how, in 1824-25, the earliest days of Finney's itinerant evangelism following his conversion, Finney's "Holy Band" of revival helpers⁵⁹ seemed to be imitating the techniques "more especially of the Rev. Mr. Nash" than of Finney,⁶⁰ "making clear," McCauley stresses, "that it was Nash who was recognized as the principal teacher of traditional revival practices,"⁶¹ particularly those related to his specialty of prayer. "**Father**" **Daniel Nash** (1771-1831) was seventeen years Finney's elder, a carpenter and widower with seven children, who converted in his late twenties and began to itinerate as an evangelist at the age of forty-eight.⁶² After meeting Finney in Adams and Evans Mills, Nash laboured as an intercessor with him in Gouverneur and DeKalb, then on to Rome and Utica, and afterwards in Troy and New Lebanon,⁶³ leaving an indelible mark on the young, impressionable Finney. "He had the strongest faith, and was the mightiest man in prayer that I had at that time ever seen," Finney wrote:

⁵⁷ See Chapter IV, note 580. "[Petitioners] have had an actual travail of soul for sinners, till they were as helpless as children. ... In the great revivals in 1826, [such feelings] were common." (Finney, *Lectures*, 30)

⁵⁸ "[Finney] was a unique candidate in divinity, a grown man, furiously independent, and already trained in another discipline. As he went from his Bible to conferences with Gale and back again, one by one he hammered out the practices and habits of mind which would mark his kind of evangelism—eventually, America's kind of successful evangelism." (Weisberger 1958, 94)

⁵⁹ "Who Finney's particular friends were at this date [1825-26] we do not know for sure, but they certainly included his three seniors, Jedediah Burchard (c. 1790-1864), Daniel Nash (1771-1831), and Nathan Beman (1785-1871)." (Murray 1996, 239) "Nash and his 'holy band' of wild young men played a much larger role in the early development of Finney's habits than Finney wanted to admit." (Smith 2007, 61)

⁶⁰ Cross 1950, 162.

⁶¹ McCauley 1995, 136. "The likelihood is that Finney learned more from this old veteran of the backwoods than he taught in return." (Cross, *op. cit.*, 161) See also Perciaccante 2003, 46.

⁶² Headley 1875, 169-70.

⁶³ "Brother, or as we called him, Father Nash, a minister who in several of my fields of labor came to me and aided me, was another of those men that had such a powerful spirit of prevailing prayer." (Finney, *Memoirs*, 318)

The manifest and instantaneous answer to some of his prayers was so startling as to arrest the attention of everybody about him.⁶⁴ He lived but a few years, after I became acquainted with him, but what years were those... [He would] take the load of unconverted sinners upon his heart, and such agonizing, prevailing prayers I never heard from any other man.⁶⁵

Nash was forthright in asserting that, while many did not, “I do understand what the prayer of faith is; and my soul does know what it is to agonize, and travail in birth, for sinners.”⁶⁶ The two were identified as a team,⁶⁷ with Nash playing an integral role⁶⁸ in shaping Finney’s practices of praying very specifically,⁶⁹ giving women voice in public prayer meetings,⁷⁰ making petitions with great intensity and loud volume,⁷¹ and doing so under the unction of the Holy Spirit.⁷² Nash was later one of a very few people who could confront Finney with the risks of his growing fame.⁷³ And though Finney seemed to prefer an increasing distance from him,⁷⁴ making little mention of Nash in his *Memoirs*,⁷⁵ “it is hardly presumptuous,”

⁶⁴ “The answers to his prayers sometimes seemed almost miraculous, for he did not confine his ‘list’ to those whom he thought might be reached by the revival, but the most obdurate and unlikely cases were made the subjects of his prayer, with results that were truly astounding.” (Beardsley 1937, 54-55)

⁶⁵ Headley, *op. cit.*, 170-71. (Finney’s remark here comes from a letter, dated July 7, 1875, a little more than a month before his death, that is not a part of The Charles Grandison Finney Papers, Oberlin College Archives. Headley wrote of having recently “received a letter from Mr. Finney, which goes back to this date” of Finney’s earliest experiences with Nash, “and sheds interesting light on the character and unheralded usefulness of [Nash’s] life.” [*ibid*])

⁶⁶ *ibid*, 172. Walzer refers to Nash as “one of the great masters of this type of prayer.” (Walzer 1944, 93)

⁶⁷ Nash records that in Utica, May 11, 1826, “Mr. Finney and I have both been hanged in effigy.” Elsewhere he writes, “When Mr. Finney and I began our race, we had no thought of going amongst ministers. ... At present, we go into no man’s parish, unless called.” (Headley, *op. cit.*, 173-74) See also Noble 1882, 412-16.

⁶⁸ P. H. Fowler noted that “Father Nash became a companion of Mr. Finney in his revival services and was largely relied upon by him for their effectiveness.” (Fowler 1877, 217) McCauley comments how Fowler’s observation is “telling about how widely Nash was regarded as being integral, if not indispensable, to Finney’s earliest work.” (McCauley, *op. cit.*, 134)

⁶⁹ See Chapter IV, note 230-31. Wright notes how Nash “was accustomed on such occasions to make out a list of persons and pray for them one by one in secret.” (Wright 1996 [1891], 33-34) “This ‘prayer of faith’ seems to be traceable—insofar as any of the measures stemmed from individual invention—to Father Nash.” (Cross, *op. cit.*, 179; see also McCauley, *op. cit.*, 130)

⁷⁰ See Chapter IV, note 270-72. Finney was also influenced in this regard by his marriages to gifted, prayerful women. (*ibid*, note 438)

⁷¹ See Chapter I, note 333; Chapter IV, notes 320-22. “Probably his prayer for the conversion of individuals did somewhat offend, since his deafness made him shout so they could be heard a half mile away.” (Cross, *op. cit.*, 161)

⁷² See Chapter I, note 365; Chapter IV, note 409.

⁷³ McCauley, *op. cit.*, 138. Nash’s “intimacy with the greater man was closer for several years than that of any other person before the Oberlin period.” (Cross, *op. cit.*, 161)

⁷⁴ “Although Finney and Nash were frequent companions while in Jefferson, St. Lawrence, and Oneida Counties, when Finney moved to more cosmopolitan congregations, he abandoned his association with the coarse Nash.” (Perciaccante, *op. cit.*, 47)

⁷⁵ *ibid*, 136. McCauley laments how “little has been written about Nash by scholars other than Cross, ... [though] the subjects scholars choose to focus on, and the obscure records that escape their notice, do not reflect or determine actual historical importance.” (McCauley, *op. cit.*, 138)

wrote Asa Mahan, “to express the belief that the world now feels, and ever will feel, the influence of the prayers of father Nash.”⁷⁶

By contrast, Finney seemed to desire a close, public association with the posterity of Jonathan Edwards, making frequent mention of him in all forms of his work.⁷⁷ “As also in the days of President Edwards”⁷⁸ was rhetoric Finney leveraged repeatedly,⁷⁹ particularly to vindicate his views of revival prayer, a crucial influence on Finney considered in the opening of Chapter IV and examined more thoroughly in Chapter V.

⁷⁶ Mahan 1882, 226.

⁷⁷ Noll 2002, 307.

⁷⁸ Finney, “How to Prevail with God”, *The Penny Pulpit*, *op. cit.*, 116.

⁷⁹ See Chapter I, note 419; Chapter IV, notes 9-13.

THEOLOGICAL GROUNDWORK

Critical comparison of Edwards and Finney introduces a measure of theological complexity. At different levels, both found spiritual origins in the Calvinist legacy. Yet they wrote, preached, and prayed from perspectives that were often, though not always, strikingly dissimilar. Plotting these theological coordinates will support interpretation of how Edwards and Finney understood travailing prayer, beginning with its relation to soteriology, the dominant theme of Edwards' preaching.⁸⁰

Soteriology

Analysis of the conversion experience was a longstanding concern of the Puritanism **Edwards** inherited. Converts were almost "pre-sanctified"⁸¹ under the expectations Puritans loaded into initial steps of belief, which they believed could be traced through a measurable sequence of self-discoveries and sensations distilled from observation⁸² over time. The classic "morphology of conversion"⁸³ of Puritan orthodoxy comprised a downward movement of understanding God's judgement and human damnation followed by an upward movement of understanding God's grace and human hope and assurance,⁸⁴ forming a linear, affective paradigm of characteristic emotions.⁸⁵ In the trough of this deep arc of "preparationism"⁸⁶ was a step of emotional harrowing when incipient saints moved from

⁸⁰ Edwards produced "more sermons in the category of soteriology than any other." (Pratt 1958, 171)

⁸¹ Lovelace 2004, 301.

⁸² "The pattern was repeated in hundreds of other [cases]. The marks of faith in a Puritan were painful to behold and sometimes deceptive, but they ran so much according to form, and ministers became so accustomed to advising men about them, that Calvin's injunction against seeking to discover a particular man's condition seemed to be overstated." (Morgan 1963, 72)

⁸³ Talbot defines the morphology as "a step-by-step analysis of what sinners would normally experience up to and through the moment when God regenerated their hearts." (Talbot 2004, 224) Although some template of the *ordo salutis* was a standard component of Protestant theological treatises, Campbell notes, the Puritans "are distinguished both by the stress they laid on it as lying at the center of the theological enterprise, and more particularly by their concern with the question of how a woman or man could *know* they were elect to eternal life." (Campbell, *op. cit.*, 47) See also WJE 4:25-32.

⁸⁴ Taves, *op. cit.*, 22.

⁸⁵ Caldwell 1983, 164. Morgan summarises stages of the morphology as "knowledge, conviction, faith, combat, and true, imperfect assurance." (Morgan 1963, 72)

⁸⁶ See Chapter I, note 29.

sorrow over sin to intense hatred of it and the despair of perceiving one's unqualified incapacity to achieve salvation.⁸⁷ Here is where, as sinners gave voice to their agonised strivings, prayer took on the earnestness and urgency of travail that Edwards believed only increased after conversion in intercession for others.⁸⁸

It was significant, however, that Edwards' own conversion experience did not follow the well-worn orthodox Puritan pathway.⁸⁹ Eventually he stopped attempting to fit experience to doctrine and instead altered his soteriology, concluding "there is an endless variety in the particular manner and circumstances in which persons are wrought on. ... 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."⁹⁰ Edwards "repudiated the old morphology," McClymond explains, "by making the *nature* of one's spiritual experiences rather than their *order* the discriminating factor in determining whether or not they were gracious."⁹¹ And the nature of Edwards' conversion had been more one of joy⁹² than terror,⁹³ a "sense of the heart"⁹⁴ exceedingly different from any natural sensation, more of an emotional apprehension

⁸⁷ Cohen 1986, 76. "While the details of the morphology varied from one Puritan teacher to another, the unquestioned assumption was that the sinner would only receive grace after becoming aware of his or her spiritual impotence and utter helplessness before God." (McClymond 1998, 40) Tracy highlights how this "work of humiliation was the central tenet of Stoddard's doctrine of conversion. ... The point Stoddard was making ... was that men should try their best to save themselves, because *only by having done so would they really understand that it wasn't sufficient*. Any man who didn't try his utmost could always tell himself that a better effort on his part would have conquered his innate sinfulness." (Tracy 1980, 33-34)

⁸⁸ See Chapter III, notes 130-31, 231-32.

⁸⁹ As a twenty-year-old, Edwards worried about this: "The chief thing that now makes me in any measure to question my good estate is my not having experienced conversion in those particular steps wherein the people of New England and anciently the Dissenters of Old England used to experience it." (Dwight 1830, 93; WJE 10:269-70; Laurence 1979, 268, note 3)

⁹⁰ WJE 4:185. See Nichols 2001, 97-98.

⁹¹ McClymond 1998, 42. Edwards wrote in *Religious Affections*: "As a seeming to have this distinctness as to steps and method, is no certain sign that a person is converted; so a being without it, is no evidence that a person is not converted. ... Nothing proves it to be necessary, that all those things which are implied or presupposed in an act of faith in Christ must be plainly and distinctly wrought in the soul, in so many successive and separate works of the Spirit that shall be, each one, plain and manifest, in all who are truly converted." (WJE 4:160-61) See also Heimert 1966, 38-39; Holifield 2003, 119.

⁹² See Chapter III, notes 47, 536.

⁹³ See *ibid*, note 177, regarding the significance of Edwards' departure from the terror preaching he had adopted from Stoddard.

⁹⁴ See *ibid*, notes 47-52.

and felt perception of beauty.⁹⁵ Such relish for divine things, and the spring of diffusive love for others that resulted, was a catalyst of the spirit of prayer Edwards considered so vital to revival.⁹⁶

Though **Charles Finney** could cite Edwards liberally as vindication of his revival measures,⁹⁷ in soteriology he undertook to differentiate himself as sharply as possible from those “traditions of the elders”⁹⁸ that assumed “sinners must have a season of protracted conviction, and that those conversions that were sudden were of a suspicious character.”⁹⁹ Finney contended against what he believed were Old School Calvinism’s¹⁰⁰ absurd distortions of “the sovereignty of God, inability, physical regeneration, and constitutional depravity”¹⁰¹ which lulled people into inaction through a doctrine of “cannotism,”¹⁰² the idea of humanity’s incapacity to do good without gracious assistance.¹⁰³ Many people had been stranded in a “state of ‘betweenity’”¹⁰⁴ by these old errors, Finney protested, “halting and doubting whether they should reject them or not.”¹⁰⁵ Such strain was at the heart of controversy¹⁰⁶ that followed Finney throughout his ministry, the primary demarcation¹⁰⁷ between Edwards and Finney historians have continued to examine.¹⁰⁸

⁹⁵ For Edwards, conversion consisted “in a new and unwonted inner harmony achieved through the feeling discovery of a ‘divine excellency’ wholly different from anything perceivable by the eye of mere reason.” (Heimert, *op. cit.*, 41-42) See also Miller 1959, 139.

⁹⁶ Edwards, like most Puritan preachers, considered the creation of a spirit of prayer “to be the major spiritual accomplishment of the conversion process.” (Hambrick-Stowe 1982, 178)

⁹⁷ See Chapter IV, note 7.

⁹⁸ *ibid*, notes 220-23

⁹⁹ Finney 1836, 38. “Formerly it had been supposed necessary that a sinner would remain under conviction for a long time... We taught the opposite of this.” (Finney, *Memoirs*, 191)

¹⁰⁰ Finney had determined that “ministers and Christians who had adopted the literal interpretation of the Presbyterian Confession of faith, had found it very difficult to deal with inquiring sinners.” (Finney, *Memoirs*, 190)

¹⁰¹ *ibid*, 40-41

¹⁰² See Chapter IV, note 40.

¹⁰³ “This is the legitimate tendency of cannotism, if they believe it, they certainly will not repent; and how can revivals prevail, how can the world be converted while so many are vehemently contending for these traditions of the elders.” (Finney 1836, 81)

¹⁰⁴ *ibid*, 80. “There is such a sticklishness on the part of many, for these crippling errors; such a constant effort to maintain these traditions of the elders, as to paralyze the influence of a great portion of the church.” (*ibid*)

¹⁰⁵ *ibid*

¹⁰⁶ Describing the firestorm of controversy surrounding Finney’s revival measures, Murray summarises: “At the heart of the matter lay a different doctrine of conversion.” (Murray 1996, 244)

The clearest statement Finney made of his soteriology came in his sermon, “Sinners Bound to Change Their Own Hearts,”¹⁰⁹ which he adapted *in toto* to become Lecture XII of his *Lectures on Revivals*. Here Finney explained how it would be possible for a person, in their “zeal to recognize and honor God as concerned in this work” of conversion, to leave out the fact

that a change of heart is the sinner’s *own act*, [leaving] the sinner strongly intrenched, with his weapons in his rebellious hands, stoutly resisting the claims of his Maker, and waiting passively for God to make him a new heart. ... God commands you to do it, expects you to do it, and if it ever is done, you must do it.¹¹⁰

“Whereas Jonathan Edwards had opened up religion to all who would love,” Leonard Sweet observed, “Finney opened it up to all who would act. Finney talked more in terms of a conversion decision than a conversion experience.”¹¹¹ And this decision, resting on an act of the will,¹¹² had to be pressed through preaching¹¹³ that convinced the sinner his condition was not unfortunate but criminal¹¹⁴ and required action now.¹¹⁵ Yet Finney’s experience had also

¹⁰⁷ Thomas Kidd points to this polarity as delineating the “cusp of change between a Christian orthodoxy that emphasized the unpredictability of God’s ‘providences,’ and a newer evangelical emphasis on the efficacy of human action to bring a divine response.” (Kidd 2004, 28)

¹⁰⁸ “Historians have been at odds for over a century concerning the degree of Finney’s departure from the theology of Edwards and its significance to the evolving tradition of evangelical revivalism. The principal point of disagreement appears almost invariably to have centered upon the issue of Finney’s doctrine of conversion, the key question being whether he perceived salvation to be the work of self-sufficient man or Calvin’s ‘sovereign God.’ From the very beginning, the character of the historical examinations of Finney’s life and ministry have been markedly influenced by the polarities imposed by this particular controversy.” (Mattson 1970, 1)

¹⁰⁹ Finney 1836, 29-56.

¹¹⁰ Finney, *Lectures*, 197.

¹¹¹ Sweet 1976, 215.

¹¹² “Under the leadership of Charles Finney, revival effected a significantly different form of religious consciousness from that evoked by Edwards’ preaching. For Finney conversion represents the resolution of a crisis of will.” (Weddle 1977, 426-28)

¹¹³ “A prime object with the preacher must be to make *present obligation* felt. I have talked, I suppose, with many thousands of anxious sinners. And I have found that they had *never before felt* the pressure of present obligation. The impression is not commonly made by ministers in their preaching that sinners are expected to repent NOW.” (Finney, *Lectures*, 206)

¹¹⁴ “Rather than pity sinful man then, the lawyer-evangelist instead declared all disobedience to be not a tragedy, but an outright crime.” (Mattson, *op. cit.*, 225) Finney’s terms here were in keeping with the governmental theory of atonement he favoured, countering the substitutionary theory in “hyper-Calvinism” he had rejected during his earliest days of being tutored by George Gale. (Noll 1992, 177; Opie 1963, 370; Wright 1996 [1891], 20-21)

¹¹⁵ Describing the revival at Utica in early 1826, “We told them the Spirit was striving with them to induce them *now* to give him their hearts, *now* to believe, and to enter *at once* upon a life of submission and devotion to Christ... We insisted then, as I have ever done since, on immediate conversion as the only thing that God could accept at their hands; and that all delay, under any pretext whatever, was rebellion against God. ... Among those sudden conversions were some of the most powerful Christians that ever have been known in that region

taught him that, in the end, “no human persuasion, no motive that man or angel can get home upon his mind, will cause [a sinner] to turn; therefore the Spirit of God must interpose to shake his preference, and turn him back from hell.”¹¹⁶ And it was this convicting, convincing work of the Holy Spirit that constituted the essential focus of travailing prayer.¹¹⁷ In practice, Finney, like Edwards,¹¹⁸ roused intercessors in the context of this paradox, sometimes advocating for human agency to the point where he could say that “if Jesus Christ were to come and preach, and the church contradict it, he would fail,”¹¹⁹ and other times promoting divine agency to the point that “if Jesus Christ were to come down here and preach to sinners, not one would be converted without the Spirit.”¹²⁰

Eschatology

Similar balance informed **Edwards’** theology of the apocalypse in which he viewed the eternal glory of the Church as the final goal of Christians, but one that God would accomplish only through the earthbound, human instrumentalities of preaching and prayer.¹²¹ “There is yet remaining a future glorious advancement of the church and kingdom of God in this world,” he preached in 1747, responding to a memorial from his Scottish friends calling for a worldwide concert of prayer. “It becomes us to be earnest and constant in praying for this glorious event.”¹²² Stein notes in his introduction to Edwards’ *Apocalyptic Writings* how eschatology was a lifetime interest of Edwards’ and a significant factor in his theological

of country; and this has been in accordance with my own experience through all my ministry.” (Finney, *Memoirs*, 191) See Chapter IV, notes 143-48.

¹¹⁶ Finney 1835b, 18-19.

¹¹⁷ See Chapter IV, 266-67.

¹¹⁸ “Jonathan Edwards and Charles Finney assume that the Holy Spirit works in and through natural factors, and hence that it is appropriate to describe a given revival in terms of both divine and human aspects.” (McClymond 2004, 45-46)

¹¹⁹ Finney, *Lectures*, 153.

¹²⁰ *ibid*, 102

¹²¹ WJE 5:53.

¹²² WJE 25:197, 202-03. Kidd surveys how several of New England’s leading “pastors had previously suggested that vigorous prayer could hasten the millennium.” (Kidd 2004, 29) Davidson concurs: “In focusing on prayer as a central means for enlarging the kingdom, Edwards placed himself in the center of New England’s apocalyptic tradition.” (Davidson 1977, 167) See also Winiarski 2005, 713.

vision.¹²³ He preached a series of sermons in 1739 that were published in 1774 as *A History of the Work of Redemption* in which he marked out the *heilsgeschichte* through three stages of history—from the fall of Adam to the incarnation of Christ, from the incarnation to the resurrection, and from the resurrection to the end of the world—illuminating a pattern of adversity and deliverance recurring as the kingdom of God gradually prevailed.¹²⁴ Edwards viewed the third, current phase as a time of “the suffering state of the church.”¹²⁵ But through revival and the conversion of all peoples of the world,¹²⁶ a “glorious work”¹²⁷ would eventually bring about “glory and prosperity to the church,”¹²⁸ an era of fulfillment that would last for a thousand years. And as the Northampton awakening became more widespread in the late 1730s and early 1740s, Edwards began to believe this millennial reign of God could be imminent:

’Tis not unlikely that this work of God’s Spirit, that is so extraordinary and wonderful, is the dawning, or at least a prelude, of that glorious work of God, so often foretold in Scripture, which in the progress and issue of it, shall renew the world of mankind.¹²⁹

For Edwards, the most important thing people could do to bring forward the eschaton was to travail in prayer.¹³⁰ The saints travail¹³¹ just as Christ travailed,¹³² and the church’s

¹²³ WJE 5:50. Pratt has classified 143 of Edwards’ sermons as pertaining to eschatology. (Pratt, *op. cit.*, 244)

¹²⁴ Holifield 2003, 123.

¹²⁵ “The suffering state of the church is in Scripture represented as a state of the church’s travail.” (WJE 9:373)

¹²⁶ “What the church has from Christ’s time till now been travailing, has been the conversion of all nations. ... [The whole creation] will continue to groan and travail in pain, under the wickedness of its inhabitants, till its inhabitants are generally converted from their wickedness to Christianity.” (WJE 5:178, 182) In the *Miscellanies*, Edwards anticipates “that there will be a vastly more glorious propagation of the true religion before the end of the world.” (WJE 18:145)

¹²⁷ WJE 4:353.

¹²⁸ WJE 9:373.

¹²⁹ WJE 4:353. “God seems to be as it were coming forth out of his place to do some extraordinary thing. We may go too far in positively determining what God is about to do or predicting future events, but there is no danger of our going too far in preparing for what may be.” (WJE 22:372) See also Marsden 2003, 267, 315, 335-37; Talbot, *op. cit.*, 223-24.

¹³⁰ “There is a time spoken of, wherein God will remarkably and wonderfully appear for the deliverance of his church from all her enemies, and when he will ‘avenge his own elect’: and Christ reveals that this will be in answer to [the saints] incessant prayers, or crying day and night. ... God seems now, at this very time, to be waiting for this from us.” (WJE 4:515-17)

¹³¹ See Chapter III, note 342.

¹³² “At the same time that he offered up his blood for souls, [he] offered up also, as their High Priest, ‘strong crying and tears’ [Heb. 5:7], with an extreme agony, wherein the soul of Christ was as it were in travail for the souls of the elect; and therefore in saving them is said to ‘see of the travail of his soul’ [Isa. 53:11].” (WJE 4:305)

travail¹³³ is joined with that of the whole world¹³⁴ for “God’s event” at the sounding of the seventh trumpet (Rev 11:15) when “the kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord”:

The mighty struggles and conflicts of nations, and shakings of kingdoms, and those vast successive changes that are brought to pass, in the kingdoms and empires of the world, from one age to another, are as it were travail pangs of the creation, in order to bring forth this glorious event.¹³⁵

Until that time, Christians will be interceding sacrificially through “great commotion and tumult”¹³⁶ just as a woman agonises purposefully through the labour and delivery of a child,¹³⁷ which was why Edwards so closely associated the word “travail” with his eschatological vision. The coming of the millennium would be like a birth,¹³⁸ prayed into reality through the Church’s travail, after which would come a long-anticipated rest.¹³⁹

In contrast, Lyrene has noted, “Noticeably absent in **Finney**’s approach to prayer was Jonathan Edwards’ emphasis on prayer for the coming millennium.”¹⁴⁰ Edwards’ distinctive contribution¹⁴¹ to the tradition of millennialism gaining momentum in America was “Arminianised” under the influence of Oberlin perfectionism,¹⁴² to make “the inauguration of the millennium contingent on human effort,” Dayton suggests, “and riding the crest of the Second Great Awakening, would link themes of perfection, reform, and millennial

¹³³ “In order to Christ’s being mystically born into the world, in the advancement and flourishing of true religion, and great increase of the number of true converts, who are spoken of as having ‘Christ formed in them,’ the Scriptures represent it as requisite, that the church should first be ‘in travail, crying and pained to be delivered’ (Rev. 12:1-2, 5).” (WJE 5:351)

¹³⁴ “When God is about to bring to pass something great and glorious in the world, nature is in a ferment and struggle, and the world as it were in travail.” (WJE 4:318)

¹³⁵ WJE 5:346.

¹³⁶ WJE 16:197.

¹³⁷ See Chapter III, 154-55.

¹³⁸ *ibid*

¹³⁹ “The church’s labor and travail is not over, nor her rest come, till this event be accomplished.” (WJE 5:182) See Chapter III, note 104.

¹⁴⁰ Lyrene, *op. cit.*, 185-86. See Hatch 1980, 559.

¹⁴¹ Goen has proposed that Edwards drew on the exegesis of Daniel Whitby and Moses Lowman to advance a postmillennial vision marking a “new departure” in American eschatology. (Goen 1959, 25-40) Edwards’ ultimate significance, Dayton summarises, was “that he contributed to the expectation of a literal millennium and helped generate a tradition of millennial thinking that would grow in force over the next century.” (Dayton 1987, 154) See also Smith 1992, 40-88.

¹⁴² Zikmund points out how the first issue of *The Oberlin Evangelist* included in its “reasons for publication” the need “to call the attention of Christians to the fact that the Millennium is to consist in the entire sanctification of the church.” (Zikmund 1969, 130; *The Oberlin Evangelist* I, 1, March 3, 1847, 8) See Sandeen 1970, 176-77.

expectation.”¹⁴³ The centrepiece of such human effort for Finney was the work of revival. What drove him was a passionate belief that conversion of individuals was the way to a better society which, secondarily with wide-ranging reform efforts,¹⁴⁴ would usher in the millennium.¹⁴⁵ It was a vision that had germinated in Finney’s itineracy across New York’s “burned-over district,” known for its receptivity to millenarian aspirations,¹⁴⁶ and came to fruit in the effort at Oberlin

to educate a generation of ministers who will go forward and convert the world. The church must *travail* in prayer, and groan and agonize for this. This is now the pearl of price to the church, to have a supply of the *right sort* of ministers. The coming of the millennium depends on having a different sort of ministers, who are more thoroughly educated *for their work*.¹⁴⁷

This shift of responsibility for bringing about the millennium from a sovereign God to the evangelistic and social reform work of individuals gained traction in the atmosphere of growing optimism about America’s emergence as the milieu and means of worldwide improvement.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴³ Dayton 1987, 155. See also Wolffe 2007, 81.

¹⁴⁴ “Finney remained primarily a winner of souls until his life’s close and never connected himself with the various reform movements that owed so much to his influence, but he had sketched in almost classic form the evangelical imperative for social activism: that the moral energy unleashed by Christianity had to be channeled into the reform of specific abuses.” (Moorhead 1978, 14)

¹⁴⁵ “Only perfect individuals could implement a perfect society, and whatever optimism Finney entertained about a perfect society was grounded in his optimism about the reforming effects of salvation and sanctification.” (Sweet 1976, 218-19) McLoughlin underscores the point that, for Finney, “the first step toward the millennium was to convert men to Christ; the rest would follow automatically from this.” (Finney, *Lectures*, xliv) See also McLoughlin 1959, 110, 112.

¹⁴⁶ “Millenarian and utopian fires burned across much of the northeastern United States, from New England to the Western Reserve of Ohio, but nowhere with greater intensity than in the belt of upper New York State called the Burned-over District.” (Barkun 1986, 2)

¹⁴⁷ Finney, *Lectures*, 222. McLoughlin comments, “When [Finney] accepted the post as professor of theology at Oberlin early in 1835 (while still in the midst of writing his lectures on revivalism), he expressly did so in order to help educate ‘a new race of revival ministers,’ who would constitute the advance guard of the world-wide evangelistic movement.” (Finney, *Lectures*, xli)

¹⁴⁸ “[Finney] was a confirmed postmillennialist who believed Christ would return at the end of the Millennium. He also believed that the Millennium had already begun, or would begin shortly, and that life on earth would become better and better until the day Christ returned. His mood fitted that of many early nineteenth century Americans.” (Cohen 1975, 97-98) This mood, which “paralleled and reinforced secular notions of human progress during this time,” was one which held to a vision of the American future as the fulfillment of divine purpose. (Lobue 1972, 43-48) See also Hardesty 1991, 43; Marty 1970, 93; Thomas 1989, 76.

All this was within close reach, Finney urged.¹⁴⁹ “If the church will do all her duty, the millennium may come in three years,” he lectured.¹⁵⁰ If only Christians could become united around this, Finney yearned, “and be agreed as to what ought to be done for the salvation of the world, and the millennium will come at once.”¹⁵¹ And at times, as in Rochester, Johnson has observed, it seemed this was happening: “They saw divisions among themselves melt away, and they began to sense that the pre-millennial unanimity was at hand—and that they and people like them were bringing it about.”¹⁵² After the horrors of the Civil War, however, revivalist postmillennial hopes were dealt successive lethal blows, from growing pluralism in waves of immigration to the rise of biblical criticism and new sciences, all unfolding in the context of harsh urbanisation and industrialisation. “The nation, stubbornly, would not be saved,” Noll writes, and “this combination set the stage for significant transitions”¹⁵³ to a starker pessimism about the potential of humanity that could ultimately be remedied only by the premillennial advent of Christ.¹⁵⁴

Prayer

While Edwards and Finney were worlds apart in family background, education, temperament, and theological assumptions, they were both intensely spiritual men, known for their fervent habit and advocacy of prayer. From a prodigious childhood of prayer¹⁵⁵ to what observers considered an exemplary devotional life as an adult,¹⁵⁶ **Jonathan Edwards’**

¹⁴⁹ Finney believed that “if conversion wrought righteousness and if society was but the sum of souls within it, the revival tide would bring a new day indeed. Logically, the American millennium was within reach.” (Bratt 1998, 58) See also McLoughlin 1959, 105-06.

¹⁵⁰ Finney, *Lectures*, 306.

¹⁵¹ *ibid*, 328

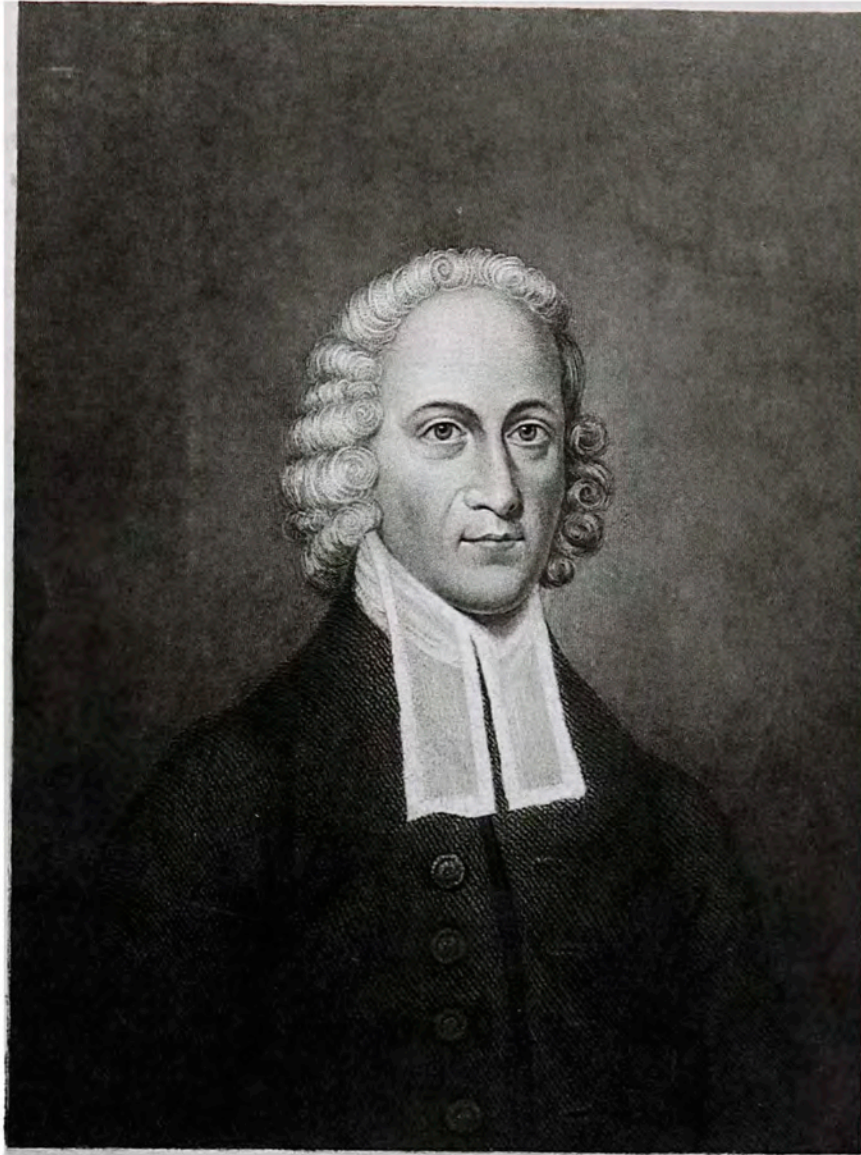
¹⁵² Johnson 2004, 109.

¹⁵³ Noll 2002, 184.

¹⁵⁴ “The radical shift that took place in the mainstream of Evangelical revivalism between Charles G. Finney and Dwight L. Moody is one of the most remarkable developments on the religious scene in the nineteenth century.” (Dayton 1987, 162)

¹⁵⁵ See Chapter III, note 444.

¹⁵⁶ Edwards’ great-grandson, Sereno Edwards Dwight, records that Edwards “often kept days of fasting and prayer in secret... It appears from his Diary, that his *stated* seasons of secret prayer were, from his youth, three times a day,—in his journeys, as well as at home. ... And his constant, solemn converse with God, in these exercises of secret religion, made his face, as it were, to shine before others.” (Dwight 1830, 592) One



Jonathan Edwards

Jonathan Edwards

Courtesy of Forbes Library, Northampton, Massachusetts.

eyewitness reported that Edwards' prayers, "in respect to copiousness, appropriateness, tenderness, and sublimity surpassed anything he ever heard from mortal lips. He said he was accustomed to look upon him even then as belonging to some superior race of beings." (Tarbox 1884, 623)

experience of prayer developed through stages¹⁵⁷ that would later help him have footing and clarity through the upheavals of revival.¹⁵⁸ Both his diary entries and *Personal Narrative*¹⁵⁹ reveal a young lad for whom prayer seemed instinctive,¹⁶⁰ a piety tested through strenuous resolutions¹⁶¹ and personal trouble¹⁶² to become a principal channel¹⁶³ of expressing the “inward, sweet delight”¹⁶⁴ constituting the core of Edwards’ conversion and lifelong Christian experience.¹⁶⁵ What Hambrick-Stowe characterised as an “intensely personal spirituality of evangelical Calvinism in the Puritan tradition,”¹⁶⁶ Edwards’ contemplative piety¹⁶⁷ grew through melancholic¹⁶⁸ and mystical¹⁶⁹ inclinations to acquire an experimental, practical orientation.¹⁷⁰ His sermons, regardless of theme, often resolved in application to

¹⁵⁷ McNerney delineates “three distinct awakenings, or stages in [Edwards’] religious development” from natural proclivity, to further understanding of Scripture and appreciation of solitude in nature, to a final strengthening “and deepening of beliefs already held.” (McNerney 1985, 21-24) See also Clebsch, *op. cit.*, 25-26.

¹⁵⁸ “Edwards was an advocate of moderation; he was no wild-eyed fanatic. But unfortunately for him the emotionalism preached by other divines in the Great Awakening did not share the experiential base from which his thought emerged. ... Much of the revivalism that followed was ‘mere’ enthusiasm, without experiential base. And it was this bogus type of religious piety from which Edwards tried to dissociate himself.” (McNerney, *op. cit.*, 28)

¹⁵⁹ Drawn from a diary Edwards kept from 1722 through 1725, a list of forty-seven personal resolutions, and private “miscellanies” of theology and philosophy, the *Personal Narrative* was primarily a “literary act of synthesis for Edwards’s theology of solitude.” (Gilpin 2002, 530) See Hambrick-Stowe 2003, 80.

¹⁶⁰ “Prayer seemed to be natural to me; as the breath, by which the inward burnings of my heart had vent.” (WJE 16:794)

¹⁶¹ McClymond and McDermott comment how the “Resolutions” reveal “an austere young man who lived his life with a kind of monastic or military discipline.” (McClymond and McDermott 2012, 64)

¹⁶² “Indeed, I was at times very uneasy, especially toward the latter part of the time of my being at college. Till it pleased God, in my last year at college, at a time when I was in the midst of many uneasy thoughts about the state of my soul, to seize me with a pleurisy; in which he brought me nigh to the grave, and shook me over the pit of hell.” (WJE 16:791)

¹⁶³ From Edwards’ early writings onward, Beck concludes that “prayer plays a central role in the definition and development of Edwards’s spiritual life.” (Beck 2010, 62)

¹⁶⁴ See Chapter III, note 536.

¹⁶⁵ *ibid*, note 533

¹⁶⁶ Hambrick-Stowe 2003, 88. See also Bremer 2006, 486-87; Lovelace 2004, 299-300; Naeher, *op. cit.*, 291.

¹⁶⁷ Contemplation, which Edwards pursued throughout his life in a “complex regimen of solitude” (Gilpin, *op. cit.*, 524) was the “employment and happiness of Christians,” he believed, and what most differentiated humans from “brutes.” (Sermon 950 on Prov 6:22[c], WJEO 68:L.9r., col. 2)

¹⁶⁸ Commenting on Edwards’ admission that he had been occasionally “overwhelmed with melancholy” (WJE 16:765) as a young man, Parker notes how he “frequently accused himself of melancholy in his private writings without really analyzing the origins of his despair.” (Parker 1968, 199) Later in life, however, and in contrast to Brainerd, Weddle observes, “Edwards moved beyond the dialectic of melancholy and resolution to a form of spirituality shaped by a vision of divine beauty and issuing in consent to the harmony of universal being.” (Weddle 1988, 298)

¹⁶⁹ McNerney believes “all the elements of a classical mystical experience are present in Edwards.” (McNerney, *op. cit.*, 21). Taylor, however, argues that while Edwards “maintained an awe and reverence for the majesty and

prayer,¹⁷¹ and to great effect,¹⁷² though Edwards always longed for more of the spiritual intensity¹⁷³ he experienced to be found in his parishioners.¹⁷⁴ But his motivations in the pulpit were the same as with his pen and in his study, for “praying was as indispensable to him as thinking was,” McClymond concludes.¹⁷⁵ “Piety was the mainspring of [Edwards’s] exertions,” as one nineteenth-century admirer put it, “the moving force of his existence, the volcanic fire that fuses his theology.”¹⁷⁶

Prayer—defined by Edwards variously as “faith expressed,”¹⁷⁷ as “breathings of the Holy Spirit,”¹⁷⁸ as “a great and principal means by which God carries on the designs of his kingdom in the world”¹⁷⁹—was, in the end, our access to the “infinite fountain of good”¹⁸⁰ Christians stood in need of:

[Prayer] is one of the greatest and most excellent means of nourishing the new nature, and of causing the soul to flourish and prosper. It is an excellent means of keeping up an acquaintance with God, and of growing in knowledge of God. It is a way to a life of communion with God. It is an excellent means of taking off the heart from the vanities of the world and of causing the mind to be conversant in heaven. It is an excellent preservative from sins and the wiles of the devil, and a powerful antidote against the poison of the old serpent. It is a duty whereby strength is derived from God against the lusts and corruptions of the heart, and the snares of the world.¹⁸¹

mystery of God, ... his ‘mysticism’ stopped there. ... To define Edwards or those like him as ‘mystics’ places them slightly beyond the mainstream, precisely where they do not belong.” (Taylor 1988, 219)

¹⁷⁰ “Christian practice, taken in the sense that has been explained, is the chief of all the evidences of a saving sincerity in religion, ... much to be preferred to ... any immanent discoveries of grace whatsoever, that begin and end in contemplation.” (WJE 2:426) “For Edwards,” Breitenbach comments, “grace is an abiding principle of holy *action* in the heart.” (Breitenbach 1988, 183)

¹⁷¹ “There are few sermons in the Edwards’ collection on the doctrine of prayer. In the application of many a sermon he enjoined the saints to go to prayer...” (Pratt, *op. cit.*, 134)

¹⁷² Commenting on “prayer bids” written and submitted in Sabbath worship by the Northampton congregation (see Chapter III, note 16), Stein suggests Edwards would have been “undoubtedly pleased” that “the bids are consistent with recommendations made repeatedly in his sermons and treatises.” (Stein 1980, 270)

¹⁷³ “As Edwards put it, true religion doesn’t consist in weak desires that barely move us beyond the point of indifference, but fervency of spirit that vigorously engages the very center of our being.” (McDermott 2000, 35)

¹⁷⁴ See Chapter III, note 67, 74.

¹⁷⁵ “Scholars generally have seen Jonathan Edwards as a Christian thinker, not as a practitioner of the Christian life. Yet the biographical evidence indicates that Edwards’s exercises of piety were just as pronounced and as regular a theme of his life as were his intellectual explorations.” (McClymond 1998, 46)

¹⁷⁶ Sherman 1860, 149. “The cornerstone of Edwards’s legacy and his subsequent import for American culture is his writing about his personal religious experience and how it is constituted and evaluated. ... What most powerfully engaged subsequent readers of Edwards’s theology was how he understood the spiritual life.” (Gura 2005, 229)

¹⁷⁷ See Chapter III, note 371.

¹⁷⁸ WJE 17:303.

¹⁷⁹ MS Sermon 809 on Ezk 36:36-37, Feb. 1746, Gen. Mss. 151, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, 14.

¹⁸⁰ WJE 19:780.

¹⁸¹ Edwards 2001, “Hypocrites Deficient in the Duty of Prayer,” *op. cit.*, 371-72.

Neglect of this great duty, the highest in all of religion, was “to dislike God,”¹⁸² to “live like atheists, ... as if there were no God.”¹⁸³ For what distinguishes God as the true God, Edwards preached, was that He hears prayer: “There is scarce anything that is more frequently asserted of God in Scripture than this, that he stands ready to hear prayer.”¹⁸⁴ And observing God’s manner¹⁸⁵ in responding to what He hears is how we learn of His nature, God’s generosity and mercy.¹⁸⁶ Edwards conveyed these right notions of the nature of God as the foundation for his theology of prayer by framing it in explicitly relational terms as “mutual discourse” with “an Excellent Companion entertaining the mind with the most desirable conversation.”¹⁸⁷ God’s part in this interaction is to hear and answer; ours is to petition earnestly and in absolute dependence on God,¹⁸⁸ abiding in faith, which is prayer’s essence.¹⁸⁹ In order to teach supplicants this reliance and to prove His sovereignty,¹⁹⁰ God may withhold His responses for a time,¹⁹¹ Edwards taught, delaying bestowal of His blessing until we have become ready to receive it.¹⁹² And often, as we shall see, this delay could continue until the pitch of trust and desire reached the level of travail.

¹⁸² MS Sermon 1143 on Rom 12:12, June 1755, Gen. Mss. 151, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, L.2r., col. 2.

¹⁸³ Edwards 2004, “God’s Manner Is First to Prepare Men’s Hearts and Then to Answer Their Prayers,” McMullen (ed.), 89.

¹⁸⁴ WJE 22:215.

¹⁸⁵ “It has been God’s manner, when he accomplished any great thing for his Church, to do it in answer to prayer.” (Sermon 922 on Mt 6:9-10, WJEO 67:L.6v.)

¹⁸⁶ For Edwards, “prayer teaches us about God’s character and ours. God’s hearing and answering our prayer speaks volumes about his nature. ... Prayer reminds us that the Most High ‘is a God of infinite grace and mercy.’ And it reminds us of our desperate need for it.” (Nichols 2001, 211) “[Herein] lies the true heart of Edwards’s theology of prayer—the seeking and finding of God. God is the centre of prayer.” (Beck, *op. cit.*, 53)

¹⁸⁷ Sermon 950 on Prov 6:22(c), WJEO 68:L.1v., col. 2.

¹⁸⁸ See Chapter III, notes 112-23.

¹⁸⁹ “All real and true prayer is the voice of faith.” (WJE 19:787)

¹⁹⁰ Beck comments, “Just as unanswered prayer does not reveal a failing in God’s knowledge but the perfection of it, Edwards saw unanswered prayer as unassailable proof of the sovereignty of God. In choosing to answer some prayers as they have been prayed and pass over others, God reveals his sovereignty.” (Beck, *op. cit.*, 44)

¹⁹¹ “Tis one design of God in withholding mercies to teach us our need of his help and our dependence upon it.” (Sermon 142 on 1 Kgs 8:35-36, WJEO 44:L.4v.) See Kreider 2003a, 80-81.

¹⁹² “When God defers for the present to answer the prayer of faith, it is ... for the good of his people sometimes, that they may be better prepared for the mercy before they receive it, or because another time would be the best and fittest on some other account.” (Edwards 1998, “The Most High a Prayer-Hearing God,” Hickman [ed.], 114)

Edwards was emphatic that prayer is not for God's good, but ours. It neither informs God¹⁹³ nor changes His mind.¹⁹⁴ Being self-sufficient and happy in Himself,¹⁹⁵ God is neither obligated to answer a sinner's prayer,¹⁹⁶ nor harmed if we leave it off.¹⁹⁷ Though He abounds in treasure,¹⁹⁸ His blessings are not drawn by our prayers,¹⁹⁹ for He is the self-moved Cause and Bestower of all things.²⁰⁰ Why, then, do we pray? Because in begging mercies, Edwards explains, we might prize them more and acknowledge God in them.²⁰¹ Prayer stirs in us our sense of need and value for what God alone can do. Through fervent petition, God prepares our hearts for His mercies in order to secure His glory and promote our good, and this right preparation was essentially what Edwards understood prayer to be.²⁰² God may "present himself"²⁰³ in a way to appear "as though"²⁰⁴ He were being prevailed upon by our

¹⁹³ "Why does God require prayer in order to the bestowment of mercies? It is not in order that God may be informed of our wants and desires. He is omniscient, and with respect to his knowledge unchangeable." (*ibid*, 115)

¹⁹⁴ Nichols summarises Edwards' view: "Although this humbles us, God ordains the means of the prayers of his people in the carrying out of his will. We don't pray to change his mind; we pray so that we can be used of him." (Nichols 2001, 210) See also Haykin, *op. cit.*, 139.

¹⁹⁵ "God himself enjoys infinite good and happiness, and the happiness that he enjoys is in himself. ... And as he is infinitely happy in himself and is self-sufficient, so he is all-sufficient." (Sermon 400 on Dt 28:12, WJEO 51:L.2r.)

¹⁹⁶ "When he does answer, he will do it not ... because he has obliged himself by any promise, but only because 'tis his pleasure oftentimes according to the riches of grace to have respect to the sinful, miserable creature's earnest desires of its own happiness, though it does not deserve that God should have any respect to it." (Edwards 2004, "God's Manner Is First to Prepare Men's Hearts and Then to Answer Their Prayers," McMullen [ed.], 92)

¹⁹⁷ "By our constancy in prayer, we cannot be profitable to God; and if we leave it off, God will sustain no damage: He doth not need our prayers." (Edwards 2001, "Hypocrites Deficient in the Duty of Prayer," *op. cit.*, 371)

¹⁹⁸ "There is in this divine treasury laid up, as it were, a vast variety of good things, innumerable kinds of blessings, all sorts of good for the creature's supply." (Sermon 400, *op. cit.*, L.2v.)

¹⁹⁹ "It is not to be thought that God is properly made willing and his mercy drawn by our prayers. The sending of God's mercy is wholly within himself." (Edwards 2004, "God's Manner Is First to Prepare Men's Hearts and Then to Answer Their Prayers," *op. cit.*, 86)

²⁰⁰ "God ... delights in bestowing, and therefore waits for our asking, and counsels us to it; not to move him to bestow the blessing, but that we may be prepared to receive it." (WJE 19:783)

²⁰¹ "God's people, by earnestly begging mercies of him, are prepared for mercies. They will the more prize them as the gift of God, will be more sensible that they come from him, and will have their hearts more prepared to praise." (Sermon 142, *op. cit.*, L.5r.)

²⁰² "They think ignorantly who think that it is not worth the while for them to pray, for this is a principal means to prepare their hearts for the mercies they seek." (Edwards 2004, "God's Manner Is First to Prepare Men's Hearts and Then to Answer Their Prayers," McMullen [ed.], 94) Pratt summarises that, for Edwards, "prayer is for the preparation of the man praying so that he might be made right and ready to receive God's answer." (Pratt, *op. cit.*, 134)

²⁰³ "For though, speaking after the manner of men, God is sometimes represented as if he were moved and persuaded by the prayers of his people; yet it is not to be thought that God is properly moved or made willing by our prayers." (Edwards 1998, "The Most High a Prayer-Hearing God," *op. cit.*, 114-16) "According to

prayers. Phrases like “as if”²⁰⁵ and “as it were”²⁰⁶ occur frequently in Edwards’ writings as conventions for interpreting Scripture that could otherwise suggest actual effect of prayer upon the divine will. It is God’s kindness to engage petitioners with these impressions, Edwards preached, to use prayer for directing our attention to Him. Indeed, it is God’s kindness to let us pray to Him at all,²⁰⁷ and certainly all the more to involve prayer as He does in accomplishing the “designs of Christ’s kingdom in the world.”²⁰⁸ But Edwards’ vision of this strategic function God had given to prayer was sweeping, truly cosmic, as he looked toward the approaching time when there would be

...given much of a spirit of prayer to God’s people, in many places, disposing them to come into an express agreement, unitedly to pray to God in an extraordinary manner, that he would appear for the help of his church, and in mercy to mankind, and pour out his Spirit, revive his work, and advance his spiritual kingdom in the world, as he has promised.

Such extraordinary prayer would gradually spread, Edwards predicted, leading to revival, thus producing more prayer until

...there shall, in process of time, be a vast accession to the church, so that it shall be ten times as large as it was before; yea, at length, all nations shall be converted unto God. ... And thus that shall be fulfilled, Psalms 65:2, “O thou that hearest prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come.”²⁰⁹

Edwards,” Kreider notes, “the anthropomorphic language of God’s responsiveness to prayer is further evidence of His graciousness.” (Kreider 2003b, 441) See also Sanders 2007, 280-84.

²⁰⁴ See Chapter III, notes 351-52. “God has been pleased to constitute prayer to be an antecedent to his bestowment of mercy and very often is pleased to bestow mercy in consequence of prayers as though he were prevailed on and moved by prayer.” (Edwards 2004, “God’s Manner Is First to Prepare Men’s Hearts and Then to Answer Their Prayers,” McMullen [ed.], 86) Here we have the crux of Edwards’ theology of prayer.

²⁰⁵ “If God needs no new information, has already determined the course of history and will unfailingly accomplish his goals, how can it legitimately be said that God answers the prayers of his people? ... The key to Edwards’s answer lies in the words ‘as if.’ From man’s perspective, it appears that God has been overcome by his prayers. God operates in this manner, Edwards maintained, as yet another act of grace, thereby encouraging man to come boldly to him. From God’s perspective, however, the prayers of men are ultimately lifted up in response to his sovereign will. ... Thus, while God has determined the course of events, he has done so in such a way that both the prayers of volitional agents and his answers to them are part of his larger, predetermined plan for history.” (Beck, *op. cit.*, 34-35)

²⁰⁶ “[That God is eminently One who hears prayer] appears in God’s being, as it were, overcome by prayer. ... In such cases, God is, as it were, overcome by humble and fervent prayer.” (Sermon 374 on Ps 65:2, WJEO 51:L.7r.)

²⁰⁷ “’Tis a great kindness in God to us that he will let us pray to Him.” (MS Sermon 1143 on Rom 12:12, June 1755, Gen. Mss. 151, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, L.1v., col. 2.)

²⁰⁸ WJE 4:516.

²⁰⁹ WJE 5:317-18. “Though Edwards defended a Calvinist doctrine of predestination, he also taught that prayer can change world history.” (Sweeney 2009, 113-14, note 13)

Charles Finney, too, was driven by a vision of the colossal potential of prayer, typified in a message entitled “The Reward of Fervent Prayer” delivered in London during his first preaching tour of England:

If Christians would but avail themselves of all the blessings which God has provided, and really become filled with the Spirit, what do you suppose would be the result? ... Could one Church be thoroughly awakened, another and another would follow, till the whole city would be aroused, and every chapel would be filled with devout inquirers after salvation. ... Let every Christian in this city be filled with the Holy Spirit, and what would be the result? London would move! Ireland would move! The world would move!²¹⁰

This conviction that “a church living with God, and fully meeting the conditions of acceptable prayer, might have more power with God than so many angels”²¹¹ was one that grew²¹² out of Finney’s own spiritual searching²¹³ and native intensity. His conversion had been a prayer event,²¹⁴ branding all that flowed from it²¹⁵ with a passion and priority for prayer for which Finney would become well-known.²¹⁶ Recollections by Oberlin students of Finney’s habits of prayer²¹⁷ would “come back through the long vista of years, a sweet and vivid memory”:²¹⁸

He often told the students in college that he could not get on with less than four hours a day to be alone with God, and on one occasion he said that whenever he found himself alone in a room, his first impulse was to fall upon his knees and pour out his heart to God. He had so

²¹⁰ Finney, “The Reward of Fervent Prayer”, *The Penny Pulpit* (London: J. Paul, c1853), May 15, 1850, 71, The Richard DuPuis Papers, Oberlin College Archive. See also Finney, *Lectures*, 69 [Ja 5:17-18].

²¹¹ Finney, “An Approving Heart—Confidence in Prayer”, *The Oberlin Evangelist* IX, 5, March 3, 1847, 35. Believing that the surest safeguard of revival’s fruit was the spiritual culture of churches, Finney laboured in prayer “with great earnestness and agony for a deeper work in my own heart, that I might be able myself to exhibit more spiritual religion to the churches, so far as I had access to them. ... I was greatly impressed with the importance of elevating the standard of piety in the churches.” (Finney 1861, 95)

²¹² Finney recounted various seasons of personal spiritual renewal, as in the winter of 1842 when “the Lord gave my own soul a very thorough overhauling, and a fresh baptism of the His Spirit.” (Finney, *Memoirs*, 456) John Morgan, Finney’s long-time colleague at Oberlin, observed his lifelong growth in prayer: “I do not think that, in his earlier years, he had this power in prayer in the same degree as he had later on in life. In the latter part of his life, I thought his praying was better than his preaching.” ([_____] 1876, *Reminiscences of Rev. Charles G. Finney...*, 49) See also Beltz 1944, 42.

²¹³ “I can recollect how ... objections to prayer came up many years since before my mind, but were instantly answered and set aside, they seemed so absurd.” (Finney, “On Prayer”, *The Oberlin Evangelist* XVII, 1, January 3, 1855, 2)

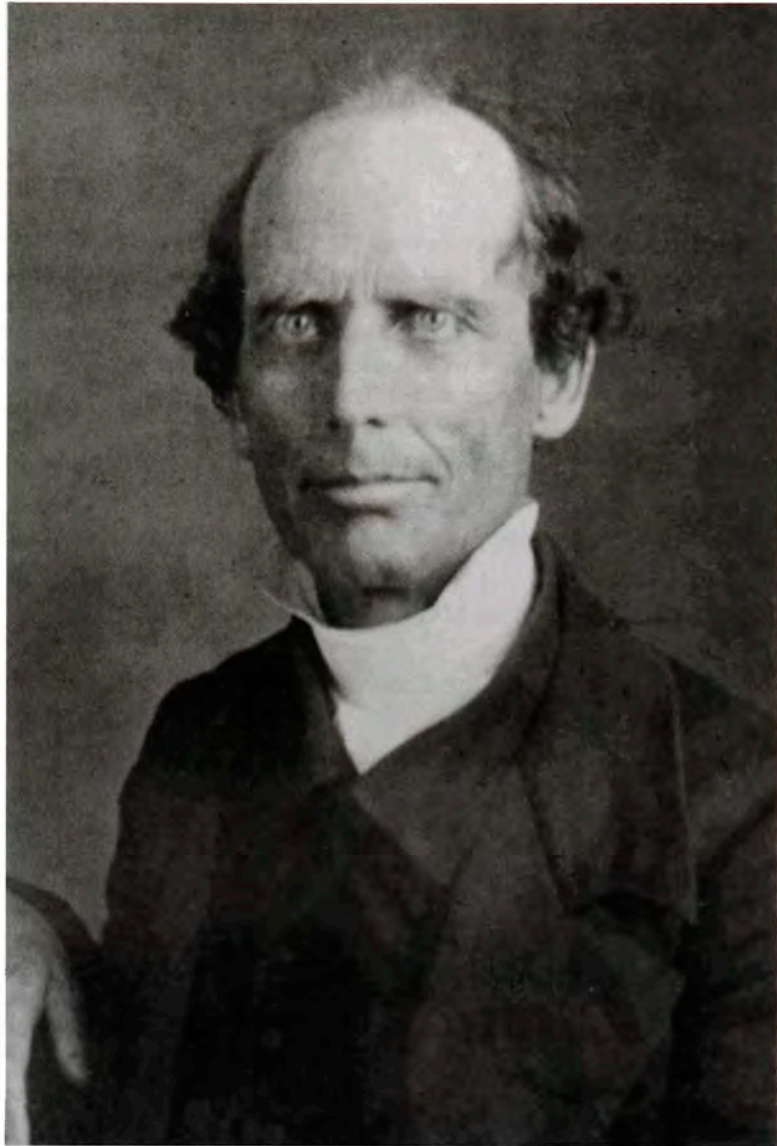
²¹⁴ See Chapter IV, notes 122, 144, 218, 289, 315, 379-80, 451, 507.

²¹⁵ “Throughout Finney’s career it would be prayer—especially what he called the ‘prayer of faith’ and ‘prevailing prayer’—that fueled his life and work.” (Hambrick-Stowe 1994, 24)

²¹⁶ See Chapter IV, note 72.

²¹⁷ “Intense prayerfulness seemed to be habitual on his own part, a state of mind that breathed out prayer without ceasing.” (Matson [n.d.], 33)

²¹⁸ *ibid*, 10-11



Charles Grandison Finney

Photo courtesy of the Oberlin College Archives.

much to say to God, and he loved to use his voice in prayer, “to let himself out,” as he expressed it, and often this was with tears and groans in his travail of soul for others.²¹⁹

By his own account, after conversion Finney regularly spent extended time²²⁰ in private prayer, sometimes trembling²²¹ and “swallowed up”²²² in ecstatic visions which he kept, for

²¹⁹ *ibid*, 31-32. Hambrick-Stowe notes how “students who later commented on their Oberlin experience uniformly cited class prayer as an unforgettable part of Finney’s theology classes.” (Hambrick-Stowe 1996, 196)

²²⁰ After evening services, Finney later recounted, he “would retire as early as I well could; but rose up at four O’clock in the morning, because I could sleep no longer, and immediately went to the study and engaged in prayer. And so deeply was my mind exercised, and so absorbed in prayer, that I frequently continued from the time I arose at four O’clock till the gong called to breakfast at eight O’clock.” (Finney, *Memoirs*, 456)

²²¹ See Chapter IV, notes 280-81.

the most part, to himself: “[Friends] would look surprised, and sometimes, I thought, incredulous; and I soon learned to keep quiet in regard to those divine manifestations, and say but little about them.”²²³ However, people found his public prayers uniquely disarming in their childlike simplicity²²⁴ which lent to his teaching on prayer a plain-spoken freshness²²⁵ that appealed to many churchgoers who, McLoughlin notes, had become “emotionally and spiritually starved by the arid legalism and formalism of Old School Calvinism.”²²⁶ Finney’s was prayer freely expressed as “the conscious harmony of our conscience, will, and sensibility in God,”²²⁷ a spiritual posture²²⁸ or attitude²²⁹ he believed to be the acid test of true religion.²³⁰

While Finney believed the impulse of prayer to be a “universal necessity,” instinctive in all people,²³¹ “prevailing prayer” which secures God’s answers was more than “the mere going aside and praying,”²³² but a perpetual yearning of the mind, an habitual presenting of the mind in a spirit of importunity. This is the true idea of prevailing prayer.”²³³ If prayer is not

²²² Finney, “Conditions of Prevailing Prayer” [part 3], *The Oberlin Evangelist* IX, 15, July 21, 1847, 115.

²²³ Finney, *Memoirs*, 39.

²²⁴ Oberlin students recalled Finney’s services in which “the reading of the first hymn seemed like the first notes of the message that God had for His waiting people; and the prayer that followed! No words of mine can describe it...” (Matson, *op. cit.*, 10) “His prayers were simple and childlike. He told God exactly what he wanted, and seemed to expect what he asked.” (Ferguson, Fergus, “Re-opening of Blackfriars Street Chapel—Professor Finney,” *The Christian News*, September 10, 1859, 5 [clipping in research notes of Richard A. G. Dupuis in The Charles Grandison Finney Papers, Oberlin College Archives, 6])

²²⁵ “His mode of presenting the truth on this matter has a freshness and uncommonness in it that serve to imprint his sentiments on one’s mind; and his illustrations and anecdotes are always pointed and striking.” ([Kirk, John], “The Prevailing Prayer Meeting,” *The Christian News*, January 7, 1860, 6 [clipping in research notes of Richard A. G. Dupuis in The Charles Grandison Finney Papers, Oberlin College Archives, 10])

²²⁶ Finney, *Lectures*, xxxii.

²²⁷ Finney, Sermon 482, “Hunger and Thirst After God”, on Mt 5:6 (1871), The Charles Grandison Finney Papers, Oberlin College Archives.

²²⁸ “Prayer is the state of the heart.” (Finney, *Lectures*, 30)

²²⁹ “O then you would need only put yourself in an attitude to be blessed and you could not fail of receiving all you could ask that could be really a good to your soul and to God’s kingdom.” (Finney, “Conditions of Prevailing Prayer” [part 3], *The Oberlin Evangelist* IX, *op. cit.*, 115)

²³⁰ “[Any system of religion that] does not beget prayer, does not unify us with God, and bring us into fellowship and sympathy with Him, it is a lie.” (Finney 1877, 120)

²³¹ “Indeed, mankind have given evidence of this in all ages and in every nation;—showing both the universal necessity, and that it is a dictate of our nature to look up to a God above.” (Finney, “On Prayer”, *The Oberlin Evangelist* XVII, *op. cit.*, 1)

²³² “Saying prayers is not offering prevailing prayer. The effectiveness of prayer does not depend so much on quantity as quality.” (Finney [1984], 41)

²³³ Finney, “How to Prevail with God”, *The Penny Pulpit*, *op. cit.*, 114.

being answered, Finney pressed, either in “letter” or “spirit,”²³⁴ then it cannot be real prayer,²³⁵ and the petitioner was likely deluded.²³⁶

Much that is called prayer is not answered in any sense whatever, and *is not real prayer*.
Much that goes under the name of prayer is offered merely for the form of it, with neither care nor expectation to be answered.²³⁷

Resolving this conundrum of why “so much that is called prayer is not answered” had been the linchpin of Finney’s conversion²³⁸ and became the springboard of his theology of prayer. He believed the essence of prayer to be petitionary, “asking favors of God,”²³⁹ but doing so according to the revealed will and way of God: “asking not only for such things as God is willing to grant, but also asking in such a state of mind as God can accept.”²⁴⁰ This meant praying as Jesus taught,²⁴¹ but with “a corresponding sensibility—a state of feeling in harmony with [God’s will]” that Finney perceived as “governmentally necessary”²⁴² and spiritually expedient. Meeting God’s conditions in prayer was what rendered “it consistent for God to do as it would not be consistent for Him to do otherwise,”²⁴³ thereby creating the atmosphere most conducive to revival, Finney’s greatest concern.²⁴⁴

²³⁴ Finney, “An Approving Heart—Confidence in Prayer”, *The Oberlin Evangelist* IX, *op. cit.*, 34. “The ways of the Lord are so much wiser than our own, that he kindly and most benevolently declines to follow our way, and takes his own. The great end, however, which we seek, if our prayer is acceptable to Him, He will certainly secure, perhaps more perfectly in his own way than he could in ours.” (Finney, “Conditions of Prevailing Prayer” [part 1], *The Oberlin Evangelist* IX, 11, May 26, 1847, 81)

²³⁵ “Great prevalence in prayer, then, is an evidence that we abide in Him. But a want of prevalence in prayer is conclusive evidence that we do not abide in Him.” (Finney 1855, 165-66)

²³⁶ As a young lawyer, Finney attended his first prayer-meeting and “became convinced they were under a delusion; that they did not prevail because they had no right to prevail. They did not comply with the conditions upon which God had promised to hear prayer.” (Finney, “Prevailing Prayer”, *The Independent of New York* XXVI, 1318, March 5, 1874, 3) See also Finney [1984], 51.

²³⁷ Finney, “Conditions of Prevailing Prayer” [part 1], *The Oberlin Evangelist* IX, *op. cit.*, 81.

²³⁸ “I do not think I ever could have been converted if I had not discovered the solution to the question, ‘Why is it that so much that is called prayer is not answered?’” (*ibid*)

²³⁹ Finney, Sermon 498, “Prevailing Prayer Meeting,” on Acts 12:5-17 [1871]; Sermon 684, “Prayer,” [n.d.]; The Charles Grandison Finney Papers, Oberlin College Archives.

²⁴⁰ Finney, “Prevailing Prayer”, *The Independent of New York* XXVI, *op. cit.*, 3.

²⁴¹ See Chapter IV, note 547.

²⁴² Finney, “The Promises of God”, *The Penny Pulpit* (London: J. Paul, c1853), May 17, 1850, 69, The Richard DuPuis Papers, Oberlin College Archive. “The government of God” to Finney meant “all that is implied in the movements of the universe that shall secure the end at which he aims.” (Finney, “Acceptable Prayer”, *The Penny Pulpit* [London: J. Paul, c1853], May 12, 1850, 33, The Richard DuPuis Papers, Oberlin College Archive)

²⁴³ Finney, *Lectures*, 52.

²⁴⁴ “[Finney’s] zeal for souls was the driving force behind his entire theology of prayer.” (Lyrene, *op. cit.*, 162, note 172)

If prayer was a condition of God for revival,²⁴⁵ then a pure heart was a condition of God for prayer.²⁴⁶ This meant not merely repentance, but renunciation of sin;²⁴⁷ “all professed prayer is an abomination,” Finney preached, “if it be not offered in a state of entire consecration of all that we have and are to God.”²⁴⁸ He denounced “prayer abomination” in extreme terms, whether that was trifling with rote prayer, the same as profanity to Finney,²⁴⁹ or negligence of any proviso of God for acceptable prayer,²⁵⁰ which was nigh on to letting God cease to exist.²⁵¹ Surfacing and confronting any hindrances to prayer like these,²⁵² often so deeply embedded in the heart,²⁵³ was how prayer prepares the petitioner to receive: “Prayer pleases God as Governor of the universe because it puts us in a position in which he can bless us and gratify his own benevolence.”²⁵⁴ Finney echoed Edwards here, teaching that

²⁴⁵ “God needs prayer from us as a condition of his doing to us and for us all he would.” (Finney, “On Prayer”, *The Oberlin Evangelist* XVII, *op. cit.*, 1)

²⁴⁶ Preaching on the need for a pure heart, Finney began, “The suppliant must understand what he needs, and have a practical and just apprehension of it. There can be no real prayer without this.” (Finney, “Prayer for a Pure Heart”, *The Oberlin Evangelist* XI, 6, March 14, 1849, 41)

²⁴⁷ “You cannot prevail in prayer, without renouncing all your sins. You must not only recall them to mind, and repent of them, but you must actually renounce them, and leave them off, and in the purpose of your heart renounce them all *for ever*.” (Finney, *Lectures*, 64)

²⁴⁸ Finney, “Prevailing Prayer”, *The Independent of New York* XXVI, *op. cit.*, 3. To pray sincerely, “there must be an entire consecration of the will and the whole being to him.” (Finney, “Acceptable Prayer”, *The Penny Pulpit*, *op. cit.*, 35)

²⁴⁹ “It is nothing better than mockery to use the Lord’s prayer as a mere form. ... In their senseless chattering of this form of prayer by the hour together, they as truly blaspheme God as if they had taken his name in vain in any other way. ... Prayer is a privilege too sacred to be trifled with.—The pernicious effects of trifling with prayer are certainly not less than the evils of any other form of profanity.” (Finney, “Conditions of Prevailing Prayer” (part 2), *The Oberlin Evangelist* IX, 12, June 9, 1847, 91)

²⁵⁰ “If there be the least sin in my heart, the Lord will not hear my prayer. Nothing short of entire obedience for the time being is the condition of acceptance with God.” (Finney, “An Approving Heart—Confidence in Prayer”, *The Oberlin Evangelist* IX, *op. cit.*, 34)

²⁵¹ One whose motive in prayer is anything less than complete obedience to God “virtually says, *Let God cease to be*; let him not require what he does; let him not pursue the end that he does; let him not govern the universe; let not his will be universal law.” (Finney, “Acceptable Prayer”, *The Penny Pulpit*, *op. cit.*, 37)

²⁵² In a sermon entitled “Heart Sins Hinder Prayer,” Finney listed sixty-two attitudes and actions regarded as “iniquity in the heart” obstructing prayer. (Finney, Sermon 472, “Heart Sins Hinder Prayer”, on Ps 66:18 [1871], *The Charles Grandison Finney Papers*, Oberlin College Archives)

²⁵³ “It is not these words, as mere words, that God regards, or that we should value. Words themselves, apart from their meaning, and from their meaning as used by us, would neither please nor displease God.—He looks on the heart.” (Finney, “Conditions of Prevailing Prayer” (part 2), *The Oberlin Evangelist* IX, *op. cit.*, 89)

²⁵⁴ Finney, “On Prayer”, *The Oberlin Evangelist* XVII, *op. cit.*, 1.

prayer changes the one praying by “mak[ing] us prize the blessing²⁵⁵ and love the Giver.”²⁵⁶

But unlike Edwards, Finney believed prayer could, in some way, also influence God:

In prevailing prayer, a child of God comes before him with real faith in his promises and asks for things agreeable to his will, assured of being heard according to the true intent of the promises; and thus coming to God he prevails with him, and really influences God to do what otherwise he would not do by any means. ... Nothing less than this corresponds either with the promises of scripture, or with its recorded facts in respect to the answers made to prevailing prayer.²⁵⁷

It was unconventional thinking like this—not prayer intrinsically, but prayer of the type

Finney promoted in revival,²⁵⁸ examined in Chapter IV—that drew him into controversy.

²⁵⁵ “We can better appreciate the value of the blessing, by how much the more it costs us and the longer we have to pray for it. The more intensely we feel in our prayer for a given case, the more fully we appreciate the blessing when it comes.” (Finney, “On Persevering Prayer for Others”, *The Oberlin Evangelist* XVII, *op. cit.*, 10)

²⁵⁶ Finney, “On Divine Manifestations”, *The Oberlin Evangelist* VIII, 6, March 18, 1846, 41. See note 202 above.

²⁵⁷ Finney, “Conditions of Prevailing Prayer” [part 1], *The Oberlin Evangelist* IX, *op. cit.*, 82. “It might be wise and good for Him to do many things if sought unto in prayer, which he could not wisely do, unasked. You cannot, therefore, infer that prayer never changes the course which God voluntarily pursues.” (Finney 1877, 221)

²⁵⁸ “‘Old School’ revivalists of the early nineteenth century stood in the [Orthodox Puritan] tradition: they in no way rejected the use of means in securing revivals. Their conflict with the ‘New Measure’ men came over the type of means that could be legitimately used.” (Carwardine 1972, 329, note 8)

Both Edwards and Finney provoked severe criticism. Even with his success in revival and the international prominence of his writings, **Jonathan Edwards** was continually on the defensive with both his Northampton congregation and among many New England clergy, once confessing, “It seems I am born to be a man of strife.”²⁵⁹ Accusations were hurled from either side of a line between enthusiasm and formalism, both of which were epithets used to disparage what opposing flanks viewed as false forms of Christianity. While such tension had already been around for nearly a century²⁶⁰ at the time of Edwards’ first experiences of revival, apparent excesses in his meetings heightened apprehension over antinomian dangers²⁶¹ in the kind of passionate spirituality Edwards’ was sponsoring. He conceded that there had been “irregularities” and “imprudences,” but Edwards upheld these as accompaniments of so much that was indisputably beneficial:

Whatever imprudences there have been, and whatever sinful irregularities; whatever vehemence of the passions, and heats of the imagination, transports and ecstasies; whatever error in judgment, and indiscreet zeal; and whatever outcries, faintings, and agitations of body; yet it is manifest and notorious, that there has been of late a very uncommon influence upon the minds of a very great part of the inhabitants of New England, ... that has been attended with [good] effects: ... so that there is a remarkable and general alteration in the face of New England in these respects.²⁶²

It all came down to Edwards’ view of zeal as an essential and distinguishing attribute of Christian life, what Christ died to make possible in people.²⁶³ Scripture commended zeal as

²⁵⁹ In a letter dated June 4, 1750, John Searle recounts a conversation with Edwards in Northampton three years earlier, which “I Shall not, probably, soon forget, as I was in your Study, you Mind appear’d considerably exercis’d and in a Moving Manner, said, ‘It Seems I am born to be a Man of Strife!’” (WJEO 32:B88)

²⁶⁰ “Neither concept [of enthusiasm or formalism] was new in 1740 or even 1640, but they derived much of their eighteenth-century meaning from the events of a hundred or so years earlier, specifically the rise of Puritanism within the Church of England and the outbreak of the English Civil War. Thus, from the mid-seventeenth century at least, a ‘formalist’ was understood as one who had the form of religion without the power, while an ‘enthusiast’ was understood as one who falsely claimed to be inspired.” (Taves, *op. cit.*, 17)

²⁶¹ “Edwards sought to lead his people to the experiential edge, but without plunging into enthusiasm. It was a dangerous place to be, a place where it is easy to be misunderstood.” (Hambrick-Stowe 2003, 90-91)

²⁶² WJE 4:325.

²⁶³ In “Zeal an Essential Virtue of a Christian” on Tit 2:14, Edwards described zeal as being so essential to the Christian that Christ “gave himself, offered up himself a sacrifice to divine justice to make way for their being possessed of it.” (WJE 22:139) In their introduction to this sermon, the editors describe it as “foundational,” “one Edwards felt was necessary to open the gates of revival. ... Here he offers from Tit. 2:14 doctrinal

“noble and excellent,”²⁶⁴ he believed, that inward heat, of which love is the flame, prosecuting all that is for God’s glory and opposing all that is against it.²⁶⁵ Immoderations that could result were the necessary stakes of a life embodying grace, for “grace is a powerful principle in the soul, and the power of it appears partly in the nature of its actings.”²⁶⁶

But some of these actings, critics protested, were threatening church order and social seemliness, arguments subtly veiling class prejudice and arrogant frustration with revivalists, May has pointed out, who were “stirring up the ignorant rabble.”²⁶⁷ Holifield estimates that in Edwards’ day ninety-five percent of New England Congregational clergy had college degrees, making them the most highly educated segment of the colonial population.²⁶⁸ Boston minister Charles Chauncy (1705-87) personified their rationalist view which held that “an enlightened Mind, and not raised Affections, ought always to be the Guide of those who call themselves Men; and this, in the Affairs of Religion, as well as other Things.”²⁶⁹ Underneath Chauncy’s Puritan orthodoxy²⁷⁰ flowed the influence of traditional scholastic psychology which compartmentalised human agency into related but discrete faculties, subordinating affection to sober reason.²⁷¹ The enthusiasm²⁷² of Edwards’ meetings was

justification for enthusiasm, arguing that zeal is not merely an acceptable attribute of a Christian but a necessary one.” (*ibid*, 137)

²⁶⁴ WJE 22:140.

²⁶⁵ “Zeal is an inward heat or fervency of spirit, and love is the flame whence that heat comes. This is the fire that fills the soul with that holy fervor that is called zeal.” (*ibid*, 141)

²⁶⁶ *ibid*, 144

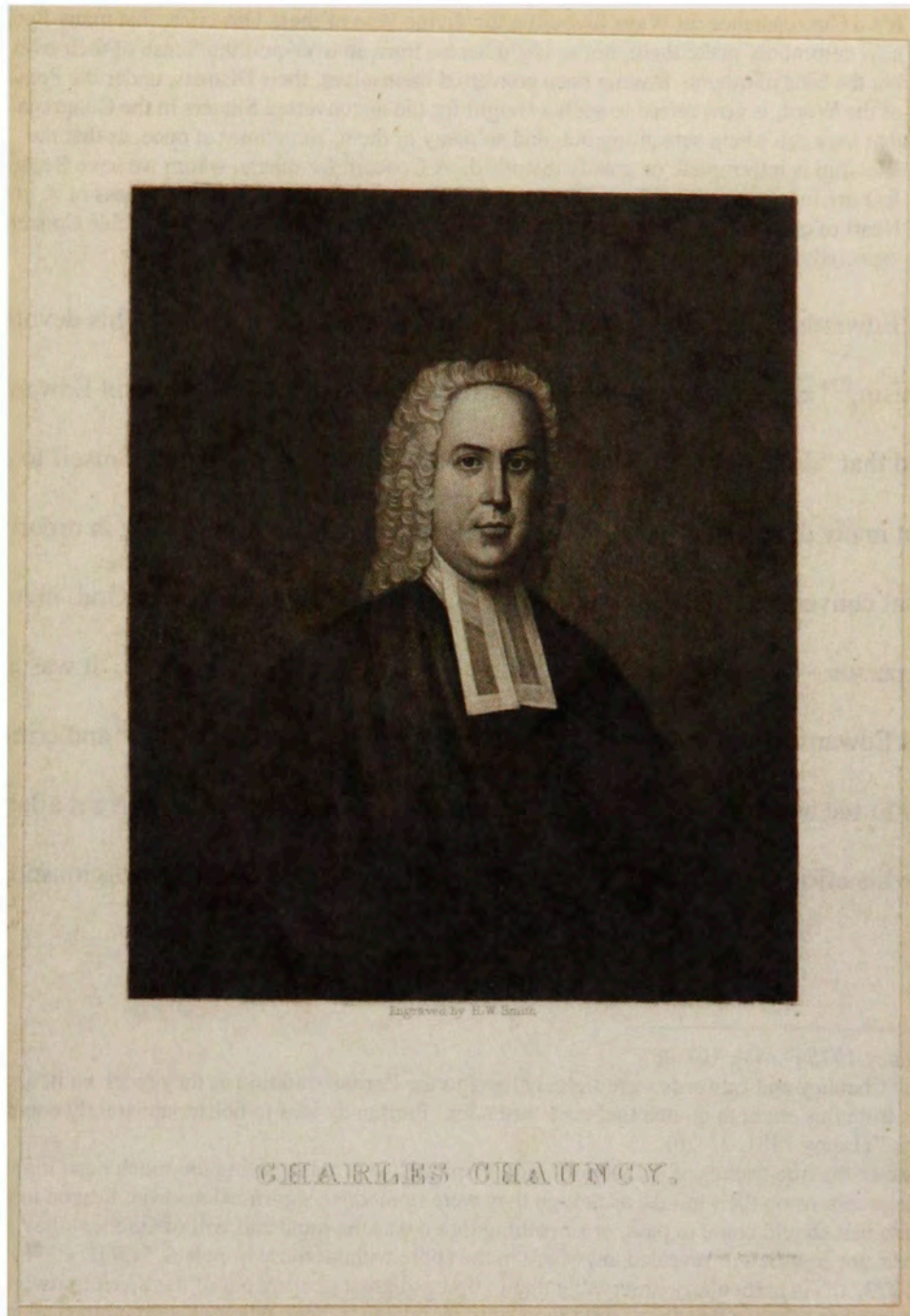
²⁶⁷ May, *op. cit.*, 55.

²⁶⁸ Holifield 2007, 74-75. “To a marked degree American colleges served as training schools for ministers. During the first fifty years of the century, over half the graduates of Harvard and Yale went into the ministry.” (*ibid*, 75) Despite his unrivalled intellect, however, Edwards subordinated education to spiritual enlightenment: “The least beam of the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ is worth more than all the human knowledge that is taught in the most famous colleges and universities in the world.” (Sermon 579a on Mt 22:9-10[a], WJEO 56)

²⁶⁹ Chauncy 1975 [1743], 327.

²⁷⁰ “Chauncy adhered to a traditional Puritan model of piety, believing that conversion should be a rational, sober process and that public expressions of emotion added little or nothing to true faith.” (Kidd 2008, 16) See also Miller 1959, 178-79.

²⁷¹ “Chauncy is captive of the scholastic psychology which breaks human agency into related but separate faculties... The influence of God’s Spirit is primarily and essentially that of enlightenment of the reason: only thereby does God perform a decorous and authentic work on the heart.” (Cherry 1990, 167) Edwards held a more unitary view which integrated reason and emotion, resulting in “the apex of the feud between Edwards and Chauncy.” (Hutch, *op. cit.*, 125)



Charles Chauncy

Engraved portrait, c1856 (HUP Chauncy, Charles [1b]). Courtesy of Harvard University Archives, Pusey Library.

upending this arrangement as manipulative preachers stirred a kind of intercession Chauncy found suspect:

²⁷² "Those hostile to the Awakening had various reasons for opposing it, ranging from contrary views of religious temperament to fears of encroachment upon privilege and class. However, all the opponents of the Awakening agreed upon one thing—its enthusiasm." (Lovejoy 1969, 187)

It's a Circumstance no Ways favouring the divine Rise of these Out-cries, that many People now commonly make them, not as urg'd hereto from an over-pouring Sense of their own Sins, but the Sins of others. Having been converted themselves, their Distress, under the Preaching of the Word, is now raised to such a Height for the unconverted Sinners in the Congregation, that they can't help screaming out; and so many of them, sometimes at once, as that the Worship is interrupted, or greatly disturb'd. A Concern for others, whom we have Reason to fear are in a State of Sin, is, no Doubt, reasonable; and there will be more or less of it, in the Heart of every sincere Christian. But are Shriekings a suitable Expression of this Concern; especially, in the House of GOD?²⁷³

Edwards shared Chauncy's aversion for ecclesiastical upheaval, his devotion to Puritanism,²⁷⁴ and his scrutiny of enthusiastic claims to revelation.²⁷⁵ But Edwards also allowed that "there never yet was any manifestation that God made of himself to the world, without many difficulties attending it."²⁷⁶ Rather than always unfolding in orderly ways, he held that conversion—an apprehension of the beauty and excellency of God, involving the whole person—might occur unpredictably, even uncontrollably at times. It was a middle ground Edwards endeavoured to take,²⁷⁷ challenging both the fanatics²⁷⁸ and critics²⁷⁹ of revival to see in salvation both the enlightenment of the mind and a heart set aflame. But despite his effort, in the aftermath of the Awakening,²⁸⁰ "the Puritan consciousness became

²⁷³ Chauncy 1975 [1743], 107-08.

²⁷⁴ Both "Chauncy and Edwards were fiercely loyal to the Puritan tradition as they received it, and in the writings from this era both quoted the same 'orthodox' Puritan divines to bolster apparently contradictory positions." (Lippy 1981, 25-26)

²⁷⁵ "Some of the true friends of the work of God's Spirit have erred in giving too much heed to impulses and strong impressions on 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." (WJE 4:278)

²⁷⁶ *ibid*, 273. "'Tis particularly observable that in times of great pouring out of the Spirit to revive religion in the world, a number of those that for a while seemed to partake in it, have fallen off into whimsical and extravagant errors... Therefore the Devil's sowing such tares is no proof that a true work of the Spirit of God is not gloriously carried on." (*ibid*, 245-46)

²⁷⁷ "To be sure, the substance of Edwards' argument regarding the Awakening ... was directed against the rationalist rather than the enthusiast position, since he believed the former extreme was the one gaining more apologetic force at the time. But he made quite clear that the enthusiast extreme was for him as equally destructive of the nature of religious faith as the rationalist." (Cherry 1990, 170) See also Breitenbach, *op. cit.*, 179; Hutch, *op. cit.*, 124; Taylor, *op. cit.*, 217.

²⁷⁸ "Another thing I would entreat the zealous friends of this glorious work of God to avoid, is managing the controversy with opposers with too much heat and appearance of an angry zeal." (WJE 4:287)

²⁷⁹ Detractors should be very cautious in their appraisal of revival, Edwards warned, "lest they should be found to be opposers of the Holy Ghost. ... We had better speak against God the Father, or the Son, than to speak against the Holy Spirit in his gracious operations on the hearts of men." (*ibid*, 275)

²⁸⁰ "During the epistasis and catastrophe of the Awakening, the fissure between piety and reason had deepened and widened until society became basically disjoined into revivalists and antirevivalists, with no really tenable mid-position remaining." (White 1972, 60)

severed into antithetic modes of rational moralism and passionate religiosity,” Cherry concluded, “a schizophrenia that still plagues American Protestantism.”²⁸¹

Finney frequently cited Edwards’ woes²⁸² from the incessant disparagement of his detractors as precedent and vindication of what Finney perceived as the undeserved uproar of disapproval that also trailed him.²⁸³ In fact, recent scholarship has seen Finney’s penchant for cloaking his new measures, particularly prayer,²⁸⁴ in Edwards’ mantle as evidence for the “invention” of the first Great Awakening, what Conforti views as an interpretive fiction created for settling disputes during the Second Great Awakening.²⁸⁵ What is beyond debate is the fact that Finney was relentlessly dogged by criticism, living in almost constant controversy.²⁸⁶ he once showed a friend a pile of death threat letters and commented, “I guess I am worth more to kill than for anything else.”²⁸⁷ Unlike Edwards, Finney was scorned by opponents not only for his emotionalism but also for heresy,²⁸⁸ being accused of Pelagianism²⁸⁹ and despised for the theological extravagances of his imitators. One of

²⁸¹ Cherry 1990, 165.

²⁸² Chronicling the advances in Christianity viewed “as New Measures, not found in the Bible, and that would necessarily lead to distraction and confusion in the churches,” Finney explains how unwarranted opposition by some alongside the “rash zeal” of promoters of revival had “spread a pall over the churches for years.” He concluded: “This was the case, as is well known, in the days of President Edwards.” (Finney, *Lectures*, 259, 271)

²⁸³ “Finney’s entire attitude towards the storms he raised, in fact, was one of wounded innocence.” (Weisberger, *op. cit.*, 116)

²⁸⁴ See Chapter IV, note 418.

²⁸⁵ “At the outset of the Second Great Awakening New Divinity leaders began an interpretive process that continued into subsequent phases of the revival: invoking the past to explain the present and anticipate the future.” (Conforti 1991, 101) Edwards became “admired as a man of remarkable, even saintly piety, ... the major American authority on individual conversion and mass revivalism, ... [and he] emerged as a cultural and intellectual icon whose thought ... was wheeled out simply to ‘dignify’ evangelical theological efforts. Evangelicals enshrined Edwards as the most distinguished eighteenth-century founder of America’s righteous empire.” (Conforti 1995, 38)

²⁸⁶ “Finney was used to criticism, or at least he should have been, for critical comments had followed him wherever he went.” (Johnson 1969, 349). See also Chapter IV, notes 84, 194, 520; Opie, *op. cit.*, 394-95; Pyke 1997, 34. Perciaccante suggests Finney began with a more open, pliable understanding which with time became more strident and formal (Perciaccante, *op. cit.*, 41), or more “closed” in Bergson’s rubric of societies “on the alert for attack and defense, bound, in fact to a perpetual readiness for battle.” (Bergson 1935, 266)

²⁸⁷ [] 1876, *Reminiscences of Rev. Charles G. Finney*..., 50.

²⁸⁸ “The truth is, that [Finney’s] system contains but little that is *new*. It is mainly, if not entirely, composed of exploded errors and condemned heresies.” (Dod 1835, 482) See also Mattson, *op. cit.*, iv.

²⁸⁹ Dod 1835, 505-06; Finney, *Lectures*, xxix; Pyke, *op. cit.*, 40.

Finney's closest associates, for example, Jedediah Burchard (1790-1864),²⁹⁰ was said to have, "by persuasion and the use of the most exciting language, and even taking hold of individuals, got a company of persons of both sexes upon their knees to pray—ranged in two parallel lines, facing each other."

He began to pass up and down between them, crying out, with great violence, repeatedly, "Agonize, I tell you! Why don't you agonize! agonize" &c. &c. In this way he continued for a considerable time, exciting them to pray; exclaiming, "Pray away!—Pray away!—I have not had a conversion these twenty minutes!"²⁹¹

In his *Lectures* a decade later, Finney acknowledged mistakes like this while confronting his opponents' obsession with them:

That there have been evils, no one will pretend to deny. But I do believe, that no revival ever existed since the world began, of so great power and extent as the one that has prevailed for the last ten years, which has not been attended with as great or greater evils. Still, a large portion of the church have been frightening themselves and others, by giving constant attention to the *evils* of revivals.²⁹²

Finney believed travailing prayer to be the stumbling block of the "blind and stupid,"²⁹³ those who had been unsuccessful in revival²⁹⁴ due to the condition of their own "frosty hearts."²⁹⁵ Their skewed anxiety about the risks of revivals, he maintained, was no reason for giving travailing prayer up.²⁹⁶

Finney's opponents, however, were actually neither blind nor stupid but were among the intellectual heavyweights of the day,²⁹⁷ clustering in three camps of disapproval: 1) Old

²⁹⁰ See note 59.

²⁹¹ Stone 1835, 314-15. Another similar episode was reported of Augustus Littlejohn, a Finney man itinerating in the Oneida Presbytery of New York: "After the evening was far spent, there having been no fainting, falling, or crying aloud for mercy, and some signs of impatience and wish to be going were manifested, and the praying Christians became more and more vehement, Littlejohn said, 'Can't we roll the wheels a little harder?' (these were his identical words). He then raised his voice to the highest pitch, threw himself forward from his knees to the floor, and pounded, torturing himself in extreme agony, sometimes groaning and sighing (ostensively for poor sinners)." (Perkins 1831, 3-4)

²⁹² Finney, *Lectures*, 272.

²⁹³ *ibid.*, 65

²⁹⁴ See Chapter IV, note 89.

²⁹⁵ Finney 1827, 6-7. "Very often the greatest offence possible to [professors of religion], is to preach about this kind of prayer." (Finney, *Lectures*, 87)

²⁹⁶ See Chapter IV, note 420.

²⁹⁷ In a letter to his wife, Lidian, February 18, 1855, Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote, "Today, I heard Mr Phinney, the noted revivalist preach. I did not suppose such a style of preaching still survived. A great parade of logic, to be sure, but all built on a cobweb of church traditions which a child's popgun or a doll's brush would go through. I could not help telling my kind entertainer ... that I thought the preacher had extolled God's heart at the



Lyman Beecher

Photo courtesy of Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Brady-Handy Photography Collection. Public Domain.

School Calvinists, 2) Unitarians and Universalists, and 3) conservative revivalists, including New School Presbyterians.²⁹⁸ A leading voice of this third group, Lyman Beecher (1775-

expense of his head. ... 'Tis 25 years since I heard him once before. I did not like him then much better.” (Emerson 1939, 493)

²⁹⁸ Lyrene, *op. cit.*, 147-52. Noll would relate these divisions to the first of four polarities fracturing evangelical Christianity in Finney’s day: 1) formalists (Congregationalists, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, and others who were small in number but great in leadership and influence) vs. antiformalists (Methodists, Baptists, Christians, Disciples of Christ, and others who made up three-fifths of American evangelicals); 2) race, with African

1863), actually found many points of agreement with Finney theologically²⁹⁹ but clashed with his revival methodology³⁰⁰ and radicalism.³⁰¹ Though he admired Finney's successes,³⁰² Beecher believed that in order to preserve evangelical unity³⁰³ it would be "necessary that Brother Finney should come upon ground on which we can sustain him, for we cannot justify his faults for the sake of his excellencies."³⁰⁴ Such faults were the preoccupation of Beecher's colleague and fellow revivalist, Asahel Nettleton (1783-1844), who had witnessed what he feared would be the potential damage of Finney's innovations, and took the lead in denouncing him.³⁰⁵ After publication in 1835 of Finney's *Sermons on Various Subjects* and *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*, antagonism localised at Princeton, bastion of the Old School, where Albert Baldwin Dod (1805-45), thirteen years Finney's junior and in many ways his foil,³⁰⁶ took him to task for his theological, methodological, and character flaws.³⁰⁷

Americans responding more readily to Methodists and Baptists; 3) slave states vs. free states; and 4) men vs. women. (Noll 2002, 175-79)

²⁹⁹ "The friction between Finney and Beecher was not theological in nature, in fact, they were close to agreement on such matters and both were New School adherents." (Johnson 1969, 346)

³⁰⁰ "Beecher was apprehensive regarding the 'new measures' being employed by Finney lest they disrupt the unity of the church and eventually hinder the cause of revivals." (*ibid*)

³⁰¹ McLoughlin comments, "Much of the antagonism between Beecher and Finney stemmed from Beecher's inherent political conservatism and Finney's inherent political or pietistic radicalism." (Finney, *Lectures*, xviii)

³⁰² See Chapter IV, note 397.

³⁰³ "Beecher had no heart for such controversy within the orthodox church," Mead concluded. "For him the unity of that church was of supreme importance." (Mead 1942, 206-07) McLoughlin concurred: "Beecher had been for some time mulling over in his mind a vague but elaborate scheme for what he called 'a great evangelical assimilation' among the nation's church. Finney's provocative and sensational revival measures would not be conducive to the sort of ecclesiastical maneuvering that would be necessary for the success of this ecumenical endeavor among Calvinists." (Finney, *Lectures*, xvii-xviii) "What bothered Beecher the most," Bowden adds, was that Finney was "cultivating loyalty to himself among the clergy and other ecclesiastical leaders. ... By early 1827 Beecher sought to crush Finney." (Bowden 1991, 63)

³⁰⁴ Beecher 1865, 2, 96-97. See Chapter IV, notes 273, 278, and 308 for illustrations of Beecher's criticism of Finney.

³⁰⁵ According to Beecher, "Few men have been more blessed in revivals than Mr. Nettleton. Yet he it was who stood foremost in opposition to the movements of Mr. Finney and his collaborators. ... In his early ministry he had been called to move in the track of Davenport's wild-fire a century previous, and had conceived an almost morbid horror of anything approaching to fanaticism." (*ibid*, 92) See Chapter IV, notes 19, 183, 271, 416; Fletcher 1971, 16; Guelzo 1989, 236.

³⁰⁶ Bratt 2006, 16.

³⁰⁷ "There is a very peculiar self-isolation about [Finney]. Through all his writings there is found an ill concealed claim to be considered as one called and anointed of God, to do a singular and great work. ... One might suppose indeed, that he considered himself the residuary legatee of all the prophetic and apostolical authority that has ever been in the world, so arrogantly does he assume all knowledge to himself." (Dod 1835, 484)



Asahel Nettleton

*By Samuel Lovett Waldo (1783-1861) and William Jewett (1789-1874)
via Wikimedia Commons. Public Domain.*

With orotund style and biting sarcasm, Dod voiced Princeton's conflict³⁰⁸ with all that Finney embodied, registering a pivotal denunciation³⁰⁹ that concluded with the question of how Finney could remain in the Presbyterian church.³¹⁰

³⁰⁸ "Princeton emphasized the role of divine election in the process of salvation; Finney focused on human agency. Princeton believed that in worship, as in governance, all things should be done 'decently and in good order'; Finney's motto could have been 'Whatever it takes.' Princeton closely observed precedent; Finney boldly innovated. Princeton upheld the Presbyterian tradition of an educated ministry; Finney had read theology with a pastor in a New York hamlet, accepted what met his standards, and discarded the rest. 'The rest' included much of Princeton's style, which he derided as effeminate, and its substance, which he thought to be irrelevant at best and wrong-headed at worst." (Bratt 2006, 15)

³⁰⁹ McLoughlin considered Dod's critique as "the official and definitive counterattack upon the theological revolution that Finney led." (Finney, *Lectures*, xxii)

Editors of Finney's *Memoirs* note how it had been his policy over time "to ignore opposition and keep about his revival work."³¹¹ Early criticism had found some resolution at a conference convened on July 18, 1827, in New Lebanon, New York at which debate centred not on theology but methods,³¹² and not the use of any means³¹³ but particular "new measures"³¹⁴ considered dubious, even repugnant, to some. Finney emerged from the confrontation with few battle wounds, some growing respect from Beecher,³¹⁵ and a newfound national following.³¹⁶ This made him a more formidable target for Dod, who Finney essentially disregarded. With time, however, Finney questioned his reticence toward adversaries³¹⁷ who had "spoken contemptuously of those whose hearts are laboring, and agonizing, and travailing in birth for the recovery of a backsliding church."³¹⁸ The spirit of prayer that could both provoke³¹⁹ and quash³²⁰ opposition was at the heart of those revival

³¹⁰ "Many of the very expressions and forms of stating these doctrines upon which [Finney] pours out his profane ridicule, are found in the Confession of Faith. Why then does he remain in the church?" (Dod 1835, 526)

³¹¹ Finney, *Memoirs*, xx.

³¹² "It has to be emphasized that the New Lebanon Conference ... was not a doctrinal confrontation between young, anti-intellectual, Jacksonian semi-Pelagians and old, crabbed, Tory Calvinists. ... It was basically an argument about methods in revival." (Guelzo 1989, 236)

³¹³ "Old-school revivalists of the early nineteenth century stood in the traditions of orthodox Puritan theology, which saw conversion in terms of the operation of means on the unregenerate, without in any sense denying the supernatural character of the process of grace. ... The conflict between revivalists like Nettleton and the new-measure men came not over the use of means, but over the type of means to be employed legitimately." (Carwardine 1978, 9)

³¹⁴ "The points of real contention were six: protracted meetings, the denunciation of pastors who opposed revivals, colloquial preaching and prayer, use of the anxious meeting and bench, the hasty admission of converts to church membership, and, most of all, allowing women to pray in mixed assemblies." (Hardesty *op. cit.*, 83)

³¹⁵ At New Lebanon, Weisberger writes, "Beecher had a look at [Finney], and emerged with a respectful evaluation. ... Finney and Beecher drew closer together." (Weisberger, *op. cit.*, 119-21)

³¹⁶ "For a history of religious thought," Noll observes, "the New Lebanon conference provided decisive legitimation for Finneyite revivalism as a recognized contributor to Reformed theology." (Noll 2002, 296) James Johnson agrees that "before the conference he was known mainly in the 'burnt district,' but afterwards, the 'new measures' of the Oneida County revivals and Finney himself became the objects of national attention." (Johnson 1969, 347) See also Cole 1950, 396.

³¹⁷ "As the years went by," Rosell and Dupuis observe, "it became increasingly hard to recapture the power of the early revivals. Finney found that all his attempts to broaden and deepen the revival movement met with resistance in the churches. Much of the opposition seemed to be based on prejudice against his early revivals. ... It became apparent to Finney that it may have been a mistake to allow the early misrepresentations and attacks to go unchallenged." (Finney, *Memoirs*, xxi)

³¹⁸ Finney 1861, 97.

³¹⁹ See Chapter IV, note 417.

³²⁰ Finney recalled a Scottish clergyman named Southard who spoke out at a Oneida Presbytery meeting in Utica, making "a violent speech against the revival as it was going on. What he said greatly shocked and grieved the Christian people who were present. They felt like falling on their faces before God, and crying to Him to prevent what he had said from doing any mischief. ... Christians gave themselves to prayer. There was

doctrines and practices Finney believed were deserving of consideration, free from misunderstanding, by generations to come, which was in part why he wrote his *Memoirs*.³²¹ And in this, to a real extent, Finney succeeded: “While some of his concepts of revival and conversion have been rightly criticized,”³²² Lyrene concludes, “much of Finney’s theology of prayer has withstood the test of time.”³²³ To probe this claim more deeply, it is to a comparative examination of both Finney’s and Edwards’ theology and practice of travailing prayer that we turn our attention next.

a great crying to God that night that he would counteract any evil influence that might result from that speech which had been made by Mr. Southard. The next morning Mr. Southard was found dead in his bed. This again produced a great shock, but on the right side.” (Finney, *Memoirs*, 177-78)

³²¹ “Here, then, was Finney’s main purpose: to give a sketch of the revivals, including the doctrines preached, the measures used, and the results, to ‘enable the church hereafter, partially at least, to estimate the power and purity of those great works of God.’ In this way people might perhaps recapture the spirit of the early revival movement.” (*ibid*, xxviii)

³²² For example, Ken Blue disparages “faith formula” thinking, prevalent in modern Pentecostalism, which he traces directly to the influence of Finney. (Blue 1987, 42-43)

³²³ Lyrene, *op. cit.*, 177.

JONATHAN EDWARDS AND THE FIRST GREAT AWAKENING

TIMELINE OF IMPORTANT EVENTS

- | | |
|------|---|
| 1703 | Born on October 5 in East Windsor, Connecticut, the only son of eleven children, to Timothy and Esther Stoddard Edwards. |
| 1709 | Begins studying Latin with his father in preparation for college. |
| 1712 | Awakening occurs in East Windsor. Edwards builds a prayer booth in a swamp. |
| 1716 | Begins studies at Yale. |
| 1720 | Delivers valedictory address at Yale commencement and begins master's degree. |
| 1721 | Conversion experience in May/June. |
| 1722 | Begins pastorate of English Presbyterian congregation in Manhattan in August. Begins composing his "Resolutions" and "Miscellanies." Herrnhut founded as a Moravian settlement in Saxony by Zinzendorf. |
| 1723 | Begins "Notes on the Apocalypse." |
| 1724 | Elected tutor of Yale College on May 21. Begins writing his "Notes on Scripture." |
| 1726 | Called to serve in August as Solomon Stoddard's assistant in Northampton. |
| 1727 | Ordained on February 15. Marries Sarah Pierpont on July 28. |
| 1729 | Stoddard dies on February 11, leaving Edwards as sole pastor in Northampton. |
| 1730 | Begins composing his "Blank Bible." |
| 1734 | Revival spreads throughout the Connecticut River valley in December. |
| 1735 | Suicide in Northampton of Joseph Hawley, Edwards' uncle (husband of Stoddard's daughter, Rebecca). |
| 1737 | Publishes first edition of <i>A Faithful Narrative</i> in London. George Whitefield begins preaching in London and Bristol. |
| 1739 | Preaches <i>A History of the Work of Redemption</i> from March through August (published posthumously in 1774). Whitefield comes to America. John Wesley begins open-air preaching in Bristol. |
| 1740 | Whitefield selects a site in Georgia for his orphanage and preaches in multiple locations up the colonial coast, including Northampton on October 17-19. Edwards writes his "Personal Narrative" in December. |

- 1741 Height of the Great Awakening in New England that summer. Preaches "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" in Enfield, Connecticut on July 8. Delivers *Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God* at Yale's commencement on September 10 (published later that year).
- 1742 Publishes *Some Thoughts Concerning the Present Revival of Religion in New England*. Sarah Edwards experiences powerful spiritual ecstasies from January 19 through February 4. Cambuslang Revival near Glasgow peaks in August. David Brainerd is appointed a missionary of the Society in Scotland for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge.
- 1744 First Methodist Conference at the Foundry, London. Scottish ministers agree in October to a concerted plan of prayer for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.
- 1745 John Wesley suggests in a March 16 letter to John Erskine the inclusion of Edwards in the concert of prayer. Cape Breton expedition in March. Louisburg taken on June 17 after a forty-seven day siege.
- 1746 Publishes *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*.
- 1747 Brainerd moves into the Northampton parsonage on May 28. Brainerd dies in October. Edwards begins writing Brainerd's *Life* that autumn. Publishes *An Humble Attempt to Promote Explicit Agreement and Visible Union of God's People in Extraordinary Prayer*.
- 1749 Publishes *An Account of the Life of the Late Reverend Mr. David Brainerd*.
- 1750 Dismissal from Northampton church on June 22.
- 1751 Call to serve the Stockbridge Mission on February 22. Installed in August.
- 1757 Invited by trustees to serve as third president of the College of New Jersey (Princeton) on September 29.
- 1758 Assumes office of president on February 16. Inoculated for smallpox on February 23. Dies of complications from inoculation in Princeton on March 22. Sarah dies of dysentery October 2.

CHARLES FINNEY AND THE SECOND GREAT AWAKENING

TIMELINE OF IMPORTANT EVENTS

1792	Born on August 29 in Warren, Connecticut, the seventh child of Sylvester and Rebecca Finney.
1794	Family moves to Oneida County, New York, where Charles attends school.
1795-1810	Revivalist camp meetings spread across frontier America, propelled by the meeting at Cane Ridge, Kentucky, from August 6 to 13, 1801.
1808	Parents move west to Henderson, New York, near the shore of Lake Ontario.
1812-14	Attends high school in Warren, Connecticut.
1815-17	Teaches school in New Jersey.
1818-21	Studies law as a junior partner in the office of Judge Benjamin Wright at Adams, New York.
1821	Conversion experience on October 10.
1822-23	Studies theology under the Rev. George W. Gale of First Presbyterian Church, Adams, New York. Licensed to preach on December 30, 1823, the day he met "Father" Daniel Nash. Nathaniel Taylor appointed Professor of Theology at Yale.
1824	First revival meetings at Evans Mills and Antwerp in Jefferson County, New York. Commissioned by the Female Missionary Society on March 17. Ordained at Evans Mills on July 1. Marries Lydia Andrews.
1825-26	Conducts revivals across the "burned-over district" of Oneida County, New York. Is introduced to Edwards' writings on revival.
1827	Releases first publication, a sermon entitled "Can Two Walk Together Except They Be Agreed?" delivered March 4 in Troy, New York. New Lebanon Convention on July 18-26.
1830-31	Conducts the most successful revival meeting of his ministry in Rochester, New York. Launch of the <i>New York Evangelist</i> on March 6, 1830.
1832	Accepts pastorate of Chatham Street Chapel (Free Presbyterian Church) in New York City.
1834	Takes ocean voyage to Mediterranean for his health from January to July.
1834-35	Revival Lectures delivered in autumn and winter.

- 1835 Accepts position as Professor of Theology at Oberlin Collegiate Institute (later Oberlin College) in February. Publishes *Lectures on Revivals of Religion* in May and *Sermons on Various Subjects* in June.
- 1836 Withdraws from the Presbyterian Church on March 2 to accept pastorate of Broadway Tabernacle (Congregational) in New York City. Publishes *Sermons on Important Subjects*.
- 1837 Discontinues New York pastorate on April 6. Becomes pastor of Oberlin Congregational Church until 1872. Publishes *Lectures to Professing Christians*.
- 1838 Helps establish the *Oberlin Evangelist* in October.
- 1842 Conducts another successful revival in Rochester.
- 1843 Experiences a “great enlargement,” a fresh baptism of the Holy Spirit.
- 1846 Publishes *Lectures on Systematic Theology*.
- 1847 Death of Lydia Finney.
- 1848 Marries Elizabeth Atkinson.
- 1849-50 First revival preaching tour in Great Britain.
- 1851 Accepts presidency of Oberlin College until 1866.
- 1857-58 Conducts revival meetings in Boston and Providence during the “layman’s prayer revival” emanating from New York City.
- 1859 Second revival preaching tour in Great Britain. Recounts highlights of 1857-58 prayer revival in a sermon delivered at Blackfriar’s Street Congregational Church in Glasgow on September 4.
- 1861 Publishes *Letters on Revivals of Religion*.
- 1863 Death of Elizabeth Atkinson Finney.
- 1864 Marries Rebecca Rayl.
- 1868 Completes manuscript of his *Memoirs*.
- 1872 Retirement from Oberlin.
- 1875 Dies in Oberlin on August 16
- 1876 *Memoirs and Sermons on Gospel Themes* published posthumously.

“EARNESTLY CRYING TO GOD
FOR SPIRITUAL MERCIES”

JONATHAN EDWARDS AND TRAVAILING PRAYER

The formation, convictions, and critics of Edwards and Finney emerged from the unique milieu of each man and the movement they led. For Edwards, as we have seen, Puritanism—both its distinctives and decline—was one of several dynamic factors contributing to what became a transatlantic awakening in England, Scotland, and the American colonies. In order to interpret travailing prayer as a pattern of preparedness for this revival, we should begin with understanding the way Edwards privileged vivid spiritual experience in his preaching and leadership, what he meant by describing it as the “sense of the heart,” and why he viewed zeal as the consummate religious affection. All these ideas, worked out with parishioners in Northampton, shaped what he believed about travail as an extraordinary manner of prayer, long-suffering in its pleadings and far-reaching in its effects. This first section of Chapter III explores these and other crucial aspects of Edwards’ outlook to set the stage for in-depth analysis of his theology and practice of travailing prayer that will follow.

THE FIRST GREAT AWAKENING AND ITS MILIEU

Common to promoters of The Great Awakening, and to its antecedent movements, was a high regard for passionate religiosity, epitomised in the “sweet burning” Jonathan Edwards described as the essence of his conversion experience.¹ Thomas Kidd has observed that many historians trace this accent on “heart religion”² to continental Pietism, emerging among north German Protestants in the late seventeenth-century, which influenced various groups of European settlers in colonial America, New England Puritans being a notable one.³ The Puritan stream of devotional practices and patterns of spiritual experience, according to

¹ “The sense I had of divine things, would often of a sudden as it were, kindle up a sweet burning in my heart; an ardor of my soul, that I know not how to express.” (WJE 16:793)

² See notes 43-46.

³ Kidd 2008, 3. Mark Noll concurs that Pietism became “a crucial stimulus—in several of its varieties—for later evangelical awakenings in English-speaking lands.” (Noll 2003, 61)

Charles Hambrick-Stowe, is what colonial revival leaders would eventually draw from “both to fuel and to guide the Great Awakening in their region.”⁴ Early in the 1700s, great-grandchildren of the pioneering New England colonisers—the third generation made in America, of whom Edwards was the intellectual luminary—had begun to perceive an encroaching self-satisfaction and distance from the spiritual fervour that had motivated their Puritan ancestors to risk all for this godly experiment in the New World.⁵ Decades of jeremiads from Congregationalist pulpits⁶ had failed to reignite those original fires, Michael Crawford has demonstrated, leading to a broad shift in preaching emphasis on the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.⁷

Whatever emphases gave The Great Awakening its American-made distinctions, the phenomenon was also part of an international evangelical revival, the infrastructure of which, Susan O’Brien has argued, comprised a transatlantic correspondence network connecting to George Whitefield as a hub.⁸ By the time of his meeting Edwards on October 17, 1740, Whitefield had become the “catalyst and floating center”⁹ of the Awakening, facilitating expanded linkages with the Methodist revival¹⁰ and the Scottish covenant renewal movements. Soon after, the “holy fair” tradition of open-air sacramental celebrations would climax in Cambuslang, near Glasgow, with Whitefield preaching to tens of thousands.¹¹ Some scholars have suggested that the continuity and expansion of such customs of Scottish

⁴ Hambrick-Stowe 1993, 280. See also Noll, *op. cit.*, 53.

⁵ “The Great Awakening was an attempt to do something about this state of affairs, to promote a radical return to the purity of an earlier condition when the grace of God had abounded in the hearts of his people.” (Lovejoy 1985, 178-79) See also Kidd 2007, 1.

⁶ See note 415.

⁷ “Balancing the calls to the people to change their ways could be heard with equal clarity reminders that the power to reform was not theirs, but God’s. After 1700 the balance shifted to the latter message. All attempts at reformation had been frustrated, preachers announced, because God’s Spirit had not accompanied them. A lasting reformation could come about only as consequence of a revival of religion through the outpouring of God’s grace.” (Crawford 1991b, 23)

⁸ O’Brien 1986, 816.

⁹ Stout 1991, 113.

¹⁰ Though Edwards and John Wesley never met or engaged in any direct correspondence, the two men did have knowledge of each other’s work and ideas. Wesley published five of Edwards’ works, more than he did of any other individual. (Rogers 1966, 20, 22) See also Robert Doyle Smith, 1990.

¹¹ Schmidt 2001, 41-42. See also Arthur Fawcett, 1971.

piety better explain The Great Awakening than any theory of innovation or challenge to the religious establishment.¹² Other analysis has viewed “The Great Awakening,” a phrase never used by Edwards but coined by Joseph Tracy in 1845,¹³ as lacking the cohesion and importance that has conventionally been ascribed to the movement.¹⁴

Though debate continues regarding the extent to which history may have grasped or inflated The Great Awakening’s significance, there was little dispute among those involved over the volatility and spiritual challenge of their day. “Ministers, and in all probability most of the people, believed the case was desperate,” Perry Miller observed,¹⁵ a mood detected by Stephen Stein in his examination of “prayer bids” written and submitted in Sabbath worship by Edwards’ Northampton congregation in response to the **catastrophic events and economic hardships** they experienced.¹⁶ That Edwards saved these slips of paper,¹⁷

¹² “The concept of revitalization assumes the existence of an established, traditional society that is becoming stale. A culture that has yet to mature and stabilize cannot be ‘revitalized.’ In light of historical knowledge about eighteenth-century culture, a far more reasonable conclusion would identify the Great Awakening as part of this cultural growth rather than as ‘revitalization.’” (Westerkamp 1988, 10-11)

¹³ Tracy 1969 [1845], 1. Jon Butler comments that Edwards “never homogenized the eighteenth-century colonial religious revivals by labeling them ‘the Great Awakening.’ ... Rather the first person to do so was the nineteenth-century historian antiquarian Joseph Tracy.” (Butler 1982, 307) See also Conforti 1995, 39; McCulley and Baker (eds) 2005, 94, note 11.

¹⁴ Butler (note 13) has been prominent in questioning the nature and influence of the colonial revivals suggesting The Great Awakening “might better be thought of as an interpretive fiction and as an American equivalent of the Roman Empire’s Donation of Constantine, the medieval forgery that the papacy used to justify its subsequent claims to political authority.” (Butler 1990, 165) He points to the fact that Tracy’s work, constructed to promote revivals in his own day, “did not find immediate favor among American historians.” (Butler 1982, 307)

¹⁵ Miller 1943, 253.

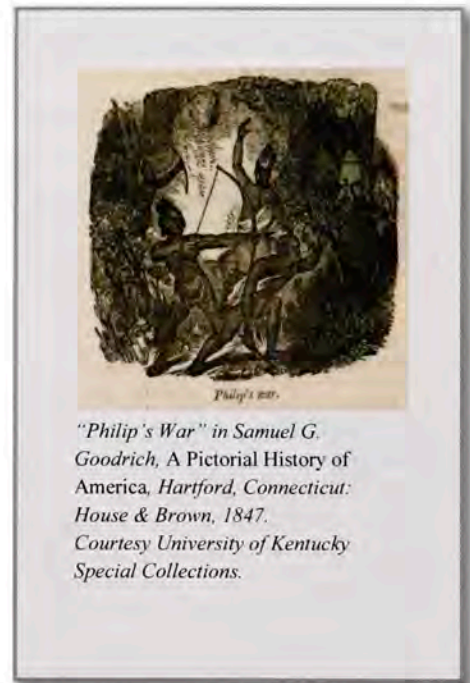
¹⁶ “Arising from everyday situations, the requests mirror a broad range of human experiences and emotions... Death is grimly evident in the bids: nearly 30 percent were occasioned by someone’s demise. ... Other calamities did the same. The military expedition against Cape Breton, for example, provided occasion for numerous requests.” (Stein 1980, 264-65) See Chapter I, 11-12, for a description of the five historical streams of desperation sometimes found to correlate with revival movements.

¹⁷ “The mid-1740s were a time of rising financial pressure on Edwards; providing for his large and growing family proved a heavy burden. In those circumstances he was forced to use every scrap of paper at his disposal.” (*ibid*, 262) In 1742, when the Northampton congregation withheld Edwards’ salary in dissatisfaction with his stand on the revival’s progress, Edwards was forced to borrow money to support his household. (Grant 1967, 29) See also Winslow 1941, 200ff. Edwards’ experience of the hardships of colonial life was not unlike his parishioners’. He “lived on the frontier and faced the accompanying threat of Indian invasions. ... At times, both at Northampton and especially at Stockbridge, tension ran high. One letter to Esther Edwards Burr from her father finds the family sheltered in a fort.” (Nichols 2004, 49) Marsden has commented that Edwards “walked with arrows of death flying around him—as did everyone in the congregation” (Marsden 2003, 223), making believable his calls in sermons “to extraordinary prayer in a time of personal affliction.” (Sermon 958 on Neh 1:3-4, WJEO 68:L.5v., vertxo+5) Edwards was convinced that “the divine excellency of real Christianity, is never exhibited with such advantage, as when under the greatest trials.” (WJE 2:93)

repurposing them by writing on their blank sides, points to the financial strain that was widespread. Just as calamities such as the King Philip's War had contributed to "a new sense of desperation among pious New Englanders,"¹⁸ Edwards used a day of fasting called in response to an epidemic of disease in Boston as the setting of his most comprehensive sermon presentation on prayer.¹⁹ And just as New Englanders had filled their meetinghouses for prayer in response to an earthquake on October 29, 1727,²⁰ Edwards recurrently treated drought as a basis for self-examination and strenuous petition: "If a people in a time of sore drought acknowledge God and turn from their sin and go to God through Christ by prayer and supplication tis the way for them both to obtain the temporal blessing they need and also to obtain great spiritual blessings that are far better."²¹

Prayer was needed even more out of **concern over spiritual declension in church and society,**

because "then God's honour is more nearly concerned."²² Edwards stirred concern over the



¹⁸ Kidd 2007, 3. In 1675-78, English colonists and Native Americans were involved in an armed conflict, the "King Philip's War," named for the main leader of the Native American side, Metacomet, known to the English as "King Philip." "War," Edwards preached, "is that by which the church of God has been especially endangered... [So it behooves all people]—magistrates, ministers and people; young and old—to go to [the] God of armies and pour out their prayers and supplications to him." (WJE 25:136-37)

¹⁹ Kreider 2003, 437. Similarly, Edwards leveraged the deaths of young adults in Northampton to rouse urgency: "God has of late been very awful in his dealings with us, in the repeated deaths of young persons that have happened amongst us. This should stir everyone up to be in the more haste to press into the kingdom of God, that so you may be safe whenever death comes." (WJE 19:298)

²⁰ Crawford 1991b, 114-15.

²¹ Sermon 142 on 1 Kgs 8:35-36, WJEO 44:L.1v., ins.1. See also Sermons 400 and 937 on the theme of spiritual drought and rain.

²² Sermon 958, *op. cit.*, L.6v. Here Edwards was addressing the threat of division being incited by controversy "respecting the qualifications of communicants" (L.8r.) in the Northampton church, a "great temporal calamity" (L.10v., col.2) for which he acknowledged many viewed Edwards as "wholly the blameable Instrument" (L.10r., col.2). He draws sixteen parallels from the Old and New Testament to the dark "cloud that hangs over us" (L.11r., col.2) as support for asserting that "it is ever been God's manner thus to hear the prayers of his Church when she has cried unto God in times of distress." (L.14r., col.2)

“very threatening aspect” that Christ was being “openly blasphemed, and mocked, and scoffed, and laughed at in the streets in our nation.”²³ In his sermon “Importunate Prayer for Millennial Glory,” he preached that at times such as these when “the church and the state of religion is sunk so low,” God does “that which greatly tends to excite the expectations and appetite and earnest desires of God’s people after these things, and so their prayers for them.”²⁴ From Edwards’ perspective, rooted in Puritan covenant theology,²⁵ of **deep seriousness about sin and the judgement of God**, present-day calamities were to be understood as the consequence of such spiritual deterioration,²⁶ the “frown of God”²⁷ portending the “most awful and overwhelming judgments.”²⁸ Edwards’ notebooks reveal his millennialist interest²⁹ in current affairs as event-texts³⁰ by which God was seeking to capture the attention of the elect, for whom “in a time of public calamity prayer be a duty.”³¹ The “glorious times of the Church on earth,” said Edwards, ushered in by the Holy Spirit operating “in a remarkable manner as a **spirit of prayer**,”³² cannot “be introduced without very great and general commotions and overturnings in which professing Christians will

²³ Perry Miller cites here a sermon by Edwards on Mt 25:24-28 in which he “enumerates the signs of the times.” (Miller 1989, 98-99) In “Peaceable and Faithful amid Division and Strife,” against the charge that “I make too much of things, and think worse of them than they be,” Edwards asserts his assessment of Church and culture’s condition as “undeniable—he that would hide it, must hide the wind.” (WJE 19:670-71)

²⁴ WJE 22:377.

²⁵ “In a tradition stretching back to the Reformation and before, God was conceived as entering into a covenant with a people or nation, and blessing or punishing that people in proportion to their fidelity to the terms of the covenant.” (McDermott 1992, 12)

²⁶ For example, in the case of drought, “We are often taught in God’s word,” Edward preached, “to look upon the withholding of needed rain from the fruits of the earth as a judgment of God for the sins of a people.” (Sermon 142, *op. cit.*, L.2r.)

²⁷ Sermon 958, *op. cit.*, L.9v., col. 2.

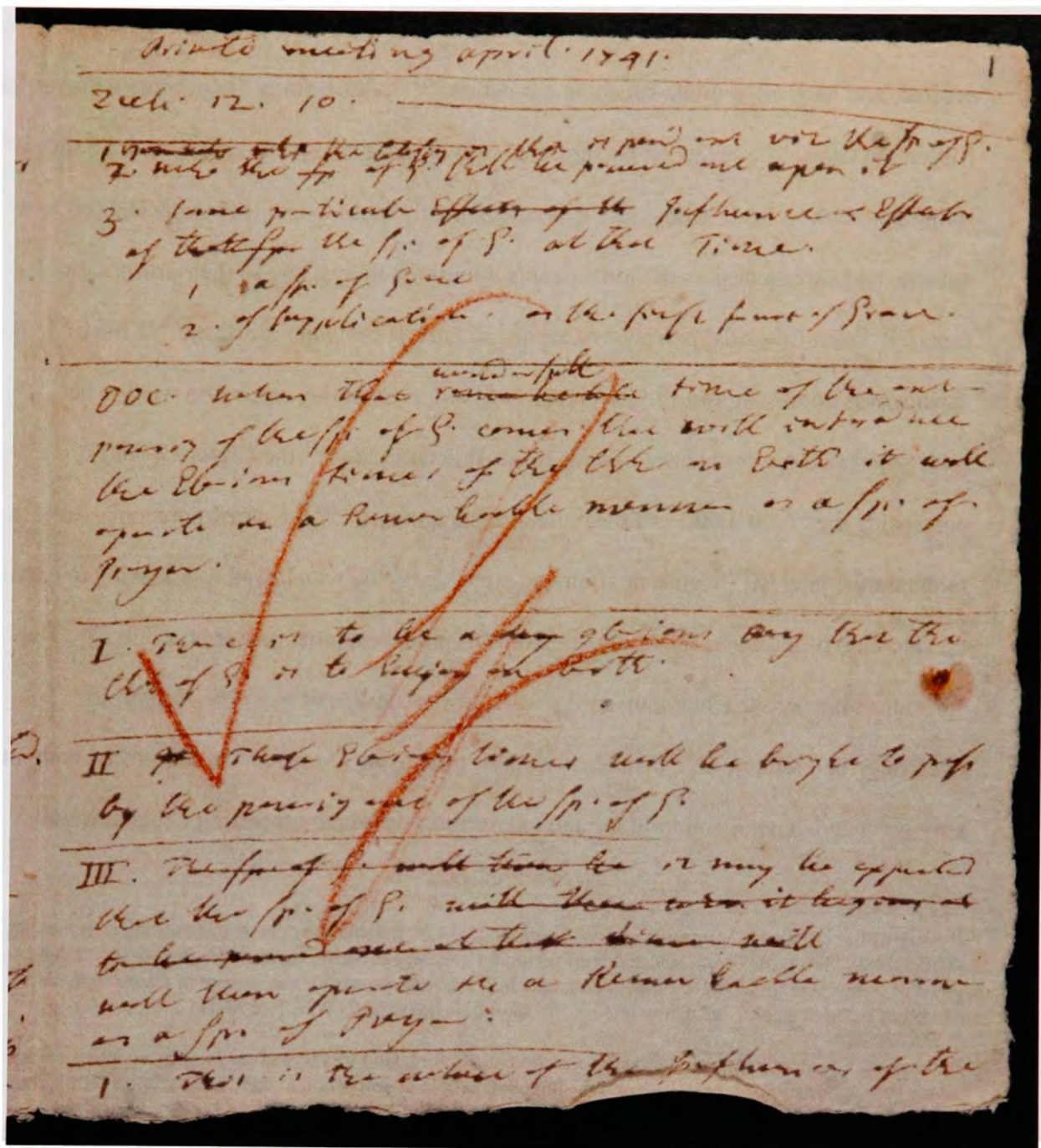
²⁸ WJE 19:297: “The state of the nation, and of this land, never looked so threatening of such a thing as it does at this day. The present aspect of things exceedingly threatens the dying of vital religion, and even those truths that are especially the foundation of it, out of this land, and so God’s departing from us.” (*ibid*)

²⁹ See Chapter II, notes 121-38.

³⁰ Helen Westra has observed that while Edwards was more reticent regarding the meaning of far-flung political turmoil, naval battles, and ecclesiastical struggles around the world, by contrast “his pulpit expositions of *local* circumstances and events in Northampton ... are seldom speculative but rather convey unblinking pronouncements of what God is saying and doing in the event.” (Westra 1999, 135)

³¹ Sermon 400 on Dt 28:12, WJEO 51:L.8r.

³² MS Sermon 608 on Zech 12:10, Apr. 1741, Gen. Mss. 151, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, 1. See the first page of Edwards’ handwritten duodecimo manuscript of this sermon on the next page. Edwards’ understanding of the burden of fervent prayer as a charism or work of the “spirit of grace and supplication” (WJE 25:204) is explored beginning on p. 169.



Opening page of Edwards' previously untranscribed duodecimo of MS Sermon 608 on Zech 12:10, Apr. 1741, Gen. Mss. 151, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. Public Domain.

doubtless have great trials.”³³ Such was the collective memory of **persecution** in

Puritanism’s past,³⁴ and such could be the future, Edwards allowed.³⁵ In the American

³³ WJE 22:371.

³⁴ In his research into early Puritan and Separatist conventicles in England, which were eventually outlawed by three acts of Parliament, Henry Martyn Dexter found that “sometimes they would be nearly all incarcerated at once... We have the names of twenty-four who—some of them after long and wasting confinement—died in various dungeons—the majority in Newgate.” (Dexter 1880, 255-56) Depositions of Clement Cambell and John Dove, kept in the Harleian Collection of the British Library, provide a glimpse into the travailing prayer of these

edition of his *Humble Attempt*, some of New England's leading evangelicals anticipated the "general slaughter of the witnesses of Christ" penultimate to the apocalypse "which we ... are like to share in"—all the more reason to pray for "extraordinary suffering graces."³⁶

That glorious day, for which suffering was anticipated, would be one in which God's Spirit is "wonderfully poured out on his professing people for reviving vital piety among them and to fit them for the propagation of it. God will make use of his church as the means."³⁷ Herein was the essence of what Edwards meant when he used the word "revival." It was to him, as J. I. Packer has written, the experience of God "pouring out his Spirit and thereby ratcheting up the power and speed of the Spirit's work" in a way "so vivid as to be overwhelming and inescapable. ... Revival is God touching minds and hearts in an arresting, devastating, exalting way, to draw them to himself."³⁸ Edwards' fidelity to such vivid experience, both in his sermons³⁹ and theological treatises,⁴⁰ has been shown by historians to be in continuity⁴¹ with traditional Puritan "experimental" spirituality,⁴² one of several seventeenth and eighteenth-century European "religion of the heart" movements

little gatherings: "In y^r prayer one speketh, & the rest doe grone, or sob, or sigh, as if they would wringe out teares, but say not after him that prayeth. Their prayer is extemporal. ... They teach that all stunted prayers & red service is but babling in the Lords sight & hath neyther promises of blessing nor edification, for that they are but cushyns for such idell Priests and Atheists as have not the Spirit of God..." (*ibid*, 257)

³⁵ See Chapter I, 12.

³⁶ WJE 5:310. "Women travail and suffer great pains in bringing children [forth], which is to represent the great persecutions and sufferings of the church in bringing forth Christ and in increasing the number of his children; and a type of those pains that are in the soul when bringing forth Christ." (WJE 11:55)

³⁷ WJE 22:369.

³⁸ Packer 2004, 96, 99.

³⁹ Glenn R. Pratt, who made the first attempt to sort and catalogue Edwards' sermons, wrote that his "emphasis on the primacy of experience as the source of knowledge is at the roots of his graphic and descriptive preaching in which he seeks to lead the hearer to undergo in his mind the concrete elements of the truth he is presenting." (Pratt 1958, 32)

⁴⁰ John E. Smith has commented that "Edwards's appeal to experience in theology ... led him to connect piety and practice in a way that has had a permanent influence on all forms of religion in America." (Smith 1974, 167)

⁴¹ Canadian scholar Brad Walton, challenging Perry Miller, John Smith, and others who have argued for the originality and departure of Edwards' emphasis on experience, has shown through extensive review of the writings of 17th century Puritan divines how their forms, language, and conceptualisation of spiritual sensation and heart religion contain all the elements that make up Edwards' *Religious Affections*. (Walton 2002, 36-42, 225-231)

⁴² "As a cultural group, it is the Puritans who introduced belief in the primacy of internal experience into American religious life." (Porterfield 1999, 82-83) Anne Taves has observed how "Puritans disparaged the absence of experience as 'formalism.' Conversely, non-Puritans disparaged ... the 'experience' of the Puritans as 'enthusiasm.'" (Taves 1999, 17)

identified by Ted Campbell and others as sharing emphasis on personal encounter with God through affective experience.⁴³ The “heart,” a biblical metonym for the inner person,⁴⁴ was for Edwards the home of true religion, “the principal and original seat of it,”⁴⁵ and prayer was the heart’s best gauge: “Men oftentimes pray to God in their words, when there is no such thing as prayer in the heart. ... ’Tis only a show and pretense of prayer, and that because their prayer is not the voice of the heart, but only of the mouth.”⁴⁶

But it was the new apprehensions of the heart, even more than its prayers, that defined Christian conversion for Edwards,⁴⁷ a new inward perception in the elect “entirely different in its nature and kind, from anything that ever their minds were the subjects of before they were sanctified.”⁴⁸ This “new sense” or “inward, sweet sense” was a “sense of the heart, of the supreme beauty and sweetness of the holiness or moral perfection of divine things.”⁴⁹ For Edwards, the sense of the heart was both Spirit-assisted perception of divine excellency and desire leading to action, the “harmonious interpenetration of the cognitive and volitional powers”⁵⁰ in the saints. Possession of the sense of the heart, Terrence Erdt has suggested, “constituted the assurance of election. It was an ‘exclusive testimony’ enjoyed by the saint alone.”⁵¹ Only through this kind of ideal apprehension, what Edwards characterised as “sensible,” could a person gain both knowledge of and longing for God. “No idea in all of Edwards’ works is more original,” wrote John Smith in his introduction to *Religious*

⁴³ Campbell 1991, 11.

⁴⁴ Pettit 1966, 1.

⁴⁵ WJE 2:100: “True religion is evermore a powerful thing; and the power of it appears, in the first place, in the inward exercises of it in the heart.”

⁴⁶ WJE 19:786-87. See also WJE 22:221 and Edwards 1998, “The Most High a Prayer-Hearing God,” Hickman (ed.), 117.

⁴⁷ Edwards described his own conversion as deriving from reading 1 Tim 1:17: “As I read the words, there came into my soul, and was as it were diffused through it, a sense of the glory of the divine being; a new sense, quite different from anything I ever experienced before.” (WJE 16:792)

⁴⁸ WJE 2:205.

⁴⁹ *ibid*, 272

⁵⁰ Cherry 1990, 18. “Edwards intimates that he is not content with simply describing faith as an act of *both* the understanding *and* the inclination. For faith is a *sense of the heart*... It is a human act in which the human faculties are virtually blended.” (*ibid*, 14) Norman Fiering concurs that “since the spiritual sense included at once intellectual illumination, aesthetic delight, and a new inclination toward God, Edwards could comfortably speak about this sense in diverse terms.” (Fiering 1981, 127)

⁵¹ Erdt 1978, 173.

Affections, “and no doctrine was more far reaching in its influence upon the course of Puritan piety” than the sense of the heart.⁵²

Edwards forged these concepts of revival and religious affections in the spiritual furnace of Northampton (see map on the following page), which he described as distinguished by their “knowledge in things that relate to heart religion and Christian experience, and their great regards thereto.”⁵³ His *Faithful Narrative* (1737), documenting by direct observation and data collection⁵⁴ the Awakening occurring there in the early 1730s, “gave birth to the ‘science of revivals’,” Joseph Conforti suggests, and established Edwards as the unrivalled voice for experiential religion in colonial America.⁵⁵ His importance grew out of not only his role as a revivalist, Conrad Cherry posits, but also his willingness to bring the revivals under analytical, theological scrutiny,⁵⁶ maturing in *Some Thoughts Concerning the Revival* (1742), and culminating in the *Treatise on Religious Affections* (1746). A part of the genius of *Religious Affections* was its prolonged retrospection⁵⁷ allowing Edwards to probe beyond empiricism⁵⁸ to reach reflections that have proven enduring.⁵⁹ Here he asserts that “true

⁵² WJE 2:30.

⁵³ WJE 4:145.

⁵⁴ Exploring the significance of *A Faithful Narrative* as an early work of sociological research, Finbarr Curtis notes that it “was not only an account of the Northampton revival, but a methodological treatise on scholarly observation and description of mass religious experiences.” (Curtis 2004, 51)

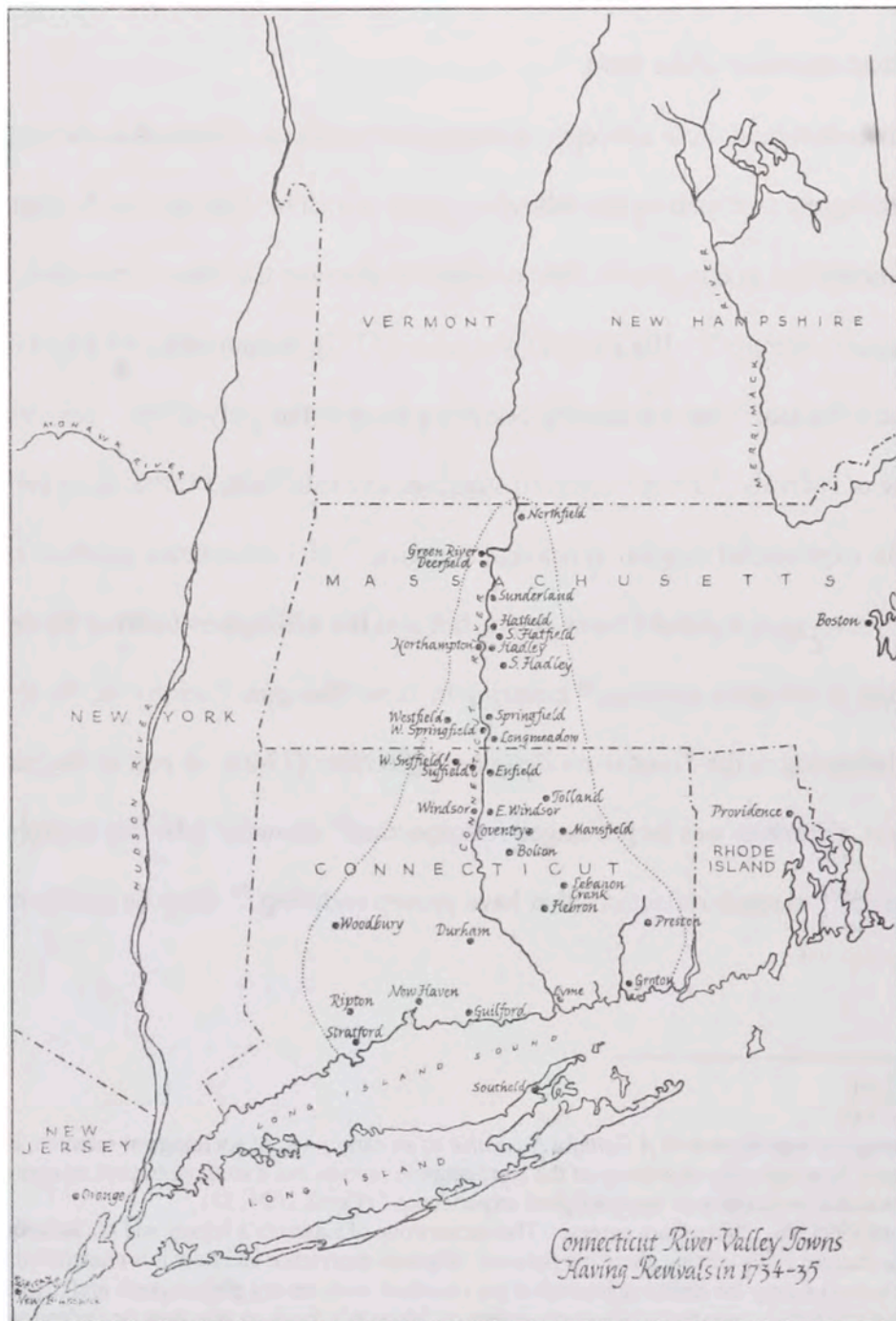
⁵⁵ Conforti 1995, 46. Philip Gura agrees: “The cornerstone of Edwards’s legacy and his subsequent import for American culture is his writing about his personal religious experience and how it is constituted and evaluated. ... This is not to deny the enduring interest of his doctrinal work among philosophers and theologians. But what most powerfully engaged subsequent readers of Edwards’s theology was how he understood the spiritual life.” (Gura 2005, 229)

⁵⁶ Cherry 1975, 27.

⁵⁷ Edwards wrote *Religious Affections* some years after the height of the Awakening, observing how “the convictions of some seem to be great, while that which is the occasion of their convictions is new; which when that begins to grow old, will gradually decay, and wear off.” (WJE 19:294)

⁵⁸ Because the deep locus of revival in the human heart defied objective authentication, Curtis comments on how *Religious Affections* marked “a curious development in Edwards’s science of revivals ... [that] refuted the adequacy of any empirical method, and rendered empiricism as little more than a measure of negative signs.” (Curtis, *op. cit.*, 63)

⁵⁹ Harold Simonson calls *Religious Affections* Edwards’ “masterpiece,” citing Perry Miller’s description of it as “the most powerful exploration of religious psychology in all American literature.” (Simonson 1982, 56) It is, according to Michael Haykin, “one of the richest books on Christian spirituality in the history of the church.” (Haykin 2005, 123) At the least, Brooks Holifield writes, it “remains the best defense of revivalism published in colonial America.” (Holifield 2003, 103)



Taken from *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* 4 (24), Smith, John E. (ed.). Copyright © 1972 by Yale University. Used by permission of Yale University Press.

religion, in great part, consists in holy affections”⁶⁰ which are “the vigorous, lively actings of the will or the inclination.”⁶¹ Affections are the driver, the engine of life, “very much the

⁶⁰ WJE 2:35.

⁶¹ *ibid*, 98

spring of men's motion and action,"⁶² or in Gerald McDermott's words, "the source and motivating power of thoughts and feelings... [and] the root of all spiritual experience, both true and false."⁶³ Edwards admonishes critics of the revival to remain open to the affections, even if some expressions seem aberrant or excessive, because their absence is evidence of being "in a state of spiritual death,"⁶⁴ and their presence is clearly warranted in Scripture.⁶⁵

One crucial consideration of this project is the way in which travailing prayer can be understood as giving voice to the zeal⁶⁶ and longing intrinsic to the affections. Edwards' description of the two could seem almost interchangeable, travailing prayer simply being an outward manifestation of the "exceeding energy" and "holy ardor"⁶⁷ requisite of the affections:

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 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: "Be ye fervent in spirit, serving the Lord" (Rom 12:11)... If we ben't in good earnest in religion, and our wills and inclinations be not strongly exercised, we are nothing.⁶⁸

Because not "all desires that are very earnest and vehement" are evidence of "the proper breathings of a new nature,"⁶⁹ our affections must be scrutinised. Edwards provides two sets of criteria, twelve reliable and twelve unreliable indicators, in the *Treatise*, of which the eleventh positive sign is especially germane to understanding Edwards' view of travailing prayer:

⁶² WJE 2:101.

⁶³ McDermott 2000, 31. In his introduction, John Smith summarises that "the affections manifest the center and unity of the self; they express the whole man and give insight into the basic orientation of his life." (WJE 2:14)

⁶⁴ WJE 2:120.

⁶⁵ "They who would deny that much of true religion lies in the affections, and maintain the contrary, must throw away what we have been wont to own for our Bible, and get some other rule, by which to judge of the nature of religion." (*ibid*, 106)

⁶⁶ See Chapter II, notes 263-66. See also Morgan 1973, 63.

⁶⁷ WJE 25:91. Scholars generally agree that spiritual intensity was Edwards' great concern and experience, "crav[ing] in his parishioners the same intensity of commitment he felt within himself." (Hambrick-Stow 2003, 90) He "abhorred moderation in religion" (McClymond 1998, 108) but "was most impressed by spiritual intensity" (Marsden, *op. cit.*, 325). In his treatment of the affections, Edwards came in the end "to declare the supremacy of passion" (Miller 1959, 184), understanding "the Christian life [as] a Spirit-wrought passionate engagement of the entire person in the living Christ" (Haykin 2005, 125).

⁶⁸ WJE 2:99-100.

⁶⁹ WJE 25:625.

XI. 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. ... [The more a true saint] thirsts and longs after God and holiness, the more he longs to long, and breathe out his very soul in longings after God.⁷⁰

Here may be Edwards' best, succinct description of travailing prayer—to “breathe out his very soul in longings after God”—which, like the affections, “is like kindling a flame; the higher it is raised, the more ardent it is; and the more it burns, the more vehemently does it tend and seek to burn.”⁷¹

This “fervent disposition” or “flame in the soul ... rises not in men by contemplation and enjoyment, but has respect to practice.”⁷² Earnest, importunate prayer was for Edwards one of these primary practices of the affections, its zeal and vigor serving to “show by our practice that we heartily desire the thing that we pray for.”⁷³ He understood travail as a dimension of the “manner of prayer,” advising his parishioners that if they were discouraged at their lack of success in seeking God, they should not continue in their “fleshly, dull, irresolute manner any longer, and that it’s high time for you to begin a new method.”⁷⁴ Praying in a “cold and careless manner”⁷⁵ is “dishonorable to God,”⁷⁶ asking of Him “in such a manner as implicitly to ask and deny at the same time.”⁷⁷

Broadly, the manner of prayer Edwards advanced was both “extraordinary,”⁷⁸ going beyond the baseline rhythms of colonial piety,⁷⁹ and “extempore,” a hallmark of Puritan devotional life. Puritans from the beginning had believed “stinted,” set forms squelched the

⁷⁰ *ibid*, 376-77

⁷¹ *ibid*. In “Zeal an Essential Virtue of a Christian,” Edwards preached regarding “those that are hot, i.e. those that are true Christians.” (WJE 22:143)

⁷² WJE 22:140, 144.

⁷³ *ibid*, 377

⁷⁴ Edwards 2003, “The Way to Obtain the Blessing of God Is Not to Let Him Go Except He Bless Us,” McMullen (ed.), 24.

⁷⁵ Edwards 1998, “Christ’s Agony,” Kistler (ed.), 311.

⁷⁶ WJE 22:153.

⁷⁷ WJE 22:221.

⁷⁸ Hambrick-Stowe differentiates ordinary and extraordinary prayer as it was promoted in Puritan devotional manuals and New England practice: “The most important was ‘ordinary prayers at set times,’ and the second type was referred to as ‘ejaculatory’ or ‘extraordinary prayer.’” (Hambrick-Stowe 1982, 180)

⁷⁹ In “God’s People to Pray for the Promised Latter-Day Outpouring of the Spirit,” Edward clarifies that “{regular prayer} should be preceding extraordinary prayer.” (MS Sermon 809 on Ezk 36:36-37, Feb. 1746, Gen. Mss. 151, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, 3)

spontaneity in prayer necessary for making it more relevant to immediate needs⁸⁰ and more pleasing to God,⁸¹ as one late 17th century writer protested:

And for Prayer, when it may be the poore Ministers soule was full of *groanes*, and *sighs*, and he would have rejoyced to have *poured out his soule* to the Lord, he was tied to an old Service-Booke, and must read that till he *grieved the Spirit of God*, and dried up his owne spirit as a *chip*, that he could not pray if he would...⁸²

Besides being extraordinary and extemporaneous, however, prayer should be “earnest,”⁸³ which for Edwards denoted the prayers of Christ in Gethsemane, the apogee of travailing prayer, when “being in an agony He prayed more earnestly.”⁸⁴ Here again Edwards was moving in the Puritan stream of the travailing prayer tradition which “had an almost desperate quality to it for America’s earliest settlers,”⁸⁵ formed at the hands of great divines like Cotton Mather (1663-1728)⁸⁶ and Thomas Shepard (1605-49).⁸⁷ In his study of the Puritan practice and experience of prayer, Naeher observed how, “in spite of the rhythms of prayer that framed Puritan life, Puritans wrote of entering into true ... prayer only in response to experiences of profound distress and personal need.”⁸⁸ Edwards called this the “prayer of

⁸⁰ Sleeper 2006, 510.

⁸¹ Moore 2005, 33: “Spontaneous prayer, they contended, was far more pleasing in the eyes of God.” Francis Bremer has observed, “Puritans believed that the use of set forms of prayer was a human invention that rested on tradition rather than scripture, and they sometimes even criticized such forms as idolatrous images of the kind forbidden by the second commandment.” (Bremer 2006, 486) For further discussion of Puritan rationale for rejection of liturgical prayer see Davies 1990, 147-156, and 1997, 98-108.

⁸² Cradock 1648, 67.

⁸³ See Chapter I, note 235.

⁸⁴ Lk 22:44 [KJV]. In “Christ’s Agony,” Edwards preached that in Gethsemane Christ teaches “us after what manner we should pray to God..., with great earnestness and engagedness of spirit.” (Edwards 1998, “Christ’s Agony,” *op. cit.*, 311)

⁸⁵ Moore 2005, 50.

⁸⁶ “Whatever the forms [Mather’s] devotions took, ... they all were marked by a physical strain, emotional pressure, and zealotry. ... Most of these devotions found him in an attitude of beseeching, begging, and pleading with all the intensity he could muster.” (Middlekauff 1971, 205)

⁸⁷ “Shepard’s meditations led him to see ‘it is my duty not only to pray but to live by prayer and begging.’ His London editors remarked that Shepard would regularly ‘pray and weep’ as he approached God in solitude.” (Hambrick-Stowe 1982, 176, [Shepard 1967 [1853], vol. 3, 412])

⁸⁸ Naeher 1999, 24. “English Nonconformist John Bunyan (1628-88) wrote that ‘right Prayer bubbleth out of the heart when it is over-pressed with grief and bitterness, as blood is forced out of the flesh, by reason of some heavey burthen that lyeth upon it.’” (*ibid*, 25 [Bunyan 1768, 370])

the destitute,”⁸⁹ when petitioners are “at last brought to extremity,”⁹⁰ a manner of prayer to which “God hath in his word given peculiar encouragement.”⁹¹

In Scripture, Edwards asserted, “the true church of Christ is represented as travailing in birth,”⁹² “bent the worse for the outpourings of God’s spirit.”⁹³ This biblical image of travailing prayer as childbirth, one of many⁹⁴ to be explored in this chapter, was what Edwards applied to ministers agonising in prayer for their churches, parents for their children, and “neighbors one towards another how they should seek and cry for the good of one another’s souls.”⁹⁵ He likened travailing prayer to a burdensome journey through the wilderness,⁹⁶ customarily interchanging “travel” with “travail,”⁹⁷ an extension of the Puritan devotional and theological allegory of life as pilgrimage.⁹⁸ Edwards also recurrently associated “travail” with apocalyptic themes, perceiving the Church’s travail for “setting up the Kingdom of Christ”⁹⁹ as beginning with the early Church’s persecution,¹⁰⁰ continuing in the world’s tumult now as we join with the earth’s groaning¹⁰¹ and share with Christ in the

⁸⁹ Sermon 922 on Mt 6:9-10, WJEO 67:L.5v. “He will regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise their prayer.” (Ps 102:17 [KJV])

⁹⁰ WJE 19:431-32.

⁹¹ Sermon 958, *op. cit.*, L.4v., col. 2.

⁹² MS Sermon 809 on Ezk 36:36-37, Feb. 1746, Gen. Mss. 151, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, 11.

⁹³ Sermon 937 on Isa 44:3-4, WJEO 67:L.13r.

⁹⁴ “Travail” appears 260 times in the Edwards corpus, across a broad array of metaphors and applications.

⁹⁵ Edwards 1998, “Christ’s Agony,” *op. cit.*, 326.

⁹⁶ “God calls us to a great work that is often in Scripture represented by the fatigue of a long and difficult journey.” (Sermon on Isa 40:29-31[a], WJEO 57:L.3v.)

⁹⁷ WJE 25:660, note 2. Edwards particularly connected travail with gruelling ascent: “When we travail up an hill ’tis against our natural tendency and inclination, which perpetually is to descend; and therefore we can’t go on ascending without labor and difficulty. But there arises a pleasant prospect to pay us for our labor as we ascend, and as we continue our labor in ascending, still the pleasantness of the prospect grows. Just so is a man paid for his labor and self-denial in a Christian course.” (WJE 11:58)

⁹⁸ “The sense of being on pilgrimage structured Puritan religious experience from the first stages of conversion on through the saint’s growth in God’s grace, and it strongly colored the daily and weekly disciplines of devotional activity.” (Hambrick-Stowe 1982, 20)

⁹⁹ WJE 9:477.

¹⁰⁰ “This is properly the time of the church’s travail; for from Nero’s time till now, the church has been in travail, to bring forth the glory of the approaching millennium, or the establishment of Christ’s kingdom through the earth.” (WJE 15:255)

¹⁰¹ “Certainly it is fit, that the church of God should be in travail for that, which (as I before observed) the whole creation travails in pain for.” (WJE 5:351)

“travail of his soul,”¹⁰² but coming to an end in “God’s event”¹⁰³ as the Church enters its rest.¹⁰⁴ Until then, he exhorted, “Let us earnestly cry to God, that he would pour out his Spirit upon us to revive our first love and excite us to the doing of our first works.”¹⁰⁵ To see more clearly how Edwards understood this earnest prayer↔outpouring↔revival connection is where we turn next, using our matrix¹⁰⁶ of historical, interrelated traits as a lens.

¹⁰² This, one of Edwards’ favourite phrases to describe the suffering of Christ for God’s redemptive work in the world which we emulate and extend, comes from Isa 53:11 [KJV]: “He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied.”

¹⁰³ WJE 23:357.

¹⁰⁴ “The millennium is the sabbatism of the church, or the time of her rest. But surely the days of her sabbatism or rest don’t begin, till she ceases to be any longer in travail. And the church don’t cease to be in travail, till she has brought forth what she has for these many ages been in travail for.” (WJE 5:178)

¹⁰⁵ WJE 17:97.

¹⁰⁶ Chapter I, 41-43.

CORE TRAITS OF TRAVAILING PRAYER IN THE THEOLOGY AND PRACTICE OF JONATHAN EDWARDS

Content

Neediness and Brokenness The awakening in New England was waning as

Edwards penned these words to an anonymous correspondent in Scotland in November of 1745:

God has lately done great things before our eyes, whereby he has shown us something of his wonderful power and mercy; but ... we have been many ways rebuked for our self-confidence, and looking to instruments, and trusting in an arm of flesh; and God is now shewing us that we are nothing, and letting us see that we can do nothing. ... And it is apparent that we can't help ourselves, and have nowhere else to go, but to God. ... Now how fit is it that God's people, under such circumstances, would go to God by prayer, and give themselves more than ordinarily to that duty, and be uniting one with another in it, ... tending to promote their offering up their cries with one heart, and, as it were, with one voice.¹⁰⁷

This reasoning—recognition “that we can do nothing” stirring the Church to “go to God by prayer”—was like the genetic sequence of revival DNA for Edwards. **Neediness** was the basis for prayer, and prayer evoked the sense of neediness, that by fervent “prayer there may be excited and exercised a sense of the necessity and value of the mercy” sought.¹⁰⁸ The essence and definition of prayer in Puritanism, Naeher writes, was the “straightforward acknowledgement of human need, and of God’s sufficient power and goodness to meet that need.”¹⁰⁹ For Edwards, “how needy we are” is why we pray,¹¹⁰ an awareness that wears off quickly in the mind of hypocrites. “But it is far otherwise with the true convert ... [who] seems himself still to be a poor, empty helpless creature, and that he still stands in great and continual need of God’s help.”¹¹¹

¹⁰⁷ WJE 5:445.

¹⁰⁸ Edwards 2004, “God’s Manner Is First to Prepare Men’s Hearts and Then to Answer Their Prayers,” McMullen (ed.), 86.

¹⁰⁹ Naeher, *op. cit.*, 40.

¹¹⁰ MS Sermon 608 on Zech 12:10, Apr. 1741, Gen. Mss. 151, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, L.1v.

¹¹¹ Edwards 2001, “Hypocrites Deficient in the Duty of Prayer,” Nichols (ed.), 359.

Here is indication of Edwards' doctrine of inability undergirding all of what he believed and promoted about prayer, that "man as a creature is absolutely dependent on God," no stronger than a leaf blown in the wind, no more able to help himself than "a poor infant would be, if it should be cast out on the open field, in its blood in the day that it was born."¹¹² In a private meeting to pray during drought in 1736, Edwards explicated this dogma at length, comparing our dependence on God to the earth's for rain, as the build-up to a sweeping logic: "If it be so, then we learn how suitable a thing it is that God should be sought to by Prayer."¹¹³ That only God can do the work of God was Edwards' Reformed theological inheritance and the ethos of prayer in Northampton.¹¹⁴ Acknowledgment¹¹⁵ of this utter dependence¹¹⁶ on God was what prayer "put[s] us in the mind of"¹¹⁷ and habituates,¹¹⁸ and was how prayer operated as the antecedent to mercy, preparing petitioners to receive:

With respect to ourselves, God requires prayer of us in order to the bestowment of mercy, because it tends to prepare us for its reception. Fervent prayer in many ways tends to prepare the heart. Hereby is excited a sense of our need, and of the value of the mercy which we seek, and at the same time earnest desires for it; whereby the mind is more prepared to prize it, to rejoice in it when bestowed, and to be thankful for it.¹¹⁹

¹¹² WJE 19:382-83.

¹¹³ Sermon 400, *op. cit.*, L.6v. See Sermon 937 for the same reasoning idea preached by Edwards in an August, 1748, sermon of thanksgiving for rain.

¹¹⁴ Describing this theme in the Northampton prayer bids, Stein writes, "The theology of dependence implied in the structure and language of the bids was explicit in the accent of Edwards's parishioners on the will and pleasure of God. In requests arising from situations of distress, the petitioners regarded themselves as deficient in capacity and therefore in need of assistance." (Stein, *op. cit.*, 267)

¹¹⁵ "With respect to God, prayer is but a sensible acknowledgment of our dependence on him to his glory." (Edwards 1998, "The Most High a Prayer-Hearing God," *op. cit.*, 116)

¹¹⁶ Edwards repeatedly characterised human need, expressed through prayer, in bold terms: "We can do nothing without the influx and concurrence of the divine power. Without this we can't eat or work, or walk or breathe, or stir hand or foot." (Edwards 2003, "Persons Ought to Do What They Can for Their Salvation," Nichols [ed.], 373) "Seeing therefore you stand in such continual need of the help of God, how reasonable is it that you should continually seek it of him, and perseveringly acknowledge your dependence upon him, by resorting to him, to spread your needs before him, and to offer up your requests to him in prayer." (Edwards 2001, "Hypocrites Deficient in the Duty of Prayer," *op. cit.*, 371)

¹¹⁷ Edwards 2004, "God's Manner Is First to Prepare Men's Hearts and Then to Answer Their Prayers," *op. cit.*, 86.

¹¹⁸ "Earnestly begging mercies of him ... brings [his people] into an acquaintance with God and habituates them to a dependence upon him." (Sermon 142, *op. cit.*, L.5r.)

¹¹⁹ Edwards 1998, "The Most High a Prayer-Hearing God," *op. cit.*, 116.

Such recognition of neediness and preparedness to receive is how Edwards would have understood humility,¹²⁰ which was for him the “nurse of graces,”¹²¹ the nature of true zeal,¹²² and the interior posture of genuine prayer.¹²³

But earnest, ardent prayer was more than reasonable to Edwards. It was also “sensible,” engaging the “inward sense” when need is felt as so pressing that it overtakes all other thoughts to “engross the care of the mind.”¹²⁴ This is the sensation of “extreme necessity” or “perishing necessity”¹²⁵ signifying the work of grace that produces the “brokenhearted prayers”¹²⁶ God wants. “Brokenhearted affections” were those most agreeable to Christ,¹²⁷ Edwards wrote in the *Treatise*, like those of Mary’s broken alabaster box of ointment,¹²⁸ affections of the soul that “breaketh for the longing that it hath.”¹²⁹ In a sermon on Ps 51:17—“the sacrifices of God are a broken heart”—urging sinners to seek salvation, Edwards explained how **brokenness** only intensifies after genuine conversion: “the most brokenhearted saints are the greatest saints.”¹³⁰ Begotten in the true convert is deeper humility and greater longing, so that “his business [at the throne of grace], instead of being diminished, is, since his conversion, rather increased.”¹³¹ It is a “mighty work of God’s

¹²⁰ Since his youth, Edwards had yearned for “humility, brokenness of heart and poverty of Spirit: and there was nothing that I had such a spirit to long for.” (WJE 16:796) McClymond and McDermott comment that “rather than conceiving of humility as a duty imposed on him, Edwards seemed to enjoy placing himself in the posture of suppliant before God. He relished the thought of lying low before God.” (McClymond and McDermott 2012, 71)

¹²¹ WJE 19:788.

¹²² “A true zeal is not a proud or an ostentatious zeal. ... But a true Christian zeal, even when most warm and most engaged, is attended with humility and is in no wise inconsistent with it.” (WJE 22:151)

¹²³ “It may be, on the contrary, your petitions were put up with an inwardly unquiet, turbulent, discontented, unsubmitive sort of spirit. A prayer that is put up after this manner, is not real prayer. Such persons don’t act the part of beggars that supplicate and pray, but of creditors that demand their dues.” (WJE 19:787)

¹²⁴ WJE 19:277.

¹²⁵ *ibid.*, 280

¹²⁶ Sermon 375 on Ezk 16:63, WJEO 51:L.9v. Advocating the Concert of Prayer in 1745, Edwards corresponded anonymously with Rev. John MacLaurin of Glasgow, longing “that we may go to God, self-empty, brokenhearted.” (WJE 5:445)

¹²⁷ WJE 2:348.

¹²⁸ Lk 7:37-38

¹²⁹ Psalm 119:20 [KJV]

¹³⁰ Sermon 275 on Ps 51:17, WJEO 48:L.10r.

¹³¹ Edwards 2001, “Hypocrites Deficient in the Duty of Prayer, *op. cit.*, 359-60. Here is a principle in Edwards that applies throughout this chapter: that what he writes about the yearnings and urgencies of those pressing into the Kingdom for salvation applies equally and even more to those soundly converted. Edwards relocated

sovereignty”¹³² to infuse His people with this gracious brokenness, “this evangelical preparation of the heart for the bestowment of mercies.”¹³³

Urgency and Agony

In a February 3, 1747, sermon responding to the call from Scottish clerical friends to join a worldwide concert of prayer for the “glorious advancement of the church and the kingdom of God in this world,” Edwards concluded the doctrinal section, which became the nub of *An Humble Attempt*, with a simple imperative: “This extraordinary prayer ought not to be delayed.”¹³⁴ **Urgency**—something of what Edwards meant by the phrase “continuing instant in prayer”¹³⁵ from Rom 12:12 [KJV]—was the property of prayer expected from a mind seized and heart broken by the need for God. Edwards frequently sermonised on “speediness”¹³⁶ and immediacy¹³⁷ as an index of the engagedness of both sinners and saints, warning that “hell is full of procrastinators and good intenders.”¹³⁸ “Our day is limited”¹³⁹ and delay is “contempt upon God,”¹⁴⁰ so we must get down to business¹⁴¹ and press into prayer now.¹⁴² Edwards’ exemplar of urgency was David Brainerd,¹⁴³ whose “earnest and importunate prayers for the Indians”¹⁴⁴ seemed driven by the

the crux of travail from the humiliation of the seeker to the fervent affections and prayers of the saint. Almost all of what is said in the New Testament, Edwards believed, of “continuing instant in prayer, crying to God day and night ... is spoken of, and directed to the saints.” (*ibid*; see also Sermon 352 on Ps 10:17, WJEO 50:L.10r.) In a June, 1741, letter to eighteen-year-old Deborah Hatheway, a Suffield, Massachusetts, convert in the revival, Edwards advised her that when someone has “attained to conversion they ought not to be the less watchful, laborious and earnest in the whole work of religion, but the more; for they are under greater obligations.” (WJE 16: 91)

¹³² “‘Tis a mighty work of God’s sovereignty to make such a change in the heart and to inspire such a nature that is should have such hungerings—man naturally is exceeding far from it.” (Sermon 418 on Mt 5:6, WJEO 52:L.7v.)

¹³³ Edwards 2004, “God’s Manner Is First to Prepare Men’s Hearts and Then to Answer Their Prayers,” *op. cit.*, 84.

¹³⁴ WJE 25:202, 204.

¹³⁵ WJE 2:382, 4:500.

¹³⁶ Sermon 595 on Mt 11:12(b), WJEO 57:L.26r.

¹³⁷ Edwards 2003, “Persons Ought to Do What They Can for Their Salvation,” *op. cit.*, 370-71.

¹³⁸ Sermon 311 on Eccl 9:10(c), WJEO 49:6r.

¹³⁹ WJE 19:281.

¹⁴⁰ Sermon 311, *op. cit.*, Lk 13:24.

¹⁴¹ In “Pressing Into the Kingdom of God,” Edwards preached, “The prudent merchant will discern opportunities; he won’t be idle on market day.” (WJE 19:291) The “market day of the soul” was a commercial metaphor of piety’s exigencies, recurrent in Puritan devotional literature. See Lake 1993, 14; Morgan 1973, 46-47; and Naeher, *op. cit.*, 35-36.

¹⁴² WJE 19:291.

¹⁴³ See Chapter I, notes 150, 250.

threat of time's short-lived opportunities: "Thus my days roll away," Brainerd wrote, "with but little done for God... But oh, what a death it is to strive and strive; to be always in a hurry, and yet do nothing."¹⁴⁵

Some scholars have interpreted Edwards' edited adaption of Brainerd's diary, the "popular capstone"¹⁴⁶ of his publishing output, as Edwards' attempt to narrate *Religious Affections* in biographical form.¹⁴⁷ The devotional ideal Brainerd embodied became Edwards' case study for commending urgent desire in prayer as authentic and attainable.¹⁴⁸ Edwards believed Brainerd's exertion to remain "ardent in prayer" with "desire to see the power of God"¹⁴⁹ could incite others to "go and spread all their desires before God in their full extent, not to be afraid, ... but let their petitions be as large as their desires."¹⁵⁰ Edwards preached that innate human desire becomes regulated and compounded "by the infusing [of] a spiritual nature into the soul in regeneration,"¹⁵¹ producing spiritual desires that are more impassioned and less self-interested. Grace does not "diminish but tends [to] increase the actual desires of the soul. ... The better and more excellent the saints are, the stronger are their desires."¹⁵²

¹⁴⁴ WJE 7:304.

¹⁴⁵ *ibid.*, 229, 398

¹⁴⁶ Hambrick-Stowe 2003, 92.

¹⁴⁷ Breitenbach 1988, 184: "[Edwards'] *Life of David Brainerd* (1749) was a skillful transcription of *Religious Affections* into a biographical format."

¹⁴⁸ See Clebsch 1973, 38; Hambrick-Stowe 2003, 92; and Pettit 1985, 34-36. Edwards spoke of Brainerd as a "young gentleman of very distinguishing qualifications, remarkable for his piety" (WJE 16:185) whose "manner of prayer was very agreeable. ... What his lips uttered seemed to flow from the fullness of his heart, as deeply impressed with a great and solemn sense of our necessities, unworthiness, and dependance, and of God's infinite greatness, excellency, and sufficiency, rather than merely from a warm and fruitful brain, pouring out good expressions." (WJE 7:446)

¹⁴⁹ WJE 7:226.

¹⁵⁰ WJE 19:785. Edwards believed feeble desire contributed to lack of effectiveness in prayer, for "when people slight the mercies that they seek or have no great sense of their excellency or laying desires after them, they are not so likely to obtain them." (Edwards 2004, "God's Manner Is First to Prepare Men's Hearts and Then to Answer Their Prayers," *op. cit.*, 84) Here again, Edwards was reaffirming the "theology of human desire" (Knight 1994, 119) tradition in Puritan piety developed by New England ministers like Thomas Shepard who considered desire the substance of prayer: "Holy prayers ... are such desires of the soul left with God." (Shepard 1967 [1853], vol. 1, 265)

¹⁵¹ Sermon 871 on Prov 10:34(c), WJEO 65:L.3r.

¹⁵² *ibid.*, L.9r., L.14v

This escalating urgency of desire in prayer is fundamental to how Edwards understood Christ's travail in Gethsemane, "the most earnest prayers that ever were made."¹⁵³ After Christ began in the garden asking the Father to "let this cup pass from me,"¹⁵⁴ angels came strengthening him to pray again "more earnestly."¹⁵⁵ That "in his second prayer he prayed more earnestly than in his first"¹⁵⁶ was evidence to Edwards of growing urgency in Christ "that God's will might be done in what related to His sufferings."¹⁵⁷ This second prayer is what Edwards believed we find described in Hebrews 5, when Jesus prayed "with strong crying and tears"¹⁵⁸ as the Church's High Priest:

Christ offered up these strong cries with His flesh in the same manner as the priests of old were wont to offer up prayers with their sacrifices. Christ mixed strong crying and tears with His blood, and so offered up His blood and His prayers together that the effect and success of His blood might be obtained. Such earnest, agonizing prayers were offered with His blood; and His infinitely precious and meritorious blood was offered with His prayers. ... The account that Luke gives us seems to imply that His bloody sweat was partly, at least, with the great labor and earnest sense of His soul in wrestling with God in prayer.¹⁵⁹

Here is the urgency of supplication climaxing in **agony** embodied in the "bloody sweat" of Jesus, an image functioning for Edwards as something of an icon of travingling prayer.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵³ Edwards 1998, "Christ's Agony," *op. cit.*, 323. Edwards exalted Christ's travail as the model of Christian spirituality in *Religious Affections*: "He was the greatest instance of ardency, vigor and strength of love, to both God and man, that ever was. It was these affections which got the victory, in that mighty struggle and conflict of his affections, in his agonies, when he prayed more earnestly, and offered strong crying and tears, and wrestled in tears and in blood." (WJE 2:111) See notes 83-84.

¹⁵⁴ Mt 26:39 [KJV]

¹⁵⁵ Lk 22:43-44 [KJV]

¹⁵⁶ Sermon 495 on Heb 9:13-14, WJEO 53:L.27r. See also WJE 15:172-74.

¹⁵⁷ Edwards 1998, "Christ's Agony," *op. cit.*, 303. Edwards emphasised that Jesus was not praying more fervently to avoid the cross. Instead, having accepted "the dreadfulfulness of His sufferings," Christ travailed in prayer because he "was afraid lest His poor, feeble strength should be overcome, and that he should fail in so great a trial." (*ibid.*, 304)

¹⁵⁸ Heb 5:7 [KJV]. "The strong crying and tears of which the apostle speaks are doubtless the same that Luke speaks of in the text when he says, 'Being in agony, He prayed more earnestly.'" (Edwards 1998, "Christ's Agony," *op. cit.*, 302)

¹⁵⁹ *ibid.*, 308-09

¹⁶⁰ In *The Blank Bible*, Edwards records the research of contemporary anatomists and theologians regarding the physiology of Christ's sweating with blood, noting that the "blood, being gradually forced through his pores, congealed in clotters before it fell to the ground, so that they were *great* drops, not properly drops, but rather clotters. The word in the original signifies lumps or clotters." (WJE 24:919, 963) Details such as these recur in Edwards' preaching on travingling prayer: "Look into the garden of Gethsemane, and there behold him lying on the earth, with his body covered over with clotted blood, falling down in lumps to the ground, with his soul exceeding sorrowful even unto death, and offering strong crying and tears together with this blood. ... Thus he travailed in birth with his seed; thus he labored and suffered for the salvation of those souls that the Father had committed to him. This is the example of the great Shepherd." (WJE 25:72)

Vigorous, muscular strife was the freight of the word “agony,” rooted in the name of the venue of ancient Olympic games, “called ‘Agon,’ or ‘the place of agony.’” The word is particularly used in Scripture for that striving in earnest prayer wherein persons wrestle with God. They are said to agonize, or to be in agony in prayer.”¹⁶¹ This trademark of Brainerd’s praying¹⁶² was what Edwards believed God was waiting for from all of us,¹⁶³ especially from the ministers of the Church. Wilson Kinnach observes how Edwards, in his many ordination sermons,¹⁶⁴ “asked ministers to rise to heroic, even self-sacrificial roles” warranting the God-given honour of their position, which was “in some respects greater than that of the angels.”¹⁶⁵ Ministers “should imitate their great Master in his fervent prayers, ... considering how Christ prayed and agonized for them, in tears of blood. They should travail in birth with the souls that are committed to their care.”¹⁶⁶ Because “truth will have a hard birth,”¹⁶⁷ Edwards preached, “the seed of the Word is to be steeped in tears.”¹⁶⁸

Sometimes the fruit those seeds yielded could be overpowering. It is beyond the scope of this project to examine the psychology¹⁶⁹ of The Great Awakening generally or of

¹⁶¹ Edwards 1998, “Christ’s Agony,” *op. cit.*, 267. See also WJE 15:285.

¹⁶² “But just at night, the Lord visited me marvelously in prayer; I think my soul never was in such an agony before... I was in such an agony, from sun half an hour high till dark, that I was all over wet with sweat... Oh, my dear Jesus did ‘sweat blood’ for poor souls! I long for more compassion for them.” (WJE 7:169-70)

¹⁶³ “God seems now, at this very time, to be waiting for this from us. When God is about to bestow some great blessing on his church, it is often his manner, in the first place, so to order things in his providence as to shew his church their great need of it, and to bring ‘em into distress for want of it, and so put ‘em upon crying earnestly to him for it.” (WJE 4:517)

¹⁶⁴ Nichols has commented that “young ministers customarily invited someone who had influenced them to preach at their installation service. Nearly everyone wanted Jonathan Edwards. His ordination sermons were so numerous that one scholar wrote an entire dissertation on them.” (Nichols 2001, 58)

¹⁶⁵ WJE 25:344. See Holifield 2007, 73.

¹⁶⁶ WJE 25:337, 343.

¹⁶⁷ WJE 25:454.

¹⁶⁸ WJE 16:279.

¹⁶⁹ The prevailing conception during the early colonial period—referred to as “faculty psychology,” descended from medieval scholasticism—“viewed the human mind as an aggregate of autonomous functions (‘faculties’), which were believed to operate discretely and in a prescribed order.” (Walton, *op. cit.*, 15) Many scholars understand Edwards to have supplanted this compartmentalised notion with a unitive concept of the “heart” joined with the “inclination” into an integrated whole. Walton surveys differences in scholarly opinion as to the influence on Edwards’ religious psychology of John Locke’s (1632-1704) “simple idea” and empiricism. (*ibid.*, 34; Chapter II, notes 45-49) See also Cherry 1990, 18; Nichols 2001, 112-13; and Parker 1968, 205. Scholars have studied how Edwards’ “new psychology” uniting head and heart, with the heart given ascendancy in the affections, validated a shift in preaching that aimed itself less at rational exposition and more to emotional appeal “as the quickest way to conviction of sin and conversion. In this way they produced a revival which

Edwards' understanding of the affections, or even travailing prayer, particularly; much good work has been done in this regard and will hopefully continue from current research. But it should be acknowledged here that the urgency and agony of travailing prayer bore similar traits and risks to the spiritual anxiety¹⁷⁰ Hambrick-Stowe has characterised as a "motivating force in the daily devotional practices of colonial New Englanders throughout their lives."¹⁷¹ We have already seen how that, while Edwards found inspiration in Brainerd's fervent praying,¹⁷² he was uneasy with his morbid introversion and other psychological problems,¹⁷³ making "drastic alterations" throughout Brainerd's diary for publication.¹⁷⁴ Extreme and forceful emotion was brought to the forefront of religious experience in revolutionary ways during this period,¹⁷⁵ sometimes wrought from the melancholy of seekers and petitioners,¹⁷⁶

swelled into a general awakening." (Lovejoy, *op. cit.*, 179-80) See also Cohen, 1986; Erdt, 1978; and Hutch, 1978.

¹⁷⁰ Puritan uncertainty about the reliability of one's salvation produced "a feverish and seemingly desperate devotion." (Davies 1990, 174) Even the influential Thomas Shepard, quoted by Edwards in *Religious Affections* more than any other writer (WJE 2:54), contemplated suicide (Shepard 1967 [1853], vol. 1, 327). Observing the delicate equipoise between alarming and nurturing unregenerates, Cohen comments how "the despondent misconstrue their situation and choose an unproductive course. Magnifying appropriate anxiety, they overreact to perceived debility and paralyze themselves." (Cohen 1986, 88)

¹⁷¹ Hambrick-Stowe 1982, 20.

¹⁷² See Chapter I, note 250.

¹⁷³ *ibid.*, note 397

¹⁷⁴ Comparing the published *Life* with the original diary, Winthrop Brainerd has noted that "when Brainerd too vividly describes his thoughts, or shows a self-concern that Edwards deems extreme, the sentence or paragraph is dropped. ... When Brainerd sank too low, the passage was simply left out. ... [T]he Brainerd in the Edwards text has been shaped to fit the pattern required. He is presented as a far more evenly balanced human being than he actually was." (Brainerd 1985, 24-27)

¹⁷⁵ In her "history of the rituals that characterized the Great Awakening," Westerkamp concludes that their "most remarkable common characteristic is the intense emotional response." (Westerkamp, *op. cit.*, 8-10) Gura associates this phenomenon with Edwards: "What Edwards had privileged, through his interactions with those going through 'the work' and, later, in his writings about the awakenings, was nothing less than the final unassailable significance of an individual's emotions—his or her *feelings*—to genuine religious experience." (Gura, *op. cit.*, 231)

¹⁷⁶ Edwards defined melancholy in *Religious Affections* as an illness in which the mind is "overpowered by the disordered motions of the animal spirits; and so the devil has greater advantage to affect the mind, by working on the imagination." (WJE 2:290) Because of this, "many persons have needless distresses that they had much better be without" (WJE 19:279), a condition with which Edwards had personal experience, having himself being "overwhelmed with melancholy" at times in his youth (WJE 16:765). Gail Thain Parker has surveyed various writings on melancholy that likely influenced his thinking (1968, 195-99), which came to its final expression in Edwards' preface, appendix, and notes to his *Life of Brainerd*. Here he acknowledged that there was "one thing in Mr. Brainerd ... that may be called an imperfection in him, ... and that is, that he was one who by his constitution and natural temper was so prone to melancholy and dejection of spirit." (WJE 7:91) Edwards attributes Brainerd's condition primarily to his being alone. (WJE 7:533-34) In *Some Thoughts Concerning the Present Revival of Religion in New England*, Edwards anonymously presents his wife, Sarah Pierpont Edwards, as a contrasting "example of evangelical piety" whose acquaintance with the affections,

other times stirred by terror preaching,¹⁷⁷ and in some cases producing devastating results.¹⁷⁸

Urgent, agonising prayer “has no goodness when performed merely from fear,” Edwards preached;¹⁷⁹ even the devil “cried out very earnestly to Jesus out of fear of misery.”¹⁸⁰ Yet, “by praying as well as they can, ... a man had better pray out of self-love than neglect prayer out of self-love.”¹⁸¹ Herein lay both travailing prayer’s potential and perplexity.

Daring and Contending To sift the petitioner’s deepest motives in travailing prayer—fear, self-love, or otherwise—was part of what God was doing in sometimes appearing to resist prayer. Trials, Edwards believed, promoted self-knowledge.¹⁸² God has often delayed answering prayer “not that he was unwilling to bestow the blessing,” but so petitioners might make self-discoveries regarding the nature or degree of their “resolution and perseverance in ... seeking the blessing” and “know their own weakness and dependence.”¹⁸³ So that they may gain these benefits, God struggles with supplicants—He “seemingly resists

“raised to a higher pitch than in any other instances I have observed or been informed of,” had resulted in a “constant uninterrupted rest ... without one hour’s melancholy or darkness.” (WJE 4:331, 335)

¹⁷⁷ Terror preaching employed words and images to bring “shock upon the senses” (Miller 1959, 158) and induce humiliation (Robert Doyle Smith 1990, 131), the stage of preparation for conversion that brought seekers to heart-wrenching helplessness. Edwards had been tutored by his maternal grandfather, Solomon Stoddard, a master of terror preaching (Kinnach 1975, 37-39), to believe “it is a reasonable thing to endeavor to fright persons away from hell” (WJE 4:248). So he warned his parishioners against “being tormented forever in body and soul under the unmixed and unrestrained wrath of enraged omnipotence.” (Edwards 2003, “Persons Ought to Do What They Can for Their Salvation,” *op. cit.*, 387) Commenting on Edwards’ most famous awakening sermon, “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God” (WJE 22:400-35), Marsden describes Edwards’ use of language “to arouse affections that would excite vital knowledge, ... employ[ing] so many images and address[ing] them so immediately to his hearers that they were left with no escape.” (Marsden, *op. cit.*, 221-23) After the Awakening, from 1747 on, Kinnach observes that “Edwards was not to return to full-blown hellfire preaching. The revivalist had seen the limitations of revival preaching, and while a fear of damnation was only rational in the context of his faith, it seems Edwards no longer saw the Stoddardean emphasis upon fear as a positive dimension of preaching.” (Kinnach 2007, 118) Walton states that scholarly opinion seems to agree that Edwards’ rejection of both the necessity and normativity of terror as a factor in the process of conversion “was a significant departure from earlier Puritanism.” (Walton, *op. cit.*, 35)

¹⁷⁸ At the height of the “surprising work of God in Northampton,” Edwards’ uncle Joseph Hawley, husband of Solomon Stoddard’s daughter, Rebecca, became so discouraged over the state of his soul that he cut his throat and died on June 1, 1735, a Sabbath morning (WJE 4:109-10). “When Hawley committed suicide,” Tracy comments, “the happy confidence of the revival was over for Edwards.” (Tracy 1980, 118)

¹⁷⁹ Sermon 85 on Lk 8:28, WJEO 43:L.11v., ms damage.

¹⁸⁰ *ibid*, L.3v.

¹⁸¹ *ibid*, L.7v.

¹⁸² See Chamberlain 1994, 553: “Trials, according to Edwards, were an integral part of the Christian life because they were the vehicle for the acquisition of self-knowledge.” Edwards saw in God’s command that Abraham sacrifice his son “the greatest evidence to Abraham’s conscience,” and in Israel’s years of wandering was discovered the way “to discover them to themselves, that they might know what was in their own hearts.” (WJE 2:431-32)

¹⁸³ WJE 19:423-25. See also WJE 24:179-81.

them, instead of hearkening to them”¹⁸⁴—inviting us to be **daring** in prayer “without esteeming it an indecent boldness.”¹⁸⁵ We should not “be afraid, or straitened, or confined at all.”¹⁸⁶ Instead, Edwards preaches, God’s blessing may be “insisted on”¹⁸⁷ with the same obstinate¹⁸⁸ tenacity of the Canaanite woman¹⁸⁹ who typified prayer that will “take no denial”¹⁹⁰ and “give [God] no rest”¹⁹¹ until it has received.

It was this audacity that caused Puritans like Richard Sibbes (1577-1635) to understand prayer as “a kind of wrestling, and **contending** with God, ... a binding of him with arguments, and promises of his own.”¹⁹² Isaiah 45:11 revealed God as “pleased to represent Himself, as it were, at the command” of prayer,¹⁹³ appearing “as it were, overcome by prayer, [and] graciously manifest[ing] himself as conquered by it.”¹⁹⁴ The phrase “as it were” recurs in Edwards’ treatment of contending in prayer because he wants to make the point that God does not need our wrestling; we do.¹⁹⁵ Wrestling with God in prayer is how petitioners come to a sense of our need for what we pray for, become convinced of our

¹⁸⁴ *ibid*, 423

¹⁸⁵ Edwards 1998, “The Most High a Prayer-Hearing God,” *op. cit.*, 116. In “The Terms of Prayer,” Edwards preaches, “When we think what poor, polluted, wretched creatures we are, it looks like a great boldness to go and ask such things of God. But the doctrine shows that this is no greater boldness than God allows us of his free grace in Christ.” (WJE 19:784)

¹⁸⁶ WJE 19:785.

¹⁸⁷ MS Sermon 809 on Ezk 36:36-37, Feb. 1746, Gen. Mss. 151, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, 8.

¹⁸⁸ “Thus God allowed Jacob to wrestle with him, yea to be resolute in it. God allows obstinancy, if I may so speak in this way, as Jacob who, when God said, ‘Let me go,’ said, ‘I will not let thee go except then bless me.’” (Sermon 374 on Ps 65:2, WJEO 51:L.4v.)

¹⁸⁹ Mt 15:22-28. “Jacob and the woman of Canaan, met with great discouragements, while they were wrestling for a blessing: but they persevered, and obtained their request.” (WJE 16:182)

¹⁹⁰ Sermon 595, *op. cit.*, L.24.v. See also Edwards 1998, “The Most High a Prayer-Hearing God,” *op. cit.*, 114.

¹⁹¹ Isa 62:7

¹⁹² Sibbes 1863 [1640], 96.

¹⁹³ Sermon 958, *op. cit.*, 68:L.5r. “Thus saith the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, and his Maker, Ask me of things to come concerning my sons, and concerning the work of my hands command ye me.”

¹⁹⁴ Edwards 1998, “The Most High a Prayer-Hearing God,” *op. cit.*, 115.

¹⁹⁵ “God did not need Jacob’s wrestling with him in order to make him willing to bless him. God was willing before and came to him with that design to bless him. God is willing to bless his people, and this is the reason he stirs them to wrestle with him for a blessing.” (Edwards 2003, “The Way to Obtain the Blessing of God Is Not to Let Him Go Except He Bless Us,” *op. cit.*, 22)

unworthiness to receive it, acknowledge God “to be the author of the blessing,” and become prepared for its bestowal.¹⁹⁶

Wrestling was, in a real sense, the substance of the Christian life for Edwards: “the employment that Christians must spend their lives in, wrestling with God in seeking of him, and wrestling with their enemies in resisting them.”¹⁹⁷ “A Christian must live a fighting, struggling life,”¹⁹⁸ and prayer, Edwards believed, was the ultimate “field of battle.”¹⁹⁹ At the height of the Awakening in February of 1740, Edwards preached a sermon on Mt 11:12—“the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence and the violent take it by force”—inventorying the opponents with which Christians wrestle in the “warfare that is appointed them”²⁰⁰: from dullness, bitterness, and bad habits, to satanic deception, business entanglements, and social arrogance. But “in vain will all your wrestling with the world, the flesh, and the devil be,” Edwards declared, until you “wrestle with God for his help, ... [and] pour out your soul before him.”²⁰¹ In a later sermon on the same text, he compared the violence of our striving in prayer for God’s help to the vehement resolution²⁰² of “warriors that are about to storm a strong city,”²⁰³ a struggle in which we must either “conquer or die.”²⁰⁴

¹⁹⁶ *ibid*, 22-23

¹⁹⁷ WJE 24:181. Edwards drew this double-sided character of prayer’s grappling from the example of Jesus who “wrestled with His enemies and with His great sufferings, but at the same time wrestled with God to obtain His help to enable Him to get the victory.” (Edwards 1998, “Christ’s Agony,” *op. cit.*, 321)

¹⁹⁸ WJE 19:696. “It is impossible but that a godly man should find much to do, and that he should find great occasion for labor and diligence, and many sighs, and groans, and pantings of heart, and earnest cries, and vehement conflicts. The life of a godly man is a life full of conflicts.” (*ibid*)

¹⁹⁹ Edwards 2001, “Hypocrites Deficient in the Duty of Prayer, *op. cit.*, 373.

²⁰⁰ Edwards 1998, “Christ’s Agony,” *op. cit.*, 318. While seeking God for conversion entailed an aggressive struggle among the unregenerate, the battle only escalated for Christians: “’Tis a great mistake in any to suppose that they have occasion for striving and violence in religion, only before they are truly religious at all. Where there is one exhortation in the New Testament to sinners {in regard to the pains they had need to take} in order to conversion, there are ten [to saints].” (MS Sermon 790 on 1 Cor 9:26, Aug. 1745, Gen. Mss. 151, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, 4) See note 131.

²⁰¹ Sermon 595, *op. cit.*, L.19r. to L.25r. Edwards preached on a similar theme in Sermon 949 on Prov 6:22(b), WJEO 68:left marg.:“+Feb.1752,” that “grace maintained in lively exercise is a continual safeguard to a person” in all manner of desperate circumstances.

²⁰² Edwards indicated in his “Resolutions” the personal embrace of a fierce piety from his youth: “22. Resolved, to endeavor to obtain for myself (as much happiness, in the other world,) as I possibly can, with all the power, might, vigor, and vehemence, yea violence, I am capable of, or can bring myself to exert, in any way that can be thought of.” (WJE 16:754) He had likely been influenced in this regard by Stoddard, who emphasised in his preaching the violence required in spiritual earnestness. (Schafer 1963, 342)

²⁰³ Sermon 177 on Mt 11:12, WJEO 45:L.4v.

Wrestling in prayer was the experience of Edwards' devotional exemplars, both his wife, Sarah,²⁰⁵ and his spiritual son,²⁰⁶ David Brainerd.²⁰⁷ But the archetype of prayer's contending was the Old Testament²⁰⁸ patriarch,²⁰⁹ Jacob, who wrestled with God and prevailed:

Thus God appeared to oppose Jacob in what he sought of him; yet Jacob was resolute, and overcame. Therefore God changed his name from Jacob to Israel; for, says he, "as a prince thou has power with God and with men, and has prevailed." Gen 32:28. A mighty prince indeed!²¹⁰

"Thoroughly obstinate and insuperable in his resolution,"²¹¹ Jacob "laid out his strength in wrestling"²¹² through the darkness of night, as did Christ in the Garden, being declared a prince as "a type of Him who was the Prince of princes."²¹³ As Jacob's struggle anticipated Christ's wrestling in travail, Edwards believed it had been "ordered in providence, and recorded in Scripture history, to be a type and representation of ... that fervent, and earnest, and persevering prayer, in which we ought to seek the blessing of God."²¹⁴ Edwards could introduce his sermon, "Blessed Struggle," explaining that this was a literal wrestling "though

²⁰⁴ *ibid.* See also Sermon 595, *op. cit.*, L.11.r.

²⁰⁵ Sarah Edwards' narrative of her extraordinary religious experiences in 1742 was later published by Jonathan and included anonymously (WJE 4:331-47) in *Some Thoughts Concerning the Present Revival of Religion in New England*. She begins acknowledging how she "thought I very much needed help from God" and so began "earnestly wrestling with God for it." (McCulley and Baker, *op. cit.*, 1)

²⁰⁶ Patricia Tracy depicts Brainerd's relationship in the Northampton parsonage as one in which Edwards had "'adopted' him spiritually and professionally." (Tracy 1985, 29)

²⁰⁷ The idea that "God enabled me to wrestle" (WJE 7:161, 162, 169, 179, 215, 225, 226, 256, 258, 396) in prayer for "divine blessings" (159), "enemies" (162), "friends" (226), the "Indians" (402), and for God's "cause and kingdom" (166) is a dominant idiom typifying Brainerd's conception and experience of prayer.

²⁰⁸ Pratt observed the extensive use of the Old Testament in Edwards' preaching, noting that "no less than forty-one percent of his extant sermons come from the first portion of the Bible." (Pratt, *op. cit.*, 42)

²⁰⁹ Edwards asserted that Jacob did not wrestle in prayer "as a private person, but as the head of his posterity, the nation of Israel." (Edwards 1998, "Christ's Agony," *op. cit.*, 310)

²¹⁰ Edwards 1998, "The Most High a Prayer-Hearing God," *op. cit.*, 115. Edwards returns to the "prince prevailing" image to portray the power of any Christian in earnest prayer: "Christian prayer has power and prevalency enough with God to obtain even such great things, to bring down from heaven so great a blessing. As a prince, they have power with God." (MS Sermon 809 on Ezk 36:36-37, Feb. 1746, Gen. Mss. 151, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, 12)

²¹¹ WJE 24:181.

²¹² Edwards 2003, "The Way to Obtain the Blessing of God Is Not to Let Him Go Except He Bless Us," *op. cit.*, 19.

²¹³ Edwards 1998, "Christ's Agony," *op. cit.*, 310.

²¹⁴ WJE 19:423. See also Edwards 2003, "The Way to Obtain the Blessing of God Is Not to Let Him God Except He Bless Us," *op. cit.*, 17.

typical of something spiritual,”²¹⁵ because he believed, as Marsden states, that “everything is related, because everything is related to God.”²¹⁶ Edwards had an expository penchant for emphasising the unity of the Old and New Testaments, accounting for his great interest in typology,²¹⁷ which was for him a primary interpretive key to unlocking our understanding of God’s intentions in Scripture and in our world. Not only Jacob wrestling, but also, as we shall see, women birthing and men soldiering, rain and drought, woods and mountains, all these were given by God, among other things and in different ways, “to typify and represent the wonderful power and prevalency of the faithful and fervent prayers of the saints with God.”²¹⁸

²¹⁵ WJE 19:421.

²¹⁶ Marsden, *op. cit.*, 460.

²¹⁷ Typology, according to Knight, “is best understood as a form of divine speech,” or in Edwards’ words, “a certain sort of language, as it were, in which God is wont to speak with us.” (WJE 11:150) Fundamental to Edwards’ thought was that because the first and essential attribute of God is that he “is a communicating being” (WJE 13:410), “infinitely communicative” (WJE 19:780), the chief end for which God created the world was “that there might be a glorious and abundant emanation of his infinite fullness of good *ad extra*, or without himself.” (WJE 8:433) Since “principles of human nature render types a fit method of instruction” (WJE 11:191), from the beginning God has been disclosing himself in and through the world by means of prefigurative and symbolic representations, not only in Scripture but also from nature and everyday experience. (Knight 2005, 190-97)

²¹⁸ Edwards 2003, “The Way to Obtain the Blessing of God Is Not to Let Him Go Except He Bless Us,” *op. cit.*, 17.

Form

Labour It is clear that wrestling with God in prayer was, for Edwards, one of those exercises “wherein men are wont to exert their strength,”²¹⁹ for “prayer requires a great deal of care and ... **labour**.”²²⁰ Earnest prayer was hard work. Edwards had no patience with laxity or laziness when it came to prayer, expecting every person, regardless of their station, age, or spiritual condition, to “use great diligence in prayer to God,”²²¹ expending themselves in this “great and laborious service.”²²² These were resounding echoes of “the ethic of striving that lies at the heart of Puritan thought,” Cohen has termed it, a “psychology of work” that can explain why the preachers “always spoke of the godly life as arduous”²²³ and expected parishioners “to labor so hard in the fields of the Lord.”²²⁴

Second in number only to soteriology was the category of ethics in Edwards’ preaching, and nearly one-fourth of his ethical sermons had to do with Christian striving.²²⁵ God required such striving and “great labour”²²⁶ in earnest prayer because towering impediments were always standing in the way of it, and very “few are they that lay out themselves in that earnest and laborious manner ... as to get over these mountains.”²²⁷ Opposition to the work of prayer is what Jesus confronted by travailing in Gethsemane, Edwards preached, “so should Christians, with the utmost earnestness, improve their time with souls engaged in this work, pushing through the opposition they meet with, pushing

²¹⁹ WJE 2:387.

²²⁰ Sermon 554 on Job 27:10, WJEO 55:L.11v. (This section is omitted from the Nichols edition.)

²²¹ Edwards 2003, “Persons Ought to Do What They Can for Their Salvation,” *op. cit.*, 378.

²²² WJE 2:387.

²²³ Cohen, *op. cit.*, 111-12.

²²⁴ *ibid.*, 133

²²⁵ Pratt, *op. cit.*, 244-49. Pratt categorised 295 sermons as having to do with soteriology and 286 with ethics, of which 63 pertained to striving. In “Blessed Struggle,” Edwards acknowledged to the Northampton church that the many places in Scripture calling for Christian striving “have been too often mentioned to you, and too well known by you, to need to be particularly mentioned at this time.” (WJE 19:424)

²²⁶ “God requires great labour, and that they should lay out themselves, and they don’t spare themselves.” (Sermon 177, *op. cit.*, L.5v.)

²²⁷ Edwards 2003, “Persons Ought to Do What They Can for Their Salvation,” *op. cit.*, 388.

through all difficulties and sufferings that are in the way.”²²⁸ Obstructions broken through in prayer were indication of a thorough seeker who understands that “the more opposition you meet with, the more difficulty with your own heart, the more likely you will obtain it.”²²⁹

These principles were pieces fitting into a larger picture for Edwards that viewed seeking God as the fundamental deportment of Christian life. God commands that unregenerate people seek him, and so he “stirs them up to strive for conversion.”²³⁰ But the Scriptures, Edwards asserted, “everywhere represent the seeking, striving and labor of a Christian, as being chiefly after his conversion, and his conversion as being but the beginning of his work.”²³¹ Thus Christians seek God all their lives,²³² through all afflictions,²³³ and in every need, for “God won’t bestow {his blessing} without any steadfast and earnest seeking.”²³⁴ So expansive was Edwards’ paradigm of seeking, McClymond and McDermott point out, that it was one thing we do on earth that we will continue doing in heaven: “In the human journey toward God, there was—quite literally—no limit as to how far one might progress. Heaven itself was to be a ‘progressive state,’ and in some sense one might say that the seeking after God never ends.”²³⁵

Seeking and labouring were this pervasive in Edwards’ view of earnest prayer, in part, because he saw striving as the endowment of general grace, an engagement with God available to all. Under God’s “common assistance,” it is as much within a person’s power to “set apart a suitable proportion of their time” and “use great diligence in prayer to God” as it

²²⁸ Edwards 1998, “Christ’s Agony,” *op. cit.*, 320.

²²⁹ WJE 19:434.

²³⁰ WJE 17:280-81. Henard has described how Edwards commended the benefits of seeking God as increasing the “probability that salvation would be granted” or, at the least, offering the possibility “of a reduction in eternal punishment” to the non-elect. (Henard 2006, 152-56)

²³¹ WJE 2:382.

²³² “God, in directing of us to seek after holiness, only advises us to be friends to our own souls.” (MS Sermon 1166 on Prov 19:8, June 1756, Gen. Mss. 151, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, 1)

²³³ In a sermon calling the people to “go to God by prayer for help” during drought, Edwards concludes, “Having this great encouragement, therefore let us turn everyone from his evil way and earnestly seek God under the present affliction.” (Sermon 142, *op. cit.*, L.6v.)

²³⁴ WJE 19:431. Edwards explains here that “God requires men to seek, and constantly to seek, because hereby [they will be] prepared to prize the blessing {by him}, [to] acknowledge it received of him, {and to} praise him for it.” (*ibid*, 432)

²³⁵ McClymond and McDermott, *op. cit.*, 66.

is “[to] manag[e] any secular business.”²³⁶ In other words, any person who can work for money can work in prayer. And to this “natural action”²³⁷ Edwards offered, in “Praying for the Spirit,” an audacious promise:

I am bold to say, that if you will seek this blessing and take no more pain for it than most of you take every year for worldly profit, you shall have it. God will bestow it upon [you]. It is a great deal more certain that you will have success in this.²³⁸

Edwards did not intend to make guarantees here. Toilsome labour in prayer did not ensure God’s response, for in striving people do not “get the blessing by their own strength ...; nor do they purchase the blessing, or in any wise make themselves more worthy of it.”²³⁹ But Edwards did assert that indolence and lethargy in prayer would ensure failure. He railed against dullness in prayer as forcefully as he advocated diligence, preaching that “slothfulness in the service of God ... is as damning, as open rebellion.”²⁴⁰ And not only to God, carelessness in prayer is also objectionable to us:

Slack and slothful attendance upon [the duty of prayer], and unsteadiness in it, are the causes which make it so great a burden as it is to some persons. Their slothfulness in it hath naturally the effect to beget a dislike of the duty and a great indisposition to it. But if it be constantly and diligently attended, it is one of the best means of leading not only a Christian and amiable, but also a pleasant life.²⁴¹

Slack seekers trust themselves, Edwards believed. Labour and diligence in prayer are what convince petitioners of labour’s limits and our dependence on God so that it isn’t long “before he finds the sensibleness of his heart, and earnestness of his spirit greatly

²³⁶ Edwards 2003, “Persons Ought to Do What They Can for Their Salvation,” *op. cit.*, 378. Edwards preached in “Pressing Into the Kingdom of God” that every person is capable “with great diligence to attend the matter of your duty towards God, ... to attend all ordinances, and all public and private duties of religion, and to do it with your might.” (WJE 19:283)

²³⁷ *ibid*

²³⁸ WJE 22:222.

²³⁹ WJE 19:431. Rather than to acquire the blessing we seek in prayer, we “labor to get our hearts prepared for an answer. ... And the want of this is without doubt very often one great reason why persons don’t obtain an answer to their prayers.” (Edwards 2004, “God’s Manner Is First to Prepare Men’s Hearts and Then to Answer their Prayers,” *op. cit.*, 88-89)

²⁴⁰ WJE 2:388. “The everlasting Kingdom is that which is too far off for lazy Christians to see.” (Sermon 458 on 2 Pet 1:10-11, WJEO 53:L.2v.)

²⁴¹ Edwards 2001, “Hypocrites Deficient in the Duty of Prayer,” *op. cit.*, 372.

increased.”²⁴² For all these benefits, Edwards would echo the “earnest longing” of his wife, Sarah, that “those of us, who were the children of God, might now arise and strive.”²⁴³

Gender Striving in prayer, however, also involved saints relating to God in ways beyond those of children. In his sermon, “The Terms of Prayer,” Edwards illustrated the generosity of God to the elect, celebrating the fact that the privileges they are admitted to in response to their earnest prayers

...are of the highest kind conceivable. They are received into the nearest relation to Christ, and that which above all other betokens endearment, even that of being his spiritual bride. They are united to him in the closest union. They are represented as being the members of Christ’s body, “of his flesh, and of his bone” (Eph. 5:30); yea, as brought into an union that is more after that of being one flesh.²⁴⁴

This “closest union” explains for Edwards “the frequent comparisons made [in Scripture] between the church’s spiritually bringing forth Christ and a woman in travail,”²⁴⁵ why the Church “is represented in the Old Testament both as the wife and mother of Christ.”²⁴⁶ Such references are a glimpse into Edwards’ extensive use of **gender** and particularly female sexual imagery in his writing and preaching on earnest prayer, a feature so widespread that McClymond and McDermott claim, “The general assertion that Edwards’s spirituality included an erotic aspect would seem to be unassailable, however one might interpret his language.”²⁴⁷ Here again Edwards reveals his formation in the Puritan heritage in which it was conventional, Bremer has observed, to employ “sexual images to speak of God’s love, and it was commonplace to talk and write about Christ as the soul’s bridegroom.”²⁴⁸

²⁴² WJE 19:284.

²⁴³ McCulley and Baker, *op. cit.*, 5.

²⁴⁴ WJE 19:779.

²⁴⁵ WJE 13:440.

²⁴⁶ WJE 11:278.

²⁴⁷ McClymond and McDermott, *op. cit.*, 74. Barbour looks to Edwards’ *Personal Narrative* as the “description of a love affair with the Divinity” to trace origins of Edwards’ employment of “the metaphor of sexuality.” (Barbour 1998, 287-91)

²⁴⁸ Bremer 2009, 48. Elsewhere Bremer comments on how “many puritans wrote and talked about the maternal attributes of God, one example being John Cotton, who titled his catechism for New England youth *Milk for Babes, Drawn Out of the Breasts of Both Testaments*, the Scriptures being the means by which God bestowed a mother’s love.” (*ibid*, 36-37)

Puritanism elevated the female voice of fervent prayer.²⁴⁹ Noting the “sheer amount of time and energy that puritan women spent in devotional exercises,”²⁵⁰ Naeher observed how “they consistently wrote or spoke of coming to the more intensely personal experience of prayer ... through times of profound distress and crisis.”²⁵¹ Typifying this were the “plaints and Groanes”²⁵² of Anne Bradstreet (1612-72), the first published poet and woman in the British North American colonies: “I sovght him who my Soul did Love, wth tears I sovght him earnestly.”²⁵³ Not only in prayer but also in testimony to their religious experiences,²⁵⁴ women could be looked to as models of piety, as did Edwards with his wife, Sarah,²⁵⁵ and others.²⁵⁶ Having been reared by the “queenly” Esther Stoddard²⁵⁷ as one son among ten sisters, and then bringing up eight daughters, all of whom became well-grounded and erudite, it was instinctive in Edwards to value feminine expressions of piety. He “allowed that [women] were more spiritual than men,” Minkema observes, which likely contributed to shaping not only his “so called ‘feminized’ spirituality, with its emphases on affections and the expression of emotions,”²⁵⁸ but also the bride and mother “root cluster” of metaphors which, Chastain has suggested, “is so basic to Edwards’s thought that it lies

²⁴⁹ “Women were to speak freely to their heavenly bridegroom, and were recognized as being able to exercise the same power, or efficacious competence, in prayer as men could. ... The expectation and experience of forceful praying of God’s scriptural promises, to move God himself, gave women increased confidence in their expressive abilities and power.” (Naeher, *op. cit.*, 149)

²⁵⁰ *ibid.*, 108

²⁵¹ *ibid.*, 98

²⁵² McElrath and Robb 1981, 221.

²⁵³ *ibid.*, 220. See also Hambrick-Stowe 1982, 186; 1988, 77.

²⁵⁴ Caldwell considers the Puritan conversion narrative “the first faint murmurings of a truly American voice.” (Caldwell 1983, 41) The significance of this genre was even greater for women, Baker has suggested, “for whom the conversion narrative was the earliest form of public expression that was sanctioned and indeed welcomed.” (McCulley and Baker, *op. cit.*, xiii)

²⁵⁵ “Sarah Edwards served as a model of spiritual quickening for her husband, for her congregation, and for the larger New England Calvinist community.” (*ibid.*, xviii) See note 205.

²⁵⁶ Minkema notes, “The persons [Edwards] chose as exemplars of true sainthood were all women—Abigail Hutchinson, Phoebe Bartlett, his wife Sarah—with the exception of the decidedly non-masculine David Brainerd.” (Minkema 2012, 6)

²⁵⁷ An earlier generation of scholars, such as Increase Tarbox here, viewed the feminine influences in Edwards’ life as an advantage: “When we remember how queenly a woman his mother, Esther Stoddard was, physically, mentally, spiritually; when we remember that Jonathan Edwards stood, as an only son, nearly midway among his ten sisters, it is not unnatural for us to conclude that his superlative greatness was due, in some measure, to the fact that he wonderfully combined in himself the masculine and feminine elements.” (Tarbox 1884, 630)

²⁵⁸ Minkema, *op. cit.*, 12.

behind and informs every writing about the church, whether he makes explicit reference to it or not.”²⁵⁹

The church praying as a mother in childbirth was a great sign of hope for Edwards, an alignment with “travail pangs of the creation”²⁶⁰ indicating that God was at the ready for bringing his redemptive work to its fulfillment. In correspondence with William McCulloch (1691-1771), the church of Scotland minister of Cambuslang instrumental in the inception of the famous revival there,²⁶¹ Edwards writes:

If at the same time that the creation (that “waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God” [Rom. 8:19]) appears especially in travail, the church of God appears remarkably as a woman with child, crying, and travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered, wrestling and agonizing with God in prayer, for the promised blessing, there is the more reason to hope that the time is nigh, when she shall bring forth that man-child that is to rule all nations. The prayers of God’s people will not be in vain.²⁶²

Here Edwards encapsulates the eschaton in the idiom of childbirth “when Christ is mystically born into the world, ... represented in the 12th chap. of Rev. as being in consequence of the church’s crying and travailing in birth, and being pained to be delivered. One thing here intended, doubtless, is her crying and agonizing in prayer.”²⁶³ Female imagery forms a circular whole for Edwards, with the church travailing in prayer to give birth to the groom who will then marry the Church in the eschaton.²⁶⁴ “From the resurrection of Christ till the fall of Antichrist,”²⁶⁵ the church’s ministers, “that are her mouth, ... [will] cry like a travailing woman.”²⁶⁶ Of this Brainerd set the standard, who did “‘labor always fervently’ [Col. 4:12], ... in prayers day and night, wrestling with God in secret, and ‘travailing in birth,’ with unutterable groans and agonies, ‘until Christ were formed’ [Gal. 4:19] in the

²⁵⁹ Chastain 1990, 2.

²⁶⁰ WJE 5:346. “The ingenerating of a principle of grace in the soul, seems in Scripture to be compared to the conceiving of Christ in the womb (Gal. 4:19). And therefore the church is called Christ’s mother (Cant. 3:11).” (WJE 2:161)

²⁶¹ Haykin 2007, 77, note 1.

²⁶² WJE 16:209.

²⁶³ WJE 4:517.

²⁶⁴ Chastain notes how in *The History of Redemption* “the birth, which is the completion of the work of the church militant, precedes the coming of the bride.” (Chastain, *op. cit.*, 5)

²⁶⁵ WJE 18:516.

²⁶⁶ WJE 4:389.

hearts of the people to whom he was sent!”²⁶⁷ However, travailing prayer was not only the domain of clergy and archetypal saints. It was also to be “the spirit of the church,” the childbirth agonies of all “those that have been in distress for the souls of others.”²⁶⁸

Whereas female symbolism tracks closely with Edwards’ apocalyptic vision of the Church, he seemed to apply male imagery of ardent prayer more broadly to all parts of Christian life at conversion and beyond. The “essential virtue of a Christian” was zeal, “an inward ardency of mind to excite us to acquit ourselves like men in the race and in the battle.”²⁶⁹ We have already seen the importance to Edwards of masculine tactics in prayer such as wrestling and violence,²⁷⁰ epitomised in Jacob and represented in God’s search through the prophet Ezekiel for one who would “stand in the gap before me”,²⁷¹ “for he that is powerful in prayer is compared to a valiant man in fight.”²⁷² Contending and clashing in prayer may have engendered a measure of “swagger and perhaps even a competitive element in the way puritan men noted the hours spent in rigorous prayer, and in ‘wrestling’ with God himself,” Naeher points out.²⁷³ Puritan men were evaluated socially according to their ability to pray with emotive power “and in ways that brought clear and demonstrable results.”²⁷⁴

²⁶⁷ WJE 7:530.

²⁶⁸ WJE 4:305. See Appendix II.

²⁶⁹ WJE 22:147.

²⁷⁰ See pp. 146-47.

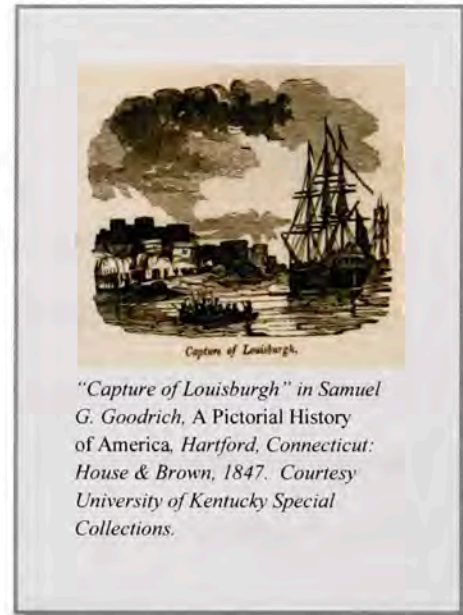
²⁷¹ Ezk 22:30

²⁷² WJE 24:750. “All true Christians are good and faithful soldiers of Jesus Christ, and fight the good fight of faith.” (WJE 2:387)

²⁷³ Naeher, *op. cit.*, 315-18. “A fundamental way in which the private and public prayers of puritan men differed from those of puritan women was that the men consistently spoke with a decidedly greater pride. Women could speak at times of praying importunately and assertively, but not of their prayers healing the sick and changing the weather. Men, on the other hand, regularly recorded such prayerful exploits.” (*ibid*, 370)

²⁷⁴ *ibid*, 371. “Everyone knew that those under a man’s authority would suffer if that man lacked ability in prayer.” (*ibid*)

But in battle as in prayer, men “prove miserable soldiers,” Edwards preached, who “are much in boasting.”²⁷⁵ In an August, 1745, sermon, two months after the surprising fall of the French fortress of Louisburg to English colonial forces,²⁷⁶ Edwards soberly called on those returning from the conflict to apply their recent experience now to spiritual warfare:²⁷⁷ “You that are here present that went forth in the late expedition against that strong city, Louisburg, you can tell something what belongs to war; and consequently, you are under special advantages to tell what belongs to the life of a Christian.”²⁷⁸ Spiritual soldiering, like actual combat, Edwards had preached during the Awakening, called up a manly grit to forsake the familiar for “hard lodging and hard fare,”²⁷⁹ exerting to the utmost “against the mouth of the cannon”²⁸⁰ with a willingness to bleed and bear wounds and a resolve that “they will win the prize or die in battle.”²⁸¹



²⁷⁵ Sermon 595, *op. cit.*, L.2r.

²⁷⁶ This occurred during the War of Austrian Succession, known in the British colonies as King George's War. Edwards had also preached on this same "occasion of the return of our soldiers from Cape Breton," what then was the French province of Île-Royale, the capital of which was Louisburg. (Sermon 787 on 2 Chr 20:27-29, WJEO 63)

²⁷⁷ Clearly Edwards understood the military bearing of earnest prayer as being about, at least in part, the confrontation necessary to retake what "the devil has conquered." (MS Sermon 790 on 1 Cor 9:26, Aug. 1745, Gen. Mss. 151, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, 6) In Sermon 790, he details the "fallen angels" (6) and evil spirits under Satan's command, who "are very numerous, and of great ability in war" (6), wielding their weapons to invade our minds with "evil thoughts and imaginations" (7). But we have a "glorious Captain" (11), Edwards assures, who has "provided arms for us" (11), though few fight like this. Only living "a morally honest life, is far from being a Christian life" (12). When Scripture calls us to take up spiritual arms, it is not employing "mere hyperbolic figures of speech" but beckoning us to what is "absolutely necessary" (13).

²⁷⁸ *ibid*, 14

²⁷⁹ Sermon 595, *op. cit.*, L.4r.

²⁸⁰ *ibid*, L.5v.

²⁸¹ *ibid*, L.8v.

Masculine bellicosity was the saint's praying posture, for "when God truly delivers men from spiritual bondage, they go forth prepared both to travail and to fight."²⁸² This twofold nature of earnest prayer—"both to travail and to fight"—roughly parallels its female and male distinctives, accessible to both men and women, that Edwards saw united in the nature of God, who "shall go forth as a mighty ... a man of war, ... [and who will] cry like a travailing woman."²⁸³

Physicality In his introduction to the *Encyclopedia of Religious Revivals in America*, editor Michael McClymond identifies "bodily manifestations," in both uniquely male and female expression, as the second of seven characteristics of revivals, noting that "the intensification of experience that occurs in revivals is not confined to the spirit, heart, or mind, but commonly reveals itself in the physical body."²⁸⁴ So intense was the sheer **physicality** of what persons "under convictions" experienced in the Great Awakening, as well as those interceding in prayer for them, that Edwards exhorted all to remain "diligent in their worldly business" as a counterbalance. The disadvantage of neglecting one's job for earnest prayer was that "it tends to unfit the body when the mind is under strong concern... It is very profitable without [doubt] to keep the body from being overwrought with concern."²⁸⁵ The physical manifestations of fervent prayer were also potentially hazardous in the way they could lead to hypocrisy²⁸⁶ and pride, Edwards warned, pointing to tears as a particular risk: "When [seekers] have made a prayer, wherein they thought they were very much engaged, and seemed to be affectionate, and shed tears plentifully; ... they are much taken with it, and

²⁸² MS Sermon 700 on Ex 13:18, Apr. 1743, Gen. Mss. 151, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. See listing on WJE 25:718.

²⁸³ Isa 42:13-15 [KJV]

²⁸⁴ McClymond 2007, xxii-xxiii.

²⁸⁵ Edwards 2004, "God's Manner Is First to Prepare Men's Hearts and Then to Answer Their Prayers," *op. cit.*, 103-04.

²⁸⁶ "Like the people that cried, 'Hosanna!' many tears have been shed. These tears are hypocritical tears that are followed with no lasting alteration in the frame of the heart." (WJE 22:209)

are conceited of themselves on that account.”²⁸⁷ Such circumspection was the mood of Puritan worship. Valuing decorous bodily carriage and preservation of order, Puritans preferred, even enforced, a standing posture in public prayer,²⁸⁸ possibly with eyes uplifted to heaven in imitation of Jesus.²⁸⁹ It cannot be surprising, then, how controversial were the scenes of Edwards’ revival meetings, like at Suffield, Massachusetts, on July 6, 1741, with attendees “crumpled to the ground, their bodies contorting with such violence, according to one witness, that ‘you would have thought there bones all broken, or rather that they had no bones.’”²⁹⁰ The “screaming out” and “shrieking” of travailing prayer over “the Sins of others” in revival meetings were what Charles Chauncy, Edwards’s fiercest opponent, cited in questioning whether

...the GOD of Order, would, by the Exertment of his Power, raise this Concern to such a Height, as that his own Worship should be broke up upon the Account of it? ... These are the Reasons, why I can’t entertain so high an Opinion as some others do, of the Terrors appearing in strange bodily Effects, which have been so common in this Land.²⁹¹

Though Edwards believed a work of God was “not to be judged of by any effects on the bodies of men; such as tears, trembling, groans, loud outcries, agonies of body, or the failing of bodily strength,”²⁹² nevertheless, with all its perils, the physicality of earnest prayer was vitally important to him, not to be jettisoned due to the excesses of some. Posture and tears, appetite and fasting, “breathings and pantings,” heat and taste²⁹³ were corporeal

²⁸⁷ WJE 19:532-33. “Tears are very deceitful things and are much less to be regarded than some other things.” (Edwards 2003, “The Way to Obtain the Blessing of God Is Not to Let Him Go Except He Bless Us,” *op. cit.*, 27)

²⁸⁸ “Considered ‘noxious,’ kneeling, like so many other customs, was seen as a throwback to Catholicism and the Church of England. ... Most churches had a ‘tithingman,’ an officer of the parish appointed annually to preserve strict order in services. Specifically, the tithingman would sit at a desk near the front of the church and carefully watch the moves of every worshipper.” (Moore 2005, 32)

²⁸⁹ Davies 1990, 172.

²⁹⁰ Winiarski 2005, 684 (quotation taken from a recently discovered letter by eyewitness Samuel Phillips Savage, July 6-7, 1741 [two days before Edwards preached “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God”], transcribed in this article’s Appendix, 739).

²⁹¹ Chauncy 1975 [1743], 107-08.

²⁹² WJE 4:230.

²⁹³ Though beyond the scope of this project, Edwards’s concept of taste as revelation underscores the broader importance of the physical senses in his theology and piety: “There is likewise such a thing as a divine taste, given and maintained by the Spirit of God, in the hearts of the saints, whereby they are in like manner led and guided in discerning and distinguishing the true spiritual and holy beauty of actions.” (WJE 2:283) See also Campbell 2003, 178; Taylor 1988, 278-79. Edwards expressly highlights “sweetness” as the favoured idiom of

features of strenuous prayer figuring into Edwards' broader spirituality which "turned the attention of Americans to the outward manifestation," Clebsch has observed, "the sensibility, the palpability of religious experience in concrete human lives."²⁹⁴ He framed prayer as a venting,²⁹⁵ the longings and "pantings of heart"²⁹⁶ that are given to the saints by the Holy Spirit: "their prayers are the breathings of the same Spirit."²⁹⁷ Ardent petitioners were envisaged as becoming out-of-breath from the vehemence of prayer's conflicts, sweating heavily like Brainerd from the effort,²⁹⁸ or becoming swallowed up in prayer's ecstasy, losing all strength like Sarah Edwards, and falling to the floor.²⁹⁹ Spiritual raptures like this were referred to as the tactile experiences of "God's caress" by Puritans,³⁰⁰ and as a "sweet burning"³⁰¹ by Edwards, which he commended in *Religious Affections* as "an inward burning ... as natural to the new creature, as vital heat is to the body."³⁰² Despite their risks, tears were an especially significant physical aspect of ardent prayer as the saints strove to imitate

his personal experience of God, using the word fifty-five times in ten pages and two more times in the conclusion of his *Personal Narrative*. (Hambrick-Stowe 2003, 86)

²⁹⁴ Clebsch, *op. cit.*, 20. "[Edwards] made religious experience so outwardly palpable that these Christian truths and the realities for which they stood became sweet to the taste, symmetrical to the eye, harmonious to the ear, pleasant to the touch and the smell." (*ibid*, 17-18)

²⁹⁵ As a nineteen-year-old, Edwards was speaking of earnest prayer in this way: "64. Resolved, when I find those 'groanings which cannot be uttered,' of which the Apostle speaks [Rom. 8:26], ... that I will promote them to the utmost of my power, and that I will not be weary of earnestly endeavoring to vent my desires, nor of the repetitions of such earnestness." (WJE 16:758)

²⁹⁶ WJE 2:208.

²⁹⁷ WJE 17:303. "The Spirit of God is the same with the breath of God, or what God breathes. Now what are so properly said to be the breathings of the soul, as its affections?" (WJE 13:307)

²⁹⁸ "I was in such anguish, and pleaded with so much earnestness and importunity, that when I rose from my knees I felt extremely weak and overcome; I could scarcely walk straight, my joints were loosed, the sweat ran down my face and body, and nature seemed as if it would dissolve." (WJE 7:261; see also Chapter I, note 288)

²⁹⁹ During Sarah Edwards' extraordinary religious experience of 1742, "the intenseness of my feelings" in communion with God was such that it "overcame me, and took away my strength, so that I could no longer stand on my feet." (McCulley and Baker, *op. cit.*, 6, 15) While reporting becoming "overwhelmed" (5, 6) and "faint with joy" to the point that she "sunk down on the spot" (7), Sarah also described being able to "scarcely refrain from leaping" (10) and being so alive in prayer that "I could not sit still, but walked the room for some time, in a kind of transport" (15).

³⁰⁰ "Puritan diaries abound with records of individuals meditating and praying to God, and with the feeling of God's caress that often blessed the prayerful believer." (Bremer 2006, 486; see also 2009, 48.) So central was this physical paradigm of piety that Cohen took it as the title of his book, *God's Caress: The Psychology of Puritan Religious Experience*.

³⁰¹ WJE 16:793. See also note 1.

³⁰² WJE 2:283.

Christ in what He “shed tears for, and poured out prayers for.”³⁰³ Now was the era of the church’s continued travail “wherein she sowed in tears.”³⁰⁴

Indispensable to the church’s petitionary vocation was its “spiritual appetite,” which “having a taste of little, makes ’em desire much. And that inclines them ... [to] pour out their desires before God, and to ask of him those great blessings.”³⁰⁵ Edwards understood “holy hungerings and thirstings”³⁰⁶ as a typology revealing both the effect of affliction³⁰⁷ but also, and more, the fruit of regeneration wherein the saints have been imbued with insatiable desire for God.³⁰⁸ Unquenchable spiritual appetites were the driver of prayer³⁰⁹ and a verification of authentic affections³¹⁰ for Edwards. So Christians should “endeavour to promote spiritual appetites by laying yourself in the way of allurements.”³¹¹ “There is no such thing as excess in our taking of this spiritual food,” Edwards preached. “There is no such virtue as temperance in spiritual feasting.”³¹²

But in the practice of spiritual fasting, Edwards found considerable virtue and support to earnest prayer. Public days of earnest prayer and fasting had been a common practice in Puritan New England since the seventeenth century, some of these becoming annualised³¹³

³⁰³ WJE 5:342.

³⁰⁴ WJE 9:477. In his examination of Scottish communions as precursors to American revivals, Leigh Eric Schmidt comments that “the tears, the sobbing, the sighing, the solemn visages were part of the spectacle, part of the drama of the communion season... Being bathed in tears and being washed in the blood of Christ were, in sum, often tandem events.” (Schmidt, *op. cit.*, 79)

³⁰⁵ WJE 19:785.

³⁰⁶ Sermon 418, *op. cit.*, 52:L.3v.

³⁰⁷ “Such especially may be said to be thirsty in this respect that [are] in afflicted circumstances.” (Sermon 909 on Jn 7:37, WJEO 66:L.1v.)

³⁰⁸ “Regeneration restores those spiritual appetites by the infusing [of] a spiritual nature into the soul.” (Sermon 871, *op. cit.*, L.2v.-3r.) “The same mighty Power that has given the appetites is able to satisfy them.” (Sermon 418, *op. cit.*, L.7v.)

³⁰⁹ “We find nothing that has more to stir men up to action ... than appetites.” (Sermon 418, *op. cit.*, L.13v.)

³¹⁰ See note 67-68.

³¹¹ Sermon 117 on Cant. 5:1, WJEO 44:L.9v.

³¹² WJE 14:286.

³¹³ Yearly days of fasting and prayer were the baseline expectation of those desiring revival. (WJE 14:505) Later, defending the Awakening, Edwards entreated sceptics, most of whom had “kept from year to year days of public fasting and prayer,” to concede the possibility that these public fasts were producing hoped-for outcomes: “Now when so great and extensive a reformation is so suddenly and wonderfully accomplished, in those very things that we have sought God for, shall we not acknowledge it?” (WJE 4:331)

and others being called in response to calamity.³¹⁴ Edwards thought that “ministers, above all persons, ought to be much ... in praying and fasting one with another.”³¹⁵ But he stressed even more the discipline of “secret fasting”—“especially proper for some, proper for all on some occasions”³¹⁶—as a duty “that all professing Christians should practice, and frequently practice.”³¹⁷ Here again Edwards turned to Brainerd as his paragon, noting the close correlation between the way Brainerd’s secret fasting intensified his intercessions and the special blessings he received from God:

Among all the many days he spent in secret fasting and prayer that he gives an account of in his diary, there is scarce an instance of one but what was either attended or soon followed with apparent success and remarkable blessing in special incomes and consolations of God’s Spirit; and very often before the day was ended.³¹⁸

Paradoxically, although Edwards, in his sermon at Brainerd’s funeral, spoke of fasting and prayer as practices Brainerd “earnestly recommended on his deathbed”³¹⁹ to some young ministerial candidates, the young hero’s early passing³²⁰ may have been hastened by the extreme physicality of his piety. Edwards allowed that an “imperfection in Mr. Brainerd ... was his being excessive in his labors; not taking due care to proportion his fatigues to his strength.”³²¹

³¹⁴ For example, Edwards preached ten times within a two-year period on special fast days related to military conflicts. (WJE 5:35-36, note 2)

³¹⁵ WJE 4:507.

³¹⁶ MS Sermon 608 on Zech 12:10, Apr. 1741, Gen. Mss. 151, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, L.3r.

³¹⁷ WJE 4:521.

³¹⁸ WJE 7:531.

³¹⁹ *ibid.*, 553

³²⁰ See Chapter I, note 150.

³²¹ WJE 7:95.

Practice

Sound or Silence The physicality of childbearing emblematised travailing

prayer's anguish, pointing to why it could often be very loud. Citing the prophecies of Isaiah, Edwards believed great volume of **sound** would accompany the glorious days to come:

It seems to be foretold that the Gospel should be especially preached in a loud and earnest manner, at the introduction of the prosperous state of religion, in the latter days. ... And this will be one way that the church of God will cry at that time, like a travailing woman, when Christ mystical is going to be brought forth.³²²

Revival meetings could be very noisy. Eyewitnesses were often initially shaken by the “Groans & Screaches as of Women in the Pains of Childbirth; but above these were Houlings and Yellings,”³²³ critics protested, that were being incited by the preacher's “vehemence both of voice and gesture” to the point that “shrieks catch from one to another ... and bring forward a general scream.”³²⁴ As we have seen,³²⁵ Edwards was unwilling officially to disallow “loud outcries” in the revival since he had found there to be “no rule of Scripture given us to judge of spirits by, that does, either expressly or indirectly, exclude such effects.”³²⁶ In his observation, one product of the converting influences of God's Spirit was that some “han't been able to forbear crying out with a loud voice.”³²⁷ Even more, Edwards pressed, if Christ was willing to pray for us with “loud and bitter cries,” how can we “yet be cold, and heavy, and insensible, and regardless!”³²⁸ A readiness for noisy intercession,

³²² WJE 4:389 (Isa 40:9; 52:7-8; 42:14).

³²³ Winiarski, *op. cit.*, Appendix, 738.

³²⁴ WJE 4:473, note 1 (from the anonymous [Charles Chauncy?] *Letter from a Gentleman in Boston to Mr. George Wishart, One of the Ministers of Edinburgh, Concerning the State of Religion in New England* [Edinburgh, 1742]).

³²⁵ See note 292.

³²⁶ WJE 4:231.

³²⁷ WJE 4:175. One of the converts possibly admitted by Edwards to communion at Suffield was a “dumb and deaf” man whose convictions were so intense that “from his Knees in his Chamber where he was found praying he was heard by an unusual noise at near a miles distance, not by One only, but by the whole neighborhood within this Space, so as to draw them together.” (Winiarski, *op. cit.*, Appendix, 737) Similar were the expressions of the saints encountering the “eternal enjoyment of God's immutable love,” as with Sarah Edwards: “Melted and overcome by the sweetness of this assurance, I fell into a great flow of tears, and could not forbear weeping aloud.” (McCulley and Baker, *op. cit.*, 2)

³²⁸ WJE 2:123.

emulating Jesus, was the call Edwards issued to ministers in his first ordination sermon to be published:

Look into the garden of Gethsemane, ... [in] which he cried out with that loud and lamentable and repeated cry. Thus he travailed in birth with his seed; thus he labored and suffered for the salvation of those souls that the Father had committed to him. This is the example of the great Shepherd.³²⁹

However, Edwards was equally reluctant to sanction loudness in prayer without some clarification, which he provided in *Religious Affections*. “Gracious affections don’t tend to make men bold, forward, noisy and boisterous,” he wrote, “but rather to speak trembling”³³⁰ in true humility, which is the inverse of “a noisy thing; it is not loud and boisterous.”³³¹ Edwards had observed how revival meetings could spread a virus of volume, to the point that the “loudness and vehemence of their speech” was something persons could become “insensibly habituated to, by example and custom.”³³² “False religion may cause persons to be loud and earnest in prayer,”³³³ Edwards warned:

The worshippers of false gods were wont to lift their voices and cry aloud, lest their gods should fail of hearing them, as Elijah tauntingly bid the worshippers of Baal do, 1 Kings xviii. 27. But the true God hears the silent petitions of his people. He needs not that we should cry aloud; yea, he knows and perfectly understands when we only pray in our hearts, as Hannah did, 1 Sam. i. 13.³³⁴

The Puritans had stressed the value of inaudible prayer, knowing that sometimes one’s “affections are too big for their expressions,” Richard Hollinworth (1607-56) wrote, so that “the Spirit of Prayer may be found in **silent** Ejaculations.”³³⁵ Edwards echoed this idea that “there is a faith and fervency of soul that may be expressed in a silent Prayer or Ejaculation as in a long Loud Prayer that overcomes the most high.”³³⁶ “Long” was as unmeritorious as

³²⁹ WJE 25:72.

³³⁰ WJE 2:361.

³³¹ *ibid*, 2:335-36: “The Scripture represents it as of a contrary nature. Ahab, when he had a visible humility, a resemblance of true humility, went softly (1 Kgs. 21:27).”

³³² WJE 4:472-73: “They will be more and more violent and boisterous, and will grow louder and louder, till their actions and behavior becomes indeed very absurd.”

³³³ WJE 2:164.

³³⁴ Edwards 1998, “The Most High a Prayer-Hearing God,” *op. cit.*, 115.

³³⁵ Hollinworth 1656, 53, 51. “Words are but the outside of prayer. ... The Father hath compassion on his sick Child, though it cannot speak articulately, nor speak at all, but only sighs, groans, looks upon his Father, and then his Bowels yearn.” (53-54)

³³⁶ Sermon 95 on Am 8:11, WJEO 43:L.16r.

“loud” to Edwards. The Puritan norm on a common Sabbath was for the minister to pray between sixty to ninety minutes, usually with the congregation standing,³³⁷ and to preach about the same amount of time.³³⁸ But Samuel Hopkins, Edwards’ first biographer and a frequent visitor in their home, commented that “he was not wont, in ordinary cases to be long in his prayers: an error which he observed was often hurtful to public and social prayer, as it tends rather to damp than promote true devotion.”³³⁹

This sound-and-silence, duration-and-brevity balance in Edwards’ view of traveling prayer was an expression of the “harmony, symmetry, proportion, and fitness [that] affected the way Edwards thought about almost everything.”³⁴⁰ His tenth authenticating sign “wherein those affections that are truly gracious and holy, differ from those that are false, is beautiful symmetry and proportion.”³⁴¹ “Without doubt,” he explained, “some saints have been in great distress for the souls of particular persons, so as to be as it were in travail for them.”³⁴² But when these agonies in prayer rise to a pitch beyond “what has been usually heard or read of in eminent saints,” or if these outcries seem mismatched to the petitioner’s usual patterns of compassion and concern, “such agonies are greatly to be suspected.”³⁴³ A person’s fervent intercessions, in all aspects, should accord with the “universality of their sanctification.”³⁴⁴

Importunity and “Praying Through”

Though saints may pray at different levels across the decibel spectrum, the call in Scripture to “give God no rest” in prayer was unmistakably loud and clear to Edwards:

³³⁷ Moore 2005, 31.

³³⁸ Hambrick-Stowe 1982, 105. See also 2008, 201.

³³⁹ Hopkins 1804, 53. Those lacking “the nature of true grace” tend “to be zealously engaged in the external exercise of religion,” Edwards wrote. “So it was with the Pharisees; they made long prayers, and fasted twice a week.” (WJE 2:164)

³⁴⁰ Holifield 2003, 105.

³⁴¹ WJE 2:368.

³⁴² *ibid.*, 368-69

³⁴³ *ibid.*, 369. Edwards had observed those whose “earnestness seems to arise from a great mixture of human passion, and an undue and intemperate agitation of the spirits, which appears by their earnestness and vehemence not being proportioned to the nature of the subject they insist on.” (WJE 4:462)

³⁴⁴ *ibid.*, 365

I know of no place in the Bible, where so strong an expression is made use of to signify importunity in prayer, as is used in Is. 62:6-7 where the people of God are called upon to be importunate for this mercy: "Ye that make mention of the Lord, keep not silence, and give him no rest, till he establish, and till he make Jerusalem a praise in the earth." How strong is the phrase! And how loud is this call to the church of God, to be fervent and incessant in their cries to him for this great mercy!³⁴⁵

Biblical evidence insisting on **importunity** as a trait of the kind of praying God waits for appeared rife to Edwards,³⁴⁶ especially as depicted in the insistence and repetition of "the importunate widow [who] obtained what she sought by wearying the judge with her constant importunity."³⁴⁷ By this parable Christ "encourages us to follow God with incessant prayer ... [and] not to let him alone," Edwards preached.³⁴⁸ Earnest prayer was not a mood or fit for now and then, but "it should be the way of our living,"³⁴⁹ the "constant bent of our soul"³⁵⁰ to come back again and again to God with our supplications for as long as it takes until "God is as it were overcome."³⁵¹ Edwards believed "God is represented in Scripture as though he could not withstand the importunate prayers of his people."³⁵²

Importunity, like the daring and contending of travailing prayer, was not necessitated out of a stubbornness in God or any kind of reluctance by Him to answer, as though our doggedness in petition was something God "needs to make him willing to bestow the blessing."³⁵³ Instead, "this is the way God hath taught us to seek a blessing"³⁵⁴ because of the benefit of importunity in the petitioner to improve the manner and content of the request.³⁵⁵ Moreover, tenacity and persistence have been the nature of Christ's pursuit of us, "as an

³⁴⁵ WJE 5:348. See Chapter I, note 146. Edwards concludes "The Most High a Prayer Hearing God" with a call to importunity for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit quoting this verse. (*The Works of President Edwards in Four Volumes, A Reprint of the Worcester Edition* [online], vol. 4, 572)

³⁴⁶ At one section of "Hypocrites Deficient in the Duty of Prayer," Edwards strings together twelve texts from the Old and New Testaments to substantiate how "thus abundantly the Scripture insists upon it, that we should persevere in the duty of prayer." (Edwards 2001, "Hypocrites Deficient in the Duty of Prayer," *op. cit.*, 367)

³⁴⁷ WJE 19:425 (Lk18:1-8).

³⁴⁸ Edwards 2003, "The Way to Obtain the Blessing of God is Not to Let Him Go Except He Bless Us," *op. cit.*, 21.

³⁴⁹ Sermon 458, *op. cit.*, L.5v.

³⁵⁰ WJE 19:277.

³⁵¹ WJE 24:180.

³⁵² Sermon 224 on Hos 11:9, WJEO 46:L.10v.

³⁵³ Edwards 2003, "The Way to Obtain the Blessing of God Is Not to Let Him Go Except He Bless Us," *op. cit.*, 22.

³⁵⁴ *ibid.*, 20

³⁵⁵ See note 196.

importunate suitor for our love.”³⁵⁶ So He should be entreated by us not in any “slighty way”³⁵⁷ but with “watchfulness in order to a perseverance in this duty of prayer.”³⁵⁸ Such determination calls for resolutions “so formed as that they shall not dwindle away”³⁵⁹ and hearts “thoroughly disposed to go on and hold out to the end.”³⁶⁰ But perhaps Edwards’ supreme incentive for importunity in prayer was his view of its function as a precursor³⁶¹ to the eschaton: “that the glorious peace and prosperity of the Messiah’s reign shall be given in answer to the earnest and importunate prayer of the church.”³⁶² In “Importunate Prayer for Millennial Glory,” preached at the height of the Awakening in April 1741 as God seemed “to be as it were coming forth out of his place to do some extraordinary thing,” Edwards called on the saints and even “those that yet remain in a natural condition ... earnestly and importunately to pray for the glorious {state of [the] church on earth}.”³⁶³ Edwards depicted the outpouring of the Holy Spirit as having a contingent, almost causal, association with this manner of praying, since it was “because of his importunity,”³⁶⁴ Jesus taught, that the needy friend in His parable was helped at midnight to find bread.³⁶⁵

Generations of Puritans had been taught from the likes of Thomas Shepard that “the Lord ever gives his importunate beggars their desires...; long he is many times before he gives, but payeth well for their waiting.”³⁶⁶ Edwards could also reference contemporary models, like four-year-old Phebe Bartlett, whose prayers, chronicled in the *Faithful Narrative*, sounded unusual when overheard by her mother, for “her voice seemed to be as of

³⁵⁶ Sermon 191 on Rom 5:7-8, WJEO 46:L.3r.

³⁵⁷ WJE 19:285.

³⁵⁸ Edwards 2001, “Hypocrites Deficient in the Duty of Prayer,” *op. cit.*, 370.

³⁵⁹ Sermon 142, *op. cit.*, L.6r.

³⁶⁰ WJE 19:288.

³⁶¹ It is “God’s revealed will and purpose,” Edwards wrote in *An Humble Attempt*, “that, a little before [the coming of Christ’s kingdom], his people be earnestly seeking and waiting, and importunately and incessantly crying to God for it.” (WJE 5:395)

³⁶² WJE 11:279. See note 29.

³⁶³ WJE 22:373.

³⁶⁴ Lk 11:8 [KJV]

³⁶⁵ WJE 22:221.

³⁶⁶ Shepard 1967 [1853], vol. 1, 12.

one exceeding importunate and engaged.”³⁶⁷ Being enabled to cry to God “with a childlike spirit, with importunity,”³⁶⁸ Brainerd described having prayed with such “earnestness and importunity, that when I rose from my knees I felt extremely weak and overcome.”³⁶⁹ In his own youth, yet contemplating his death, Edwards thought “I should wish, that I had been more importunate with God.”³⁷⁰ And it was this kind of sweeping duration through the whole of life that structured Edwards’ view of importunity. He preached decisively for praying *with* faith, that “true prayer is nothing else but faith expressed.”³⁷¹ But he did not appear to teach, as some had experienced before him,³⁷² a kind of praying *into* faith, the “**praying through**” to an assurance and cessation from importunity’s reiterations commended by later revivalists.³⁷³ Earnest prayer that obtains the blessing of God was of a “perpetual importunity” to Edwards, not “for a year ... or any other limited time,”³⁷⁴ for “this whole life is not too long to pray.”³⁷⁵

Authenticity and the Role of the Holy Spirit

Despite his urgings, however, many new saints did not pray their whole life, not even importuning a year. Historian Peter Beck suggests Edwards became convinced that

³⁶⁷ WJE 4:200.

³⁶⁸ WJE 7:243. Edwards compared our insistence in prayer to a child “going to its parents and being importunate for food, and if it be denied its food in its appointed season there will be bitter cries.” (Sermon 527 on Jn 21:5, WJEO 54:L.21v.)

³⁶⁹ WJE 7:261.

³⁷⁰ WJE 16:774.

³⁷¹ Sermon 554, *op. cit.*, 55:L.6v. (This section is omitted from the Nichols edition.) See Edwards 1998, “The Most High a Prayer-Hearing God,” *op. cit.*, 117: “God always hears the prayer of faith.”

³⁷² In 1716, Cotton Mather spent a night in one of his prayer vigils, writing in his Diary what became virtually a prophecy of the Great Awakening and is one example in Puritanism of the experience of “praying through”: “But we can do very Little. Our Encumbrances are insuperable; our Difficulties are infinite. If He would please, to fulfill the ancient Prophecy, of *pouring out the Spirit on all Flesh*, and revive the extraordinary and supernatural Operations with which He planted His Religion in the primitive Times of Christianity, ... and cause them to speak with the Tongues of Men under the Energy of Angels ...; wonderful Things would be done immediately... I pleaded, that His Word had given us Reason to hope for a Return of these Powers. ... I pleaded ... for a Descent of His mighty Angels, to give wonderful Shakes unto the World, and so seize upon the Ministers of His Kingdome, as to do Things which will give an irresistible Efficacy unto their Ministry; I concluded with a strong Impression on my Mind; *They are coming! They are coming! They are coming! They will quickly be upon us; and the World shall be shaken wonderfully!*” (Mather 1957?, vol. 2, 365-66)

³⁷³ See Chapter I, note 341.

³⁷⁴ Edwards 2003, “The Way to Obtain the Blessing of God Is Not to Let Him Go Except He Bless Us,” *op. cit.*, 20.

³⁷⁵ MS Sermon 1143 on Rom 12:12, June 1755, Gen. Mss. 151, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, L.4r., col. 2.

many supposed converts of the recent revivals were not converts at all, for they had failed to remain committed in things of the faith, particularly prayer. ... Had they been truly converted they would have continued in prayer. Had they continued in prayer, the revival would not have ended and God would not have been denied his glory yet again.³⁷⁶

The Awakening's diminution created a crisis of **authenticity** for Edwards in distinguishing between "real prayers and pretended ones,"³⁷⁷ the latter being counterfeit piety of hypocrites whose manner of prayer is, "after a while, in a great measure to leave it off."³⁷⁸

Discerning genuineness in religious experience was for Edwards "a subject on which my mind has been peculiarly intent, ever since I first entered on the study of divinity,"³⁷⁹ what Finbarr Curtis considers "the central project that ran throughout Edwards's inquiries into revivalism."³⁸⁰ Such was the emphasis of the Puritanism that, as we are seeing, influenced Edwards' perceptions of prayer and held, in most respects, his steadfast devotion.³⁸¹ Strong interest in what substantiated valid spiritual expression had been a feature of Puritanism since the late sixteenth century,³⁸² impelling relentless examination of "both their own lives, due to the powers of self-deception," Nichols has observed, "and the lives of others, due to the subtleties of hypocrisy."³⁸³ In this milieu, Edwards was formed with self-examination as a way of life. "The main difference between men and beasts," he wrote, "is that men are capable of reflecting upon what passes in their own minds; beasts have nothing but direct consciousness. Men are capable of viewing themselves

³⁷⁶ Beck 2010, 138.

³⁷⁷ Edwards 1998, "The Most High a Prayer-Hearing God," *op. cit.*, 117.

³⁷⁸ Edwards 2001, "Hypocrites Deficient in the Duty of Prayer," *op. cit.*, 355.

³⁷⁹ WJE 2:84.

³⁸⁰ Curtis, *op. cit.*, 48. Ehrat concurs, viewing *Religious Affections* as Edwards' decisive treatment of "the central questions and concerns which preoccupied him for his whole life: What is the nature of genuine Christian experience?" (Ehrat 1988, 12) In *Visible Saints: The History of the Puritan Idea*, Edmund Morgan asserts that it was Edwards' repudiation of the Stoddardean half-way covenant (see Chapter II, note 21), two years after *Religious Affections* was published, and the determination to grant baptism only to "visible saints" and their children that "launched a new cycle in the history of the idea" of how New England Puritans, from the 1630s, had differentiated authentic from insincere or accidental religious expression. (Morgan 1963, 151-52)

³⁸¹ J. I. Packer has observed, "Convictionally and confessionally, [Edwards] was a tenacious adherent of the Puritan theology that had shaped New England, and coming at a time when the fires of that heritage were burning low, he gave it a new lease of intellectual and communal life." (Packer, *op. cit.*, 87) See Chapter II, notes 16-17.

³⁸² Walton, *op. cit.*, 226.

³⁸³ Nichols 2001, 115. "Hypocrisy and self-deception stand next to Arminianism and deism as the Puritan's most feared challenges." (*ibid*, 114)

contemplatively.”³⁸⁴ So Edwards frequently funnelled his sermon application down to specific measures of introspection, as he did at a “private meeting to pray for rain” in July of 1736, asking those present “to search ourselves and see whether ... there be not something special that we have reason to think is offensive amongst us as a people.”³⁸⁵

But personal reflection only went so far. As the revivals progressed, Ava Chamberlain has suggested, Edwards grew to realise “that he had failed to perceive the close connection between emotional religious experience and self-deception.”³⁸⁶ Stressing as he did the empirical value of Christian practice, scrutinised with “the most critical observation”³⁸⁷ of a person’s lifestyle according to the twelve positive signs of the *Religious Affections*,³⁸⁸ Edwards “was attempting to combine the new revivalism with the older vigilance”³⁸⁹ of Puritan watchfulness and frequent worry about hypocrisy. In these observations, prayer was an effective gauge for Edwards, observing as he did how possible it was for a petitioner to exhibit outward mannerisms of travailing prayer and his or her heart still be wrong. The distinction he identified between the authentically earnest and enduring prayer of the saints and the misled, short-lived praying of pretenders was clear: “Hypocrites never had **the spirit of prayer** given them. They may have been stirred up to the external performance of this duty, and that with a great deal of earnestness and affection, and yet always have been destitute of the true spirit of prayer.”³⁹⁰

³⁸⁴ WJE 6:374.f

³⁸⁵ Sermon 400, *op. cit.*, L.7v. As another example, see WJE 22:147-48 for an extensive catalogue of more than fourteen questions to prompt “persons [in] examining themselves whether or no they are possessed with” the essential virtue of zeal.

³⁸⁶ Chamberlain 1994, 555.

³⁸⁷ WJE 4:472.

³⁸⁸ To the final sign of true piety, John Smith comments, “Edwards gave the largest measure of his attention and, in fact, he described it as the ‘principal sign’ (WJE 2:406) by which we are to judge. This principal sign turns out to be the practice or conduct of the person, his bearing in the world he inhabits.” (Smith 1974, 174)

³⁸⁹ *ibid*, 556

³⁹⁰ Edwards 2001, “Hypocrites Deficient in the Duty of Prayer,” *op. cit.*, 359.

In his sermon, “Hypocrites Deficient in the Duty of Prayer,” Edwards explained that “the spirit of prayer is an holy spirit, a gracious spirit,”³⁹¹ what he interpreted as the “spirit of grace and supplications” referred to in Zech 12:10 [KJV].³⁹²

The true spirit of prayer is no other than God’s own Spirit dwelling in the hearts of the saints. And as this spirit comes from God, so doth it naturally tend to God in holy breathings and pantings. It naturally leads to God, to converse with him by prayer.³⁹³

Puritans like Thomas Shepard had described how God’s Spirit “singles a man out” to create and empower an “internall spirit of prayer”³⁹⁴ in the saints, what Edwards perceived in the Old Testament character Daniel, who “understood by books that the time of God’s people’s redemption out of Babylon was nigh, [and] it stirred up in him a spirit of prayer for the mercy.”³⁹⁵ Here was an example of the spirit of prayer functioning as one of God’s “preceding providences,”³⁹⁶ kindled ahead of the mercy needed, dispatched first³⁹⁷ by the “special design”³⁹⁸ of God as preparation for His work and indication that “it soon will be accomplished”³⁹⁹—the sequence Edwards understood as the essential blueprint of earnest prayer for revival. And who took the initiative in this plan was critical, as Edwards explained in 1735 to the Northampton church following the Awakening’s genesis there:

Let none say that it was because there was more of a spirit of prayer in this place than other towns. For if there was more of a spirit of prayer, God did not bestow this mercy on us, because we had a spirit of prayer for it; but, on the contrary, he stirred up a spirit of prayer, because he had a design of bestowing this mercy. The spirit of prayer is the fruit of this grace of God to us, and not the cause.⁴⁰⁰

³⁹¹ *ibid*

³⁹² WJE 25:204. “Wherever there is a true spirit of supplication, there is the spirit of grace.” (Edwards 2001, “Hypocrites Deficient in the Duty of Prayer,” *op. cit.*, 359)

³⁹³ Edwards 2001, “Hypocrites Deficient in the Duty of Prayer,” *op. cit.*, 359. Edwards taught that the “glorious day that the Church of God is to enjoy on earth” will be brought to pass when, at its beginning, “the Spirit of God ... will operate in a remarkable manner as a spirit of prayer.” (MS Sermon 608 on Zech 12:10, Apr. 1741, Gen. Mss. 151, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, L.1r.)

³⁹⁴ Shepard 1657, 94, 100. See Hambrick-Stowe 1982, 177-178, for further discussion of Puritan understanding of the “spirit of prayer.”

³⁹⁵ WJE 22:377 (Dan 9:1-20).

³⁹⁶ WJE 5:353.

³⁹⁷ “From the representation made in prophecy,” Edwards wrote in *An Humble Attempt*, the “glorious day of revival of religion ... will be fulfilled something after this manner; first, that there shall be given much of a spirit of prayer to God’s people.” (WJE 5:315, 317)

³⁹⁸ MS Sermon 608 on Zech 12:10, Apr. 1741, Gen. Mss. 151, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, L.1v.

³⁹⁹ WJE 5:351. “Whenever the time comes that God gives an extraordinary spirit of prayer for this promised advancement of his kingdom on earth..., then the fulfilling [of] this event is nigh.” (*ibid*, 353)

⁴⁰⁰ WJE 19:467.

Alongside this process of priming and provisioning revival, the spirit of prayer also served to equip the saint for personal effectiveness in the petitionary commission. What authenticated prayer as a “good work and that acceptable unto God as a sweet savour [is] when it is performed with a spirit of prayer,”⁴⁰¹ a gifting Hopkins observed in Edwards,⁴⁰² and Edwards prized in Brainerd.⁴⁰³ Brainerd appeared to experience the spirit of prayer as somewhat unpredictable, even losable,⁴⁰⁴ perhaps explaining why Edwards could write about the “means to excite a spirit of prayer ... in all those who are not buried in ignorance or under the power of a lethargic stupor.”⁴⁰⁵ But as Lyrene points out, “a careful distinction should be made between the promotion of prayer and the spread of the spirit of prayer,”⁴⁰⁶ the latter of which was, for Edwards, something only God could do—the “voice of the Spirit,”⁴⁰⁷ enabling persons to travail with “groanings that cannot be uttered [Rom. 8:26],”⁴⁰⁸ that is “remarkably given them concerning a particularly mercy from time to time.”⁴⁰⁹

⁴⁰¹ Sermon 85, *op. cit.*, L.6r. “Christian prayer is by the Spirit.” (MS Sermon 809 on Ezk 36:36-37, Feb. 1746, Gen. Mss. 151, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, 8)

⁴⁰² “He appeared to have much of the grace and spirit of prayer; to pray with the spirit and with understanding: and he performed this part of [his] duty much to the acceptance and edification of those who joined with him.” (Hopkins, *op. cit.*, 53)

⁴⁰³ See Chapter I, note 150.

⁴⁰⁴ “Prayer was so sweet an exercise to me, that I knew not how to cease, lest I should lose the spirit of prayer.” (WJE 7:241) “I was refreshed and encouraged: Found a spirit of prayer, in the evening, and earnest longings for the illumination and conversion of these poor Indians.” (*ibid.*, 364-65)

⁴⁰⁵ WJE 16:274. (Here Edwards was citing a March 4, 1748, letter from Mr. John Brainerd, excerpted in his own May 23, 1749, letter to Revd William McCulloch.) Edwards apparently believed the spirit of prayer could be induced or aroused, at least in part, by circumstances, as occurred in the colonial expedition against the French-fortified town of Louisburg on Cape Breton Island in the Gulf of St. Lawrence: “There was very discernibly an extraordinary spirit of prayer given the people of God in New England, with respect to this undertaking, more than in any public affair within my remembrance.” (WJE 5:449) See notes 16, 276.

⁴⁰⁶ Lyrene, *op. cit.*, 124.

⁴⁰⁷ MS Sermon 809 on Ezk 36:36-37, Feb. 1746, Gen. Mss. 151, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, 8.

⁴⁰⁸ WJE 4:208.

⁴⁰⁹ WJE 4:441.

Context

Setting We have already seen how desperate events and circumstances could provide the **setting** for travailing prayer in colonial New England.⁴¹⁰ Thomas Kidd has noted how “the public day of prayer and fasting remained one of Massachusetts’⁴¹¹ and Connecticut’s most prominent special observances,”⁴¹² frequently called by clergy in the face of public danger, hazardous duties to be undertaken, great sickness, lack of some notable blessing, egregious transgression, or other threatening calamity.⁴¹³ Puritan theology⁴¹⁴ interpreted these conditions as signs of God’s judgement, for which, Edwards believed, ardent, inward-looking prayer for revival was the only remedy, a prescription that boomed in Congregationalist meetinghouses on these crucial days.⁴¹⁵ In *Some Thoughts Concerning the Revival*, Edwards spells out his vision for the structure of days of fasting and prayer, comprising the varied public settings of family, prayer society, and congregation,⁴¹⁶ each of which will be examined in this section:

In days of fasting and prayer, wherein the whole church or congregation is concerned, if the whole day, besides what is spent in our **families**, was not spent in the **meetinghouse**, but part of it in particular **praying companies or societies**, it would have a tendency to animate and engage devotion more than if the whole day were spent in public, where the people are no way active themselves in the worship, any otherwise than as they join with the minister. The

⁴¹⁰ See pp. 123-25.

⁴¹¹ Richard Gildrie analysed fast days in colonial Massachusetts from 1632 to 1686 finding twenty-nine had been called for troubles in the order of nature (*e.g.*, threats to harvest, disease, losses at sea, and others); fifty-eight were necessary because of trouble in the social order (*e.g.*, heresy, contention, loss of leaders, neglect of family, concerns for the younger generation, and threats from other nations); forty focused on trouble in Christendom; twenty-three were required for public or private sins; and twenty-two were for unspecified purposes, for a total of 172 fast days, approximately one every four months. (Gildrie 1982, 15)

⁴¹² Kidd 2004, 23. W. DeLoss Love’s *The Fast and Thanksgiving Days of New England* contains an exhaustive calendar of these observances in the American colonies showing how they grew in importance in New England over the course of the seventeenth century. (Love 1895, 464-514)

⁴¹³ “The fast especially became a standard weapon in the arsenal of public rituals available in time of trouble. It was employed regularly in the wake of the major crises in the second half of the [seventeenth] century, from general declension in piety to witchcraft.” (Hambrick-Stowe 1982, 100-01)

⁴¹⁴ “Whatever the secondary causes of events might be, these were traced back to their initiator and controller, Almighty God.” (Davies 1990, 62) See note 25.

⁴¹⁵ Perry Miller was likely the first to identify the jeremiad as a distinctively American Puritan sermonic style situated in the mood of the fast day: “Hence the one literary type which the first native-born Americans inevitably developed, into which they poured their energy and their passion, was the fast-day sermon,” the literary form of which was “something we may term, for shorthand purposes, a ‘jeremiad.’” (Miller 1953, 29)

⁴¹⁶ Edwards’ preferred context for travailing prayer—the “closet” for private, “secret” prayer—is examined on pp. 180-81: “There must not only be public and family prayer, but secret prayer; this is what is particularly commanded and urged in the gospel.” (WJE 10:381)

inhabitants of many of our towns are now divided into particular praying societies; most of the people, young and old, have voluntarily associated themselves in distinct companies, for mutual assistance in social worship, in private houses: what I intend therefore is that days of prayer should be spent partly in these distinct praying companies. ... And about the middle of the day, at an appointed hour, all have met together in the house of God, to offer up public prayers, and to hear a sermon suitable to the occasion: and then, they have retired from the house of God again into their private societies, and spent the remaining part of the day in praying together there, excepting so much as was requisite for the duties of the family and closet in their own houses. And it has been found to be of great benefit to assist and engage the minds of the people in the duties of the day.⁴¹⁷

First, the family was considered a small church in Puritan life, and family heads were admonished to lead their households in daily prayer. Family prayer was, in Edwards' view, a setting where the conversion of children should be pleaded for and experienced⁴¹⁸ and the spiritual base to which they ought to continually return.⁴¹⁹ He appears to have modelled this priority with his own children,⁴²⁰ believing that our imitation of Christ's example of travail in Gethsemane begins at home:

Here is an example for parents, showing how they ought to labor and cry to God for the spiritual good of their children. You see how Christ labored and strove and cried to God for the salvation of His spiritual children; and will not you earnestly seek and cry to God for your natural children?⁴²¹

For Edwards, fervent prayer for children or "young people" was often tantamount to prayer for revival,⁴²² for "if God should not any more remarkably pour out his Spirit upon us, in all likelihood most of your poor children, the bigger part of the rising generation, will burn in

⁴¹⁷ WJE 4:519-20 (emphasis mine).

⁴¹⁸ One of Edwards' examples in *A Faithful Narrative*, Phebe Bartlett, exhibited her new nature in conversion by being "affected in time of family prayer." (WJE 4:202)

⁴¹⁹ In the application of "The Justice of God in the Damnation of Sinners," Edwards chastised his hearers for how "you have behaved yourself in the time of family prayer! And what a trade have many of you made of absenting yourselves from the worship of the families you belong to, for the sake of vain company!" (WJE 19:349)

⁴²⁰ In her adulthood, Esther Edwards Burr, Jonathan and Sarah's firstborn, still pined for her parents' intercessions: "I am afraid I have tired out your patience and will begge leve only to add my need of the earnest praides of my Dear and Honored parents and all good people that I may [n]ot at last be a castaway, but that God would con[st]antly grant me new supplies of divine grace." (Karlsen and Crumpacker [eds] 1984, 296)

⁴²¹ Edwards 1998, "Christ's Agony," *op. cit.*, 326.

⁴²² Increase Mather had preached that "one of the greatest blessings promised in the Covenant of Grace, is, That the Lord will pour his Spirit upon the Children and Posterity of his servants." (Mather 1678, 7)

hell to all eternity.” Concern for them was motivation for “heads of families [to] earnestly cry to God for this blessing.”⁴²³

Secondly, prayer for revival was also the concern of prayer societies that had become prevalent on both sides of the Atlantic.⁴²⁴ Nearly a decade after the initial Awakening in Northampton, Edwards was still paying close attention to how these “societies for prayer and social religion were all along kept up, and there were some few instances of awakening and deep concern about the things of another world, even in the most dead time.”⁴²⁵ Organised by gender and age and meeting at designated times for corporate petition, prayer societies were viewed by some as potentially threatening to a minister’s control.⁴²⁶ Nevertheless, Edwards believed that among “those things that have a tendency to the revival of religion,” foremost was to “join together in private societies for mutual assistance in seeking and serving God.”⁴²⁷ Stein has highlighted in his introduction to the *Humble Attempt* how its natural audience, and the ideal constituency for the proposed concert of prayer, were these tightly-knit huddles of praying Christians.⁴²⁸

But thirdly, what anchored the fervent rhythms of public prayer life in New England, and certainly in Northampton,⁴²⁹ was the setting of Sabbath-keeping. Strict religious observance of the first day of the week as the Christian Sabbath had been a touchstone of Puritanism from the beginning. But in the colonies sabbatarianism became more rigorous, typically involving commitment to six full hours of public worship on Sundays, three in the

⁴²³ WJE 22:222. “Consider that you have been the instruments of bringing children into the world in a miserable state and condition, under wrath, and will you not earnestly seek a blessing by which they may be saved?” (*ibid*)

⁴²⁴ In Scotland, for example, participation in prayer societies was widespread (Fawcett 1971, 72) and was among the devotional practices, tethered to the sacrament, considered to be “very nearly the sum of Christian piety.” (Schmidt, *op. cit.*, 116)

⁴²⁵ WJE 4:544.

⁴²⁶ O’Brien, *op. cit.*, 821. Fawcett concurs: “[The prayer societies’] very vigour served to draw upon them opposition and criticism. ... Yet, in spite of the dangers inherent in such fellowship (and the evangelical minister well knew that these were very real) and the professional denigration of them as religious ‘amateurs’ ..., these groups, scattered over [Scotland], were not without significance.” (Fawcett, *op. cit.*, 72-74)

⁴²⁷ Sermon 922, *op. cit.*, L.7v.

⁴²⁸ WJE 5:37. Crawford adds, “Edwards induced the prayer societies in Northampton to adopt the quarterly days for prayer and pressed his friends in the ministry to support the concert.” (Crawford 1991b, 229)

⁴²⁹ From his examination of the Northampton prayer bids, Stein concluded “it is clear that the congregation remained the primary context for public prayer.” (Stein, *op. cit.*, 269)

morning and three in the afternoon.⁴³⁰ Horton Davies has outlined how Puritan worship opened and closed with prayers lasting fifteen minutes or longer; sermons were preceded and followed by lengthy prayers;⁴³¹ both elements of the sacrament were separately consecrated by prayer; and there was prayer after all had received communion, plus a final blessing.⁴³² Believing saints should “come frequently”⁴³³ to the throne of grace, Edwards promoted personal prayer “oftener on the Sabbath”⁴³⁴ than the two to three times daily he felt, in most cases,⁴³⁵ struck the right balance between petitioners remaining earnest and constant yet not becoming “superstitious as to the frequency of their set prayers.”⁴³⁶

As we have seen, superstition was also one of the apprehensions Puritan clergy had with liturgical prayer in the meetinghouse,⁴³⁷ which the ejected ministers of 1662 reckoned would inevitably “smother the gift of Prayer, given (we hope) to some of us, or ... cool the heat and fervency of our hearts in Prayer, or the Affections of them that hear us.”⁴³⁸ The meetinghouse itself was designed to be a setting conducive to direct, unpretentious interaction with God.⁴³⁹ But though this is what clergy were expected to demonstrate in Sabbath prayer, Edwards insisted every congregant, “even women, children and servants,” was endowed with the same capability: “they need not regret it that they are not preachers;

⁴³⁰ Hambrick-Stowe 2008, 199. “The seriousness with which the saints approached the work of glorifying God on the Sabbath set them apart as a peculiar people. Indeed, it was such rigour that first earned them the snide epithet ‘Puritan’ in the early days of the movement.” (*ibid*)

⁴³¹ See notes 337-39.

⁴³² Davies 1990, 147.

⁴³³ “Let the godly take encouragement from hence in their prayers to come boldly to the throne of grace, and to come frequently.” (WJE 19:785)

⁴³⁴ MS Sermon 608 on Zech 12:10, Apr. 1741, Gen. Mss. 151, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, L.3r.

⁴³⁵ “We read of none of the saints in Scripture as making of it a constant practice to pray more than three times a day. ... It may be proper at other times on special occasions when persons are under special presence of Spirit and find and want a strong desire to go and pour out their souls before God. Or when they have leisure and have nothing else to do they may on such occasions frequently do it.” (Edwards 2004, “God’s Manner Is First to Prepare Men’s Hearts and Then to Answer Their Prayers,” *op. cit.*, 101-02)

⁴³⁶ *ibid*, 101

⁴³⁷ See notes 78-82.

⁴³⁸ H. D. M. A. 1661, 55. Davies summarises that the Puritan attempt to model their Sabbath life after Biblical criteria “resolved itself practically in the Puritan emphasis on free prayer over against the ‘stinted forms’ of the Establishment.”

⁴³⁹ “This approach to prayer and worship extended to their architecture as well; in constructing their houses of worship, the Puritans built meetinghouses, not churches. ... Public prayer was to be offered in a simple, straightforward, and completely unadorned setting.” (Moore 2005, 30)

they may go in their earnestness and agonies of soul, and pour out their souls before One that is able to do all things; before him they may speak as freely as ministers ... and vent themselves before a prayer-hearing Father, without any restraint.”⁴⁴⁰

Locality The “cryings out in the meetinghouse”⁴⁴¹ taking place during the Great Awakening could sometimes move to a different **locality**, spilling over or transferring to a congregant’s private home,⁴⁴² even to the Edwards’ parsonage.⁴⁴³ Edwards was likely comfortable with this mobility, at least in part, as a result of his own ambulation in and fondness of the natural world as the locality of earnest prayer. What began as a boy building a prayer hut in a swamp⁴⁴⁴ and continued in prayer walks in his late teens “on the banks of the Hudson’s River,”⁴⁴⁵ Edwards’ manner of prayer, which he described in his *Personal Narrative*, was frequently to ride “into the woods,” and “having lit from my horse in a retired place ... to walk for divine contemplation and prayer.”⁴⁴⁶ At this and “several other times,” his prayer continued for an hour or so “which kept me, the bigger part of the time, in a flood of tears, and weeping aloud.”⁴⁴⁷ In his editorial notes, George Claghorn comments that “even [Edwards’] dreams were of mountain vistas and vernal grandeur. In later years, his daily

⁴⁴⁰ WJE 4:518. About this Hambrick-Stowe comments, “The distinct contribution of Puritan practical divinity ... was its elimination of any distinction between the spirituality of clergy and laity.” (Hambrick-Stowe 2008, 197)

⁴⁴¹ WJE 16:118.

⁴⁴² Two days before preaching “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God” on Wednesday, July 8, 1741, Winiarski reports that Edwards preached a follow-up message to his Sunday communion sermon in Suffield, following which “nearly two hundred people of all ages and sexes retired to a private house, where a collective outcry ensued.” (Winiarski, *op. cit.*, 700)

⁴⁴³ “About the middle of the summer [1741], I called together the young people that were communicants, from sixteen to twenty-six years of age to my house; which proved to be a most happy meeting... We had several meetings that summer of young people attended with like appearances.” (WJE 4:547)

⁴⁴⁴ “I, with some of my schoolmates joined together, and built a booth in a swamp, in a very secret and retired place, for a place of prayer. And besides, I had particular secret places of my own in the woods, where I used to retire by myself; and used to be from time to time much affected.” (WJE 16:791)

⁴⁴⁵ *ibid*, 797. Edwards began serving the English Presbyterian congregation in Manhattan in August of 1722.

⁴⁴⁶ *ibid*, 801. Earlier Edwards described spending an “abundance of my time, in walking alone in the woods, and solitary places, for meditation, soliloquy and prayer, and converse with God.” (*ibid*, 794)

⁴⁴⁷ *ibid*, 801

rides to the woods and meditations there were a direct outgrowth of these refreshing moments in his youth.”⁴⁴⁸

Clark Gilpin has asserted that Edwards’ custom to “ride two or three miles after dinner to some lonely grove, where he would dismount and walk a while,”⁴⁴⁹ as Hopkins described it, “imaginatively relocated solitude from house and church to a nature untouched by human fashioning,” thereby inaugurating “an important progression of American religious intellectuals who direct such theologically freighted expectancy toward solitude in nature.”⁴⁵⁰ McClymond and McDermott highlight Perry Miller’s emphasising of this line of “intellectual development that led from Edwards’s meditations on nature to the Transcendentalist ruminations of Ralph Waldo Emerson a century later.”⁴⁵¹ Different in this way from Brainerd,⁴⁵² his prayer exemplar, yet not entirely unique,⁴⁵³ Edwards did elevate the importance of seclusion in the outdoors as an ideal locality for travelling prayer in secret,⁴⁵⁴ where one could “converse with Christ as an intimate friend [with whom] there is no jarr or discord.”⁴⁵⁵ He believed God cared about this manner of unedited, private interaction more “than any outward actions or appearance”⁴⁵⁶ because of how it reveals the heart: “He that prays only when he prays with others, would not pray at all, were it not that the eyes of others

⁴⁴⁸ *ibid*, 745. Edwards “found, from time to time, ... a kind of vision, or fixed ideas and imaginations, of being alone in the mountains, or some solitary wilderness, far from all mankind, sweetly conversing with Christ, and wrapt and swallowed up in God.” (*ibid*, 793)

⁴⁴⁹ Hopkins, *op. cit.*, 43.

⁴⁵⁰ Gilpin 2002, 528-29.

⁴⁵¹ McClymond and McDermott, *op. cit.*, 72. “Some have viewed Edwards as a full-blown nature mystic—a sort of colonial John Muir.” (*ibid*) See also McNerney 1985, 22.

⁴⁵² “Although Brainerd spent his days riding through virgin wilderness, he recorded not one line of aesthetic sensitivity, not one hint that the unspoiled natural beauty was to him, as it was to Edwards, an ‘emblem’ of God’s creative goodness calling forth joyful praise.” (Weddle 1988, 308)

⁴⁵³ Another example of nature as the locality of earnest prayer was that of Isaac Backus, converted during the Awakening on August 29, 1741, whose “business led me out to work alone in the woods, where I had none to interrupt me, in such a converse with my God as I never had before.” (Lovejoy 1969, 44, 46 [no reference provided].)

⁴⁵⁴ McClymond and McDermott observe “almost a complete absence of other people” in Edwards’ *Personal Narrative*. “Outside of a small circle of admirers that Edwards acquired in his adult life (e.g., Samuel Hopkins, Joseph Bellamy), it is hard to identify Edwards’s friends. ... When he described his spiritual life, he spoke principally of solitary experiences.” (McClymond and McDermott, *op. cit.*, 68)

⁴⁵⁵ Sermon 950 on Prov 6:22(c), WJEO 68:L.5v.

⁴⁵⁶ Sermon 275, *op. cit.*, L.8r.

are upon him.”⁴⁵⁷ Solitude in nature could provide earnest prayer’s crucial distance from all others but God, while this communication was being nourished through the panoply of typologies on display in creation.⁴⁵⁸ “Natural imagery,” Knight suggests, “was transformed by Edwards into a coherent system of symbols” which “communicated in concentrated form (almost like a pictograph)”⁴⁵⁹ God’s being and glory:

God’s excellency, his wisdom, his purity and love, seemed to appear in everything; in the sun, moon and stars; in the clouds, and blue sky; in the grass, flowers, trees; in the water, and all nature; which used greatly to fix my mind. ... And scarce anything, among all the works of nature, was so sweet to me as thunder and lightning. ... I felt God at the first appearance of a thunderstorm. And used to take the opportunity at such times, to fix myself to view the clouds, and see the lightnings play, and hear the majestic and awful voice of God’s thunder: which often times was exceeding entertaining, leading me to sweet contemplations of my great and glorious God.⁴⁶⁰

The unselfconscious, unconstrained yearnings of travailing prayer that made solitude in nature so appealing were also what made heaven its ultimate locality to Edwards, for “heaven was the place,” Gilpin remarks, “where the affective core of true piety could well up, unimpeded.”⁴⁶¹ Edwards looked forward in the *Personal Narrative* to the end of congested, earthbound praying:

It appeared to me a great clog and hindrance and burden to me, that what I felt within, I could not express to God, and give vent to, as I desired. The inward ardor of my soul, seemed to be hindered and pent up, and could not freely flame out as it would. I used often to think, how in heaven, this sweet principle should freely and fully vent and express itself.⁴⁶²

“This world is a valley of tears, a world filled with sighs and groans,” Edwards preached, “but in heaven there is no mixture of such sounds as these. ... There is an holy cheerfulness

⁴⁵⁷ Edwards 2001, “Hypocrites Deficient in the Duty of Prayer,” *op. cit.*, 365.

⁴⁵⁸ Gilpin comments that solitary locales were, to Edwards, “spatial occasions for reverie, potentially available in any natural landscape. In addition, the theological predisposition he had cultivated led him quite consistently to stress the symbolic rather than the empirical dimension of a natural locale.” (Gilpin, *op. cit.*, 534) Knight notes that “Perry Miller was the first to remark Edwards’ extension of typology from Scripture to nature, and his 1948 introduction to *Images or Shadows of Divine Things* set the terms for the current critical disputes.” (Knight, *op. cit.*, 192) See also note 215.

⁴⁵⁹ *ibid*, 196

⁴⁶⁰ WJE 16:794.

⁴⁶¹ Gilpin, *op. cit.*, 536. “Solitude gave the foretaste of heaven, not because Edwards was alone but because there he expressed his affections toward the other or the one, unimpeded.” (*ibid*, 537)

⁴⁶² WJE 16:795-96. Brainerd, perhaps more lugubriously, also “longed exceedingly for death, to be loosed from this dullness and barrenness, and made forever active in the service of God. ... Oh, death, death, my kind friend, hasten and deliver me from dull mortality, and make me spiritual and vigorous to eternity!” (WJE 7:272)

to be seen throughout that blessed society.”⁴⁶³ The “holy converse” of earnest prayer is what prepares us for “heavenly society” and is the “forerunner of it,”⁴⁶⁴ where the burdens of prayer will be eclipsed by its joys, and there will be nothing to be heard “but the sweet and glorious melody of God’s praises.”⁴⁶⁵ All the desires that formed and fed our travailing prayer on earth will be satisfied in heaven,⁴⁶⁶ which will be reason for passionate and ever-increasing joy.⁴⁶⁷

Relationality We have seen how Edwards urged the saints to pray “in as private a manner as they well can not only to avoid the appearance of ostentation” but also to evade those “who would be ready to misinterpret their design.”⁴⁶⁸ Equally, however, Edwards perceived prayer relationally as that which “sweetens earthly friendships” and makes all “other company profitable and pleasant,”⁴⁶⁹ unless our companions and their interests are those that interfere in our contact with God.⁴⁷⁰ Personal closeness with God was the foundation of earnest prayer’s **relationality**,⁴⁷¹ our attachment of love as adopted children,⁴⁷² unbroken by death,⁴⁷³ that longs for contact⁴⁷⁴ with a God who delights to hear

⁴⁶³ Sermon 344 on Rev 14:2, WJEO 49:312.

⁴⁶⁴ Sermon 950, *op. cit.*, L.14r.

⁴⁶⁵ Sermon 344, *op. cit.*, 312.

⁴⁶⁶ “All things shall be ordered so as to promote their happiness, and they shall continue in this state of complete and perfect glory and felicity as long as they desire, and that is to all eternity.” (Sermon 871, *op. cit.*, L.21r.)

⁴⁶⁷ For Edwards, “because ‘heaven is a progressive state’ (WJE 8:706-38), the heavenly joys of the saints, and even of the triune God, will forever continue to increase.” (McClymond and McDermott, *op. cit.*, 93)

⁴⁶⁸ Sermon 958, *op. cit.*, L.21r., col. 2, L.21.v.

⁴⁶⁹ Sermon 950, *op. cit.*, L.13r.

⁴⁷⁰ “Particularly let young people examine their manner of company keeping, and the round of diversions in which, with their companions, they have allowed themselves. I only desire that you would ask at the mouth of your own consciences what has been the effect of these things with respect to your attendance on the duty of secret prayer.” (Edwards 2001, “Hypocrites Deficient in the Duty of Prayer,” *op. cit.*, 373)

⁴⁷¹ “Conversation between God and mankind in this world is maintained by God’s word on his part, and prayer on ours. ... Sincere and a suitable high friendship towards God, in all that believe God to be properly an intelligent, willing being, does most apparently, directly and strongly incline to pray.” (WJE 23:350)

⁴⁷² “The truly godly have the spirit of adoption and the spirit of a child to which it is natural to go to God and call upon him and cry to him as a Father.” (Sermon 554, *op. cit.*, L.6r. [This section is omitted from the Nichols edition.])

⁴⁷³ Prayer is a companionship “that will not fail. Death cannot divide you from it. It will faithfully stick by you in all your way through the valley.” (Sermon 950, *op. cit.*, L.12r., col. 2)

⁴⁷⁴ Prayerlessness is not “consistent with loving God above all. ... It is the nature of love to be averse to absence, and to love near access to those whom we love. We love to be with them; we delight to come often to them, and to have much conversation with them.” (Edwards 2001, “Hypocrites Deficient in the Duty of Prayer,” *op. cit.*, 364)

our voice.⁴⁷⁵ There was to Edwards a private/public symbiosis in prayer,⁴⁷⁶ another example of the balance and proportion he regarded so highly.⁴⁷⁷ Within virtually the same sentence, Edwards could admonish saints to “spend more time than ordinary in secret prayer” and “spend extraordinary time in social prayer,”⁴⁷⁸ which was “the way, above all others, private Christians may have public influence.”⁴⁷⁹ Earnest importuning for millennial glory should be the resolve of God’s people “not only in their prayers together when they are the mouth of a praying company, as in private meetings and in family prayers, but also in their secret prayers.”⁴⁸⁰ It is to both the closet and the assembly we now turn to understand this final trait of Edwards’ practice of travailing prayer as a pattern of preparedness for revival.

As much by conviction as by predilection, Edwards extolled the value of “the religion of the closet”⁴⁸¹ primarily because “the most remarkable instances we have in Scripture of the saints being favoured with converse with God were when they were alone.”⁴⁸² This was particularly true of earnest, brokenhearted intercession. To Edwards, the prophet Jeremiah⁴⁸³ demonstrated that “the saints’ pains and travailing for the souls of sinners is chiefly in secret places.”⁴⁸⁴ Edwards’ personal penchant⁴⁸⁵ was for the Puritan habit of “individual or private prayer [as] the preeminent pillar of devotional life,”⁴⁸⁶ secluding himself in his study⁴⁸⁷ and

⁴⁷⁵ “The voice of the saints in prayer is sweet unto Christ; he delights to hear it.” (Edwards 1998, “The Most High a Prayer-Hearing God,” *op. cit.*, 114)

⁴⁷⁶ Not only with regard to prayer, scholars have observed this personal/communal interdependence in other aspects of Edwards’ thought. For him, “the location of the revival lay somewhere between the two poles of the collective and individual” (Curtis, *op. cit.*, 57), just as “inward realities issued in and were tested by outward actualities.” (Clebsch, *op. cit.*, 46)

⁴⁷⁷ See notes 340-41.

⁴⁷⁸ Sermon 958, *op. cit.*, L.21r., col. 2.

⁴⁷⁹ MS Sermon 809 on Ezk 36:36-37, Feb. 1746, Gen. Mss. 151, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, 15.

⁴⁸⁰ WJE 22:376.

⁴⁸¹ WJE 2:376.

⁴⁸² Sermon 950, *op. cit.*, L.8v.

⁴⁸³ Jer 13:17 [KJV]: “If ye will not hear it, my soul shall weep in secret places for your pride; and mine eye shall weep sore, and run down with tears; because the Lord’s flock is carried away captive.”

⁴⁸⁴ WJE 2:375.

⁴⁸⁵ “Even when we balance out the youthful *Diary* with the mature *Personal Narrative*, it becomes clear that Edwards’s spirituality was neither familial nor social but solitary.” (McClymond 1998, 45)

⁴⁸⁶ Naeher, *op. cit.*, 59. Gilpin explains how “to gain assurance that a redeeming change had, in fact, occurred, the Puritan delved into the self in order to discover its enduring element.” (Gilpin, *op. cit.*, 526)

being “much on his knees in secret,”⁴⁸⁸ Hopkins wrote. He venerated his wife for her private piety,⁴⁸⁹ commending the same to his daughter,⁴⁹⁰ new converts,⁴⁹¹ and even the Mohawk and Mohican children of his later missionary concern.⁴⁹²

Together with secret prayer, though, Edwards was convinced of the strategic importance of “uniting with one another in it, agreeing together touching what they shall ask, taking some proper course to act in it with a visible union.”⁴⁹³ If the object of travelling prayer was corporate—“the glorious advancement of the church of God”⁴⁹⁴—then its expression should be collaborative as well. Edwards believed that what we have learned from Christ, who in Gethsemane travailed for that which was “not of a private nature, but of common concern to the whole Church,”⁴⁹⁵ reveals our “agreement in asking [to be] what contributes to the prevalence [i.e. prevailing] of the prayers of his people.”⁴⁹⁶ So he urged the saints to give themselves to Puritan practices⁴⁹⁷ of public prayer we have already considered⁴⁹⁸ on special days, in families, and in prayer societies: “I would there might be

⁴⁸⁷ “Presuming that Samuel Hopkins was correct, or nearly so, in his estimate that Edwards spent thirteen hours every day in his study, then it appears that the pastor’s study replaced the Connecticut forests of his youth as Edwards’s chosen location for his contemplative retreat.” (McClymond 1998, 47)

⁴⁸⁸ Hopkins, *op. cit.*, 42.

⁴⁸⁹ “She loves to be alone, and to wander in the fields and on the mountains, and seems to have someone invisible always conversing with her.” (WJE 16:790) Sarah’s example of “true religion [which] disposes persons to be much alone” (WJE 2:374) was in vivid contrast to hypocrites who “in a great measure leave off the practice of secret prayer.” (Edwards 2001, “Hypocrites Deficient in the Duty of Prayer,” *op. cit.*, 358)

⁴⁹⁰ In a letter to Mary Edwards (1701-1776), their fourth child, Edwards wrote, “Retire often from this vain world, and all its bubbles, empty shadows, and vain amusements, and converse with God alone.” (WJE 16:289)

⁴⁹¹ In the Hatheway letter (see note 131), Edwards advised, “Under special difficulties, or when in great need of or great longings after any particular mercies for your self or others, set apart a day of secret fasting and prayer alone...” (WJE 16:94)

⁴⁹² “In order to promote the salvation of the children, which is the main design of the whole Indian establishment at this place, ... each child should, from time to time, be dealt with singly, particularly and closely, about the state and concerns of his soul; and particular care should be taken to teach and direct each child, concerning the duty of secret prayer.” (WJE 16:412)

⁴⁹³ WJE 5:445. See also WJE 16:181.

⁴⁹⁴ WJE 25:200.

⁴⁹⁵ Edwards 1998, “Christ’s Agony,” *op. cit.*, 308.

⁴⁹⁶ WJE 4:520.

⁴⁹⁷ “Prayer for the Puritans had also a strongly corporate and communal aspect.” (Davies 1990, 150-51) See also Kidd 2004, 26-27, and Lovelace 2004, 305.

⁴⁹⁸ See pp. 172-74.

frequent meetings of praying companies constituted of persons ..., whether they were men or women, young or old,⁴⁹⁹ rich or poor, that frequently met together to wrestle with God.”⁵⁰⁰

We have little written record of lay public prayer in colonial New England.⁵⁰¹ But we do know Edwards also believed it would be beneficial if “ministers in a neighborhood would often meet together and spend days in fasting and fervent prayer among themselves.”⁵⁰² We have seen how he summoned the clergy to heroic, sacrificial praying,⁵⁰³ and considered the earnest praying of laypersons to be of equal value,⁵⁰⁴ a relational dynamic along with others that introduced democratising, sometimes contentious effects in New England ecclesial life.⁵⁰⁵ When relational strain resulted from “things divorced between ministers and their people,”⁵⁰⁶ Edwards advised laity to “wait on God in the way of importunate prayer, though

⁴⁹⁹ “Let young people in particular receive this exhortation” to associate together in prayer societies, Edwards preached. “Young people are especially inclined to company.” (Sermon 950, *op. cit.*, L.14v., col. 2)

⁵⁰⁰ Sermon 958, *op. cit.*, L.21v. Edwards issued the call to fervent, public intercession for revival to everyone, regardless of their station: “Let young people now earnestly cry to God. Let sinners cry to God. Let all cry for the pouring out of the Spirit on their own souls and on others.” (WJE 22:222)

⁵⁰¹ Though Erik Seeman asserts that “most laypeople in the eighteenth century maintained a tradition of communally oriented piety that allowed certain concerns to develop less through interactions with their ministers and more through interactions with other laypeople,” he is able to give few specific examples of lay prayer. (Seeman 1999, 8. See also Kidd 2004, 19, note 2.) Stein’s examination of the Northampton “prayer bids” is one of the best extant sources, which he admits is exceedingly rare: “The collection is unusual simply by reason of its existence: no equivalent set of petitions have come to light. ... The Northampton collection exists only by accident.” (Stein, *op. cit.*, 263)

⁵⁰² WJE 4:507. See also Holifield 2007, 69.

⁵⁰³ See notes 164-68.

⁵⁰⁴ See note 440. If anyone has “much of the spirit of grace and supplication, in this way they may have power with him that is infinite in power, and has the government of the whole world: and so a poor man in his cottage may have a blessed influence all over the world.” (WJE 4:518)

⁵⁰⁵ Much scholarly attention has been paid to this. Most agree Edwards’ message “that spiritual knowledge was available to any ... and was verified internally, not by some autocratic clergyman,” (Gura, *op. cit.*, 232) unlocked “a doorway to an assertive lay piety that would open far wider than he ever imagined and would permanently alter the relations between pastors and congregations in more democratic directions.” (Stout 1986, 207) “In the regions swept by revival fervor,” Holifield underscores, “the [ministerial] profession felt the shock they produced.” (Holifield 2007, 95) Critics of the Awakening and its flexing of “the ultimate power of the laity” (Westerkamp 1988, 213) believed the revivalists were only “stirring up the ignorant rabble, to the prejudice of social as well as moral order.” (May 1976, 55; Chapter II, note 267) Other historians, such as Jon Butler, have challenged this consensus, asserting that “the revivals democratized relations between ministers and the laity only in minimal ways. ... It is not possible to demonstrate that the revivals increased the traditional powers that laymen previously possessed or brought them new ones.” (Butler 1982, 314-16)

⁵⁰⁶ Edwards 2004, “God’s Manner Is First to Prepare Men’s Hearts and Then to Answer Their Prayers,” *op. cit.*, 95. Scholars have noted the irony that though “Edwards lauded the virtues of unity, concord, and agreement in civil society and within the local congregation” (McClymond and McDermott, *op. cit.*, 74), he “split his congregation” and introduced ideas that “would help fracture Reformed theology in America for almost a century.” (Holifield 2003, 126)

they have waited long, and see nothing but midnight darkness.”⁵⁰⁷ This was the solution “greatly needed,” Edwards believed, for fostering “a peaceable spirit, a spirit of union to your minister and among your flock.”⁵⁰⁸

Congregational unity in prayer was only microcosmic of Edwards’ greater vision that “agreement of many in different places and distant parts of the world in such prayer is becoming and acceptable to God.”⁵⁰⁹ Building on what Puritans like Richard Sibbes had championed, that “the prayers of others joining all together, is a mighty prevailing means for the conveying of all good,”⁵¹⁰ Crawford notes how “an agreement on both sides of the Atlantic to unite at regular intervals in prayer for the revival of religion had had advocates since early in the eighteenth century.”⁵¹¹ In October of 1744, a number of Scottish ministers agreed to devote part of Saturday evening and Sunday morning every week and the first Tuesday of the last month of each quarter of the year to fervent, united prayer for the renewed outpouring of the Holy Spirit.⁵¹² When John Wesley was invited to join, he replied to James Erskine on March 16, 1745, “Might it not be practicable to have the concurrence of Mr. Edwards in New England, if not of Mr. Tennent also, herein?”⁵¹³ Edwards enthusiastically linked up with the concert of prayer, investing his personal credibility and the considerable powers of his pen⁵¹⁴ in its promotion “far and near.”⁵¹⁵ An apocalyptic urgency “to animate

⁵⁰⁷ WJE 16:254; see also 4:518-19.

⁵⁰⁸ Edwards 2004, “God’s Manner Is First to Prepare Men’s Hearts and Then to Answer Their Prayers,” *op. cit.*, 95.

⁵⁰⁹ WJE 25:203. “There is something peculiarly amiable when God’s people in distant parts of the world [unite in prayer], for hereby becomes more visible the union of the universal church of Christ.” (*ibid*, 203-04)

⁵¹⁰ Sibbes 1867 [1655], 178. See Knight 1994, 156.

⁵¹¹ Crawford 1991b, 229. O’Brien concurs, explaining how the Concert of Prayer emerged naturally from the tradition of Puritan days of fasting and prayer. (O’Brien, *op. cit.*, 829-30)

⁵¹² This agreement expired in two years and was renewed in a new memorial, issued by a group of Scottish ministers on August 26, 1746, for another seven years.

⁵¹³ Wesley 1982, 128. The text of the Scottish “Memorial” for union in prayer is found in WJE 5:324-28. See also note 10.

⁵¹⁴ “I have taken a great deal of pains to promote this Concert here in America, and shall not cease to do so, if God spares my life, as I have opportunity in all ways I can devise. I have written largely on the subject, insisting on persuasives and answering objections.” (WJE 16:237) Edwards’ intention in publishing the *Humble Attempt* in 1747, in Beck’s view, “was not to determine the merit of any one reason but to overwhelm the callous soul of the church with the need to pray.” (Beck, *op. cit.*, 138-140)

⁵¹⁵ WJE 4:520.

God's people unitedly to cry to God"⁵¹⁶ energised his hope of coming together not only with "all God's people in America"⁵¹⁷ but also with "many thousands"⁵¹⁸ of "all Christians from the rising to the setting sun"⁵¹⁹ in "extraordinary prayers for an universal revival of religion."⁵²⁰ An important personal derivative of the concert of prayer movement for Edwards was his epistolary fellowship with six Scottish ministers⁵²¹ who became, Christopher Mitchell has commented, "some of Edwards's closest ... friends" with whom he "found the intimacy, encouragement, comfort, trust and loyalty"⁵²² that was all too rare in New England."⁵²³ "I esteem my correspondence with you, and my other correspondents in Scotland, a great honor and privilege,"⁵²⁴ he wrote to John MacLaurin, catalyst of the network, suggesting Edwards' discovery that deepening relationships not only strengthened earnest, united prayer but could be found there.

⁵¹⁶ WJE 16:221.

⁵¹⁷ *ibid*

⁵¹⁸ *ibid*

⁵¹⁹ WJE 16:218.

⁵²⁰ WJE 16:379.

⁵²¹ The group consisted of John MacLaurin, who was the principal organiser of the concert of prayer effort in Scotland; James Robe; William McCulloch of Cambuslang; John Willison; Thomas Gillespie; and John Erskine. Particularly regarding Edwards' relationship with MacLaurin, Nicholas Batzig has remarked that "a close examination of letters and extant works reveal that that their friendship was anything but a mere formal association. ... In a rather wonderful way, these men who found themselves moved by God, joined themselves to one another for necessary intellectual stimulation and spiritual support." (Batzig 2011, 78, 82)

⁵²² Mitchell notes that when Edwards was dismissed from Northampton with a family of ten children, he did not relocate into another job for a year. These Scottish ministers sent both encouragement and money; Erskine tried to secure an appointment in the Church of Scotland for Edwards. (Mitchell 2003, 237-38)

⁵²³ Mitchell, *op. cit.*, 236-39. "Edwards's isolation was real, and the spiritual and intellectual camaraderie offered by his Scottish correspondents was viewed by him, not as a luxury, but rather as the means of meeting a fundamental need in his life and ministry." (*ibid*, 226)

⁵²⁴ WJE 5:444.

OBJECTS OF TRAVAILING PRAYER

Though multifaceted in expression, travailing prayer was, for Edwards, uncomplicated and focused in its intention. In the spring and summer of 1735, when Northampton “seemed to be full of the presence of God,” he witnessed the assembly being often in tears: “some weeping with sorrow and distress, others with joy and love, others with pity and concern for the souls of their neighbors.”⁵²⁵ Here, in essence, Edwards delineates the fundamental aims of earnest prayer, each of which will be examined as this chapter concludes: 1) prayer of the unregenerate for salvation, 2) prayer of the saints in sweet delight, and 3) prayer of the world’s Christians for the work of redemption (*e.g.*, conversion of sinners, advancement of the church, and outpouring of the Holy Spirit).

First, Edwards understood travailing prayer as humanity’s optimal “method of **seeking**” **salvation**: if you will “seek heaven in this way, then ’tis probable you will obtain,” he preached; “if you would really take and have possession of that glorious kingdom, seek it in this way.”⁵²⁶ This way was one of striving as a soldier, agonising like a woman in childbirth, labouring and contending with importunity and brokenness—the unconverted mirroring the elect in all aspects of travailing prayer, as we have discussed.⁵²⁷ He admonished those who had “pretend[ed] to have been converted ... to cry to God that he would turn you back from your backslidings.”⁵²⁸

Edwards acknowledged that listeners who wept or manifested other “uncommon appearances” in revival meetings were often “of two sorts; either those that have been in great distress, in an apprehension of their sin and misery; or those that have been overcome

⁵²⁵ WJE 4:151.

⁵²⁶ Sermon 595, *op. cit.*, L.32r.

⁵²⁷ If anything, as was mentioned earlier (see note 231), Edwards’ expectation was that prayer’s earnestness would only intensify in the state of grace.

⁵²⁸ WJE 22:219-20.

with a sweet sense of the greatness, wonderfulness and excellency of divine things.”⁵²⁹ The latter of these constituted a second category of earnest prayer’s joy, one we have observed earlier from the patristic period⁵³⁰ to the charismatic renewal⁵³¹ of today. McClymond and McDermott have remarked how Edwards could shift “effortlessly back and forth from describing the process of spiritual seeking to picturesque, poignant, and sometimes lyrical evocations of his experiences of **utter delight** and absorption in God”.⁵³²

I have sometimes had a sense of the excellent fullness of Christ, and His meetness and suitableness as a savior; whereby He has appeared to me, far above all, the chief of ten thousands. And His blood and atonement has appeared sweet, and His righteousness sweet; which is always accompanied with an ardency of spirit, and inward strugglings and breathings and groanings, that cannot be uttered, to be emptied of myself, and swallowed up in Christ.⁵³³

Feeling “swallowed up in God”⁵³⁴ was representative of the feelings of pure delight Sarah Edwards found in rapturous experiences she likened to appearing to herself “to float or swim, in these bright, sweet beams of the love of Christ, ... a kind of heavenly elysium ... worth more than all the outward comfort and pleasure, which I had enjoyed in my whole life put together.”⁵³⁵ Ravishing, affectionate joy, what Edwards came to understand as his conversion experience,⁵³⁶ was the effect of affectionate longings for God himself, Who is “the great object of prayer.”⁵³⁷ “The good, that shall be sought in prayer,” Edwards wrote in the *Humble Attempt*, “is God himself. ... God himself is the great good desired and sought

⁵²⁹ WJE 4:264. This mixture in Awakening meetings may have seemed similar to that of the Hebrews as the restoration of the Temple began: “All of the people responded with a great shout when they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid. But many of the priests and Levites and heads of families, old people who had seen the first house on its foundations, wept with a loud voice when they saw this house, though many shouted aloud for joy, so that the people could not distinguish the sound of the joyful shout from the sound of the people’s weeping, for the people shouted so loudly that the sound was heard far away.” (Ezr 3:11b-13 [NRSV])

⁵³⁰ See Chapter I, note 246.

⁵³¹ *ibid*, note 165

⁵³² McClymond and McDermott, *op. cit.*, 68.

⁵³³ WJE 16:801.

⁵³⁴ McCulley and Baker, *op. cit.*, 7, 10.

⁵³⁵ *ibid*, 8

⁵³⁶ Edwards describes in his *Personal Narrative* coming to “another sense of God’s sovereignty” in which this doctrine “appeared, an exceeding pleasant, bright and sweet doctrine to me.” (WJE 16:792-93) “At the time, he was unaware of any ‘saving nature in this.’ He is quite candid that it is only in looking back that he can see God’s hand. But Edwards’ ‘new sense’ of ‘inward, sweet delight in God and divine things’ enabled him to consider this experience his conversion.” (Hambrick-Stowe 2003, 82)

⁵³⁷ Sermon 958, *op. cit.*, L.3r.

after; that the blessings pursued are God's gracious presence, the blessed manifestation of him, union and intercourse with him; or, in short, God's manifestations and communications of himself."⁵³⁸

In an exposition of the Lord's Prayer, Edwards outlines "**the advancement of the interest of religion in the world**"⁵³⁹ as a third, more wide-ranging objective of travailing prayer: "Those things that Christ mainly sought in what He did in the work of our redemption ought to be the main subject of Christian prayer."⁵⁴⁰ The Lord's example in Gethsemane taught "how great the labor and travail of Christ's soul was for others' salvation, and what earnest and strong cries to God accompanied His labors."⁵⁴¹ The Apostle Paul, too, "being so full of tears," was inflamed with zeal for "instructing, warning, and reproving others, travailing in birth with them."⁵⁴² So it was "with pity and concern for the souls of their neighbors"⁵⁴³ that Edwards stirred his Puritan congregants⁵⁴⁴ to "hearty intercessory prayers"⁵⁴⁵ for sinners, especially parents for their children and ministers for their people.⁵⁴⁶ "If the salvation of men's souls is so precious," he reasoned, "let us be exhorted earnestly to pray for the accomplishment of those times wherein there will be such plentiful effusions of God's Spirit to the conversion of men's souls."⁵⁴⁷

It should be highlighted here how clearly Edwards associated travailing prayer with love as the cause of the saints' "exceeding desire for the conversion of others," even to the

⁵³⁸ WJE 5:315. See also note 216.

⁵³⁹ Sermon 922, *op. cit.*, "pray," col. 2.

⁵⁴⁰ *ibid*, L.3r.

⁵⁴¹ Edwards 1998, "Christ's Agony," *op. cit.*, 325.

⁵⁴² WJE 2:110.

⁵⁴³ See note 525.

⁵⁴⁴ "New Englanders were urged particularly to pray for the conversion of others, especially for relatives." (Hambrick-Stowe 1982, 182)

⁵⁴⁵ "God has manifested himself in his word to be especially well-pleased with hearty intercessory prayers, or prayers for our fellow creatures." (Sermon 374, *op. cit.*, L.17r.)

⁵⁴⁶ MS Sermon 608 on Zech 12:10, Apr. 1741, Gen. Mss. 151, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, L.2v.

⁵⁴⁷ WJE 10:335. Edwards believed the Holy Spirit rouses intercessory desire in the saints: "The Spirit ... excites to acts of outward kindness and earnest desires of the salvation of others' souls." (WJE 2:256)

point of being “willing to die for the conversion of any soul.”⁵⁴⁸ Once more, earnest prayer’s stimulus was the example of Christ in the Garden, whose “strong crying shows His strong love. It shows how greatly He desired the salvation of others.”⁵⁴⁹ As this same love now flooded the hearts of the saints in revival, Edwards was keen to defend the travailing prayer it generated:

There is one particular kind of exercise and concern of mind that many have been empowered by, that has been especially stumbling to some; and that is the deep concern and distress that they have been in for the souls of others. ... Why should it be thought strange that those that are full of the Spirit of Christ, should be proportionably, in their love to souls, like to Christ, who had so strong a love to them, and concern for them, as to be willing to drink the dregs of the cup of God’s fury for them?⁵⁵⁰

“*Love*, the chief of the affections, and fountain of all other affections,”⁵⁵¹ flowed beneath the traits of travailing prayer in Edwards’ thought at a level of importance meriting greater emphasis in future research.

Love of neighbour, however, was no justification for any kind of narrow, provincial scope in earnest prayer. For Edwards, the best mitigant to insularity in saints’ petitions was “to be much in prayer to God for the glorious times of the Christian church” as a whole: “God’s glory and the glory of our redeemer is much more concerned in the state of the church abroad in the world than it is only in the state of our own souls and the souls of our near neighbors.”⁵⁵² Based on the opening requests of the Lord’s Prayer, Edwards preached that “every saint should look on himself [as] interested in the whole Church of God”⁵⁵³ and “imitate the example of their Lord,”

... who sought the good of the whole church, died for the whole, and prayed for the whole, and now daily intercedes for the whole. If we neglect to pray for the church in general and for that prosperous, glorious state of the church that is promised, or do but slightly mention it in our prayers, we shall not do as we are taught in the Lord’s Prayer, which is the special rule which Christ has given us for our direction in prayer.⁵⁵⁴

⁵⁴⁸ WJE 4:184.

⁵⁴⁹ Edwards 1998, “Christ’s Agony,” *op. cit.*, 314-16.

⁵⁵⁰ WJE 4:305. See Appendix II.

⁵⁵¹ WJE 2:106.

⁵⁵² WJE 22:375.

⁵⁵³ Sermon 958, *op. cit.*, L.7r.

⁵⁵⁴ WJE 22:375-76.

Edwards was particularly disquieted and prayerful about disunity within the church at any level, “above all,” as we have seen,⁵⁵⁵ “when it is between minister and people.”⁵⁵⁶

Laypersons were urged to “pray much for the church of God ...; and be much in prayer for the ministers of Christ.”⁵⁵⁷

However, all that Christians do to “beg of God that He would revive true religion”⁵⁵⁸—in the conversion of sinners or through the advancement of the church—was reliant on and encompassed in being “much in prayer for that great outpouring of the Spirit that God has promised shall be in the latter days.”⁵⁵⁹ Edwards understood the Holy Spirit to be both “the greatest blessing that can be asked”⁵⁶⁰ and “the greatest of all mercies”⁵⁶¹ God gives, what “God is more ready to bestow ... in answer to prayer than any other blessing.”⁵⁶² Elevating a distinctive and growing Puritan emphasis⁵⁶³ to even higher importance,⁵⁶⁴ Edwards concentrated the yearnings of the saints on the Holy Spirit as “the chief subject matter of our petitions in prayer”:⁵⁶⁵

⁵⁵⁵ See notes 506-08.

⁵⁵⁶ Sermon 958, *op. cit.*, L.10v., col. 2.

⁵⁵⁷ WJE 16:95. In this well-known letter to Deborah Hatheway (see note 131), here Edwards adds a personal note: “...and particularly I would beg a special interest in your prayers, and the prayers of your Christian companions, both when you are alone and when you are together.” (*ibid*)

⁵⁵⁸ Sermon 958, *op. cit.*, L.19v.

⁵⁵⁹ MS Sermon 809 on Ezk 36:36-37, Feb. 1746, Gen. Mss. 151, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, 3.

⁵⁶⁰ WJE 22:214.

⁵⁶¹ Sermon 374, *op. cit.*, L.18v. See also “The Most High a Prayer Hearing God” in *The Works of President Edwards in Four Volumes, A Reprint of the Worcester Edition* [online], vol. 4, 572.

⁵⁶² WJE 22:220. Often the Northampton congregation had prayed for rain during drought, and showers had come, Edward recalled. “But God is much more ready to bestow spiritual showers; he is more ready to shower down of his Holy Spirit than he is rain.” (*ibid*) See also WJE 19:785.

⁵⁶³ See note 7.

⁵⁶⁴ Among the Puritans, according to Lovelace, there was an “aura of the presence of the Holy Spirit in their writings. They had Spirit-filled minds.” (Lovelace 2004, 300) But to Lloyd-Jones, Edwards still stood out: “I am going to suggest that the element of the Holy Spirit is more prominent in Edwards than in any other of the Puritans.” (Lloyd-Jones 1996, 350) Amy Pauw has argued that his pneumatology “is in many respects the most original ... aspect of Edwards’s trinitarianism.” (Pauw 2002, 14) And Beck emphasises that, for Edwards, “the Spirit of God is the alpha and omega of prayer, the totality of all that duty entails. ... The ongoing ministry of the Spirit forms the core of Edwards’s theology of prayer.” (Beck, *op. cit.*, 177, 189)

⁵⁶⁵ MS Sermon 809 on Ezk 36:36-37, Feb. 1746, Gen. Mss. 151, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, 7.

The Holy Spirit is the great purchase of Christ.⁵⁶⁶ God the Father is the person of whom the purchase is made; God the Son is the person who makes the purchase, and the Holy Spirit is the gift purchased. The sum of all those good things in this life, and the life to come, which are purchased for the church is the Holy Spirit.⁵⁶⁷

Scripture left little doubt to Edwards that we have “more encouragement to pray for this than any other thing.”⁵⁶⁸ “That which is very much insisted on in God’s promises,⁵⁶⁹ should be very much insisted on in the church’s prayers.”⁵⁷⁰ And here again Christ in Gethsemane was the saints’ model and motive: since the outpouring of the Spirit “doubtless was the blessing that he prayed for, when as our high priest, he ‘offered up strong crying and tears,’ with his blood, ... surely his disciples and members should also earnestly seek it, and be much and earnest in prayer for it.”⁵⁷¹ Edwards preached that the Church should be stirred to travail for the Spirit by considering the benefits of the outpouring,⁵⁷² by recognising this as the “disposition of all true saints,”⁵⁷³ by uniting with creation in “groaning and travailing in pain for this glorious event,”⁵⁷⁴ and by grasping how “Christian prayer has power and prevalency enough with God to obtain even such great things.”⁵⁷⁵ We have seen, though, how Edwards was convinced nothing was sufficient to authenticate and sustain earnest prayer “for the

⁵⁶⁶ “The Holy Spirit, in his indwelling, his influences and fruits, is the sum of all grace, holiness, comfort and joy, or in one word, of all the spiritual good Christ purchased for men in this world: and is also the sum of all perfection, glory and eternal joy, that he purchased for them in another world.” (WJE 5:341)

⁵⁶⁷ WJE 8:353-54.

⁵⁶⁸ WJE 25:203.

⁵⁶⁹ “The Holy Spirit is that great benefit, that is the subject matter of the promises, both of the eternal covenant of redemption, and also of the covenant of grace; the grand subject of the promises of the Old Testament, in the prophecies of the blessings of the Messiah’s kingdom; and the chief subject of the promises of the New Testament; and particularly of the covenant of grace delivered by Jesus Christ to his disciples, as his last will and testament...” (WJE 5:341)

⁵⁷⁰ MS Sermon 809 on Ezk 36:36-37, Feb. 1746, Gen. Mss. 151, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, 8.

⁵⁷¹ WJE 5:342, 344. Edwards preached that the outpouring of the Spirit “will be the success of Christ’s sufferings. The great harvest is the fruit of what he sowed in tears and blood.” (MS Sermon 809 on Ezk 36:36-37, Feb. 1746, Gen. Mss. 151, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, 10)

⁵⁷² Among these, Edwards proclaimed, will be holiness, joy, removal of calamity, great peace, health, and long life when the Spirit is poured out in the latter days. (Sermon 809 on Ezk 36:36-37, Feb. 1746, Gen. Mss. 151, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, 8-9)

⁵⁷³ *ibid*, 10

⁵⁷⁴ *ibid*, 12. See also notes 100 and 260.

⁵⁷⁵ *ibid*

continuance of the outpouring of the Spirit”⁵⁷⁶ other than the Spirit Himself, operating as the spirit of prayer.⁵⁷⁷ In this way, the Holy Spirit was both agent and chief object of earnest prayer:⁵⁷⁸ “Christian prayer is by the Spirit. ‘Tis the voice of the Spirit,’ Rom. 8:26. But the Spirit seeks more of the same.”⁵⁷⁹ This totality of the Holy Spirit in earnest prayer for revival would become a facet of Edwards’ legacy that revivalists of the Second Great Awakening such as Charles Finney cultivated and adapted,⁵⁸⁰ to which we turn our attention next.

⁵⁷⁶ MS Sermon 608 on Zech 12:10, Apr. 1741, Gen. Mss. 151, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, L.2r.

⁵⁷⁷ See pp. 169-71.

⁵⁷⁸ “According to Edwards’s theology of prayer, the Spirit is more than the source of the believer’s prayer. The Spirit ought to be the object of that prayer as well, ‘the sum of the blessings that Christians have to pray for.’” (Beck, *op. cit.*, 181; WJE 5:347)

⁵⁷⁹ Sermon 809 on Ezk 36:36-37, Feb. 1746, Gen. Mss. 151, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, 8.

⁵⁸⁰ “The Second Great Awakening saw considerable development of the concept of the spirit of prayer.” (Lyrene, *op. cit.*, 125)

“IN PRAYER TO GOD,
WITH STRONG CRYING AND TEARS”

CHARLES FINNEY AND TRAVAILING PRAYER

THE SECOND GREAT AWAKENING AND ITS MILIEU

The legacy of Jonathan Edwards was one that positioned revival at the epicentre of God's work in the world¹ and gave emphasis to Christian experience,² particularly prayer,³ in ways that dominated the American church for more than a century.⁴ Edwards' voice echoed through generations, Henry May pointed out in *The Enlightenment of America*, as his works "were quoted from Scotland to South Carolina, among Baptists and Methodists as well as Congregationalist and Presbyterians,"⁵ and often by those who were somewhat distant theological relatives.⁶ "Finney was so far from Edwards in his philosophical outlook," McLoughlin puzzled, "that it may seem odd that he frequently quotes Edwards to buttress his views on specific aspects of revival."⁷ But having been deeply affected early on by Edwards' writings,⁸ Finney appealed for more who would do "as Pres. Edwards did in respect to revivals,"⁹ marshalling his works in defence of strong preaching,¹⁰ deep piety,¹¹ new

¹ Edwards' "original contribution to 'evangelical historiography' was," as Joseph Conforti has noted, to "place revivals at the center of the providential plan for human redemption." (Conforti 1995, 47-48) See Westra 1999, 132.

² See Chapter III, notes 39 and 54.

³ Martin Lloyd-Jones described Edwards as "preeminently the theologian of Revival, the theologian of experience, or as some have put it 'the theologian of the heart.'" (Lloyd-Jones 1996, 361) Peter Beck believes Lloyd-Jones "was right insofar as he went. But, Edwards was more than that. He was the theologian of *prayer* for revival." (Beck 2010, 141)

⁴ Edwards' "adherents dominated the Connecticut Valley for the next generation, and the most important New England seminaries for most of a century." (May 1976, 50)

⁵ *ibid*

⁶ "Edwards, to be sure," Stephen Nichols remarks, "would not be impressed by the generations of revivalists who call him father." (Nichols 2001, 111) For example, see Burns 1908, 257.

⁷ Finney, *Lectures*, xi.

⁸ In his *Autobiography*, Lyman Beecher quotes a letter from Rev. S. C. Aikin, April 20, 1827, with whom Finney had stayed during the Utica revival that began February 1, 1826: "'When I first became acquainted with him, ... I think he used too frequently the word 'devil,' and harsh expressions; but he greatly reformed, and I apprehend that reading those very quotations which you make from Edwards on Revivals was the means of his reformation. Until he came to my house (at Utica) he had never read the book, and here it was frequently in his hands during the revival; also other volumes of that great writer.'" (Beecher 1865, 2, 91)

⁹ Finney 1979, 117.

¹⁰ "To be sure, some of the Puritans were extremists. But still under their teaching there was a very different state of the individual and public conscience from what exists in these days. Those old, stern, grand vindicators of the government of God would have thundered and lightnined until they had almost demolished their pulpits if any such immoralities had shown themselves under their instructions as are common in these days." (Finney [1984], 107)

¹¹ "You must live a holy life, and consecrate all to God—your time, talents, influence—all you have, and all you are, to be his entirely. ... If I had Edwards here to-night, I could read passages showing how it was in his

measures,¹² and especially fervent prayer. Finney trumped critics of travailing prayer by claiming continuity with their hero:

This agony in prayer was prevalent in President Edwards' day, in the revivals that then took place. It was one of the great stumbling blocks in those days, to persons who were opposed to the revival, that people used to pray till the body was overpowered with their feelings.¹³

Finney believed there were clear links between Edwards' time and his own in the manner of revival prayer and how it was spreading.¹⁴ Some historians have agreed, theorising how embers of colonial renewal were never quenched but only strewn and stoked in new expressions and environments to become the Second Great Awakening.¹⁵

Many scholars interpret the Second Great Awakening as having unfolded in three phases and in three geographical theatres. The opening stage, roughly from 1795 to 1810, was associated with lively camp meetings on the borderlands of Kentucky, Tennessee, and Ohio, what Grover Loud called the "strategic battleground of religion in the westward march of the nation."¹⁶ Iain Murray cites John Boles' observation of how rapidly "the seemingly miraculous new revival technique"¹⁷ spread across the frontier to posit this period as the birth

days." (Finney, *Lectures*, 84) Finney drew especially from Edwards' resolutions to illustrate high standards in Christian lifestyle: "Pres. Edward made, and put on record this most excellent resolution;—'When I fall into sins, I will not rest until I have searched out and found the occasion and have removed it.' This great man had learned enough from his own experience to show him that he must look for the occasions of sin." (Finney, "Prayer for a Pure Heart", *The Oberlin Evangelist* XI, 6, March 14, 1849, 43) See also Finney 1827, 9.

¹² "President Edwards. This great man was famous in his day for new measures." (Finney, *Lectures*, 261)

¹³ *ibid*, 60. Here in Lecture IV, "Prevailing Prayer," Finney proceeds to "read a paragraph of what President Edwards says on the subject, to let you see that this is not a new thing in the church, but has always prevailed wherever revivals prevailed with power." For the excerpt, from which the title of this dissertation is taken, see Chapter I, note 419, and Appendix II. See also Noll 2002, 307.

¹⁴ In his address to the Blackfriars' Street Congregational Church in Glasgow on September 4, 1859 (see note 442), Finney drew parallels between the trans-Atlantic proliferation of prayer meetings in current times and Edwards' "correspondence with a number of praying men on your side of the water. President Edwards wrote, setting forth the state of religion in New England, and requesting a union of prayer between the brethren there and those in Scotland." (Finney, *The Prevailing Prayer-Meeting: A Sermon Delivered in Blackfriars' Street Congregational Chapel, Glasgow, on 4th September 1859* [London: Ward & Co.] [transcription in research notes of Richard A. G. Dupuis in The Charles Grandison Finney Papers, Oberlin College Archives] 9)

¹⁵ "If the 'Awakening' is extended from the decade of the 1740s to the century 1740-1840, its conceptual usefulness is better established. While the revival soon flagged among New England Congregationalists and middle-colony Presbyterians, it lived on in the periphery of those sections: in the backcountry, in the mean streets of their emerging cities, among the young, the displaced, and the disinherited." (Bratt 1998, 56)

¹⁶ Loud 1928, 95. See also Sweet 1944, 117.

¹⁷ Boles 1996, 89.

of revivalism and the initial “marring of American evangelicalism.”¹⁸ The second phase, from approximately 1810 to 1825, was characterised by the dignified, New England revival meetings of Asahel Nettleton¹⁹ (1783-1844) and the subtle, learned undermining of Calvinism by Timothy Dwight (1752-1817), Lyman Beecher (1775-1863), and Nathaniel Taylor (1786-1858).²⁰ These years saw the final collapse of the established church in New England, “a fact,” McLoughlin notes, “which greatly heightened the interest of the Congregational clergy in the promotion of a more modern type of revivalism.”²¹ Such was the contribution of the third phase, roughly 1825 to 1835 (and beyond on the expanding frontier), bookended from the beginning of Finney’s itinerant revivalism to publication of his *Lectures on Revivals of Religion* (1835). Bernard Weisberger is representative of historians who understand Finney as a bridge between the two previous phases in “bringing together the lay-directed pietistic vigor of the West and the respectable, seminary-bred religious enthusiasm of New England.”²² It was an amalgamation evolving in the laboratory of revival-scorched, upper New York State’s “burned-over district,”²³ the “capital” of which

¹⁸ “While their establishment of camp meetings and of altar calls arose from the best of motives, it was the result of an erroneous theology and it led to a system with consequences they failed to see. If camp meetings and altar calls could produce the same number of ‘converts’ as revivals, what was the difference between them? Could a revival ritual replace real revival?” (Murray 1996, 190) See Bruce 1974, 77-81, for description of prayer practices in camp meetings, and Cleveland 1916, 203-04, for an example of travelling prayer overheard at a camp meeting and documented verbatim in a letter by William McKendree.

¹⁹ “On the coast, and above all in New England, quieter forms of revivalism predominated. ... [These revivalists] eschewed the intense emotion and physical manifestations of the camp meetings, and sought rather to bring congregations to a quiet, solemn recognition of their spiritual need.” (Wolffe 2007, 62-63)

²⁰ See p. 200 for discussion of New Haven Theology.

²¹ McLoughlin 1959, 12.

²² Weisberger 1958, 87. “Except for his superior education, he might have been a transplant from the Kentucky of 1800.” (*ibid.*, 96) Finney developed “the bridge,” Perciaccante suggests, “between the Methodists’ successful Arminianism, the extemporaneous preaching of the Baptists and Methodists, and the law-oriented theology of the Presbyterians.” (Perciaccante 2003, 39) See Sweet 1944, 138. Finney’s blend became the norm, according to McLoughlin: “Opposing both the ecclesiastical pretensions of the conservatives and the freethinking propensities of the radicals, Finney stood for the evangelical outlook that became the prevailing one among middle-class churchgoers in mid-nineteenth century America.” (Finney, *Lectures*, vii)

²³ Finney confronted embittered opposition to revival in parts of Jefferson, Oneida, and Monroe Counties, “what in the western phrase would be called, ‘a burnt district.’” (Finney, *Memoirs*, 78) See Barkun 1986 and Cross 1950.

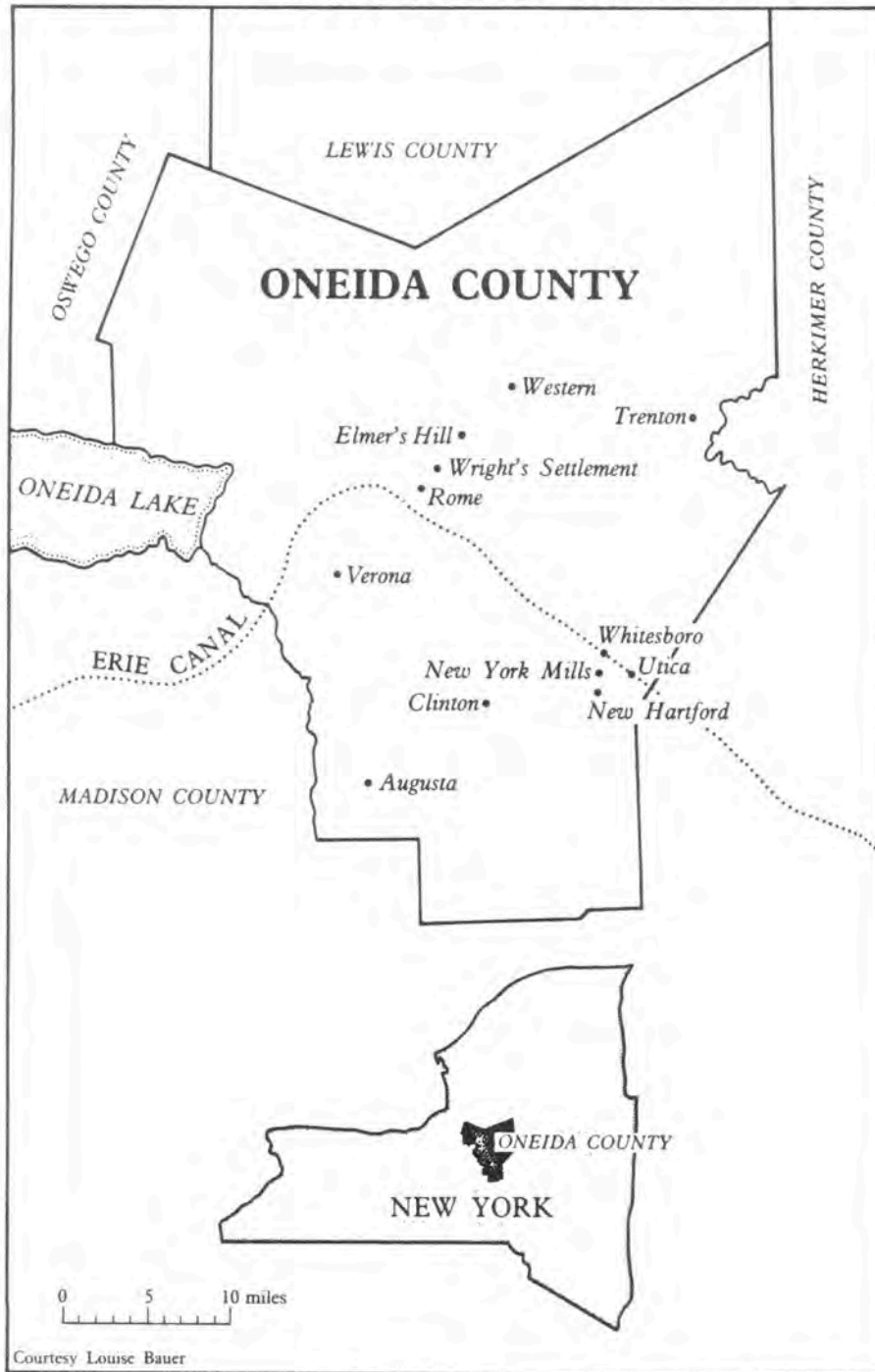
THE EARLY REVIVALS, 1824-25



Places where Finney preached from April 1824 to September 1825.

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THE ONEIDA COUNTY REVIVALS, 1825-26



Places where Finney preached from September 1825 to May 1826.

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was Rochester, a “clearing house for religious enthusiasms throughout the 1820s and 1830s,” Paul Johnson has written, and “the most thoroughly evangelized of American cities.”²⁴

What Finney witnessed in Rochester was the convergence of revival ideas and practices that had been emerging out of dynamic formalist/anti-formalist tension across the American Church.²⁵ A distinctive influence in this was the Methodists,²⁶ whom Finney respected, especially for their simple, bold preaching²⁷ and fervent prayer. “Who does not know,” Finney remarked, “that the Methodists ... used to have power with God in prayer? And that they had the universal respect of the world as sincere Christians?”²⁸ The populist upsurge,²⁹ however, that Methodists embodied was contributing to what Nathan Hatch considers historic religious upheaval and an unprecedented “explosion of entrepreneurial energy” that “splintered American Christianity and magnified the diversity of institutions claiming to be the church.”³⁰

²⁴ Johnson 2004, 13-14. Finney’s first (1830-31) of three campaigns (1842 and 1857) in Rochester, garnering for him national attention, was remembered for its unprecedented effect: “It is not too much to say that the whole character of the city was changed by that revival. Most of the leaders of society being converted, ... religion was enthroned as it has been in few other places. ... There was a wonderful falling off in crime. The courts had little to do, and the jail was nearly empty for years afterward.” ([_____] 1876, *Reminiscences of Rev. Charles G. Finney*..., 15) See notes 397-98.

²⁵ Perciaccante, *op. cit.*, 9-10; McLoughlin 1959, 41. Carwardine summarises the alchemy producing a new revivalism: “The frontier had provided a forum for its most dramatic expression; Methodists had broadened its currency; Charles Finney had helped secure its acceptance by reluctant Calvinists; city evangelicals had refined it and given it system and organization.” (Carwardine 1978, 28)

²⁶ “There is no doubt that Finney himself was influenced by Methodist revival practices and was to some extent attempting to emulate the successes of that denomination.” (Carwardine 1972, 338) Scholarship has examined how Finney redefined “religious success by the Methodists’ criteria” (Hatch 1986, 199) and developed revival practices “straight from the procedures that some Methodists had been popularizing for a quarter of a century” (Murray, *op. cit.*, 242). It was an almost unavoidable influence in light of the fact, Holifield establishes, that by 1855, if lay preachers are included, Methodists counted for 40 percent of all American clergy. (Holifield 2007, 113) See Noll 1992, 177-78, for analysis comparing Finney with Francis Asbury.

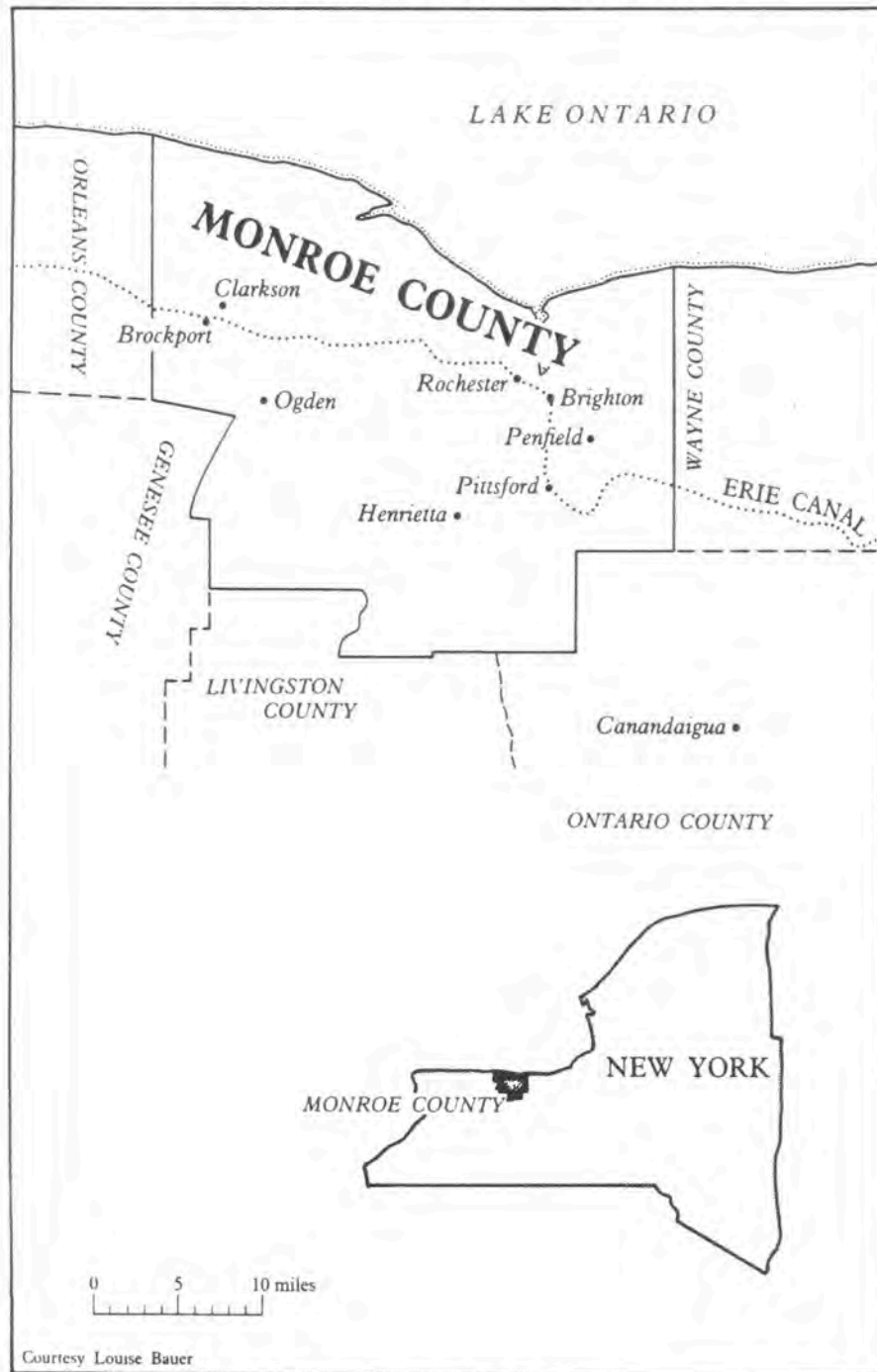
²⁷ “We must have exciting, powerful preaching, or the devil will have the people, except what the Methodists can save.” (Finney, *Lectures*, 273)

²⁸ Finney 1985 (1837), 109.

²⁹ “The post-revolutionary democratic surge in America that affected economic opportunity and the structure of political authority also profoundly altered the religious life of the nation. Eschewing all religious authority, various primitivist and restorationist groups uplifted individual conscience as the sole arbiter in matters religious, forging a religion of the people and by the people.” (Kling 1993, 11)

³⁰ Hatch 1986, 225-26. “At the beginning of the Revolutionary War, 70 percent of the churches—and a similar proportion of the clergy—were Congregationalist, Anglican, or Presbyterian. By 1855, America had at least forty-eight Christian denominations, and visitors remarked on the ‘almost endless variety of religious factions.’ The three large colonial churches now contained only about 18 percent of the clergy.” (Holifield 2007, 110)

THE ROCHESTER REVIVAL, 1830-31



**Places where Finney preached from September 1830
to March 1831.**

Taken from The Memoirs of Charles G. Finney: The Complete Restored Text (298) by Garth M. Rosell and Richard A. G. Dupuis (eds). Copyright © 1989 by Richard A. G. Dupuis and Garth M. Rosell. Used by permission of Zondervan.

This fragmentation was not only structural but theological, riven along the fault line dividing the view of revivals as miracles begun by God to save a select few on one side of the debate, and revivals requiring human agency with God's grace available to all who will receive on the other.³¹ George Marsden describes it as "the virtual obsession of much of the Protestant intellectual community" in Finney's day "to reconcile the Calvinist heritage with the realities of nineteenth-century American religious and intellectual life."³² Revival-minded Calvinists attempted to ease gently away from "Hopkinsianism,"³³ the progeny of Edwards' New Divinity, to a theology in which free will was more acceptable.³⁴ What emerged came to be known as "New Haven Theology" for its elaboration by Divinity faculty at Yale, Nathaniel Taylor foremost among them.³⁵ But while many associated him with "Taylorism," Finney remained "isolated from most of the theologians of his day," Chesebrough has observed, developing "ideas and themes that were uniquely his."³⁶ It was sophistry, Finney preached, to construe divine sovereignty as being such "that few can get the Spirit at all,"³⁷ that "God had framed the universe so wisely that there is no need of prayer,"³⁸ or that God had any intent or "right to set aside your liberty and treat you inconsistently with

³¹ Bowden 1991, 23-24. Finney "did not see how the Old School Theology could be employed to conduct successful revivals." (Johnson 1969, 358)

³² Marsden 1970, 6.

³³ Named after Samuel Hopkins (1721-1803), Edwards' theological heir and first biographer (Chapter III, note 339), Finney readily denounced what was also known as "Edwardseanism" or "consistent Calvinism"—"the two great points of which were that man ought to be willing to be damned for the glory of God and that God was the author of sin." (Finney, *Memoirs*, 251)

³⁴ Cohen 1975, 75-76.

³⁵ Holifield encapsulates Taylor's dilemma: "To remain a Calvinist he had to say that sin was certain; to be an effective revivalist, he had to say that the sinner had the freedom to break from sin. He tried to hold the tension with a formula that became the slogan of the New Haven theology: 'certainty with power to the contrary.' It was certain that all would sin even though they had the power not to sin." (Holifield 2003, 358)

³⁶ Chesebrough 2002, 68. While Finney may be considered "a daring innovator in thought as well as practice" (Noll 2002, 263), he remains elusive from clear theological categorisation. Carwardine can assert that his system "rejected the Arminianism" of socially stigmatised Methodists (Carwardine 1972, 339) while Mattson can point out how Finney "went on to reject outright both the doctrines of limited atonement and irresistible grace" (Mattson 1970, 216). Hardesty believes "Finney did not intend to be Arminian, nor did he consider himself to be" (Hardesty 1991, 36) while Noll thinks "Finney was more Arminian than Wesley: Wesley maintained that the human will is incapable of choosing God apart from God's preparatory grace, but Finney rejected this requirement" (Noll 1992, 177). The blurriness traces all the way back to his first biography: "Finney's system preserves all the advantages of Arminianism in the pulpit, and all the strength of Calvinism in the closet." (Wright 1996 [1891], 226) See Chapter I, note 25, and Weiser 1844, 1-2.

³⁷ Finney, "On Prayer for the Holy Spirit", *The Oberlin Evangelist* XVII, 11, May 23, 1855, 82.

³⁸ Finney, "On Prayer", *The Oberlin Evangelist* XVII, 1, January 3, 1855, 2.

the nature he has given you.”³⁹ Finney was determined to undo hyper-Calvinistic “cannotism” paralysing the masses,⁴⁰ proclaiming how conversions⁴¹ and revivals⁴²—and ultimately Christian perfection,⁴³ of oneself or one’s society⁴⁴—were the result of both divine and human agency. Historians have theorised how perfectionism doctrines formulated at Oberlin College,⁴⁵ where Finney came in 1835 as teacher, pastor, and eventually president, gave expression to “the hunger for a higher, holier life which was sweeping through all of American Christendom,”⁴⁶ resulting in social concern wide-ranging enough to be considered a “revivalist political ethos.”⁴⁷ Scholars also speculate how this atmosphere of benevolence and reform, flushed with innovations in markets⁴⁸ and communication,⁴⁹ powered a

³⁹ Finney, “Affections and Emotions of God”, *The Oberlin Evangelist* I, 22, October 9, 1839, 170.

⁴⁰ See notes 220-23. In his introduction to Finney’s *Lectures*, McLoughlin comments, “The first thing that strikes the reader of the *Lectures on Revivals* is the virulence of Finney’s hostility toward traditional Calvinism and all it stood for.” (Finney, *Lectures*, ix) For Finney, the results of “the church’s being 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” had been cataclysmic: “Generation after generation have gone down to hell. 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. It has been the devil’s most successful means of destroying souls. The connection is as clear in religion as it is when the farmer sows his grain.” (Finney, *Lectures*, 14-15)

⁴¹ “The sinner’s own agency is indispensable, for conversion consists in the right employment of the sinner’s own agency.” (*ibid*, 318)

⁴² “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.” (*ibid*) “Men cannot do the devil’s work more effectually, than by preaching up the sovereignty of God, as a reason why we should not put forth efforts to produce a revival.” (*ibid*, 21)

⁴³ See notes 560-61.

⁴⁴ Rosell and DuPuis describe the vantage point from which Finney wrote his *Memoirs* in the 1860s: “The decades that followed [his itinerant revivalism] had been a time of momentous change. Men and women everywhere had set about trying to perfect society. It was an era of unprecedented reform.” (Finney, *Memoirs*, xix)

⁴⁵ Always controversial, Oberlin perfectionism was promulgated chiefly by Asa Mahan, the college’s first president. See Fairchild 1984 [1883], Zikmund 1968, and Dayton 1974. Dayton later notes, “While Mahan moved increasingly toward Methodism, Finney appears to have moved away from themes of entire sanctification after an initial period in the 1840s that might be described as more Wesleyan.” (Dayton 1987, 100-01)

⁴⁶ Smith 1980, 12.

⁴⁷ “Slavery, prohibition, Populism, gambling, civil rights—a heterogeneous collection of issues—are not usually regarded as parts of a single political tradition. But they are, for all are derived in different ways from the teachings of Finney and his followers in the revival movement.” (Hammond 1979, 2)

⁴⁸ Sellers 1991.

⁴⁹ Daniel Walker Howe won the Pulitzer Prize for his “alternative interpretation of the early nineteenth century as a time of a ‘communications revolution.’” (Howe 2007, 5)

“democratic faith in the common man that made Jacksonian democracy possible,”⁵⁰ with Finney as a spokesman of his age.⁵¹

The corollary, however, of all these gains and aspirations was a destabilising of social structure and spiritual life, to which many believed the only remedy was revival.⁵² While McClymond is typical of historians who have questioned “the purported link between revival and social crisis,”⁵³ Finney,⁵⁴ those he may have influenced,⁵⁵ and other current interpreters⁵⁶ have acknowledged such a possibility in how, for example, **catastrophic events and economic hardship** set a conducive mood of anxiety and moral vulnerability.⁵⁷ Fresh from the well-known 1857-58 “layman’s revival” in New York City, Finney could recount what he had long believed⁵⁸ about how “commercial breakdown [was] the beginning of the whole

⁵⁰ McLoughlin 1978, 139. While Leonard Sweet concludes that “the long-standing attempt to make a man who refused to vote Jacksonian a religious representative of Jacksonian democracy needs to be abandoned” (Sweet 1976, 221), scholarly consensus supports Perry Miller’s thesis that Finneyan revivalism “was a mass uprising, a release of energy, a sweep of the people which made it an expression of that energy we call Jacksonian America” (Miller 1965, 30).

⁵¹ Finney, *Lectures*, vii. “Few individuals have left as deep a mark on American culture as Finney.” (Sellers, *op. cit.*, 225) See also Pyke 1997, 57.

⁵² “Established churches, stable neighborhoods, families, authoritative local elites: these and internalized restraints of every kind were swept away by the market, by migration and personal ambition, and by the universal acceptance of democratic ideas. Revivals were a means of building order and a sense of common purpose among sovereign, footloose, and money-hungry individualists.” (Johnson 2004, 9) Finney commented, “You may do anything else you please, and you can change the aspects of society in some respects, but you will do no real good; you only make it worse without a Revival of Religion.” (Finney, *Lectures*, 26) See Miller 1965, 3, and Cott 1975, 15.

⁵³ McClymond 2004, 44. Echoing McLoughlin (1959, 7), Perciaccante concludes that “the history of revivalism in Jefferson County, New York, where Charles Grandison Finney had his conversion experience and where he first preached, does not suggest or support theories that rely on economic or cultural stressor arguments to explain the causes of Second Great Awakening revivalism. Strain and crisis cannot succeed as explanations of the background of revivalism in Jefferson County.” (Perciaccante, *op. cit.*, 4-5)

⁵⁴ See Chapter I, note 56.

⁵⁵ “The history of revivals proves that great works of grace have gone before and followed great national calamities, and this has been the case of lesser awakenings in churches and small communities.” (Hervey 1884, 9) Carwardine notes, “Most contemporary ministers accepted without question the primary significance of economic distress in drawing men of all classes into the churches.” (Carwardine 1978, 52)

⁵⁶ See Chapter I, note 22.

⁵⁷ “Perry Miller grasped the essential organizing mood of the Second Awakening in *The Life of the Mind in America* (1965) when he said that ‘Anxiety over the future lies at the heart of the movement.’” (McLoughlin 1978, 104-05 [no reference provided]) Mary Ryan describes how economic change bred fear among Oneida County’s praying women: “It is easy to discern the material conditions that might breed this anxiety. The first decade in the Maternal Association’s history coincided with the opening of the Erie Canal, the doubling of [Utica’s] population, and the accompanying proliferation of grog shops, boarding houses, and brothels.” (Ryan 1981, 622)

⁵⁸ See Chapter I, note 56.

movement in that great commercial city.”⁵⁹ Such had been his personal experience in the early days at Oberlin, recalled by James Fairchild, who succeeded Finney as president:

The families of professors were in doubt as to the necessities of life, from day to day. ... Thus in the college and in the colony there was a significance, not often realized, in the prayer, “Give us day by day our daily bread.”⁶⁰

But for Finney, circumstantial hardship as stimulus for prayer was outstripped by **concern over spiritual declension in church and society**, evidence of which was abounding in his day.⁶¹ Marsden has observed the perceived paucity of anything on the early nineteenth-century frontier “to restrain the lawlessness, unbelief, and the indifference that seemed to be sweeping the nation. The religious order was collapsing.”⁶² Revivals presupposed such degeneracy,⁶³ Finney believed, and intercessors’ humble distress in response was crucial:

Sometimes the conduct of the wicked drives Christians to prayer, breaks them down, and makes them sorrowful and tender-hearted, so that they can weep day and night, and instead of scolding the wicked they pray earnestly for them. Then you may expect a revival. Indeed, it is begun already.⁶⁴

But revival could not begin without the church reaching a **deep seriousness about sin and the judgement of God**.⁶⁵ As with most things, Finney understood this in unambiguous

⁵⁹ Finney, *The Prevailing Prayer-Meeting: A Sermon Delivered in Blackfriars’ Street Congregational Chapel, Glasgow, on 4th September 1859*, *op. cit.*, 11. Drawing from the personal journal of Jeremiah Calvin Lanphier, credited with having initiated the Fulton Street prayer meeting in New York, Samuel Prime wrote, “As in the time of an earthquake, or wreck at sea, men’s hearts failing them for fear, they will cry to Him who rides upon the whirlwind, so it was believed that the financial storm had driven men to pray. And it doubtless did.” (Prime 1872b, 14-15) See Chapter I, note 18.

⁶⁰ Fairchild, *op. cit.*, 207.

⁶¹ Troubled by deterioration in their churches, Presbyterians in Princeton, New Jersey, reprinted in 1827 an official report to the Presbytery of Oneida of Finney’s revivals there a year earlier in hopes of inciting the same in their region: “This reprint however, has been prompted by consideration of a more local, and still more definite kind. It is a fact not to be denied or disguised, that the churches in this quarter of the country have, for many years, been suffering a most deplorable decline. ... And it does not appear how, without a speedy and great change in things, we can be saved from the doom of those churches which have had their ‘candlestick removed out of its place,’ and been given up to final and utter desolation.” ([] 1827, *Narrative of the Revival of Religion, in the County of Oneida; Particularly in the Bounds of The Presbytery of Oneida, in the Year 1826*, iii-iv)

⁶² Marsden, *op. cit.*, 8-9. See Lescelius 1997, 14.

⁶³ Finney, *Lectures*, 9.

⁶⁴ *ibid*, 23. A similar response to deterioration in the clergy was equally important for Finney: “I have seen much of it, and found Christians who wept and groaned in secret, to see the darkness on the minds of ministers in regard to religion, their earthliness and fear of man.” (*ibid*, 116)

⁶⁵ “A revival always includes conviction of sin on the part of the church.” (*ibid*, 15)

terms: while revival was “indispensable to avert the judgments of God from the church,”⁶⁶ only let Christians be agreed in prayer “as to what ought to be done for the salvation of the world, and the millennium will come at once.”⁶⁷ He believed conveyance of this unity and **burden of prayer as a charism** was the remit of the Holy Spirit, the effects of which were a harbinger of revival Finney had observed even among those, particularly women, whose circumstances were sometimes far from desperate.⁶⁸ This often reversed, however, in the **persecution** that usually accompanied being filled with the Spirit,⁶⁹ propelling petitioners to even more fervent prayer.⁷⁰

Whatever might rouse Christians to agonise in prayer for revival, Finney welcomed it.⁷¹ Known for both the intensity and integrity of his own prayer life,⁷² he devoted a quarter of his *Lectures* to prayer as the first and foremost means of promoting revival. Finney understood prayer as a “governmental necessity”⁷³ conjoining means to ends in compliance with the “law of [God’s] universal kingdom”.⁷⁴ “Prayer pleases God as Governor of the

⁶⁶ *ibid.*, 27

⁶⁷ *ibid.*, 328

⁶⁸ “In a few instances ladies, and some very prominent ladies, who were strongly pressed in spirit, would lead in prayer in their social meetings which we held daily from house to house.” (Finney, *Memoirs*, 176) Ryan notes how, at the beginning of Finney’s itinerancy, “the wives of merchants founded a network of societies that built the infrastructure and financed the operations of the revival ministry.” (Ryan 1981, 102-03) Finney’s understanding of how the spirit of prayer operated in revival is explored beginning on p. 241.

⁶⁹ “If you have much of the Spirit of God, ... if any man will live godly in Christ Jesus, he must expect persecution. Often the elders, and even the minister will oppose you, if you are filled with the Spirit of God.” (Finney, *Lectures*, 117) See note 417.

⁷⁰ Finney often drew attention to the “primitive prayer-meeting” before Pentecost: “Driven by fierce persecution, they assemble together; ... they pray for a bold and fearless spirit that they may preach Christ in the face of scorn and scourging—and they have it. Nothing can daunt such men—and nothing stand before them.” (Finney, “On Divine Manifestations”, *The Oberlin Evangelist* VIII, 6, March 18, 1846, 43)

⁷¹ See Chapter I, note 234.

⁷² John Morgan, for thirty-five years Finney’s co-pastor and friend, emphasised prayer as Finney’s greatest personal distinction: “There was in him, in prayer, the most remarkable power that I have ever seen in any human being.” ([] 1876, *Reminiscences of Rev. Charles G. Finney*..., 58-59) Stressing how this “identified the essence of Charles G. Finney’s evangelical spirit,” Hambrick-Stowe cites Morgan here in the closing lines of *Charles Grandison Finney and the Spirit of American Evangelicalism*. (Hambrick-Stowe 1996, 298) Other modern interpreters, such as Cohen, have viewed Finney’s personal spirituality as more enigmatic: “Finney was a hard man to understand, a passionate mystic enclosed in a tough shell of Yankee practicality.” (Cohen, *op. cit.*, 80)

⁷³ Finney, “The Promises of God”, *The Penny Pulpit* (London: J. Paul, c1853), May 17, 1850, 69, The Richard DuPuis Papers, Oberlin College Archive.

⁷⁴ Finney, *The Prevailing Prayer-Meeting: A Sermon Delivered in Blackfriars’ Street Congregational Chapel, Glasgow, on 4th September 1859*, *op. cit.*, 2. Moral law and obligation and God as “Moral Governor,” ideas

universe because it puts us in a position in which he can bless us and gratify his own benevolence.”⁷⁵ But being this obligatory “link in the chain of causes that lead to revival”⁷⁶ gave no permission for prayer becoming ordinary or perfunctory, Finney insisted. Less a set of practices than an attitude or mood, “prevailing prayer”⁷⁷ throbbed with emotion at the junction of expectant faith and angst-ridden feeling:

Prevailing prayer is, after all, rather a state of mind than a particular exercise. By this I mean, that a man *to prevail, must live in a prescribed state of mind*. Prayer is not the mere going aside and praying, but a perpetual yearning of the mind, an habitual presenting of the mind in a spirit of importunity.⁷⁸

Finney made these and other conditions⁷⁹ of “the prayer of faith” programmatic as part of his “new measures”⁸⁰ guaranteed to produce revival, if applied effectively, as much as “the right use of means to raise grain, and a crop of wheat.”⁸¹ Though “often bordering so closely on the miraculous,”⁸² Finney believed the promise of prayer was in making the supernatural natural,⁸³ a stance detractors all around him regarded as iconoclastic. As we shall see, Finney was drawn into firestorms of controversy from the start,⁸⁴ being branded a contriver or mechaniser of revival⁸⁵ by critics for his use of anxious meetings, house-to-house visitation,

construed originally by Joseph Bellamy (1719-90), an apprentice of Edwards, were the essential keys to Finney’s theological system. (Marsden, *op. cit.*, 34-35; Holifield 2003, 363)

⁷⁵ Finney, “On Prayer”, *The Oberlin Evangelist* XVII, *op. cit.*, 1.

⁷⁶ Finney, *Lectures*, 53-54.

⁷⁷ See note 361.

⁷⁸ Finney, “How to Prevail with God”, *The Penny Pulpit* [London: J. Paul, c1853], May 22, 1850, 118, The Richard DuPuis Papers, Oberlin College Archive.

⁷⁹ “Many persons seem to overlook the fact that there are conditions of acceptable prayer revealed in the Bible. But this is a fact by far too important to be ever wisely overlooked. It surely becomes every Christian to know not only that there are conditions, but also what they are.” (Finney, “Conditions of Prevailing Prayer” [part 1], *The Oberlin Evangelist* IX, 11, May 26, 1847, 81)

⁸⁰ See notes 86-89, 232, 272, 429; Chapter II, notes 300, 314-16.

⁸¹ “There is one fact under the government of God, worthy of universal notice, and of everlasting remembrance; which is, that the most useful and important things are most easily and certainly obtained by the use of the appropriate means. This is evidently a principle in the Divine administration.” (Finney, *Lectures*, 15) “There never will be a revival till *somebody* makes particular efforts for this end.” (*ibid*, 33)

⁸² Finney, “How to Prevail with God”, *The Penny Pulpit*, *op. cit.*, 117.

⁸³ See Chapter I, note 39. See also McLoughlin 1959, 85; Sweet 1976, 211.

⁸⁴ “Never a man to dodge an argument,” James Johnson remarks, Finney “lived almost constantly in the realm of controversy and debate.” (Johnson 1969, 338) Mattson adds that Finney’s “opponents unhesitatingly proclaimed him to be both ‘enthusiastic’ and ‘heretical.’” (Mattson, *op. cit.*, iv)

⁸⁵ See notes 453-56.

the mourner's bench, familiarity with God in prayer,⁸⁶ allowing women to pray in mixed assemblies,⁸⁷ protracted meetings, and other "new measures." Finney discouraged overattachment to measures⁸⁸ as readily as he dismissed opposition to them by those who "*have not been successful in promoting revivals.*"⁸⁹ His rebuttal generally returned to pragmatism: "The success of any measure designed to promote a revival of religion, demonstrates its wisdom."⁹⁰

Realism about functional effectiveness was also a part of how Finney explained traving prayer: that the spirit of prayer was not the same as travail, but often required it.

The feeling is not always so great as this, but such things are much more common than is supposed.⁹¹

I do not say now, or suppose that in all instances, this spirit is indispensable to prevail. But it often is.⁹²

Finney could look back from revival mountaintops⁹³ to survey what he had come to understand over time⁹⁴ about "travail of the soul"⁹⁵ as the zenith of prevailing prayer. With sharpened attention, he believed, all people might recognise and perhaps embrace traving

⁸⁶ See note 184.

⁸⁷ See notes 270-77.

⁸⁸ "Be watchful against *placing dependence* on a protracted meeting, *as if that of itself would produce a revival*. ... Avoid adopting the idea that a revival cannot be enjoyed *without a Protracted Meeting*." (Finney, *Lectures*, 266) Garth Rosell, coeditor of Finney's *Memoirs*, comments, "The measures themselves, for Finney and his colleagues, had no intrinsic value. They were strategic rather than dogmatic. Their purpose was to arouse interest in the mind of the listener, not to become an essential part of orthodoxy." (Rosell 1971, 49)

⁸⁹ Finney, *Lectures*, 272.

⁹⁰ *ibid*, 189. "[Finney's] method did not grow from any philosophical or theological base, but from simple pragmatism, Yankee ingenuity. The sanction was not biblical stipulation or ecclesiastical precedent, but success." (Hardesty, *op. cit.*, 89) See also Miller 1965, 27; Johnson 1969, 357.

⁹¹ Finney, *Lectures*, 30.

⁹² Finney, "How to Prevail with God", *The Penny Pulpit*, *op. cit.*, 116. "Travail of soul is often a condition of prevailing prayer." (Finney, "Prevailing Prayer", *The Independent of New York* XXVI, 1318, March 5, 1874, 3)

⁹³ Frank Beardsley cites an account written for the Presbytery of Whitesborough, meeting on September 8, 1826, about the revivals in Oneida County. It was reported that "this revival has been characterized by a remarkable spirit of prayer. Often it has been said—'Christians pray as they have never prayed before.' Many have been in deep distress, and felt what it was to *travail in birth* for souls." (Beardsley 1937, 73-74 [no reference provided]) Five years later, "There were a good many cases in Rochester in which people were exercised with this spirit of agonizing travail of soul." (Finney, *Memoirs*, 318)

⁹⁴ "At first I did not understand what this exercise of mind that I had passed through, was. But shortly after in relating it to a Christian brother he said to me, 'Why that was the *travail* of your soul.' ... A few moments conversation, and pointing me to certain scriptures, gave me to understand what it was." (Finney, *Memoirs*, 41)

⁹⁵ See Chapter I, note 281.

prayer in their experience, too: as mature Christians,⁹⁶ as new believers,⁹⁷ in the moments of conversion,⁹⁸ and even prior. The impulse of travailing prayer was actually something everyone was familiar with,⁹⁹ from “those heathen sailors who were in the ship with Jonah”¹⁰⁰ even to “the moanings of animals in distress”¹⁰¹ and “young ravens in their hunger.”¹⁰² “This, however, is not prayer; it is merely the cry of anguish,” Finney clarified:

In hearing the cry of distress, without regard to the character, motives, or designs of the petitioners, it is a mere breaking forth of God’s benevolence, without having given any pledge that he would hear and answer such petitions. But there is a kind of prayer to which God stands pledged to give an answer.¹⁰³

Finney believed that prayer God prefers and waits for, in which “we seem to see every thing and feel every thing, and express every thing, on an enlarged scale,”¹⁰⁴ had long been overlooked.¹⁰⁵ And Christians had become spiritually disabled as a result: “If any one does

⁹⁶ “Do not some of you know this? ... Are you not very conscious of these intercessions made for you, and in your very soul, as it were, with groanings that cannot be uttered? Your heart within pants and cries out after God, and is lifted up continually before him as spontaneously as it is when your heart sings, pouring out its deep outgoings of praise.” (Finney, “An Approving Heart—Confidence in Prayer”, *The Oberlin Evangelist* IX, 5, March 3, 1847, 33)

⁹⁷ “After looking around for a few moments, I knelt down and put my hand on the head of a young man who was kneeling at my feet, and engaged in prayer for mercy on his soul. I got his attention and preached Jesus in his ear. In a few moments he seized Jesus by faith, and then broke out in prayer for those around him. I then turned to another in the same way with the same result; and then another, and another, till I know not how many had laid hold of Christ and were full of prayer for others.” (Finney [1984], 20)

⁹⁸ “God rolls this weight upon the soul of a Christian,” a burden of prayer “so heavy that they cannot live under it, and then they must go to God for relief. It is like the case of many a convicted sinner. ... He hangs back, and struggles, and groans under the burden of sins, and will not throw himself upon God, till his burden of conviction becomes so great that he can live no longer; and when he is driven to desperation, as it were, and feels as if he was ready to sink into hell, he makes a mighty plunge, and throws himself upon God’s mercy as his only hope.” (Finney, *Lectures*, 66)

⁹⁹ Finney repeatedly endeavoured to demystify travailing prayer: “People sometimes wonder at Christians’ having such feelings. Wonder at that! Why, at the natural, and philosophical, and necessary results of deep piety towards God, and deep benevolence towards man, in view of the great danger they see sinners to be in.” (*ibid*, 66)

¹⁰⁰ Finney, “On Persevering Prayer for Others”, *The Oberlin Evangelist* XVII, 2, January 17, 1855, 10.

¹⁰¹ Finney, “The Conditions of Prevailing Prayer”, *The Penny Pulpit* (London: J. Paul, c1853), May 21, 1850, 106, The Richard DuPuis Papers, Oberlin College Archive.

¹⁰² Finney, “Conditions of Prevailing Prayer” (part 2), *The Oberlin Evangelist* IX, 12, June 9, 1847, 89. “It is even said in scripture that Christ heard the prayer of devils” crying out for mercy, Finney notes (Finney, “Conditions of Prevailing Prayer” [part 1], *The Oberlin Evangelist* IX, *op. cit.*, 82), as did Edwards (Chapter III, note 178).

¹⁰³ Finney, “The Conditions of Prevailing Prayer”, *The Penny Pulpit*, *op. cit.*, 106.

¹⁰⁴ Finney, “Communion with God” (part 1), *The Oberlin Evangelist* II, 18, August 26, 1840, 137.

¹⁰⁵ Finney recounted an incident with “an aged minister” who reached a state of travailing prayer for his daughters’ conversions. “He told me the great exercise of mind he had had previous to their conversion, and when I told him that it was a thing perfectly common to revivals, he felt surprised that he should have so long overlooked what the Bible says on this subject.” (Finney, “How to Prevail with God”, *The Penny Pulpit*, *op. cit.*, 116-17)

not know what this is he does not understand the spirit of prayer. He is not in a revival state.”¹⁰⁶ To attempt such an understanding of travailing prayer and its non-negotiable importance, we turn now to what Finney said about it, again using our matrix¹⁰⁷ of historical, interrelated traits as a template.

¹⁰⁶ Finney, “Prevailing Prayer”, *The Independent of New York* XXVI, *op. cit.*, 3.

¹⁰⁷ See Chapter I, 41-42.

CORE TRAITS OF TRAVAILING PRAYER IN THE THEOLOGY AND PRACTICE OF CHARLES FINNEY

Content

Neediness and Brokenness

Charles Finney's first personal experience of travelling prayer unfolded "not long after I was converted" in the engulfing sense of a sudden,¹⁰⁸ heartbreaking need to pray for a gravely ill woman who had provided lodging to him as a young man:

I felt something almost like a cramp seizing me in the region of my heart. It came upon me in the sense of a burden that crushed me, and a kind of spasm inwardly, the nature of which I could not at all understand, but with it came an intense desire to pray for that woman.¹⁰⁹

Immediately next in his *Memoirs*, Finney recounts a similar experience from receiving news that a young woman in the church choir he directed was being drawn toward Universalism.

It loaded me down with great agony. As I returned to my room, at some distance from that house, I felt almost as if I should stagger under the burden that was on my mind. I went to my room, and there I struggled, and groaned, and agonized; but could not frame to present the case before God in words, but only in groans and tears.¹¹⁰

From the earliest stages of his Christian experience, Finney began to identify the content of prayer with an influx of weight bearing down on his spirit: a feeling of being "crushed with the burden that was on my soul,"¹¹¹ becoming anxiously laden with "a great pressure of the Holy Spirit"¹¹² to the point of **brokenness**. As we shall see, such "anxiety of mind" in Christians that "weighs them down ... all the time, and makes [them] look and act as if [they have] a load on [their] mind"¹¹³ was central to Finney's perception of the spirit of prayer for revival.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁸ How the spirit of prayer "came upon" and seized petitioners is an important feature in interpreting travelling prayer as charism and vocation in Finney's understanding, which is examined beginning on p. 241.

¹⁰⁹ Finney, *Memoirs*, 40-41.

¹¹⁰ *ibid.*, 41-42.

¹¹¹ *ibid.*, 372. Finney mentioned in his *Lectures on Revivals of Religion* knowing men "of firm nerves, who stand high in character, who have been absolutely crushed with grief for the state of sinners." (Finney, *Lectures*, 30)

¹¹² Finney, *Memoirs*, 138.

¹¹³ Finney, *Lectures*, 30.

¹¹⁴ See notes 383-90.

Brokenness under the staggering load of prayer was the sense of knowing what “every Christian should know, past all doubt and demurring, that he needs God’s aid, and can do nothing to the purpose without it.”¹¹⁵ Such dependence upon the Holy Spirit was the language of prayer to Finney,¹¹⁶ a theme he preached from frequently calling petitioners to cry out from breakthroughs of spiritual poverty that “commonly precede and are the prelude to spiritual enlargement.”¹¹⁷ Such **neediness** was dynamic to Finney, not a paralysed posture of inability, but an effort to “understand the real spirit of our own prayer”¹¹⁸ through active “consideration of our shortcomings in view of [God’s] standard,” of our “want of fruit” and “our covenant obligations to God.”¹¹⁹ By such engagement persons seize “the great club to crush the serpent’s head—the head of cursed pride,”¹²⁰ which for both believers and the unconverted alike¹²¹ was, for Finney, effectual prayer’s most formidable impediment.

Breaking up pride, then, alongside breaking down under prayer’s burden, was the other crucial dimension of brokenness in travailing prayer for Finney. From the point of his conversion onward, when Finney “cried at the top of my voice” in disgrace over his self-discovery of pride that he would be “ashamed to have a human being see me on my knees before God,”¹²² Finney believed nothing of lasting spiritual importance could happen in a

¹¹⁵ Finney, “Prayer for a Pure Heart”, *The Oberlin Evangelist* XI, *op. cit.*, 41. “Men ought to pray always, because they always need the influence of prayer.” (Finney, “On Prayer”, *The Oberlin Evangelist* XVII, *op. cit.*, 1)

¹¹⁶ “The language that is so common in prayer and in the devotional dialect of the church, respects generally our dependence upon the Holy Spirit...” (Finney 1878a [1846], 362)

¹¹⁷ Finney, “Blessed Are the Poor In Spirit”, *The Oberlin Evangelist* VI, 25, December 4, 1844, 194.

¹¹⁸ Finney, “Conditions of Prevailing Prayer” [part 1], *The Oberlin Evangelist* IX, *op. cit.*, 81.

¹¹⁹ Finney, Sermon 263, “Broken and Contrite Heart,” on Ps 51:17 (1866), The Charles Grandison Finney Papers, Oberlin College Archives.

¹²⁰ Finney, “Mutual Confession of Faults, and Mutual Prayer”, *The Oberlin Evangelist* XI, 2, January 17, 1849, 11.

¹²¹ “A breaking down of heart, a getting down into the dust before God, with great humility” among Christians was prerequisite to revival prayer for Finney, tracking similarly with steps leading to conversion: “When the churches are thus awakened and reformed, the reformation and salvation of sinners will follow, going through the same stages of conviction, repentance, and reformation.” (Finney, *Lectures*, 16) Such was the revivalist consensus in Finney’s time, of which Thomas Sheardown was one example: “It is often necessary, I think, in the first place to *take away from the church all human dependence*, just as much as it is to endeavor to *take away the sinner’s dependence*, or that in which he trusts.” (Sheardown 1866, 198)

¹²² Finney, *Memoirs*, 20. See note 507.

human being until pride was dismantled.¹²³ And to provide a safeguard against the onset of self-importance in the church, a real risk under the glories of revival, was “another reason why God requires this sort of prayer”: “When the church is thus prostrated in the dust before God, and is in the depth of agony in prayer, the blessing does them good. While at the same time, if they had received the blessing without this deep prostration of soul, it would have puffed them up with pride.”¹²⁴

It was for this demolition of pride that God wrestled with Jacob, who “needed to be humbled and broken down”¹²⁵ in order to prevail in prayer. For this breaking “often God delays that he may bring us lower in the dust before him”¹²⁶ until, as in “the case of the Syrophenician woman ... our blessed Lord [is] all overcome by such blended humility and importunity and faith.”¹²⁷ These struggles and holdups of prayer were parts of the process by which God breaks up fallow ground,¹²⁸ which “is to *break up your hearts*,”¹²⁹ until prayer becomes the voice of “nothing less than universal, unqualified submission to God.”¹³⁰ “Scarcely can there be a state of higher spiritual exercise than this,” Finney remarked, which is “why so few Christians know any thing about the spirit of prayer, because they ... never knew what it was to have their hearts all broken up in this way.”¹³¹ But Finney believed that everywhere prayer for revival was built on the bedrock of brokenness through intensive self-

¹²³ This was the purpose of the “mourner’s” or “anxious bench,” one of Finney’s more controversial “new measures”: “To help the sinner to break these shackles of pride and fear, Mr. Finney conceived the idea of calling the anxious forward to special seats vacated for them in front of the pulpit, there to kneel before the whole assembly whilst prayer should be offered particularly for them. This was a hard thing for some of the proud men of that city [Rochester] to do; and yet the result showed that there was profound philosophy and consummate wisdom in it.” ([_____] 1876, *Reminiscences of Rev. Charles G. Finney...*, 18)

¹²⁴ Finney, *Lectures*, 69.

¹²⁵ Finney, “The Conditions of Prevailing Prayer”, *The Penny Pulpit*, *op. cit.*, 111.

¹²⁶ Finney, “On Persevering Prayer for Others”, *The Oberlin Evangelist* XVII, *op. cit.*, 10.

¹²⁷ *ibid*

¹²⁸ “Break up your fallow ground; for it is time to seek the Lord, till he come and rain righteousness upon you.” (Hos 10:12 [KJV] This text, and the preparation of brokenheartedness, constituted the core of “How to Promote a Revival” for Finney (Finney, *Lectures*, 38-51).

¹²⁹ Finney, *Lectures*, 38.

¹³⁰ Finney, “Conditions of Prevailing Prayer” (part 2), *The Oberlin Evangelist* IX, *op. cit.*, 90.

¹³¹ Finney, *Lectures*, 49.

examination, “as if you were just preparing yourself for the judgment,”¹³² revival was only a matter of time;¹³³ lack of brokenness was “why prayers are not answered.”¹³⁴

Urgency and Agony Self-examination, the petitioner’s “first work,”¹³⁵ was valuable, however, not only for the brokenness it revealed but also for the feelings it produced, what Finney considered introspection’s more useful effect, for “while you are musing, the fire of emotion will burn.”¹³⁶ And the crushing pressure of prayer could also generate important feelings of “urgency for the blessing,” why he insisted the petitioner “must feel the pressure of a great cause and must feel moreover that it cannot prosper without God’s interposing power.”¹³⁷ Such feelings were critical for Finney. From his experience he had become convinced that one “cannot substitute instruction” in the immutable laws of prevailing prayer for the preparation one receives from firsthand impressions; “you must feel them before God, and carry out the life and power of these truths in your very heart.”¹³⁸ When people “feel the want of a revival, they pray for it,”¹³⁹ Finney lectured, and these right feelings produce right prayer,¹⁴⁰ even failsafe prayer: “Those who feel less of the importance of a revival may pray for it in words, but they will never have the blessing. But when a

¹³² *ibid*, 48

¹³³ Finney recalled near the end of his life a prayer meeting where “a prominent impenitent man in the community administered to them, in my presence, a terrible rebuke. ... This rebuke fell heavily upon that prayer-meeting, as I shall ever remember. It did them good; for it was not long before the members of that prayer-meeting broke down, and we had a revival.” (Finney, “Prevailing Prayer”, *The Independent of New York* XXVI, *op. cit.*, 3) Commenting on Finney’s first revivals, Weisberger writes, “‘Broken down, broken down’ runs like a refrain through the memoirs of this period, as Finney harrowed his way through the townships.” (Weisberger, *op. cit.*, 99)

¹³⁴ Finney, Sermon 263, “Broken and Contrite Heart,” on Psalm 51:17 (1866), *op. cit.*

¹³⁵ Finney, *Lectures*, 51.

¹³⁶ Finney 1836, 53. Finney believed emotions are “purely involuntary states of mind” which exist “under certain circumstances calculated to excite them.” We cannot command ourselves to feel a certain way toward an object. “But we can command our *attention* to it, and look at it intently, till the proper feeling arises.” (Finney, *Lectures*, 39)

¹³⁷ Finney, “Prayer and Labor for the Gathering of the Great Harvest”, *The Oberlin Evangelist* XV, 1, January 5, 1853, 1.

¹³⁸ Finney, “On Prayer”, *The Oberlin Evangelist* XVII, *op. cit.*, 1.

¹³⁹ Finney, *Lectures*, 30.

¹⁴⁰ “When Christians offer effectual prayer, their state of feeling renders it proper for God to answer them.” (*ibid*, 52)

church has been united in prayer, and really felt the importance of a revival, they never have failed of having one.”¹⁴¹

Urgency was the feeling Finney was after in revival prayer. He came at this instinctively, both by constitution¹⁴² and conviction, believing nonchalance in prayer was evil and intolerable and that “the decisive characteristic of true religion is energy, not apathy.”¹⁴³ The imprint of his conversion¹⁴⁴—that belief set on fire produces prayer¹⁴⁵—had inscribed urgency upon his revival vision from moment one as he travailed for those in physical and spiritual peril.¹⁴⁶ So Finney would allow no delay for new converts in the exertion of prayer¹⁴⁷ and pressed for agreement among petitioners on “now” as the crucial timing of revival work: “Unless we agree to have the revival *now*, we shall not *now* use the means. ... To agree upon a future time is of no use, ...so that you see you are never properly agreed until you agree that *now* is the time.”¹⁴⁸ Above all, delay in prayer was unbearable because

¹⁴¹ *ibid*, 316. “I do not believe a case can be found, of such a church being turned empty away.” (*ibid*)

¹⁴² Though remembered as one who “could never bear lukewarmness, and laziness” ([] 1876, *Reminiscences of Rev. Charles G. Finney*..., 19), Finney was also known for his “prudent moderation” (Blodgett 1976, 11) around Oberlin (Butler, *et al.*, 2003, 252). However, Paul Johnson cites Gilbert Barnes for having “discovered” the formative role played in the abolition movement by the urgent prayer and decisionism of Finney’s revivals: “Barnes wanted to explain why, in the 1830s, critics of slavery rejected gradualist techniques, recruited thousands of new supporters, and attacked the South’s peculiar institution as a national evil that demanded immediate abolition. He analyzed the rhetoric and tactics of the movement and the sources of its support, and argued convincingly that antislavery immediatism was a direct outgrowth of the [Rochester] revival of 1830-31.” (Johnson 2004, 5) Barnes mentions Lyman Beecher ruminating after the departure of the “Lane Rebels”: “He discerned the true impulse of the antislavery movement, not in the noisy futilities of the Boston reformers, but in the expanding benevolence of the Great Revival. ‘Abolitionists,’ he concluded, were ‘the offspring of the Oneida denunciatory revivals.’” (Barnes 1957, 72; Beecher’s quote is from a letter to William Beecher, July 15, 1835, Beecher 1865, 2, 345)

¹⁴³ Finney 1877, 379.

¹⁴⁴ “All my inward feelings seemed to rise and pour themselves out; and the impression on my mind was,—‘I want to pour my whole soul out to God.’” (Finney, *Memoirs*, 23)

¹⁴⁵ “Does their love for God and for souls set their orthodoxy and their creeds *on fire* so that every truth burns in their souls and glows forth from their very faces? If so, you will not see them absent from the prayer-meetings; but you will see that divine things take hold of their souls with overwhelming interest and power.” (Finney 1877, 379)

¹⁴⁶ Finney, *Memoirs*, 40-42.

¹⁴⁷ “I have known young converts to be advised not to attempt to pray in their families, or in meetings. ‘Wait until you get strength.’ Just as if they could get strength without exercise. Strength comes by exercise. You cannot get strength by lying still. To talk to a convert about neglecting Christian action until he gets strength, is absurd. If he wants to gain strength, let him get to work.” (Finney 1948, 33)

¹⁴⁸ Finney, *Lectures*, 314-15.

of the inestimable worth of human souls¹⁴⁹ and the eternal danger they were in while living in unpardoned sin. “The Spirit makes the Christian feel the value of souls, and the guilt and danger of sinners in their present condition,”¹⁵⁰ Finney believed, peril not unlike that of loved ones caught in a housefire:

If [those] who are in this house should look up there, and see a family burning to death in the fire, and hear their shrieks and behold their agony, they would feel distressed, and it very likely that many of them would faint away with agony. ... The fact is, that those individuals who never have felt so, have never felt much real benevolence, and their piety must be of a very superficial character.¹⁵¹

In his sermon, “Sense of the Danger of Men Begets Zeal,” Finney explained how urgency in prayer flows from this “real benevolence,” our “sympathy with God.”¹⁵² “I have often thought,” Finney remarked elsewhere, “that the reason why so many pray only in form and not in heart for the salvation of souls, is that they lack this love, like God’s love, for the souls of the perishing.”¹⁵³ Such love should exhibit itself in the petitioner as “care with anxious heart”¹⁵⁴ in “expressions of powerful feeling.”¹⁵⁵

Finney admitted this matter of urgent and intensifying emotion in prayer to be a “delicate subject,” one “many professors of religions do not understand.”¹⁵⁶ And Finney himself has been something of an enigma on the topic. Student eyewitnesses participating in Oberlin revivals described the “sense of great solemnity [that] always rested upon the people as they were dismissed,”¹⁵⁷ supporting historians such as McLoughlin in interpreting

¹⁴⁹ “You must see impressively that souls are precious... Without such a sense of the value of the interests at stake, you will not pray with fervent, strong desire.” (Finney, “Prayer and Labor for the Gathering of the Great Harvest”, *The Oberlin Evangelist* XV, *op. cit.*, 1)

¹⁵⁰ Finney, *Lectures*, 91.

¹⁵¹ *ibid*, 66

¹⁵² Finney, Sermon 282, “Sense of the Danger of Men Begets Zeal,” on 2 Cor 5:11 (1866), The Charles Grandison Finney Papers, Oberlin College Archives. Finney believed petitioners should “be willing just to sympathize with God so deeply, that their souls travail in birth until other souls are born to God.” (Finney, “How to Prevail with God”, *The Penny Pulpit*, *op. cit.*, 116)

¹⁵³ Finney, “Prayer and Labor for the Gathering of the Great Harvest”, *The Oberlin Evangelist* XV, *op. cit.*, 1.

¹⁵⁴ Finney, “Conditions of Prevailing Prayer” (part 1), *The Oberlin Evangelist* IX, *op. cit.*, 81.

¹⁵⁵ Finney, *Lectures*, 66.

¹⁵⁶ Finney, “How to Prevail with God”, *The Penny Pulpit*, *op. cit.*, 116.

¹⁵⁷ Matson [n.d.], 12-13. “Mr. Finney often asked them not to talk as they went out, and thus dissipate the impression that the Spirit was making. As for himself, he seldom had more than a softly-spoken ‘God bless you’ and a warm pressure of the hand for those who were near, as he passed out of the house.” (*ibid*)

Finney's approach as one which "did not reduce sinners to madness or hysteria nor the impotence of a fainting fit."¹⁵⁸ Other interpreters conclude Finney allowed those interceding for the unconverted to carry "their awful responsibility to the point of emotional terrorism,"¹⁵⁹ harm disregarded by Finney¹⁶⁰ due in part to "this theory," Dod complained, that "it is impossible that our emotions should possess any moral character."¹⁶¹ Equipped with "remarkable psychological perception"¹⁶² and veteran expertise in what Carwardine has termed "the psychology of revival,"¹⁶³ Finney admitted that emotional "excitements are liable to injure our health. Our nervous system is so strung that any powerful excitement, if long continued, injures our health and unfits us for duty."¹⁶⁴ Finney learned caution with time, having "frequently seen cases when the excitement was very great"—transmitted like a contagion to the point that even the fanatic's prayers seemed to pour forth a lava stream of "scolding, fault-finding, and recrimination"—so that "I have learned to be afraid of this."¹⁶⁵

¹⁵⁸ McLoughlin 1959, 92. Miyakawa's view corresponds: "Finney held meetings under control and appealed to reason... [The Finney revivalists] had no direct anti-intellectual bias. Instead, many, including Finney himself, became outstanding educators and promoted education." (Miyakawa 1964, 172-73)

¹⁵⁹ Johnson 2004, 98.

¹⁶⁰ "Far from emotions being the most positively virtuous of man's capabilities," Sweet observed, to Finney "they were to be manipulated for the advancement of revivals." (Sweet 1976, 214) Howe concurs that evangelists of Finney's day "turned themselves into early psychologists of the techniques of persuasion." (Howe, *op. cit.*, 172)

¹⁶¹ Dod 1835, 501. Like most others in his era, Finney had a mechanistic concept of "the laws of mind," operating similarly to the law of gravity in the material world. (McLoughlin 1959, 68-69) But Dod was critical of Finney's insistence that only voluntary acts of the will possessed moral character, to the exclusion of "our dispositions, or states of heart." (Dod 1835, 504) McLoughlin notes that it was Finney's tendency to "redefine the psychology of the Scottish Common Sense School in order to fit his own theory of free will, that caused Professor Albert Dod of Princeton to call him 'a perfect novice in mental science.'" (Finney, *Lectures*, 39-40, note 1 [no reference provided])

¹⁶² Cross 1950, 179. Finney was remembered for how he "could read character. It would seem, indeed, as though no man ever knew the human heart better, or could more successfully explore its secret recesses of wrong and deceit." ([] 1876, *Reminiscences of Rev. Charles G. Finney...*, 16)

¹⁶³ Carwardine 1978, 49. Intrinsic to this psychology, Bratt suggests, has been American revivalism's tendency "to valorize liminal states and special intensity." (Bratt 1998, 55)

¹⁶⁴ Finney, *Lectures*, 11. Davenport suggested over a century ago that in the burned-over district of western New York State, "there was a large element of highly neurotic people who demanded strenuous excitement, and who were accustomed to look for it particularly in religious movements. And it was this class which first fell under the potent sway of Finney and of the great revivals with which his name is associated." (Davenport 1905, 190) More recently, Perciaccante similarly observes that "fervid religion was a normal form of piety among loosely organized rural congregations before 1830" in Jefferson County, New York. (Perciaccante, *op. cit.*, 5) Barkun has argued that this is one reason why the burned-over district exhibited "a special receptivity to millenarian and utopian appeals" such as Millerism and John Humphrey Noyes' Oneida Community. (Barkun 1986, 8)

¹⁶⁵ Finney 1861, 54-57.

Nevertheless, it was of the nature of God,¹⁶⁶ Finney believed, to excite desire in prayer until it reached a level of urgency commensurate with the significance of prayer's object. "If a person *truly* desires any blessing," Finney wrote, "his desires will bear some proportion to the greatness of the blessing."¹⁶⁷ Such ardent desire was a condition of real prayer¹⁶⁸ and could keep growing indefinitely,¹⁶⁹ which was one reason for God's delay in answering¹⁷⁰—to raise the pitch of our earnestness in prayer,¹⁷¹ oftentimes to the point of **agony**.¹⁷² Finney repeatedly stated that "it is when men desire the blessing with UNUTTERABLE AGONY, that they offer such prayer as will infallibly prevail with God."¹⁷³ He observed how agony in prayer "is spoken of repeatedly in the Bible as a state of mind to which great blessings are promised,"¹⁷⁴ finding its culmination in "the desires of the Lord Jesus Christ for the blessing he prayed for, [which] were amazingly strong, and

¹⁶⁶ "Here, then, if you find yourself strongly drawn to desire a blessing, you are to understand it as an intimation that God is willing to bestow that particular blessing... He excites the very desires he is willing to gratify." (Finney, *Lectures*, 78-79)

¹⁶⁷ *ibid*, 56-57

¹⁶⁸ "It is one thing to say prayer, and quite another thing to be exercised with a strong desire. Prayer, when prevalent, is a strong desire of the heart to have a certain blessing." (Finney, "The Conditions of Prevailing Prayer", *The Penny Pulpit*, *op. cit.*, 108)

¹⁶⁹ Growing spiritual desires are "doubtless pleasing to God" and "pervade heaven," Finney remarked (Finney, *Lectures*, 53-54), attainments compounding eternally from what he called the "law of progress": "May it not be that the same law of progress obtains even in heaven?" (Finney 1877, 408) See note 466; Chapter III, notes 461-67.

¹⁷⁰ Here is an example of overlap between different traits of travailing prayer, this time between the increasing urgency and importunity of the petitioner: "Do not think you are prepared to offer prevailing prayer, if your feelings will let you pray once for an object, and then leave it. Most Christians come up to prevailing prayer by a protracted process." (Finney, *Lectures*, 59)

¹⁷¹ "Sometimes God delays for the sake apparently of drawing us into more and mightier prayer. We become straitened, and agonized." (Finney, "On Persevering Prayer for Others", *The Oberlin Evangelist* XVII, *op. cit.*, 10)

¹⁷² "Oftentimes" is a caveat Finney associated with "this travail of soul, ... that deep agony" in prayer: "I do not mean to be understood that it is essential to a spirit of prayer, that the distress should be so great as this." (Finney, *Lectures*, 31) But "oftentimes," Finney had repeatedly observed, "blessings very great, which are sought, do not come, until we are so strongly excited in mind, as to be thrown into great agony—to travail in soul before God." (Finney, "How to Prevail with God", *The Penny Pulpit*, *op. cit.*, 116)

¹⁷³ *ibid*, 316. To "agonize" in prayer is a frequent watchword for revival intercession throughout Finney's corpus.

¹⁷⁴ Finney, "How to Prevail with God", *The Penny Pulpit*, *op. cit.*, 116. Here Finney highlights Elijah (1Kgs 18), Daniel (10:1-12), the Syrophenician woman (Mt 15:22-28), and the parable of the unjust judge (Lk 18:1-8) as illustrative of prayer's agony. Elsewhere he draws similar attention to Jacob (Gen 32:23-26), Moses (Ex 32:7-14), and Francis Xavier. (Finney, *Lectures*, 57)

amounted even to agony.”¹⁷⁵ Again, Finney had hammered out this conviction on the anvil of personal experience. During the winter of 1834, in poor health and unsure about the future of revivals, he complied with insistent friends to take time off in the Mediterranean.¹⁷⁶ Becoming so concerned that revivals “would decline throughout the country,” his “soul was in utter agony. I spent the entire day in prayer in my state room; or walking the deck in such agony as to wring my hands, and almost to gnaw my tongue.”¹⁷⁷ Finney eventually came to believe that the far-flung success of his *Lectures on Revivals of Religion* had been in answer to his “day of unspeakable wrestling and agony”: “This looks egotistical. But let the reader remember my agony at sea... Nobody but myself can appreciate the wonderful manner in which those agonizing throes of my soul on that occasion have met with the divine response.”¹⁷⁸

Lest they be lost, urgent longings and agonising desires in prayer were never to be trifled with but always cherished and cultivated, regardless of their risk or cost.¹⁷⁹

Ultimately, Finney warned that, even with the “inward supports of those who are filled with the Spirit,”¹⁸⁰ prayer’s anguish could lead a petitioner to the brink of life itself, citing examples of “multitudes [who] used to be overpowered, and some almost died, by the depth of their agony.”¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁵ *ibid.* In illustrating how “faith *always obtains the object*” of prayer, Finney explained that in Gethsemane Christ was not asking to be delivered from the cross; He travailed for strength to survive the pressure of anticipating it. “The burden on his soul was so great, and produced such an agony, that he felt as if he was on the point of dying. ... He had prayed for relief from *that cup*, and his prayer was answered.” (*ibid.*, 80; see also Lyrene 1985, 170)

¹⁷⁶ Fletcher 1971, 32.

¹⁷⁷ Finney, *Memoirs*, 372.

¹⁷⁸ *ibid.*, 377

¹⁷⁹ “Cherish the good desires you have. Christians very often lose their good desires, by not attending to this.” (Finney, *Lectures*, 83) A Mr. T. Brainerd, who Finney tried to help become effective in prayer, despaired of his shortcomings: “I begin to fear I shall never become a man of prayer. ... I was gaining a little but alas I cannot but seldom get hold.” (Letter from T. Brainerd to Finney, September 6, 1828, The Charles Grandison Finney Papers, Oberlin College Archives)

¹⁸⁰ Finney, *Lectures*, 120.

¹⁸¹ *ibid.*, 63. Finney spoke of “an aged minister” who “felt that his soul was loaded with such an unutterable agony, that he really must die unless that petition was granted.” (Finney, “How to Prevail with God”, *The Penny Pulpit*, *op. cit.*, 117)

disconcerting to the uninitiated onlooker,¹⁸² even reprehensible to the sceptic, because of the audacious, brash language Finney allowed it to take on. “Familiarity with God in prayer” was one of the new measures, closely associated with Finney, considered most controversial because of its perceived irreverence. “This talking to God as a man talks to his neighbor, is truly shocking,” Asahel Nettleton wrote. “I say nothing of the nature of the petitions often presented; but *the awful irreverence of the manner!*”¹⁸³ Finney admitted to being somewhat alarmed himself in his early experiences of becoming “so wrought up as to use such strong language to God in prayer.”¹⁸⁴ And he was sometimes circumspect in recounting what he had observed in the boldness of supplicants, having “known such things, that where I am a stranger I have been afraid to tell them, lest the people should think them untrue.”¹⁸⁵

But there was no misconception, Finney insisted, in engaging prayer as God’s invitation to “roll the burden upon Him”¹⁸⁶ with great **daring** in the magnitude of the request, the comportment of the asking, and the degree of expectancy for God’s answer. Communion with God is of a nature to give “great freedom and enlargement in prayer” to the petitioner, making “room enough in the benevolent yearnings of our hearts to embrace the world, and the universe; and we seem as it were to embosom the whole race, and bring them before

¹⁸² In his Lecture on “Prevailing Prayer,” Finney recalled the reaction of a bystander “who had no spirit of prayer”: “when he heard the brethren pray as if they could not be denied, he was shocked at their boldness.” (Finney, *Lectures*, 55-56)

¹⁸³ Beecher and Nettleton 1828, 35 (see also 55-56). The ablest High Church theologian of the time, John Williamson Nevins (1803-86) concurred: “What rude familiarity with the High and Holy One; what low belittling and caricaturing of all that is grand in the Gospel; what gross profanity in the style of many of the petitions, with which it is pretended to storm the citadel of God’s favors.” (Nevin 1843, 52-53; see also Bratt 1998, 73-74) A resolution concerning “all irreverent familiarity with God” in prayer was one brought forward by Justin Edwards, representing Lyman Beecher and other opponents of Finney, at the New Lebanon Convention in July, 1827. (Cole 1950, 393; see also Walzer 1944, 96)

¹⁸⁴ Finney, *Memoirs*, 139. He also observed how Christians had looked back on their “holy boldness” in prayer and “were frightened and amazed at themselves.” (Finney, *Lectures*, 58; Chapter I, 55).

¹⁸⁵ Finney, “How to Prevail with God”, *The Penny Pulpit*, *op. cit.*, 117. “Could you but hear and see how they wrestle with God, you might, perhaps, feel astonished at the holy boldness and confidence such a soul would manifest in its intercourse with God. You would hear such expressions, and see such a mighty wrestling as you would probably never forget.” (*ibid*)

¹⁸⁶ Finney, *Memoirs*, 40.

God.”¹⁸⁷ To ask sparingly, Finney preached, insults¹⁸⁸ our “Father of boundless resource”¹⁸⁹ while oceans of blessing¹⁹⁰ drape over those willing to “ask of God great things, as great as we can conceive”¹⁹¹—assurance Finney drew from one of his favourite texts, Ps 81:10 [KJV], “Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it.”¹⁹² Such confidence empowers intercessors “to express ourselves in a most emphatic and elevated manner”¹⁹³ to a point where, “if there is a strong presumption that the Spirit of God is exciting these very desires,” no level of boldness in prayer is improper.¹⁹⁴

More important, however, than the scope and style of the request was the posture of indomitable anticipation of God’s answer knowing that “God has revealed it to be his will to grant what we really believe he will grant.”¹⁹⁵ Finney spurred petitioners to have the nerve for “expecting the blessing prayed for”:

We must understand the reason why it is to be expected, we must see the evidence on which faith ought to rest, and must *absolutely believe* that the blessing will come, or we do not bring ourselves within the promise.¹⁹⁶

¹⁸⁷ Finney, “Communion with God” (part 1), *The Oberlin Evangelist* II, *op. cit.*, 137.

¹⁸⁸ “Nothing can be more offensive to God than for his professed servants to have so little confidence in him, which causes them to ask sparingly, and to receive sparingly.” (Finney, “The Reward of Fervent Prayer”, *The Penny Pulpit* [London: J. Paul, c1853], May 15, 1850, 70, The Richard DuPuis Papers, Oberlin College Archive) Finney’s concern was how undersized requests dishonour God before the world: “To see you, people would think you had no Father, that you were poor orphans.” (*ibid.* 69)

¹⁸⁹ Finney, Sermon 485, “Prayer a Privilege,” on Mt 18:19 and other selections (1871), The Charles Grandison Finney Papers, Oberlin College Archives. In this sermon Finney likens petitioners to children “with a volume of signed blank checks” and “with commands and exhortations to draw freely, largely, without ceasing for all and everything you need, with assurances.”

¹⁹⁰ “Yes; let the deep, broad Pacific Ocean be elevated on high and there pent up, and then conceive of its pressure. How it would force its way and pour out its gushing floods where the least channel might be opened!” (Finney, “An Approving Heart—Confidence in Prayer”, *The Oberlin Evangelist* IX, *op. cit.*, 34)

¹⁹¹ Finney, “The Reward of Fervent Prayer”, *The Penny Pulpit*, *op. cit.*, 65.

¹⁹² Finney, Sermon 553, “Open Your Mouth Wide,” on Ps 81:10 (1872), The Charles Grandison Finney Papers, Oberlin College Archives. See Finney’s handwritten “skeleton” of this sermon on the next page.

¹⁹³ Finney, “Communion with God” (part 1), *The Oberlin Evangelist* II, *op. cit.*, 138.

¹⁹⁴ Finney, *Lectures*, 57. Though he spoke of “holy boldness” (notes 185-86) and “humble boldness” (Finney, “An Approving Heart—Confidence in Prayer”, *The Oberlin Evangelist* IX, *op. cit.*, 33), Finney sometimes extolled a level of audacity in prayer that was bound to agitate his critics, as with that of one woman who “shut herself up, determined to seek this blessing till she should find. ... She cried mightily to God. She said, ‘If Thou dost not give me this blessing, I can never believe Thee again.’” (Finney 1877, 406)

¹⁹⁵ Finney, Sermon 172, “Prayer of Faith,” on Mk11:24 (1864), The Charles Grandison Finney Papers, Oberlin College Archives.

¹⁹⁶ Finney, *Lectures*, 313.

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Ps. 81:10. ^{no 2} Open your mouth wide.

I. Implied in first clause. ^{Includes all his people.} 1. I am Jehovah your God. Upon me, you are dependent. 2. I thought you ^{not} up. I am therefore committed to you. A relation ^{address to the generations that}

3. I am interested in you. 4. Regard me as being to you all that is implied in this relation. ^{comes to}

5. My heart. My word. My honor are pledged. II. Implied in the injunction. 1. Ask of me great things. 2. As great as you can. 3. Be assured of my interest in you. 4. Do. Of my ability. 5. Do. Willingness. 6. Do. Uacliness. 7. Draw often. Deeply. 8. My honor is concerned that you lack nothing. ^{include}

III. Implied in the promise. 1. It must be interpreted in the light of his character. Revelations & the circumstances. Our dependence. Our responsibility. The work before us. The end he has in view. His interest. Honor.

2. He will give all we will ask believing. 3. He will give us when & as we need.

IV. What then are the conditions of this promise. 1. Faith that embraces the first clause. Elements 2. Do. that embraces the spirit of the injunction. 3. Do. that expects the thing promised. 4. Large desire. 5. Coming to God, & casting our selves upon him. 6. Making him as the Lord our God. Love. Obedience. Confidence.

Opening page of Finney's "skeleton" of Sermon 553, "Open Your Mouth Wide," on Ps 81:10 (1872), The Charles Grandison Finney Papers, Oberlin College Archives.

These were key features of “the prayer of faith” for Finney, which he believed “has been one of the universal antecedents of a revival of religion since God owned the world.”¹⁹⁷ Faith as “an indispensable condition of prevailing prayer”¹⁹⁸ required “the expectation of receiving what we ask,”¹⁹⁹ an undaunted confidence that Finney allowed to be daring but not reckless, for “faith must always have evidence.”²⁰⁰ From the earliest days of his itinerancy, Finney believed God had trained him in the application of biblical promises to prayer, leading him “to understand better how to use them, and to what cases they were especially applicable.”²⁰¹ Later reaping from a decade of practice, Finney could explain in his Lecture on “The Prayer of Faith” that we may pray with daring anticipation only when God’s promises, prophetic declarations, the indications of providence, or Spirit-given desires provide evidence “to believe that we shall have the very things we pray for.”²⁰²

With this confirmation, petitioners had warrant to be insistent²⁰³ in prayer, not falling “into a quarrel with God if He does not answer,”²⁰⁴ yet **contending**, as Finney advised ministers, to “make your calling your constant argument with God for all that you need for the accomplishment of the work.”²⁰⁵ Only four years removed from his short career in the Adams, New York, law office of Judge Benjamin Wright, Finney’s early expressions of prayer reveal the adamant tone of a legal claim:

¹⁹⁷ Finney, *The Prevailing Prayer-Meeting: A Sermon Delivered in Blackfriars’ Street Congregational Chapel, Glasgow, on 4th September 1859*, *op. cit.*, 3.

¹⁹⁸ Finney, “The Conditions of Prevailing Prayer”, *The Penny Pulpit*, *op. cit.*, 110.

¹⁹⁹ Finney, “Prevailing Prayer”, *The Independent of New York* XXVI, *op. cit.*, 2. “You must pray in faith. You must expect to obtain the things you ask for. You need not look for an answer to prayer, if you pray without an expectation of obtaining it.” (Finney, *Lectures*, 64)

²⁰⁰ Finney, *Lectures*, 74.

²⁰¹ Finney, *Memoirs*, 139. See Ostrander 2000, 8.

²⁰² Finney, *Lectures*, 74-81. See Lyrene, *op. cit.*, 167-77. In Finney’s first experience of travailing prayer for a sick woman, he discovered the invincible certainty that informed his understanding of faith in prayer thereafter: “I do not know how I was made sure of this; but it was in some way made plain to me, so that I had no doubt that she would recover.” (Finney, *Memoirs*, 40-41; see note 109)

²⁰³ “Yet again we must ask and insist upon [the] fulfillment [of God’s promises] to our souls. We are authorized to expect it in answer to our faith.” (Finney 1877, 412)

²⁰⁴ God is under no obligation to Christians who have not met His conditions for prayer, Finney preached: “It is important for men to understand that they should approach God in prayer only when they have a right to pray.” (Finney, “Conditions of Prevailing Prayer” [part 3], *The Oberlin Evangelist* IX, 15, July 21, 1847, 114)

²⁰⁵ Finney 1895b, 40.

I felt so certain that He would hear me, and that faithfulness to His promises and to Himself rendered it impossible that He should not hear and answer, that frequently I found myself saying to Him, "I hope thou dost not think that I can be denied. I come with thy faithful promises in my hand, and I cannot be denied."²⁰⁶

Frequently Finney referred to Jacob wrestling,²⁰⁷ his own wrestling,²⁰⁸ or the church wrestling²⁰⁹ to illustrate "this travail of soul, ... which persons feel when they lay hold on God for such a blessing, and will not let him go till they receive it."²¹⁰ And prayer's contention could sometimes escalate beyond argument and struggle to thoroughgoing battle, requiring one to "put on the harness of a mighty conflict with the powers of darkness."²¹¹ Spiritual Christians should "expect very frequent and agonizing conflicts with Satan,"²¹² opposition which cannot hinder revival "if it only drives Christians to God in prayer."²¹³ Finney summoned prayer warriors to "rush to the front rank of the battle"²¹⁴ where they can "betake themselves to God, literally besieging his throne."²¹⁵ "Religion is very intelligible

²⁰⁶ Finney, *Memoirs*, 139.

²⁰⁷ "Take the case of Jacob, for example. How very affecting were the circumstances under which he is represented as prevailing with God! He wrestled all night." (Finney, "The Conditions of Prevailing Prayer", *The Penny Pulpit*, *op. cit.*, 111)

²⁰⁸ It was "after a day of unspeakable wrestling" in prayer at sea about the future of revivals (see notes 176-78) that "the subject cleared up to my mind." (Finney, *Memoirs*, 372)

²⁰⁹ During the August, 1826, revival in Troy, New York, "We had a prayer-meeting from house to house daily at eleven o'clock. At one of those meetings I recollect that a Mr. Stowe, cashier of a bank in that city, was so pressed by the spirit of prayer, that when the meeting was dismissed he was unable to rise from his knees, as we had all just been kneeling in prayer. He remained upon his knees, and writhed and groaned in agony. He said, 'Pray for —,' who was president of the bank of which he was cashier. ... When it was seen that his soul was in travail for that man, the praying people knelt down and wrestled in prayer for his conversion." (Finney, *Memoirs*, 209-10)

²¹⁰ Finney, *Lectures*, 31.

²¹¹ Finney, *Memoirs*, 139. Oberlin students recounted Finney sometimes travelling in spiritual confrontation that verged on exorcism: "We once saw a young man lying at full length upon the floor of Mr. Finney's room, his face almost black with rage, as he cursed God and cursed the day of his birth, as though possessed of the evil one; Mr. Finney meantime walking the floor, wringing his hands and groaning aloud as he fervently prayed that the enraged bull of Bashan might not break through all restraint; blaspheme the Holy Ghost, and so be cast off forever." ([] 1876, *Reminiscences of Rev. Charles G. Finney...*, 13)

²¹² Finney, *Lectures*, 117.

²¹³ *ibid*, 29

²¹⁴ Finney, "Prayer and Labor for the Gathering of the Great Harvest", *The Oberlin Evangelist* XV, *op. cit.*, 2.

²¹⁵ Finney, "How to Prevail with God", *The Penny Pulpit*, *op. cit.*, 118.

and easily understood,” Finney declared. “It is a warfare.”²¹⁶ “If any have not experienced this struggle they are not Christians.”²¹⁷

²¹⁶ Finney 1877, 360.

²¹⁷ Finney, Sermon 354, “Christian Warfare,” on Gal 4:16-24 (1868), The Charles Grandison Finney Papers, Oberlin College Archives.

Form

Labour

That Finney would closely associate revival prayer with arduous struggle is the predictable upshot of his broader theological outlook, deriving from exertion of his “voluntary powers”²¹⁸ at conversion, which understood “that *human agency is just as indispensable to a revival as divine agency.*”²¹⁹ Finney rejected what he called “cannotism,” that “spurious philosophy” of inability²²⁰ that lay at the heart of the “traditions of the elders.”²²¹ To evade its danger, McLoughlin has commented, was “the central burden of all Finney’s early preaching”²²² by which he challenged people “to do all that lies within their power”²²³ in the spiritual life. He opened his *Lectures* saying, “*Religion is the work of man.* It is something for man to do.”²²⁴ Consequently, Finney believed petitioners should agree in seeing prayer as part of the **labour** of bringing about revival “*by the use of means* like other events.”²²⁵ In contrast to the “slothful servant” who neglects his duty or “slightly performs it,”²²⁶ labourers in prayer make a sacrifice of time, willingly setting aside the work of business and homemaking, as did the first Christians before Pentecost: “These people cheerfully gave up their time... It was the work of all, the business of all, and wherefore cannot we put forward such efforts at any rate?”²²⁷ Reprieve from prayer’s toil depended on gaining inner certainty, in Finney’s experience: he sometimes could find “no relief” and was

²¹⁸ Finney, *Memoirs*, 21.

²¹⁹ Finney, *Lectures*, 318.

²²⁰ See note 40; Chapter II, note 103.

²²¹ Finney 1836, 81.

²²² Finney, *Lectures*, xxix.

²²³ *ibid*, 107. Stein has observed how, in time, this impulse shaped the logic of Oberlin perfectionism: “Natural ability not only removed any excuse from accountability; in the process it further paved the way to perfectionism by demanding the fullest possible exertions of that ability, in terms of both quality and quantity.” (Stein 1996, 165)

²²⁴ Finney, *Lectures*, 9.

²²⁵ *ibid*, 318

²²⁶ Finney, Sermon, 53, “Slothful Servant,” on Mt 25:26 (1860), The Charles Grandison Finney Paper, Oberlin College.

²²⁷ Finney, *The Prevailing Prayer-Meeting: A Sermon Delivered in Blackfriars’ Street Congregational Chapel, Glasgow, on 4th September 1859, op. cit.*, 5. Finney believed time investments in revival should not stop at prayer: “We see the hypocrisy of those who profess to be praying for a revival while they are doing nothing to promote it. There are many who appear to be very zealous in *praying* for a revival, while they are not *doing* anything at all for one.” (Finney, *Lectures*, 324)

“unable to rest” until he had “obtained the assurance in my own mind” that the answer was on the way.²²⁸

This labour of revival prayer was framed and intensified through focus:

A man must have some definite object before his mind. He cannot pray effectually for a variety of objects at once. The mind of man is so constituted that it cannot fasten its desires intensely upon many things at the same time.²²⁹

Likely learned from Father Nash,²³⁰ the link between particularity and faith²³¹ in prayer became a distinctive influence²³² of Finney’s revival measures, concentrating the work of every prayer meeting²³³ and each intercessor²³⁴ so they would “not pray all over the world.”²³⁵ But while passionate focus ordered the work of prayer, it also could produce an absorption that tested and even overwhelmed the limitations of physical strength. Frequently enough Finney had himself travailed in prayer until he “perspired profusely”²³⁶ so that by his mid-adulthood, “in my present state of health, I find it impossible to pray as much as I have been in the habit of doing... It overcomes my strength.”²³⁷ He knew of many who had toiled to the point at which their “strength was quite exhausted”²³⁸ and their “body was

²²⁸ Finney, *Memoirs*, 40.

²²⁹ Finney, *Lectures*, 54.

²³⁰ “It was Nash who promoted the revival practice of ‘particular prayer’ or the ‘prayer of faith’—speaking in prayer to God very specifically about people and events, needs and joys—one of the ‘new measures’ almost universally attributed to Finney.” (McCauley 1995, 130)

²³¹ “Is it a mere loose idea, that if a man prays for a specific blessing, God will by some mysterious sovereignty give something or other to him, or something to somebody else, somewhere? ... No, we are to believe that we shall receive the *very* things that we ask for.” (Finney, *Lectures*, 74)

²³² Lyrene, *op. cit.*, 186. This influence continued into the next generation of revivalists who were trained that “intercession for particular persons has often been observed as a sign of the near presence of the mighty Saviour.” (Hervey, *op. cit.*, 16)

²³³ “Come together with a definite object, and let that object be sought in earnest prayer.” (Finney, *The Prevailing Prayer-Meeting: A Sermon Delivered in Blackfriars’ Street Congregational Chapel, Glasgow, on 4th September 1859, op. cit.*, 4)

²³⁴ In his Lecture, “Meetings for Prayer,” Finney taught, “Each one should pray for some one object. — It is well for every individual to have one object for prayer...” (Finney, *Lectures*, 128)

²³⁵ *ibid*, 129. “Prayer meetings are often too long,” Finney protested. “In some places it is common to begin a prayer meeting by reading a long portion of Scripture. Then the deacon or elder gives out a long hymn.” This is followed by a “long prayer,” “a long extract from some book or magazine,” “another long hymn and another long prayer, and they go home.” He concludes, “No wonder there was no revival. Such prayer meetings are enough to hinder a revival.” (*ibid*, 135, 132)

²³⁶ Finney, *Memoirs*, 457. See Chapter I, note 279.

²³⁷ Finney, *Lectures*, 106.

²³⁸ Finney, *Memoirs*, 138.

overpowered”²³⁹ with nosebleed,²⁴⁰ fatigue, and breakdown.²⁴¹ To anyone willing to be filled with the Holy Spirit, Finney pledged, God would “give you as much of the spirit of prayer as you have strength of body to bear,”²⁴² a boundary supplicants sometimes breached, like a woman in Utica, New York, who “prayed for two days and nights almost incessantly, until her strength was quite overcome.”²⁴³ Finney recounted meeting the wife of one labourer in prayer who “often feared he would pray himself to death,”²⁴⁴ the price of revival all can be prepared to pay,²⁴⁵ and that some actually did:

Said a good man to me, “O, I am dying for the want of strength to pray. My body is crushed, the world is on me, and how can I forbear praying?” I have known that man go to bed absolutely sick, for weakness and faintness under the pressure. ... Shall I tell you how he died? He prayed more and more, and he used to take the map of the world before him, and pray, and look over the different countries, and pray for them, till he absolutely expired in his room, praying. Blessed man!²⁴⁶

Gender Like Edwards before²⁴⁷ and others after him,²⁴⁸ Finney likened the labour of prayer to the labour of childbirth as the travail of the church for the conversion of sinners. In Lecture XIV of his *Lectures to Professing Christians*, he explains:

A principal design of the institution of marriage is the propagation of the species. So it is in regard to the church. Through the instrumentality of the church, children are to be born to Christ, and he is to see his seed, and to see of the travail of his soul, and be satisfied, by converts multiplied as the drops of the morning dew. It is not only through the travail of the Redeemer’s soul, but through the travail of the church, that believers are born unto Jesus Christ. As soon as Zion travailed, she brought forth children.²⁴⁹

²³⁹ Finney, *Lectures*, 60.

²⁴⁰ See Chapter I, note 279.

²⁴¹ *ibid*, note 61

²⁴² Finney, *Lectures*, 84.

²⁴³ Finney, *Memoirs*, 172.

²⁴⁴ Finney, *Lectures*, 119.

²⁴⁵ “If you are filled with the Spirit, ... you will be resigned in death; you will always feel prepared to die, and not afraid to die...” (*ibid*, 120)

²⁴⁶ *ibid*, 184. Finney could be describing Nash here, who, according to Asa Mahan in his *Autobiography*, “was at last found in his closet, on his knees dead before God; a very fitting place and condition for such a man to die.” (Mahan 1882, 226)

²⁴⁷ See Chapter I, note 300.

²⁴⁸ See Chapter I, notes 292, 295, 299.

²⁴⁹ Finney 1985 (1837), 341 (Isa 66:7-9 [KJV]).

From the labour contractions of prayer arresting the petitioner “almost like a cramp seizing me,”²⁵⁰ travailing prayer continues until that new convert is finally “brought forth with pain”²⁵¹ with attachments resulting in the intercessor “like that of a mother for her first-born.”²⁵² We have seen how Finney could also draw upon a characteristically male image of prayer as aggressive fighting, like that of Francis Xavier who “prayed so fervently that he seemed as it were to do violence to heaven.”²⁵³ But the **gender** emphasis of revival prayer for Finney was notably female, based not only in biblical typology but even more from his observation that “God had greatly used and greatly honoured the instrumentality of women, and is still doing so.”²⁵⁴

Finney’s itinerant revivalism began in 1824 with the allocation of \$192 for his support by the Oneida Female Missionary Society,²⁵⁵ and throughout his ministry it was praying women, contemporaries observed, “upon whom Mr. Finney depended when he went abroad and was in the heat of battle.”²⁵⁶ Less worried than his critics about how it might affect the social order,²⁵⁷ Finney came to believe that prayer should be expressed in a manner “to exercise the gifts of every individual member of the church—male and female.”²⁵⁸ Scholars have argued this was for him more a matter of pragmatics than theology:²⁵⁹ the conspicuous

²⁵⁰ Finney, *Memoirs*, 40.

²⁵¹ Finney, *Lectures*, 69.

²⁵² *ibid*, 68

²⁵³ *ibid*, 57

²⁵⁴ Finney, *The Prevailing Prayer-Meeting: A Sermon Delivered in Blackfriars’ Street Congregational Chapel, Glasgow, on 4th September 1859, op. cit.*, 12. “The present revival is characterized far above all precedent by the individual activity and labour of the female members of the churches.” (*ibid*) See Hardman 1987, 102.

²⁵⁵ Ryan 1981, 60. Founders of this organisation were all members of the First Presbyterian Church of Whitesboro, where Finney’s first wife, Lydia Andrews, confessed her faith in 1815.

²⁵⁶ Matson, *op. cit.*, 63

²⁵⁷ “In an intelligent educated community great freedom may be given in the use of means without danger of disorder.” (Finney, *Memoirs*, 556)

²⁵⁸ Finney, *Lectures*, 138.

²⁵⁹ “Finney encouraged women to speak and pray in the presence of men, not because of any enlightened view on the role of women in the church and society, but because women were usually the first ones affected by revivals and their example and energies could expand the revivalist endeavor through the contagion of sympathy.” (Sweet 1976, 213)

absence of men,²⁶⁰ and the predominance of women in churches²⁶¹ and as the primary moral force within the family and community,²⁶² justified why Finney relied on women so prominently, particularly in revival prayer.²⁶³ It was a commitment he carried forward, however, helping to establish in Oberlin the first coeducational college in the world at a time, Howe points out, “when women could find little higher education open to them.”²⁶⁴ And Finney clearly extolled the examples of praying women as potent illustrations of his revival principles, such as his memory of “a man of hard heart and iron frame—a strong, burly man, who had stood up against the revival” until he met his match: “But he had a praying wife and a praying sister, and they gathered their souls in the might of prayer close about him as a party of men would hem in a wild bull in a net.”²⁶⁵

Wives, sisters, and especially mothers in prayer populated an emerging movement of maternal associations—what Mary Ryan considers “the female contribution to the ‘new measures’ of the Second Great Awakening”²⁶⁶—where prayer gave women a voice they had nowhere else in society.²⁶⁷ Nancy Cott has described how, in the upheaval of social and familial dislocations that accompanied the advancement of market capitalism, “prayer

²⁶⁰ This was “more than a matter of absentmindedness” among men, Mary Ryan observed. “It was accompanied by some disenchantment with religious doctrines” and a “notable lack of deference to the pastor.” (Ryan 1981, 75)

²⁶¹ Ryan has documented how, in Utica, New York, from 1800 to 1840, “the first family member to enter the church was twice as likely to be female than male.” (Ryan 1978, 604)

²⁶² Hackett 1991, 143. Ryan notes that “the transition from patriarchal authority to maternal affection as the focal point of childhood socialization was the linchpin of this transformation.” (Ryan 1981, 102)

²⁶³ Drummond 1985, 113. Early historians considered Finney to have been a pioneer in this regard: “Mr. Finney, we believe, was the first American evangelist who labored abroad; and also the first to recognize the valuable assistance of women in revival efforts...” (Headley 1875, 167) See also Hudson and Corrigan 1998, 154. That the post-Revolutionary cultural environment viewed women as “more virtuous than men” (Kling 2007, 385) and “more potentially spiritual than men” (Noll 2002, 178) also contributed to the premium Finney and others placed on women’s prayers.

²⁶⁴ Howe, *op. cit.*, 175.

²⁶⁵ Finney 1877, 389. Finney’s works are punctuated with anecdotes of women praying for their children (Finney, *Memoirs*, 147–48), “the case of a certain woman” in prayer here (Finney, *Lectures*, 65), “I knew of a woman” praying there (*ibid.*, 67)—women interceding sacrificially and catalytically. Ryan underscores that when one of Finney’s first revivals began in Whitesboro, “it was a woman who lighted the first sparks.” (Ryan 1981, 92) See Walzer, *op. cit.*, 149, note 35.

²⁶⁶ Ryan 1978, 617. “A review of the records of Utica’s First Presbyterian Church exposes the female agency of the Second Great Awakening with striking clarity. At the time of the first revival women constituted 70 percent of the church population. The mothers, in other words, first planted the families’ religious roots on the frontier.” (*ibid.*, 614)

²⁶⁷ Kling 2007, 385.

meetings gave young women opportunity for public expression of anxiety, and offered them sympathy and support perfectly attuned to the peer relationships they relied on.”²⁶⁸ These types of volitional allegiances boosting women were part of a broader, prickly democratisation unfolding in American religion of which “no creed but the Bible” and confidence in private judgement were distinctive features.²⁶⁹ Finney was plunging headlong into these disputatious waters when he declared, “I know some have supposed that the Scriptures plainly prohibit the speaking or praying of women in promiscuous assemblies. I do not so understand the teachings of the Bible.”²⁷⁰

He knew female prayer among men to be controversial²⁷¹ and denied introducing it,²⁷² yet Finney did not try to prevent it in the face of fierce antagonism. Lyman Beecher objected that “no well educated female can put herself up, or be put up, to the point of public prayer,

²⁶⁸ Cott, *op. cit.*, 21. “The reasons supporting young women’s conversions during the second Great Awakening suggest why Christian identity was fundamental to the definition of ‘womanhood’ through the nineteenth century.” (*ibid.*, 23)

²⁶⁹ Hatch 1980, 566. Reflecting on the Christian (Disciples of Christ) movement between 1780 and 1820, Hatch comments, “This explicit faith that biblical authority could emerge from below, from the will of the people, was the most enduring legacy of the Christian movement. ... People gladly accepted a theology that addressed them without condescension, balked at vested interests, and reinforced ideas of ... self-reliance.” (*ibid.*)

²⁷⁰ Finney, “Letter from Prof. Finney to Miss A. E. of Vermont, No. 4”, *The Oberlin Evangelist* VII, 9, April 23, 1845, 68. Regarding Finney’s hermeneutic, Hardesty comments, “For Finney, the Bible, like the law, represented the condensed wisdom of the past, but it could be flexibly applied and its interpretation changed to fit present circumstances. ... Finney believed that anyone could go directly to the Bible; ‘plain common sense’ would lead them to understand the Scriptures and to ‘believe that they mean just what they say.’” (Hardesty, *op. cit.*, 62 [Finney, *Lectures*, 83]) See McLoughlin 1959, 22, 26, 69.

²⁷¹ “Within the last few years, female prayer meetings have been extensively opposed in [New York] state. What dreadful things! ... And serious apprehensions were entertained for the safety of Zion, if women should be allowed to get together to pray. And even now, they are not tolerated in some churches.” (Finney, *Lectures*, 259) John Frost, Finney’s coworker from Whitesboro, had written in the lead-up to the New Lebanon Convention that he was convinced Nettleton “considers the praying of females in the presence of males as the greatest evil to be apprehended.” (Letter from John Frost to Finney, April 21, 1827, The Charles Grandison Finney Papers, Oberlin College Archives) Hardesty asserts consensus on this: “Scholars have debated the significance of the New Measures but all have agreed that the question of women praying in mixed public assemblies was by far the most controversial.” (Hardesty, *op. cit.*, 79) See Drummond, *op. cit.*, 113.

²⁷² Referring to a letter from Asahel Nettleton protesting public prayer by women, Finney writes, “No opposition that I know of was manifested to this either at Utica or at Rome; nor was it a thing that I had myself introduced, for I had no agency in introducing that among their people, and do not know whether it had existed there before or not.” (Finney, *Memoirs*, 176) Scholars have attributed the genesis of public female prayer to the influence of the Methodists (Carwardine 1972, 334; Heyrman 1998, 166-67), Father Nash (Hardesty, *op. cit.*, 81), and Theodore Weld (Walzer, *op. cit.*, 95, note 2). Cross emphasises that “no evidence has appeared to support the notion that either Charles Finney or Theodore Weld made any bold innovation in allowing feminine prayers in ‘promiscuous assemblies.’” (Cross, *op. cit.*, 177)

without the loss of some portion of that female delicacy, which is above all price.”²⁷³ Such a “fanatical temper” makes women willing to “unsex themselves,” Nevin insisted: “There can be no surer sign of grossness and coarseness in religion, than a disposition to tolerate this monstrous perversion, under any form.”²⁷⁴ Finney argued the precise opposite, that religion was inevitably injured unless “every one should have the opportunity to pray, and to express the feelings of his heart, if he has any.”²⁷⁵ He found it disturbing when “women sometimes refuse to take their turn in prayer, and pretend they have no ability to pray. ... God MARKS those individuals with his disapprobation and curse who refuse to pray when they ought.”²⁷⁶ Women were changed by the part in revival prayer Finney encouraged them to have, and antebellum America was changed as a result.²⁷⁷

Physicality Cramps and nosebleeds, hand-wringing and tongue-gnawing, overwhelming bodily expenditure to the point of exhaustion and even death: the content and form of travailing prayer were also controversial for their sheer **physicality**. “Decency and order are given to the winds” in new measure prayer meetings, Nevin lamented, as “a dozen perhaps are heard praying at once, in all unseemly postures, and with the most violent gestures.”²⁷⁸ Finney considered such censure entirely unwarranted:

If the bodily strength is taken away—if swoonings and faintings occur; if persons fall prostrate in the public assembly, in the family circle, or in their closets; if they are seized with bodily agitations or trembling,—multitudes take alarm, and infer, as a thing of course, that they are either the workings of a disordered imagination, or the results of infernal agency. Now there are few more unreasonable or ridiculous prejudices among mankind than this... Why is it at all wonderful that the infinitely solemn, important, and awful things of eternity, when clearly brought home to the minds of men, should produce great tremblings, and quakings, and prostrations of body, with “groanings that cannot be uttered”? Nay, verily, it is

²⁷³ Beecher and Nettleton, *op. cit.*, 90-91.

²⁷⁴ Nevin, *op. cit.*, 53.

²⁷⁵ Finney, *Lectures*, 138.

²⁷⁶ *ibid*, 135

²⁷⁷ Hardesty concludes, “Their critics said that allowing women to assume these new roles would change the structure of society. They were right.” (Hardesty, *op. cit.*, 112) Ensuing theological shifts, Kling argues, “laid the basis for the feminist movement in New England.” (Kling 1993, 10)

²⁷⁸ Nevin, *op. cit.*, 52-53. Writing under the pseudonym “Novanglus,” Beecher comments in a review of Finney’s first published sermon: “Some fanatical sects have been in the habit of encouraging outward bodily expressions of feeling, and attaching great importance to them, such as groaning aloud in the time of prayer, falling down, rolling about, and the like, and speaking of them as evidences of the special and powerful influences of the Spirit...” (Beecher and Nettleton, *op. cit.*, 49-50)

not at all strange. But the only wonder is, that mankind are not a thousand times more affected in this way than they really are.²⁷⁹

Finney had been introduced to prayer as both a spiritual and corporeal experience²⁸⁰ and remained inclined toward mystical encounters such that when “engaged in prayer ... *my flesh literally trembled on my bones*. I shook from head to foot, like a man in an ague fit, under a full sense of the presence of God.”²⁸¹ Repeatedly he had witnessed how “in the strongest exercise of faith the nerves of the body seem to give way for the time being”²⁸² with supplicants becoming so “bowed down that they could neither stand nor sit.”²⁸³ Sometimes this resulted in kneeling, a prayer posture some resisted “for fear of being taken as a Methodist.”²⁸⁴ At other times, even strong, polished people had been known to collapse face down in prayer for the unconverted²⁸⁵ as did a Mrs. Brayton in Western, New York, who, upon hearing from Finney of her daughter’s unwillingness to repent, became so shocked “that she groaned aloud, and fell prostrate on the floor. She was unable to rise, and struggled and groaned out her prayers in a manner that immediately indicated to me that Cynthia must be converted.”²⁸⁶ So physically overpowering was the force of prayer that one woman was known by Finney to have dropped dead by it:

I knew a woman in Rochester, who was in a great agony of prayer for the conversion of her son-in-law. One morning he was at an anxious meeting, and she remained at home praying

²⁷⁹ Finney 1861, 48-51.

²⁸⁰ What was likely Finney’s first awareness of travailing prayer came from the firsthand account by his youngest brother of a prayer meeting in early 1824 led by a Deacon Montague in Adams, New York. Deacon Montague began by standing up behind his chair and “soon began to wax warm” as he continued to “rise upon his toes and come down upon his heels more emphatically. And as the Spirit of prayer led him onward, he began to raise his chair together with his heels, and bring that down upon the floor... He continued to do this, and grew more and more engaged till he would bring the chair down as if he would break it to pieces. ... The deacon continued to struggle until he was about exhausted; and when he ceased my brother said that there was nobody in the room that could get off from their knees.” (Finney, *Memoirs*, 34)

²⁸¹ *ibid*, 195

²⁸² Finney [1984], 116. It was a false presumption, Finney stressed, “that none but what are termed *nervous people*” were prone to succumb to prayer’s overwhelming effects. “There is enough in religious truth, if clearly discovered to the mind by the Holy Spirit, to prostrate the bodily frame of the strongest man on earth.” (Finney 1861, 49)

²⁸³ Finney, *Lectures*, 30. Finney’s much-admired prayer partner, Abel Clary, was one for whom “the burden of his would frequently be so great that he was unable to stand.” (Finney, *Memoirs*, 317) See Chapter I, note 257.

²⁸⁴ Finney, *Lectures*, 256.

²⁸⁵ “I have seen a man of as much strength of intellect and muscle as any man in the community, fall down prostrate, absolutely overpowered by his unutterable desires for sinners.” (*ibid*, 65)

²⁸⁶ Finney, *Memoirs*, 149.

for him. At the close of the meeting, he came home a convert, and she was so rejoiced that she fell down and died on the spot. It is no more strange that these effects should be produced by religion than by strong feeling on any other subject. It is not essential to prayer, but the natural result of great efforts of the mind.²⁸⁷

Travailing prayer, however, could not only engulf petitioners but also unleash physical expression in ways that seemed sometimes uncontrollable. Finney's experiential touchstone was always his conversion when he had "tried to suppress my tears, but could not."²⁸⁸ The Holy Spirit had manifested Himself then "*like a wave of electricity*, going through and through me," as "*waves of liquid love*," and "it seemed to me that I should burst. I wept aloud with joy and love."²⁸⁹ Weeping and tears thereafter were the heart language of intercession for Finney, who often was unable to pray in words "but only in groans and tears."²⁹⁰ He came to believe that when prayer for souls finally reached this point of "strong crying and tears, you may be certain there is going to be a revival."²⁹¹ Finney thought the same of sweat²⁹² as an embodiment of tenacity in prayer when "the perspiration has poured down you, and even if you have not obtained, yet you have not given up the struggle, until you finally humbled yourselves. Then you have prevailed."²⁹³ Becoming short-of-breath went hand-in-hand as further physical verification of prayer's legitimacy and strength:

The case of a certain woman, of whom I read, in a revival, made the greatest impression on my mind. She had such an unutterable compassion and love for souls, that she actually panted for breath. What must be the strength of the desire which God feels, when his Spirit produces in Christians such amazing agony, such throes of soul, such *travail*...²⁹⁴

But the physicality of prayer could comprise not only self-expression but also self-denial. Finney had found it personally profitable "to hold frequent days of private fasting"²⁹⁵

²⁸⁷ Finney, *Lectures*, 68.

²⁸⁸ Finney *Memoirs*, 22.

²⁸⁹ *ibid*, 23. "These waves came over me, and over me, and over me one after the other, until I recollect I cried out, 'I shall *die* if these waves continue to pass over me.'" (*ibid*, 24)

²⁹⁰ *ibid*, 42. Mrs. Brayton (note 287) "was unable to say much in words, but her groans and tears witnessed the extreme agony of her mind." (*ibid*, 149)

²⁹¹ Finney, *Lectures*, 29. It is from this sentence that the current chapter of my dissertation takes its title. See Chapter I, note 27.

²⁹² See note 236.

²⁹³ Finney, "The Conditions of Prevailing Prayer", *The Penny Pulpit*, *op. cit.*, 111.

²⁹⁴ Finney, *Lectures*, 65.

²⁹⁵ Finney, *Memoirs*, 39.

for kindling “a revival in our soul”²⁹⁶ as remedy to a flagging spirit of prayer and for gaining “greater prevalence with God.”²⁹⁷ Fasting was “in many cases entirely indispensable to a right state of religious feeling,”²⁹⁸ abstaining from food in order to excite spiritual appetite for continuous, agonising, persistent prayer.²⁹⁹ This was to “know ourselves as starving souls,”³⁰⁰ a state of prayerfulness³⁰¹ acknowledging how crucial it was that the soul’s “hungering after the bread and its thirsting for the water of life should be duly enkindled, and that the spirit should pant and struggle after God, and ‘cry out for the living God.’”³⁰² Occasionally, such austerity and exertion could cause prayer to overheat and nearly consume the petitioner physically. Finney despised any sensationalism or charlatanism in this regard.³⁰³ But while “these bodily effects are not at all essential to prevailing prayer,”³⁰⁴ when they inevitably occurred, he insisted, “I should not, on that account, stay my hand, or take it for granted that anything was wrong.”³⁰⁵

²⁹⁶ Finney, Sermon 112, “Fasting and Prayer Essential to Strong Faith,” on Mt 17:21 (1863), The Charles Grandison Finney Papers, Oberlin College Archives.

²⁹⁷ Finney, Sermon 310, “Fastings Often / Christ and Apostles Fasted Often,” on 2 Cor 11:27 (1867), The Charles Grandison Finney Papers, Oberlin College Archives.

²⁹⁸ Finney, “Preached on the Day of the National Fast, May 14”, *The Oberlin Evangelist* III, 12, June 9, 1841, 93.

²⁹⁹ Finney devotes Sermon 482 (“Hunger and Thirst After God”, on Mt 5:6 [1871], The Charles Grandison Finney Papers, Oberlin College Archives) to this theme.

³⁰⁰ Finney 1855, 70. “In general it is found true that before Christians will sufficiently apprehend the relations of this supply to their wants and to the means of supplying them, this hunger and thirst becomes very intense, so as to overpower and cast into insignificance all their other appetites and desires.” (Finney 1877, 411)

³⁰¹ Finney, Sermon 427, “Hunger and Thirst,” on Mt 5:6 (1870), The Charles Grandison Finney Papers, Oberlin College Archives.

³⁰² Finney 1855, 71-72.

³⁰³ “I should, of course, abhor aiming to get up an excitement for the purpose of producing such results as bodily prostrations.” (Finney 1861, 51)

³⁰⁴ Finney, *Lectures*, 67. See Chapter I, note 283.

³⁰⁵ Finney 1861, 51.

Practice

Sound or Silence

When travailing prayer boiled up, it could become not only overpowering but noisy, as in Finney's early revivals when his cohort earned notoriety for conducting their devotions "in a manner so loud and boisterous, as to disturb the inhabitants ... and arrest the attention of travelers as they passed in the streets."³⁰⁶ This, again, exasperated Finney's detractors.³⁰⁷ "There is no need of praying as if God and man were deaf," scolded Beecher, "or of wailing on the floor, and frothing at the mouth, as if filled with hydrophobia, instead of the Spirit of God."³⁰⁸ Finney would not have disagreed, himself a frequent critic of "boisterous, vociferous preaching, exhortation, or prayer" that could agitate and strain until "the sensibility seems to gush forth like a flood."³⁰⁹ Not a spasm or explosion, but "a calm, deep, sacred flow of the soul"³¹⁰ was Finney's ideal, a degree of excitement "*consistent with the healthful operation of the intellectual powers*. Whatever exceeds this, must be disastrous."³¹¹ Along with being concise and to the point,³¹² he observed how the greatest intercessors were often the quiet type,³¹³ modelling how the life of prayer should be one of "continually lifting up our hearts in silent ejaculations."³¹⁴

³⁰⁶ Cross, *op. cit.*, 179 (no reference provided). See also Carwardine 1978, 8.

³⁰⁷ In a defence of the "mourner's bench," Weiser admitted that "some are opposed to the 'mourner's bench' on account of the noise which those make who go to it. And, indeed, revivals in general are opposed on this ground; too much noise, too much weeping, too much groaning, too much sighing, too much praying!" (Weiser, *op. cit.*, 32)

³⁰⁸ Beecher and Nettleton, *op. cit.*, 100. Contemporary observers have criticised excessive loudness in prayer as reluctance to trust in God's grace alone: "This largely accounts for the volume of noise and emotionalism at some healing meetings. The frenzy is a form of work, which people believe will get God moving." (Blue 1987, 47)

³⁰⁹ Finney 1861, 52.

³¹⁰ *ibid*

³¹¹ *ibid*, 50-51

³¹² Finney urged that public prayers be short, "pertinent, not repetitious," with concession to seasons of importunity when one may be "drawn into wrestling as Jacob was. These are exceptional cases." (Finney, Sermon 498, "Prevailing Prayer Meeting," on Acts 12:5-17 [1871], The Charles Grandison Finney Papers, Oberlin College Archives) See Chapter III, note 336-39.

³¹³ Abel Clary "was a very silent man, as almost all are who have that powerful spirit of prayer." (Finney, *Memoirs*, 317) Revivalists adopted Finney's practice (Matson, *op. cit.*, 35-36) of searching out these unseen intercessors upon arrival to a locality: "When, therefore, a pastor or evangelist is about to commence special meetings, he will do well to inquire whether any are or have been secretly or quietly praying for a gracious visitation of the Lord. If he shall be so happy as to find out such hidden ones, it would not always be wise to proclaim his discovery." (Hervey, *op. cit.*, 11)

³¹⁴ Finney 1877, 254.

Yet it was never far from his memory how, at conversion, Finney “would only whisper my prayers, after having stopped the key-hole to my door” attempting to conceal his awkwardness and pride.³¹⁵ If silent prayers could mask pride, then the best antidote was the voice. Finney “believed much in audible prayer,”³¹⁶ Oberlin students recalled, and under his hand travailing prayer could become loud. The decibels rose in his conversion to the level that “I literally *bellowed out* the unutterable gushings of my heart.”³¹⁷ Travailing for others, often Finney “could only groan with groanings so loud and deep”³¹⁸ as he did on one occasion in Oberlin during a time of drought. “In the preacher’s voice was the plaintiveness of a creature’s cry,” an eyewitness remembered; “the picture of the groaning and wailing priest of the Most High, as he pressed the claim of his people to the very throne of heaven, is a life memory.”³¹⁹ Finney’s volume and intensity in prayer were likely validated by his own memories of Deacon Montague,³²⁰ Abel Clary,³²¹ and particularly, “Father” Daniel Nash, Sr., for whom “much fault was found ... because of the loudness of his voice in prayer.”³²² Finney, however, had witnessed the convincing value to sinners of those clamorous prayers:

[In Gouverneur, New York, lived] a Mr. Martin, who was a strong Universalist, and for a considerable time kept away from our meetings. One morning Father Nash ... rose up, as his custom was, at a very early hour; and went back to a grove some fifty rods, perhaps, from the road, to have a season of prayer alone. It was before sunrise; and Brother Nash, as usual, became very much engaged in prayer. It was one of those clear mornings, on which it is possible to hear sounds a great distance. Mr. Martin had arisen and was out of doors at that early hour in the morning, and heard the voice of prayer. He listened, and could distinctly hear Father Nash’s voice. He knew it was prayer, he afterwards said; though he could not distinguish much that was said. He however said that he knew *what* it was, and *who* it was. But it lodged an arrow in his heart. He said it brought a sense of the reality of religion over him, such as he never had experienced before. The arrow was fastened. He found no relief till he found it in believing in Jesus.³²³

³¹⁵ Finney, *Memoirs*, 16.

³¹⁶ Matson, *op. cit.*, 60. Finney “exhorted the students to accustom themselves to the use of the voice when alone.” (*ibid*)

³¹⁷ Finney, *Memoirs*, 24.

³¹⁸ *ibid*, 40

³¹⁹ Matson, *op. cit.*, 57.

³²⁰ “My brother said that Deacon Montague began as usual in his prayer, in a low, feeble voice; but soon began to wax warm and to raise his voice, which became tremulous with emotion. ... He continued to raise his voice...” (Finney, *Memoirs*, 34)

³²¹ Finney recalled an incident when Mr. Clary “was in one of his seasons of travail of soul. ... His groans could be heard all over the house.” (Finney, *Memoirs*, 333) See Appendix III.

³²² Wright, *op. cit.*, 33. See Chapter I, note 333.

³²³ Finney, *Memoirs*, 130.

“pitch of **importunity**”³²⁴ in prayer, exemplified individually in the Syrophoenician woman’s insistence³²⁵ and corporately in the gathering of Jesus’ steadfast followers who, before Pentecost, “held on from day to day, held on, and carried out the condition—that they were to hold fast, and give God no rest till he accomplished what they had assembled to ask him for.”³²⁶ Finney believed that “to submit to any dispensation of Providence is impossible till it comes.”³²⁷ By this he meant that Christians should always keep praying until it is clear not to, only after God’s will has appeared in present reality and we correctly, then, acquiesce to it and find satisfaction in it.³²⁸ But “while the will of God is not known, to submit, without prayer, is tempting God,” confounding “submission with indifference.”³²⁹ Who knows but that everything is hinging on our “offering the right kind of prayer”: “the very condition on which [an impenitent friend] is to be saved from hell, may be the fervency and importunity of your prayer for that individual.”³³⁰

³²⁴ Finney, *Lectures*, 58.

³²⁵ When Jesus told the woman he had come only “for the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Mt 15:24 [KJV]), “she was not to be discouraged by that. Notwithstanding this apparent discouragement, she would believe that she could get the blessing, therefore she pressed it still, only increasing in importunity, and would not be discouraged.” (Finney, “How to Prevail with God”, *The Penny Pulpit*, *op. cit.*, 114) “Upon this case our Lord seized to enforce and encourage importunity in prayer.” (Finney, “On Prayer”, *The Oberlin Evangelist* XVII, *op. cit.*, 1) See also Finney, “On Persevering Prayer for Others”, *The Oberlin Evangelist* XVII, *op. cit.*, 10. Finney also drew upon other “striking instances of this in the Bible. For instance, take the cases of Jacob, Moses, Elijah, Daniel, and the Syrophoenician woman” (Finney, “The Conditions of Prevailing Prayer”, *The Penny Pulpit*, *op. cit.*, 111), “and the teaching of the Bible generally” (Finney, “Prevailing Prayer”, *The Independent of New York* XXVI, *op. cit.*, 3).

³²⁶ Finney, *The Prevailing Prayer-Meeting: A Sermon Delivered in Blackfriars’ Street Congregational Chapel, Glasgow, on 4th September 1859*, *op. cit.*, 6. See Acts 1:14.

³²⁷ Finney, *Lectures*, 56.

³²⁸ Finney illustrates with David’s fasting and prayer for his son with Bathsheba (2 Sam 12:15-23): “While the child was yet alive, he did not know what was the will of God, and so he fasted and prayed, and said, ‘Who can tell whether God will be gracious to me, that my child may live?’ He did not know but that his prayer and agony was the very thing on which it turned, whether the child was to live or not. He thought that if he humbled himself and entreated God, perhaps God would spare him this blow. But as soon as God’s will appeared, and the child was dead, he bowed like a saint. ... This was true submission. He reasoned correctly in the case. While he had no revelation of the will of God, he did not know but what the child’s recovery depended on his prayer. But when he had a revelation of the will of God, he submitted.” (*ibid*)

³²⁹ *ibid*

³³⁰ *ibid*

Importunity, then, involved both repetition—“follow[ing] up petition with request, turning them over and over,”³³¹ adding “entreaty to entreaty”³³²—as well as tenacity and holy boldness, which Finney considered impossible for those whose “hearts are not fixed”³³³ like that of Jacob to persevere in prayer, even through the night.³³⁴ The quantity of prayer mattered, he maintained: “If you mean to pray effectually, you must pray a great deal.”³³⁵ But every reiteration should be the renewed request of a burdened spirit, not the vain repetitions condemned in Scripture³³⁶ and churned out in liturgical contexts.³³⁷ “Your hope of success in prayer therefore should not lie in the amount, but in the quality of your prayers,”³³⁸ and it was our importunity, Finney insisted, that God uses to draw us eventually into this calibre of “more and mightier prayer”³³⁹ He prefers. Ongoing appeals despite God’s perceived unresponsiveness suffer petitioners “to develop a certain state of mind”³⁴⁰ through a protracted process³⁴¹ of searching out all hindrances,³⁴² divesting us of all selfishness,³⁴³

³³¹ Finney, “The Conditions of Prevailing Prayer”, *The Penny Pulpit*, *op. cit.*, 111.

³³² Finney, “Prevailing Prayer”, *The Independent of New York XXVI*, *op. cit.*, 3.

³³³ Finney, “Prayer and Labor for the Gathering of the Great Harvest”, *The Oberlin Evangelist XV*, *op. cit.*, 2.

³³⁴ Finney, “The Conditions of Prevailing Prayer”, *The Penny Pulpit*, *op. cit.*, 111. See also Finney, *Memoirs*, 138.

³³⁵ Finney, *Lectures*, 63. “You are not to pray for a thing once, and then cease, and call that the prayer of faith.” (*ibid*, 84)

³³⁶ “But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.” (Mt 6:7 [KJV])

³³⁷ “It is a most singular fact that the Roman Catholic church has fallen into the practice here condemned. Like the priests of Baal, in Elijah’s time, they demand and practice everlasting repetitions of the same words, numbering their repetitions of Pater Nosters and Ave Marias by their beads, and estimating the merit of praying by the quantity and not the quality of their prayers. ... They think if there can only be prayer enough, that is, repetitions enough of the same or similar words, the prayer will be certainly effective, and prevalent with God.—No mistake can be greater.” (Finney, “Conditions of Prevailing Prayer” [part 2], *The Oberlin Evangelist IX*, *op. cit.*, 89)

³³⁸ Finney, “Conditions of Prevailing Prayer” (part 3), *The Oberlin Evangelist IX*, *op. cit.*, 115.

³³⁹ Finney, “On Persevering Prayer for Others”, *The Oberlin Evangelist XVII*, *op. cit.*, 10.

³⁴⁰ Finney, “How to Prevail with God”, *The Penny Pulpit*, *op. cit.*, 116.

³⁴¹ “Most Christians come up to prevailing prayer by a protracted process.” (Finney, *Lectures*, 59)

³⁴² “Providences must have time and scope to operate. Providential difficulties must be removed out of the way, and time may be requisite for this.” (Finney, “On Persevering Prayer for Others”, *The Oberlin Evangelist XVII*, *op. cit.*, 10)

³⁴³ “This is fearfully common. The real motives are selfish. Yet they come before God and urge their request often and long,—perhaps with great importunity; yet they are selfish in their very prayers, and God cannot hear.” (Finney, “On Prayer for the Holy Spirit”, *The Oberlin Evangelist XVII*, *op. cit.*, 82)

and stimulating faith.³⁴⁴ In this way, importunity, Finney taught, was necessary for becoming suitably equipped in prayer: “Do not think you are prepared to offer prevailing prayer, if your feelings will let you pray once for an object, and then leave it.”³⁴⁵

However, after having prayed much more than once and fulfilling God’s conditions, Finney asserted it ultimately *was* possible to leave it, **praying through** to peace and faith’s rest. Importunity was not interminable but was meant to be transitional to a position of confidence, relief, and inner knowing that God’s answer was imminent. The “prayer of faith” for a specific need, if it met God’s conditions, Finney believed, would never fail to receive God’s response, either in spirit or letter: “The results sought constituted the spirit of the prayer; the specified manner constituted the letter.”³⁴⁶ Finally reaching assurance had been both Finney’s personal³⁴⁷ and vicarious experience in importunate prayer with Mr. Clary and others whose travail buoyed him with certainty that “it will all come out right.”³⁴⁸ Leading up to the 1825-26 revivals in Oneida County, for example, Finney recalled visiting in the home of Mr. Harris, an elder in the Presbyterian church in Western, whose wife seemed close to death, shut away “in her room groaning and struggling in prayer.”

Hearing my voice in the sitting room she came out from her bedroom, and upon her face was a most unearthly, heavenly glow. Her countenance was lighted up with a hope and a joy that were plainly from heaven. She exclaimed, “Brother Finney, the Lord has come! This work will spread over all this region! A cloud of mercy overhangs us all; and we shall see such a work of grace as we have never yet seen.” Her husband looked surprised, confounded, and knew not what to say. It was new to him, but not to me. I had seen such scenes before; and believed that prayer had prevailed, nay, I felt sure of it in my own soul.³⁴⁹

³⁴⁴ Upon expressing her willingness to accept the crumbs of Jesus’ mercy, Finney comments, “What a spirit was this! Christ turned and said, ‘O woman, great is thy faith; be it unto thee even as thou wilt!’ He had developed her faith.” (Finney, “How to Prevail with God”, *The Penny Pulpit*, *op. cit.*, 114)

³⁴⁵ Finney, *Lectures*, 59.

³⁴⁶ Finney, “Conditions of Prevailing Prayer” [part 1], *The Oberlin Evangelist* IX, *op. cit.*, 81. “God often answers prayer according to the spirit, when he does not answer it precisely according to the letter.” (Finney, “The Conditions of Prevailing Prayer”, *The Penny Pulpit*, *op. cit.*, 105)

³⁴⁷ After a third period of agonising prayer for a sick woman (see notes 94, 109), Finney “obtained the assurance in my own mind that the lady would not die.” (Finney, *Memoirs*, 40-41) Finney grew to approach prayer with this sureness of anticipated outcomes, entering a room or retiring to a grove of trees for giving “ourselves up to prayer until we prevailed.” (Finney, *Memoirs*, 120)

³⁴⁸ *ibid*, 317. After a subsequent episode of prayer with Mr. Clary, Finney sensed that “the Spirit of prayer was upon him, and I felt his influence upon myself, and took it for granted that the work would take on a powerful type.” (*ibid*, 333-34)

³⁴⁹ Finney, *Memoirs*, 147-48. This may be the same episode Finney refers to in his *Lectures* (32) cited in Chapter I, note 346.

Often a sense of relief indicated to supplicants that importunity could wind down, when having been “driven to extremity, they make a desperate effort ... [to] exercise a childlike confidence” in Christ. “Then they feel relieved... The burden is gone, and God seems in kindness to sooth down the mind to feel a sweet assurance that the blessing will be granted.”³⁵⁰ A case in point was that of a bank cashier named Mr. Stowe³⁵¹ who interceded persistently for his employer, prolonging a prayer-meeting. But “as soon as the mind of the cashier was so relieved that he could go home, we all retired; and soon after the president of the bank for whom we prayed, expressed hope in Christ.”³⁵² How such reprieve and resolution actually registered in the petitioner’s awareness, Finney could not strictly explain. He described how John Knox importuned during the Scottish Reformation until he somehow knew “that deliverance had come. He could not tell what had happened, but he felt that something had taken place, for God had heard their prayers.”³⁵³ For Finney, the denouement of importunity was simply a closing gift of prayer’s discourse, hearing with spiritual ears God’s “Yes!”³⁵⁴

Finally, the resolution of travail’s relentlessness was rest:

It has always been my experience, when I have a day or season of great travail of soul for any object, if I *pursue* the subject, and continue my pleadings until I prevail and my soul is at

³⁵⁰ Finney, *Lectures*, 67. Soon after being licensed to preach, Finney was in Antwerp, New York, and rose early one Sunday morning, making his way to a grove “to pour out my heart before God for a blessing on the labors of the day. I could not express the agony of my soul in words, but struggled with much groaning and, I believe, with many tears, for an hour or two, without getting relief. I returned to my room in the hotel; but almost immediately came back to the grove. This I did three times. The last time I got complete relief, just as it was time to go to the meeting.” (Finney [1984], 17)

³⁵¹ See note 209.

³⁵² Finney, *Memoirs*, 210.

³⁵³ Finney, *Lectures*, 70. Similarly, after Finney had prayed with a “brother minister” in Rochester, “I recollect he would say, ‘Lord, I do not know how it is; but I seem to know that thou are going to do a great work in this city.’” (Finney, *Memoirs*, 316)

³⁵⁴ After many hours agonising in prayer for a young woman undergoing a crisis of faith (note 110), “the darkness gave way, and the whole subject opened to my mind; and as soon as I plead for her God said to me, ‘Yes!’ ‘Yes!’ If he had spoken with an audible voice it would not have been more distinctly understood and heard, than the ‘yes,’ ‘yes,’ that was spoken within my soul. It instantly relieved all my solicitude. My mind became immediately filled with the greatest peace and joy; and I felt a complete certainty in my mind that her salvation was secure.” (Finney, *Memoirs*, 42)

rest,—that in answer to such prayers God not only gives me what I ask, but exceedingly above all that I at the time had in my mind.³⁵⁵

Here may have been one of Finney's pioneering contributions to revival prayer,³⁵⁶ one which rippled through generations³⁵⁷ who placed their hope in God-assigned rest as His imprimatur and finish line of importunity,³⁵⁸ the essential nature of faith,³⁵⁹ and the reward of the petitioner's vocation:

Let those who are called to these trials, and conflicts and temptations, and who groan, and pray, and weep, and break your hearts, remember this consideration: your peace, so far as your feelings towards God are concerned, will flow like a river.³⁶⁰

Authenticity and the Role of the Holy Spirit

The objective of prayer's

exertions for Finney was always more than peace and relief. It was answers,³⁶¹ much fruit in "prevalence with God."³⁶² "Why is it that so much that is called prayer is not answered?" was Finney's biggest holdup to faith as a young man.³⁶³ "Was that which I heard real prayer,

³⁵⁵ *ibid*, 377. Finney could recount episodes when prayer's agony "seemed to be set aside": "My prayers were swallowed up in that; and I often found myself smiling, as it were, in the face of God, and saying that I did not want anything. I was very sure that He would accomplish all His wise and good pleasure; and with that my soul was entirely satisfied." (*ibid*, 459)

³⁵⁶ See Chapter I, note 341.

³⁵⁷ Late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century revivalists such as D. L. Moody continued to emphasise how "nothing is more pleasing to our Father in heaven than direct, importunate, and persevering prayer." (Moody 1885, 99) Finney could be studied as a bridge from the "perpetual importunity" of Edwards (Chapter III, notes 374-75), passing "from a *seeking* faith to a *resting* faith" free from "great distress, anxiety and worry" of the Higher Life and Keswick Movements (Pollock 1964, 26-27).

³⁵⁸ "Have you ever prayed ... till you felt that rest in God, that confidence, as perfect as if you saw God come down from heaven to give it to you?" (Finney, *Lectures*, 87)

³⁵⁹ "Faith is the confidence of the heart in the truth of God. It is a resting, a repose of the mind in God." (Finney, "The Rest of Faith", *The Oberlin Evangelist* I, 21, September 25, 1839, 161)

³⁶⁰ Finney, *Lectures*, 118.

³⁶¹ "Prevailing prayer is that which secures an answer." (Finney, "Prevailing Prayer", *The Independent of New York XXVI, op. cit.*, 2) "Prevailing prayer, or effectual prayer, is that prayer which attains the blessing that it seeks. It is that prayer which effectually moves God." (Finney, *Lectures*, 54)

³⁶² "Great prevalence in prayer, then, is an evidence that we abide in Him. But a want of prevalence in prayer is conclusive evidence that we do not abide in Him." (Finney 1855, 165-66)

³⁶³ "I was particularly struck with the fact that the prayers that I listened to in their prayer meetings, from week to week, were not, that I could see, answered. ... I knew not what to make of it. It was a question in my mind whether I was to understand that these persons were not truly Christians, and therefore did not prevail with God; or whether I misunderstood the promises and teachings of the Bible on this subject, or whether I was to conclude that the Bible was not true. ... On one occasion, when I was in one of their prayer-meetings, I was asked if I did not desire that they should pray for me. I told them, No, because I did not see that God answered their prayers." (Finney, *Memoirs*, 12-13) "I do not think I ever could have been converted if I had not discovered the solution of the question, 'Why is it that so much that is called prayer is not answered?'" (Finney, "Prevailing Prayer", *The Independent of New York XXVI, op. cit.*, 3) Finney refers to this same "stumbling block" in "The Conditions of Prevailing Prayer", *The Penny Pulpit, op. cit.*, 105.

in the Bible sense?" he probed.³⁶⁴ From the start, like those before him,³⁶⁵ concern for prayer's **authenticity** was a hinge of Finney's revival theology and practice, for it was possible, he concluded, for Christians to confuse "that which is commonly regarded as prayer, and that which God regards as such."³⁶⁶ It was a delusion, for example, for people to think that the fervour of travailing prayer could be self-generated, feelings that "can never be caused to start into existence, and glow and burn in the mind at the direct bidding of the will."³⁶⁷ Instead, these right emotions of effective prayer that people sought and Finney prized could only be accessed by divine impartation, for "people are not apt to desire with the right kind of desires, unless they are excited by the Spirit of God."³⁶⁸ The fickleness of emotion³⁶⁹ and susceptibility to asking amiss³⁷⁰ made introspection³⁷¹ prerequisite to genuine prayer, the willingness even "to do violence to yourself" knowing that "you never will have the **spirit of prayer**, till you examine yourselves, and confess your sins."³⁷² Hypocrisy, excessive levity, pride, and worldly-mindedness³⁷³ were among impediments to the spirit of prayer outlined in Lecture VII, "Be Filled with the Spirit,"³⁷⁴ toleration of which drove the

³⁶⁴ Finney, "Prevailing Prayer", *The Independent of New York* XXVI, *op. cit.*, 2.

³⁶⁵ Lyrene traces the concept of the "spirit of prayer" from New England Puritanism, through the first trans-Atlantic awakening, to the first phase of the Second Great Awakening. (Lyrene, *op. cit.*, 119-25)

³⁶⁶ Finney, "The Conditions of Prevailing Prayer", *The Penny Pulpit*, *op. cit.*, 105-06.

³⁶⁷ Finney 1835b, "How To Change Your Heart," www.gospeltruth.net/1835SOVS/1835sovs_sermonII.htm (accessed online November 2013). "From my soul I abhor all affectation of feeling where there is none, and all attempts to work one's self up into feeling by groans." (Finney, *Lectures*, 105)

³⁶⁸ Finney, *Lectures*, 78. "No Christian ever prays aright, unless led by the Spirit." (*ibid*, 99) Yielding to the leadership of the Holy Spirit was among "the conditions upon which God had promised to hear prayer." (*ibid*)

³⁶⁹ "Highly wrought emotions are liable to deceive, for as they cannot be the subject of a present distinct examination, without ceasing to exist, they are the least to be depended on as an evidence of a title to the inheritance of the saints in light." (Finney 1836, 53)

³⁷⁰ Effective prayer required "asking not only for such things as God is willing to grant, but also asking in such a state of mind as God can accept." (Finney, "Prevailing Prayer", *The Independent of New York* XXVI, *op. cit.*, 2)

³⁷¹ Finney considered prayer itself to be self-revealing: "If you know the habitual tenor of people's prayers, it will show which way the tide of their feeling sets." (Finney 1985 [1837], 62)

³⁷² Finney, *Lectures*, 49.

³⁷³ "Suppose a man engaged in his worldly scheme, and that God should give that man the spirit of prayer. Of course he would pray for that which lies nearest his heart; that is, for success in his worldly schemes, to serve his own gods with. Will God give him the spirit of prayer for such purposes?—Never." (Finney 1985 [1837], 24-25)

³⁷⁴ Finney, *Lectures*, 109-14.

spirit of prayer away,³⁷⁵ as Finney himself had experienced.³⁷⁶ The only remedy was deep repentance³⁷⁷ and more prayer.³⁷⁸

From initial inklings of an “inward voice”³⁷⁹ at Finney’s conversion, “the Lord taught me in those early days of my Christian experience, many very important truths in regard to *the spirit of prayer*.”³⁸⁰ He came to understand there to be something of a tipping point where, after much travail, “the Lord gave me power to prevail”³⁸¹ knowing that “it was God the Holy Spirit making intercession in me.”³⁸² This typically occurred as “He pressed my soul in prayer.”³⁸³ Finney identified heaviness and anxiety³⁸⁴ for the unconverted as the “praying state of mind.”³⁸⁵ “The spirit of prayer is not a spirit of joy”³⁸⁶ but of distress³⁸⁷ in petitioners “that weighs them down”³⁸⁸ with strong desires³⁸⁹ and intense urges to pray:

Do you ask what it is, that leads your mind to exercise benevolent feelings for sinners, and to agonize in prayer for them? What can it be but the Spirit of God? There are no devils that

³⁷⁵ Finney illustrates with the figure of a young man who “once had the spirit of prayer, but neglecting his duty, he grieved the Spirit away.” (*ibid*, 112; see also Finney 1877, 254) It was crucial to “make redress wherever you have committed an injury. You cannot expect to get the spirit of prayer first, and then repent.” (*ibid*, 98) Finney uses the phrases “being filled with the Spirit” and “having” or “receiving the spirit of prayer” interchangeably: “The Spirit in the hearts of saints is pre-eminently a spirit of prayer.” (Finney 1877, 255) See also Gresham 1987, 45-46.

³⁷⁶ “If even for a day or an hour I lost the Spirit of grace and supplication, I found myself unable to preach with power and efficiency, or to win souls by personal conversation. ... I found myself having more or less power in preaching and personal labor for souls just in proportion as I had the Spirit of prevailing prayer.” (Finney, *Memoirs*, 138)

³⁷⁷ “Let there be this deep work of repentance, and full confession, this breaking down before God, and you will have as much of the spirit of prayer as your body can bear up under.” (Finney, *Lectures*, 49)

³⁷⁸ “How shall we get this influence of the Spirit of God? It must be sought by fervent, believing prayer.” (*ibid*, 96) See Lyrene, *op. cit.*, 181.

³⁷⁹ Finney, *Memoirs*, 18.

³⁸⁰ *ibid*, 40

³⁸¹ *ibid*

³⁸² *ibid*, 377-78. “The prayer was not properly mine, but the prayer of the Holy Spirit.” (*ibid*)

³⁸³ *ibid*. So “pressed by the spirit of prayer” was Mr. Stowe (notes 209 and 351) “that when the meeting was dismissed he was unable to rise from his knees.” (*ibid*, 209)

³⁸⁴ See Chapter I, note 61.

³⁸⁵ Finney, “Prayer and Labor for the Gathering of the Great Harvest”, *The Oberlin Evangelist* XV, *op. cit.*, 1.

³⁸⁶ Finney, *Lectures*, 133. It was because of this that Finney insisted on very little singing in prayer meetings: “Why, if you knew your house was on fire, would you first stop and sing a hymn before you put it out? ... It is just about as natural for the people to sing when exercised with a spirit of prayer. When people feel like pulling men out of the fire, they don’t feel like singing.” (*ibid*)

³⁸⁷ “The more you have of [Christ’s] Spirit, the more clearly you will see the state of sinners, and the more deeply you will be distressed about them. Many times you will feel as if you could not live in view of their situation; your distress will be unutterable.” (Finney, *Lectures*, 116)

³⁸⁸ *ibid*, 30.

³⁸⁹ “When *the Spirit of God is upon you*, and excites strong desires for any blessing, you are bound to pray for it in faith.” (*ibid*, 78)

would lead you so. If your feelings are truly benevolent, you are to consider it as the Holy Spirit leading you to pray for things according to the will of God.³⁹⁰

Such impulses should be tested and discerned, but not resisted out of fear,³⁹¹ Finney implored, for to restrain prayer “must always quench the Spirit”³⁹² causing Him to be grieved and risking His withdrawal.³⁹³ That would mean disaster to any effectiveness in prayer³⁹⁴ and in the revival enterprise. It was only when Christians had a spirit of prayer that revival could be expected,³⁹⁵ explaining why Finney was known for first scouting out any persons gifted in this way wherever he went for a revival.³⁹⁶ His famed Rochester campaign, praised by Beecher as “the greatest work of God, and the greatest revival of religion, that the world has ever seen in so short a time,”³⁹⁷ began “under the most disadvantaged circumstances that could well be imagined,” Finney recollected. “But there were a few remarkable cases of the spirit of prayer, which assured us that God was there, and we went on.”³⁹⁸

In Lecture VI, “Spirit of Prayer,” Finney depicted the principal involvement of the Holy Spirit in prayer as one of leadership:³⁹⁹ leading petitioners to understand things in ways that produce deep feeling,⁴⁰⁰ to understand and apply the promises of Scripture in prayer, even leading Christians to pray for things not specified in Scripture⁴⁰¹ or yet to occur in the

³⁹⁰ *ibid*, 96

³⁹¹ “We do wrong, if we let the fear of impulses lead us to resist the *good* impulses of the Holy Ghost. ... A great deal has been said about fanaticism, that is very unguarded, and that causes many minds to reject the leadings of the Spirit of God. ... We should insist on a close scrutiny, and an accurate discrimination. There *must* be such a thing as being led by the Spirit.” (*ibid*, 103)

³⁹² Finney 1877, 254.

³⁹³ Finney, Sermon 498, “Prevailing Prayer Meeting,” on Acts 12:5-17 (1871), *op. cit.* “A state of mind which will not grieve the Spirit of God, but will watch against everything which does grieve the Spirit of God, is indispensable to the true spirit of prayer.” (Finney, “How to Prevail with God”, *The Penny Pulpit*, *op. cit.*, 117)

³⁹⁴ “Prayer, to be effectual, must be by the intercession of the Spirit.” (Finney, *Lectures*, 58)

³⁹⁵ *ibid*, 30

³⁹⁶ “His question on entering a place to begin meetings, was not, who will help in the preaching, but who are the praying ones. Has there been a spirit of prayer poured out upon any in the community?” (Matson, *op. cit.*, 61)

³⁹⁷ Finney, *Memoirs*, 325-26.

³⁹⁸ Finney, *Lectures*, 34.

³⁹⁹ “It is wonderful to see how naturally and earnestly the Spirit leads us to pray.” (Finney 1877, 254)

⁴⁰⁰ The Holy 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.” (Finney, *Lectures*, 91)

⁴⁰¹ Here was a principle of inference in prayer Finney developed, how “the Spirit leads Christians to desire and pray for things of which nothing is specifically said in the word of God.” Finney accepted that “many people will be afraid of it if they hear it called a new revelation. ... But the plain truth of the matter is, that the Spirit

future.⁴⁰² The Spirit was the leader of last resort in prayer,⁴⁰³ helping “Christians to pray according to the will of God, or for the things that God desires them to pray for.”⁴⁰⁴ Gaining access to this leadership involved some effort on the supplicant’s part,⁴⁰⁵ even application of a kind of sanctified imagination.⁴⁰⁶ Much more, however, Finney perceived the spirit of prayer as a charism, one example of which was Abel Clary in whom Finney recognised “the great gift of God that was upon him, the Spirit of prayer.”⁴⁰⁷ Mr. Clary had been credentialed for preaching, but Finney detected intercession to be his true vocation,⁴⁰⁸ like Father Nash, who, McCauley points out, “was very clear about his widely recognized, extraordinary gift of prayer as a gift of the Holy Spirit: ‘[I]t is nothing in me, aside from the Holy Ghost.’”⁴⁰⁹ For both these men and others, including Finney, the spirit of prayer often engaged suddenly, unpredictably, as when Clary was once asking the blessing at lunch:

But a sentence or two had escaped him when he broke instantly down, moved suddenly back from the table, and fled to his bedchamber. ... I understood it in a moment, and got up and went to his room. He was in one of his seasons of travail of soul. He lay groaning upon the bed, and tossing from side to side; the Spirit making intercession for him and in him with groanings that cannot be uttered.⁴¹⁰

leads a man to pray.” Finney repeatedly observed this in relation to a burden of prayer petitioners might receive from the Spirit for a particular individual. (*ibid*, 93)

⁴⁰² “A Christian may be made to see and discern clearly the signs of the times, so as to understand, by providence, what to expect, and thus to pray for it in faith. Thus they are often led to expect a revival, and to pray for it in faith, when nobody else can see the least signs of it.” (*ibid*, 94)

⁴⁰³ “When all other means fail of leading us to the knowledge of what we ought to pray for, the Spirit does it.” (*ibid*, 90)

⁴⁰⁴ *ibid*

⁴⁰⁵ “That is the way for a Christian to obtain deep feeling, by thinking on the object. God is not going to pour these things on you, without any effort on your own. You must cherish the slightest impressions.” (*ibid*, 97)

⁴⁰⁶ “Look, as it were, through a telescope that will bring it up near to you; look into hell, and hear them groan; then turn the glass upwards and look at heaven, and see the saints there, in their white robes, with their harps in their hands, and hear them sing the song of redeeming love... Do this, and if you are not a wicked man, and a stranger to God, you will soon have as much of the spirit of prayer as your body can sustain.” (*ibid*, 98)

⁴⁰⁷ Finney, *Memoirs*, 333. Finney mused over how Clary was one of many in those early days: “This Mr. Clary, and many others among the men, and a large number of women, partook of the same Spirit, and spent a great part of their time in prayer.” (*ibid*, 317-18)

⁴⁰⁸ “He had been licensed to preach; but his spirit of prayer was such, he was so burdened with the souls of men, that he was not able to preach much, his whole time and strength being given to prayer.” (*ibid*, 316-17)

⁴⁰⁹ Letter from Daniel Nash to Finney, November 26-27, 1831, The Charles Grandison Finney Papers, Oberlin College Archives. See Chapter I, note 365.

⁴¹⁰ Finney, *Memoirs*, 333. See note 321 and Appendix III.

These groanings of travailing prayer Finney took to be human articulation of “the voice of God,”⁴¹¹ which transcended language. From his experience⁴¹² and study of Scripture,⁴¹³ Finney concluded that when “the Spirit helps the people of God to pray according to the will of God,”⁴¹⁴ this is normally “something that language cannot utter—making the soul too full to utter its feelings by words, where the person can only groan them out to God, who understands the language of the heart.”⁴¹⁵

Like so much else Finney adopted with prayer, groaning under the inspiration of the Spirit drew sharp criticism,⁴¹⁶ which he cautioned listeners to expect:

Nothing will produce an excitement and opposition so quick as the spirit of prayer. If any person should feel burdened with the case of sinners, in prayer, so as to groan in his prayer, why, the women are nervous, and he is visited at once with rebuke and opposition.⁴¹⁷

But Finney countered that church history was on his side,⁴¹⁸ and that “let[ting] the Spirit take his own course”⁴¹⁹ was worth the risk.⁴²⁰ “I would sooner cut off my right hand,” he declared, “than rebuke the spirit of prayer, as I have heard of its being done by saying, ‘Don’t

⁴¹¹ *ibid*

⁴¹² In one of Finney’s earliest experiences of travailing prayer, he “tried to get my prayer before the Lord; but somehow words could not express it. I could only groan and weep, without being able to express what I wanted in words.” (*ibid*, 40)

⁴¹³ Gresham comments that Finney “based his view on a very literal interpretation and application of the passage in Romans, ‘the Spirit maketh intercession with groanings that cannot be uttered.’” (Gresham, *op. cit.*, 46; Rom 8:26 [KJV])

⁴¹⁴ Finney, *Lectures*, 55.

⁴¹⁵ *ibid*, 95

⁴¹⁶ Nettleton’s complaint favoured a much milder, quieter manifestation: “That holy, humble, meek, modest, retiring form, sometimes called the Spirit of Prayer, and which I have ever regarded as the unfailing precursor of a revival of religion, has been dragged from her closet, and so rudely handled by some of her professed friends, that she has not only lost all her wonted loveliness, but is now stalking the streets in some places stark mad.” (Beecher and Nettleton, *op. cit.*, 18)

⁴¹⁷ Finney, *Lectures*, 105. “If you have much of the Spirit of God, it is not unlikely you will be thought deranged by many. ... You must make up your mind to have much opposition, both in the church and in the world.” (*ibid*, 115, 117)

⁴¹⁸ At the New Lebanon Convention, “it was said that groaning ought to be discountenanced. ... Then the apostle Paul was egregiously deceived, when he wrote about groanings that cannot be uttered. Edwards was deceived, when he wrote his book upon revivals. Revivals are all in the dark. Now, no man who reviews the history of the church will adopt such a sentiment.” (*ibid*, 105-06)

⁴¹⁹ Finney, *Memoirs*, 39.

⁴²⁰ “True, there is danger of abuses. ... But this is no reason why they should be given up. The best things are always liable to abuses.” (Finney, *Lectures*, 21)

let me hear any more groaning.”⁴²¹ It came down to assuming an inward posture of yieldedness,⁴²² the church jettisoning formality and “giving themselves up to the spirit of prayer.”⁴²³ If this could happen, Finney lectured in New York’s Chatham Street Chapel, “If I could see this church filled with the Spirit, ... not two weeks would pass before the revival would spread all over this city.”⁴²⁴

⁴²¹ *ibid*, 106. Few matters stirred Finney’s passion more than the spirit of prayer: “I hardly know where to end this subject. I should like to discuss it a month, till the whole church could understand it...” (*ibid*) See also Finney, “An Approving Heart—Confidence in Prayer”, *The Oberlin Evangelist* IX, *op. cit.*, 33-35.

⁴²² “If [the Spirit] is drawing you to prayer, you must quit every thing to yield to his gentle strivings. ... If you wish him to remain, you must yield to his softest and gentlest motions, and watch to learn what he would have you do, and yield yourself up to his guidance.” (Finney, *Lectures*, 123)

⁴²³ Finney, *The Prevailing Prayer-Meeting: A Sermon Delivered in Blackfriars’ Street Congregational Chapel, Glasgow, on 4th September 1859*, *op. cit.*, 6.

⁴²⁴ Finney, *Lectures*, 123.

Context

Setting This big “if”—“if we could find one church that were perfectly and heartily agreed in all these points”⁴²⁵—captured Finney’s vision of the church as the ideal **setting** for travailing prayer: “O that the whole church could be so filled with the Spirit as to travail in prayer, till a nation should be born in a day!”⁴²⁶ His ecclesiology allowed this was only possible, as we have seen,⁴²⁷ in non-liturgical settings where prayer could be free-flowing. The spirit of prayer and forms of prayer were irreconcilably opposed:

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. 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.⁴²⁸

In time, Finney translated this antiformalism into the theatre-derived architectural designs of Chatham Street Chapel, which opened in 1832, and Broadway Tabernacle, 1836, both of which were constructed, Kilde points out, to allow audiences to experience “a new sense of intimacy and engagement” conducive to prayer and demonstrating “the architectural culmination of [Finney’s] years of experience as a revivalist.”⁴²⁹

Finney extended his antipathy toward memorised or routinised praying to the setting of the household, considering it a “prayer abomination” if parents thought “that formal family prayer is doing their duty.”⁴³⁰ Quite the opposite, the family was an environment for urgent,

⁴²⁵ “O, if we could find one church that were perfectly and heartily agreed in all these points, so that they could pray and labor together, all as one, what good would be done!” (*ibid*, 331)

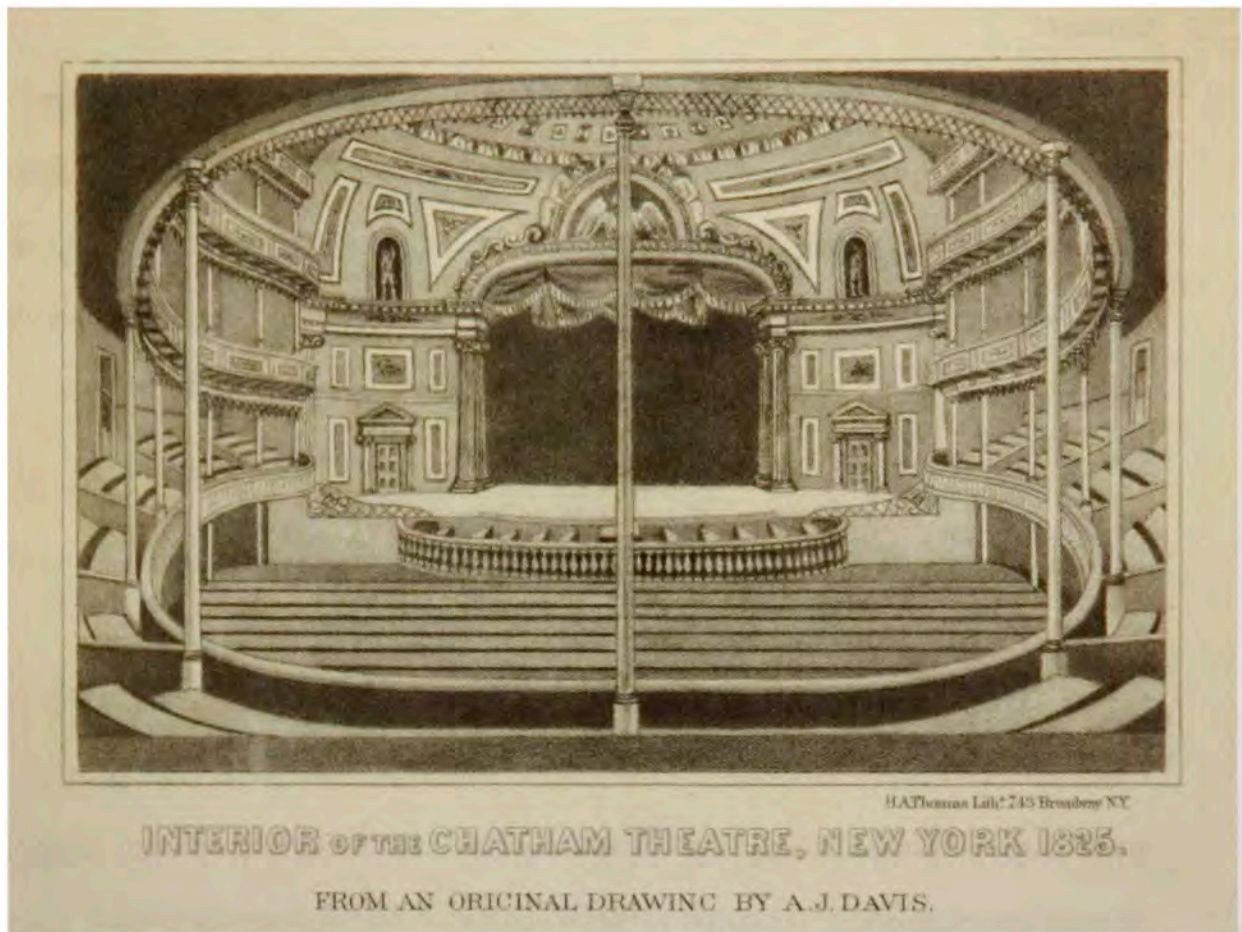
⁴²⁶ *ibid*, 65. “There must be in the church a deeper sense of the need of the spirit of prayer.” (*ibid*, 105)

⁴²⁷ See note 336-37. We have also already noted Finney’s aversion for much music in the worship setting for travailing prayer. See note 386.

⁴²⁸ Finney, *Lectures*, 103. “Don’t tell me men are truly pious, when their prayers are droned over, as much a matter of form as when the poor Popish priest counts over his beads. Such a man deceives himself, if he talks about being the true friend of God and man.” (Finney 1985 [1837], 63)

⁴²⁹ Kilde 2004, 89-91. “Though this unorthodox space was not explicitly identified by Finney ... as itself a ‘new measure,’ it did indeed serve revivalism in just such a capacity.” (*ibid*, 89) Bratt notes how, from the 1840s on, congregations turned away from revivalist innovations to neo-Gothic church architecture which “fed an aesthetic hunger long frustrated by revival-and-reform’s stringent moralism; it provided a measured calm apart from rancorous exertions.” (Bratt 1998, 72) See Holifield 2007, 131.

⁴³⁰ Finney, Sermon 558, “Prayer Abomination,” on Prov 28:9 [n.d.], The Charles Grandison Finney Papers, Oberlin College Archives.

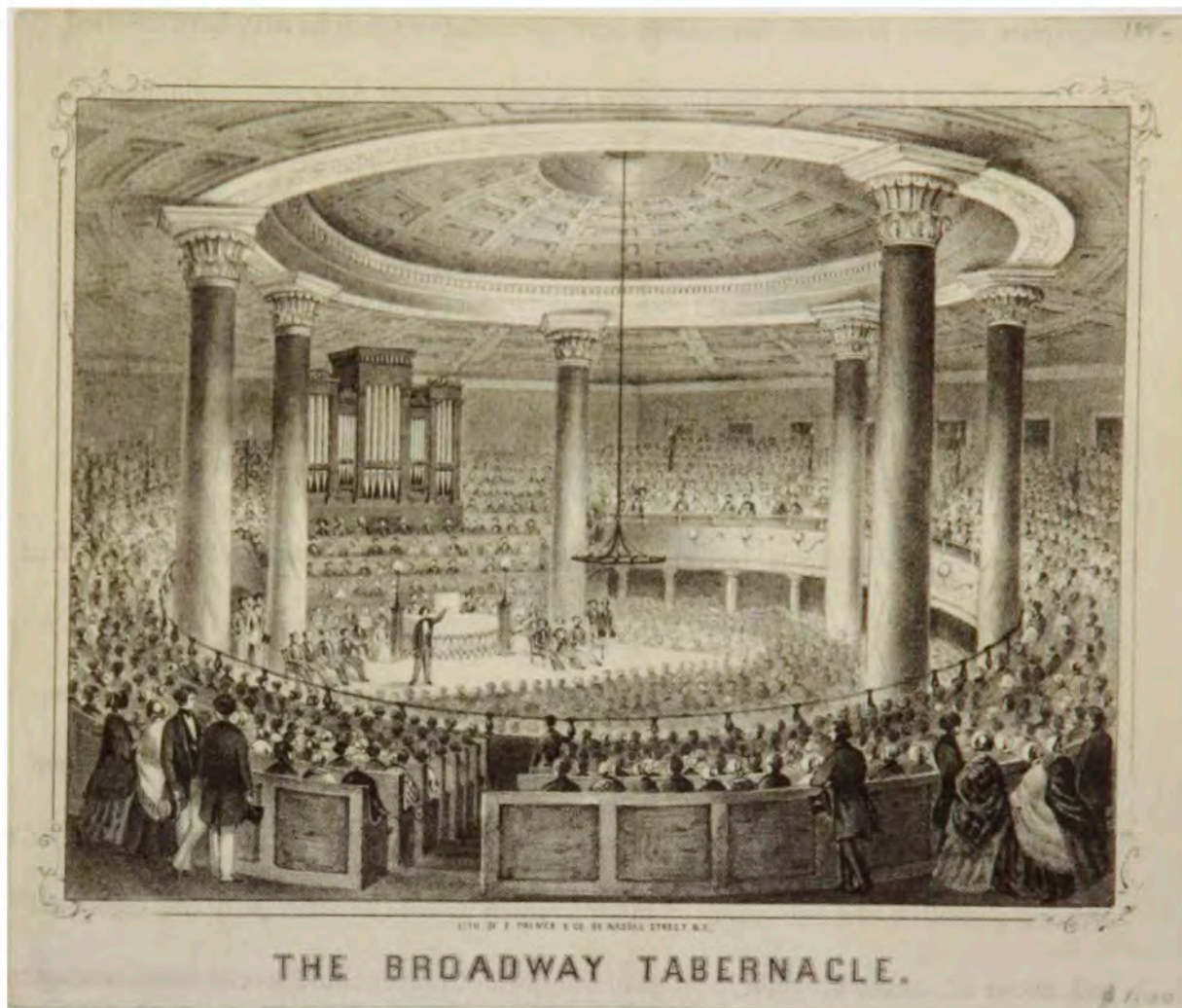


Chatham Theatre as it appeared in 1825 before being converted into a chapel in 1832.
 Print collection, Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints, and Photographs, The New York Public Library.
 Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations.

agonising, intercession, whether that was for the restoration of a marriage⁴³¹ or for the healing⁴³² or salvation of a child:

⁴³¹ During an 1850 preaching tour in England, a man related to Finney the story of suspecting his wife's infidelity: "I told her what I feared. She confessed her guilt, and not only so, but avowed her determination to quit me, and to live with him, whatever might come of it. ... I could not say anything more to her; but I went to God, and cried day and night unto him—O God, wilt thou not avenge me of this mine adversary? For two weeks, I scarcely slept at all, but prayed and wept, sometimes in one position and sometimes in another. But for two weeks, I gave God no rest, but prayed continually—O God, wilt thou not avenge me of this mine adversary? At the same time, I let my wife understand, that my arms and heart were open to receive her if she would return, and I would forgive her all the past. I kept myself in that position. I wept before God. I prayed, and I cried unto him to avenge me. At the end of the two weeks, she came back heart-broken, confessing her sin, humbling herself, and doing all that I could wish her to do; and she has since been all that I could wish her to be.' What a striking case is this!" Finney comments. "If in any one case more than another, a man would feel a disinclination to make a matter the subject of prayer, it would be in such a case as this; yet he did, and prevailed in the extraordinary manner I have described." (Finney, "How to Prevail with God", *The Penny Pulpit*, *op. cit.*, 115-16)

⁴³² "I once knew a wicked man who under deep affliction from the dangerous illness of his child, set himself to pray that God would spare and restore the dear one; and God appeared to answer his prayer in a most remarkable manner." Finney recounts this anecdote to illustrate "the parental character of the great Jehovah" in hearing the "cries of distress" even of "persons not pious." (Finney, "Conditions of Prevailing Prayer" [part 1], *The Oberlin Evangelist* IX, *op. cit.*, 82)



Broadway Tabernacle, built for Finney in 1836 to his own design.

Print collection, Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints, and Photographs, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations.

But hear that professedly Christian father's prayer for his ungodly son. He thinks he *ought* to pray for him once or twice a day, so he begins; but ah, he has almost forgot his subject. He hardly knows or thinks what he is praying about. God says, pray for your dying son! Lift up your cries for him while yet Mercy lingers and pardon can be found. But alas! where are the Christian parents that pray as for a sentenced and soon-to-be-executed son!⁴³³

If parents become adequately disturbed over their son's or daughter's spiritual condition to be "agreed as touching the things they should ask for the salvation of their children,"⁴³⁴

Finney audaciously claimed "that pious parents can render the salvation of their children certain."⁴³⁵ But in a rare demonstration of public vulnerability, witnessed by his first

⁴³³ Finney 1877, 142.

⁴³⁴ Finney, *Lectures*, 323.

⁴³⁵ *ibid*, 331. "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." If children were not converted, Finney placed the onus entirely on

biographer, Finney revealed this to have been one instance when he may have asserted prayer's potential beyond the reach of even his own personal, near-term attainment:

The sincerity of Finney's heart exhibited itself in a very touching manner in a scene which I myself witnessed some time in the year 1856. It was at the Sabbath services in the First Church of Oberlin. In the morning he began a sermon on the training of children; and, as was frequently the case, continued until the clock struck twelve, then stopped suddenly short, saying that he would finish in the afternoon. In the afternoon he took up the subject where he had left it, but for some cause did not have his wonted freedom of utterance. The reason was soon made apparent. Pausing abruptly, he said: "Brethren, why am I trying to instruct you on the subject of training your children in the fear of God, when I do not know that a single one of my own children gives evidence of having been converted?" He burst into tears, knelt down in the pulpit, offered a few words of prayer, and dismissed the audience.⁴³⁶

Nevertheless, parental prayer for children, particularly among mothers in maternal associations,⁴³⁷ was a trend Finney embraced in close partnership with his first wife, Lydia, who, along with being the mother of their six children, was a skillful organiser of women's prayer meetings.⁴³⁸ This was the prime setting of travailing prayer for Finney. Whether among men, women, or in a mixed, "promiscuous" assembly, the prayer meeting was not a preaching meeting or a conference⁴³⁹ but the milieu where Christian unity was cemented⁴⁴⁰ and, above all, where the right feelings of the spirit of prayer could spread like a contagion. "Nothing is more calculated to beget a spirit of prayer, than to unite in social prayer, with one who has the spirit himself," Finney explained in Lecture VIII, "Meetings for Prayer." "If they are any where near the standard of his feelings, his spirit will kindle, and burn, and

parents: "Which shall we believe, that God's promise has failed, or that these parents did not do their duty? Perhaps they did not believe the promise, or did not believe there was any such thing as the prayer of faith." (*ibid*, 85-86)

⁴³⁶ Wright, *op. cit.*, 192. Iain Murray highlights this moment as a key challenge to Finney's "breath-taking claims" for the prayer of faith: "One can admire Finney's sincerity and believe, with this biographer, that the position was later different, but how does this confession harmonize with his claim that the truth of his teaching was proved by its success?" (Murray, *op. cit.*, 283, 289) Lyrene concurs that "Finney appears at times to have been more interested in defending his concepts than in admitting the possibility of exceptions." (Lyrene, *op. cit.*, 173, note 103)

⁴³⁷ See notes 266-68.

⁴³⁸ Hardman 1987, 102. After Lydia died in 1847, Finney married Elizabeth Atkinson in 1848, who also "was particularly important in directing female prayer meetings." (Hewitt 2001, 178) After she died in 1863, Finney married Rebecca Rayl, who survived him by thirty-two years. See Beltz 1944, 45-46; Butler, *et al.*, *op. cit.*, 190.

⁴³⁹ Finney, Sermon 498, "Prevailing Prayer Meeting," on Acts 12:5-17 (1871), *op. cit.*

⁴⁴⁰ "Never do [Christians] love one another so well as when they witness the outpouring of each other's hearts in prayer." (Finney, *Lectures*, 124)

spread all around.”⁴⁴¹ Finney’s model was the ten-day post-ascension meeting described in Acts 1:14⁴⁴² to “pray for the descent of the Spirit” in which the followers of Jesus were all interested, expectant, and bound together in “mutual confidence,”⁴⁴³ devoid of sectarian spirit or personal ambition.⁴⁴⁴ These petitioners were also “deeply earnest,” prepared to wrestle and persevere—an indicting contrast to “modern prayer-meetings,” Finney bemoaned, “which are cold and profitless because there is no liberty and no free utterance.”⁴⁴⁵ But in prayer meetings where “words seem freighted with irrepressible emotion, ... you can see that God is there. Everyone feels it.”⁴⁴⁶ This capacity for prayer meetings to exude, as did Father Nash, “a sense of the reality of religion,”⁴⁴⁷ persuaded Finney to adopt an all-comers policy: except for the merely snoop or sarcastic,⁴⁴⁸ Finney welcomed anyone, including the unconverted,⁴⁴⁹ into prayer meetings after having repeatedly observed how “sinners are often convicted by hearing prayer.”⁴⁵⁰ Eavesdropping on a man’s soul-travail had been a stepping-

⁴⁴¹ *ibid*, 125

⁴⁴² Finney referred to and spoke from this text at various times, one of the most intriguing of which was at the reopening of Blackfriars’ Street Congregational Church in Glasgow on September 4, 1859. Beside the fact that Finney makes no mention of the event in his *Memoirs*, and that there appear to be no extant copies in the United States of the pamphlet publication of this message, it is also unique in content. In handwritten notes by Richard DuPuis, one of the editors of Finney’s *Memoirs*, DuPuis documents the account by Fergus Ferguson, pastor of Blackfriars’ Street Church, of how Finney rose early that Sunday morning asking for paper, pen, and ink. “It had struck him on awakening to give in the forenoon a narratory address on the history of the American revivals in which he had been called to take part, and he was eager to draw out a brief synopsis of the discourse before breakfast.” Finney took this text, Acts 1:14, “and the main idea insisted on was this, that where there was a praying company met, as had assembled in the upper room at Jerusalem, the blessing of the Holy Ghost was sure to fall.” Finney delivered this eighty-minute panoramic summary of revival prayer to an audience of over 1200.

⁴⁴³ See note 533-36.

⁴⁴⁴ Finney, “The Primitive Prayer Meeting”, *The Oberlin Evangelist* XVI, 24, November 22, 1854, 185-86.

⁴⁴⁵ *ibid*, 185. Finney believed prayer meetings were to be “a union of hearts before God’s mercy-seat, the Spirit coming down to make intercession with their spirit with groanings that cannot be uttered. Every prayer-meeting should bear this character, modified only according to the type of those circumstances that call for prayer.” (*ibid*, 186)

⁴⁴⁶ *ibid*

⁴⁴⁷ See note 323.

⁴⁴⁸ “Finney knew that the chemistry of prayer worked only when everyone shared in it, and he discouraged attendance by scoffers, cranks, and the merely curious.” (Johnson 2004, 100-01)

⁴⁴⁹ “It is important that impenitent sinners should always attend prayer meetings. If none come of their own accord, go out and invite them. Christians ought to take great pains to induce their impenitent friends and neighbors to come to prayer meetings. ... You can’t pray, if you have invited no sinner to go.” (Finney, *Lectures*, 138-39)

⁴⁵⁰ *ibid*, 125. “When such prayer is offered, they know there is something in it; they know God is in it, and it brings them near to God; it makes them feel awfully solemn, and they cannot bear it.” (*ibid*, 126)

stone in Finney's own conversion,⁴⁵¹ convincing him that if an unbeliever could only hear prayer at its most heart-rending, faithful best, "he would go away and say, 'Now I know, as I exist, I know there is such a thing as communion with God. O such expressions! such language! I know God was there!'"⁴⁵²

While Finney urged Christians to extempourise their petitions in prayer meetings with unconstrained feeling, he could sound very staged regarding logistics, earning for him the continuing reputation of a "revival engineer"⁴⁵³ who regularised and mechanised prayer, Cohen remarks, into "efficient organization and the use of proper techniques."⁴⁵⁴ In the opinion of these historians, writes Mattson, Finney was "fundamentally a mass psychologist"⁴⁵⁵ who radically systematised revivalism believing, as Bratt says, that fervent "preaching and praying could bring souls to conversion in a calculable fashion."⁴⁵⁶ Finney was exacting in his expectation of control over specific sequences of content and participants in prayer meetings, how to handle latecomers, avoiding controversial topics, even ensuring adequate ventilation in the building⁴⁵⁷—all factors aimed primarily at managing the mood of the assembly.⁴⁵⁸ The delicate task of navigating between the Scylla of some petitioners being

⁴⁵¹ "When I was an impenitent sinner, I had been out to attend to some law business. Returning and passing by a school-house, I heard a man praying. That prayer did more to impress my mind with the subject of religion, than all I had heard before, from my birth. I have not the least doubt but that such a prayer would affect almost any man of reflection, could he hear it. The man did not know that any one could hear him. He had left his work in the field, and had retired to the school-house for secret communion with God. And as I rode along, I heard him and stopped, and listened to what he said. And Oh! It set my mind on fire! That was what I had never witnessed before. It seemed as if I was brought right into the presence of God! The very tones of his voice, before I could understand what he said, seemed to come down upon me, like the voice of God from heaven. Every word he spoke seemed to come right from the bottom of his heart. His voice was frequently choked with groans, and sighs. It was the voice of a man pleading with God!" (Finney, "[Delighting in the Lord]", *The Oberlin Evangelist* VII, 14, July 2, 1845, 107)

⁴⁵² *ibid*

⁴⁵³ Cross, *op. cit.*, 184. McLoughlin wrote that Finney "believed it to be the legitimate function of a revivalist to utilize the laws of mind in order to engineer individuals and crowds into making a choice which was ostensibly based upon free will." (McLoughlin 1959, 86) How Finney marshalled techniques of psychology (acknowledged as beyond the limits of this project [Chapter I, note 426]) in promoting travelling prayer could be an important topic for future research.

⁴⁵⁴ Cohen, *op. cit.*, 93. See also Johnson 2004, 101.

⁴⁵⁵ Mattson, *op. cit.*, 21.

⁴⁵⁶ Bratt 1998, 58.

⁴⁵⁷ Finney, Sermon 498, "Prevailing Prayer Meeting," on Acts 12:5-17 (1871), *op. cit.*

⁴⁵⁸ Finney, *Lectures*, 126-36.

too “dignified”⁴⁵⁹ and the Charybdis of others who are “so illiterate that it is impossible persons of taste should not be disgusted”⁴⁶⁰ was a challenge for the leader of the meeting, whose remarks, discernment, and personal spirit of prayer were paramount.⁴⁶¹ Such concerns were not all original to Finney,⁴⁶² but the emphasis and structure he gave to prayer meetings, Lyrene concludes, “was unique for his time.”⁴⁶³

Locality It could also be argued that Finney was unique in the local and concentrated focus he gave to revival prayer. “Edwards’ great vision of a world coming to Christ,” Lyrene notes, “was narrowed by Finney to focus on a particular community, a particular church, and as the Spirit led, on a particular individual.”⁴⁶⁴ That individual, Finney believed, had to become humble and willing to pray in any **locality**.⁴⁶⁵ Though it had its place in the heights of heaven,⁴⁶⁶ Finney had found travailing prayer to be at home in the meetinghouse,⁴⁶⁷ the schoolhouse,⁴⁶⁸ and in the office.⁴⁶⁹ Petitioners could cry out to God in

⁴⁵⁹ *ibid*, 132-33

⁴⁶⁰ *ibid*, 136

⁴⁶¹ “Prayer meetings are the most difficult meetings to sustain, as they ought to be. They are so spiritual, that unless the leader be peculiarly prepared, both in heart and mind, they will dwindle.” (*ibid*, 138)

⁴⁶² “Instead of imagining that revivalism before 1830 was a wholly spontaneous phenomenon, which then became ‘routinized’—McLoughlin’s term—one might see the entire North American revivalist tradition from colonial times to the present as an ongoing negotiation over the use of means or techniques. ... Long before Finney, the routinization of revivals was well underway.” (McClymond, *op. cit.*, 16)

⁴⁶³ “Finney’s lecture on prayer meetings was unique for its time. It was more comprehensive than previous instructions regarding prayer meetings.” (Lyrene, *op. cit.*, 157)

⁴⁶⁴ *ibid*, 186

⁴⁶⁵ It had become known that Finney languished in prayer for his conversion in the woods near Adams, New York, an environment for which Squire Wright, under whom Finney had trained as an attorney, expressed disinclination. Wright’s battle with pride tormented him to the point of suicide until “one night, he said, on returning from meeting he was so pressed with a sense of his pride, and with the fact that it prevented his going up into the woods to pray, that he was determined to make himself believe, and make God believe, that he was not proud; and he sought around for a mud puddle in which to kneel down, that he might demonstrate that it was not *pride* which kept him from going into the woods.” (Finney, *Memoirs*, 37) Beardsley adds that as word spread of Finney’s conversion in the woods, “several persons were converted in the woods, and when Judge Wright heard them narrate their experience he resolved that he never should go to the woods to pray. To him it seemed an unnecessary procedure.” (Beardsley, *op. cit.*, 28-29)

⁴⁶⁶ “The Bible represents spirits in heaven as praying. ... Have they lost all sympathy with those interests of Zion? Far from it. Knowing more of the value of those interests, they no doubt feel more deeply their importance, and pray more earnestly for their promotion.” (Finney, “On Prayer”, *The Oberlin Evangelist* XVII, *op. cit.*, 1)

⁴⁶⁷ “The burden was so great that I left the office almost immediately, and went up to the meeting house to pray.” (Finney, *Memoirs*, 40)

⁴⁶⁸ See note 451.

⁴⁶⁹ “I stayed for a considerable time in the church in this state of mind, but got no relief. I returned to the office; but I could not sit still.” (Finney, *Memoirs*, 40)

their homes,⁴⁷⁰ their parlors,⁴⁷¹ and their bedrooms.⁴⁷² The site of anguished intercession could be in a barn,⁴⁷³ a boat,⁴⁷⁴ but especially in the woods. Finney had known the agony of prayer in all these varied contexts, beginning with his conversion north of Adams, over a hill, in “a grove of woods”:

I then penetrated into the woods for, I should think a quarter of a mile, went over on the other side of the hill, and found a place where some large trees had fallen across each other, leaving an open place between three or four large trunks of trees. There I saw I could make a kind of closet. I crept into this place and knelt down for prayer.⁴⁷⁵

While the “mourner’s bench” was something of a vortex of public travail,⁴⁷⁶ the forest remained Finney’s preferred private locality for “the going out of my heart to God,”⁴⁷⁷ as it also was for the Oberlin community.⁴⁷⁸ Some historians have interpreted this as a link in the bridge from Edwards’ reflections on nature to Transcendentalist contemplations burgeoning simultaneously with Finney’s great decade of itinerant revivalism.⁴⁷⁹

Sylvan hideaways were sometimes the escape from both the small towns of upstate New York and large cities along the eastern seaboard where Finney had seen the difference

⁴⁷⁰ “The first I knew of [Mr. Clary] being at Rochester, a gentleman who lived about a mile west of the city, called on me one day, and asked me if I knew a Mr. Abel Clary, a minister. I told him that I knew him well. ‘Well,’ said he, ‘he is at my house, and has been there for so long a time. ... He cannot go to meetings, he says. He prays nearly all the time, day and night,’ said he, ‘and in such an agony of mind that I do not know what to make of it.’” (*ibid*, 317)

⁴⁷¹ “One night, [Squire Wright] said he prayed all night in his parlor that God would have mercy on him.” (*ibid*, 37)

⁴⁷² See note 110.

⁴⁷³ “I could not rest in the house, and was obliged to retire to the barn frequently through the day, where I could unburden my soul and pour my heart out to God in prayer.” (Finney, *Memoirs*, 139)

⁴⁷⁴ See notes 176-78.

⁴⁷⁵ Finney, *Memoirs*, 18-19.

⁴⁷⁶ In his apologia for the “Bench System,” Weiser represents it as the unrivalled locality for travail leading to conversion: “Persons so converted, are surrounded by more affecting circumstances, and receive deeper impressions. Perception is more awakened, conviction is more pungent, prayer is more ardent, the will more resolved. There is a prostration and a solemnity of feeling, which is never forgotten.” (Weiser, *op. cit.*, 9)

⁴⁷⁷ Finney, *Memoirs*, 20. “When I was a young Christian, ... I used to spend a great deal of time in prayer; sometimes, I thought, literally praying ‘without ceasing.’ ... On those days I would seek to be entirely alone with God; and would generally wander off into the woods...” (*ibid*, 39) See also Finney [1984], 17. He noted that John Knox “had a place in his garden where he used to go and pray.” (Finney, *Lectures*, 69) Finney’s view and practice of solitude as a context for travelling prayer will be examined in the following section on Relationality, beginning on the next page. See notes 347, 350.

⁴⁷⁸ “For a long time, in the early history of Oberlin, the woods were not far away, and they seem to have been a chosen resort, when one wanted to get alone with God, far away from human sound.” (Matson, *op. cit.*, 62)

⁴⁷⁹ See Chapter III, notes 450-51.

locality could make in fostering or hindering openness to the burden of prayer.⁴⁸⁰ He once commented, for example, on the city of Boston as a place where his “mind was greatly drawn out in prayer for a long time, as indeed it always has been when I have labored in Boston. I have been favored there uniformly with a great deal of the Spirit of prayer.”⁴⁸¹ Friends, however, cautioned him on the spiritual hazards of the urban environment, Cohen notes, of losing “touch with the simple rural people who had made up his first and most enthusiastic audiences.”⁴⁸² By and large, Finney agreed. While many interpreters like McCauley have suggested his principal vision was one of adapting the spiritual fervour of frontier pietism “to the needs and climate of a large urban apostolate, [making] it a part of the middle-class church experience,”⁴⁸³ neither Finney, his associates, nor his ways of praying would ever be truly at home in the city:

When we know not what to pray for, the Holy Spirit leads the mind to dwell on some object, to consider its situation, to realize its value, and to feel for it, and pray, and travail in birth, till the person is converted. This sort of experience I know is less common in cities, than it is in some parts of the country, because of the infinite number of things to divert the attention and grieve the Spirit in cities.⁴⁸⁴

Relationality

City-dwellers ensnared by the “fashionable life”⁴⁸⁵ were also more likely to become backslidden into a worldly spirit⁴⁸⁶ lacking “brotherly love and Christian confidence in one another.”⁴⁸⁷ This was, for Finney, the ultimate calamity:

⁴⁸⁰ See Chapter I, 64.

⁴⁸¹ Finney, *Memoirs*, 456.

⁴⁸² Cohen, *op. cit.*, 93. “Wrote one, ‘You may be surrounded by men of wealth and distinction whose attention and flattery may not be the most favorable to prayer and humble dependence on God.’” (*ibid*, [no reference provided]) Finney’s prayer partner and mentor, Father Nash, pulled on his heartstrings to stay near him in the countryside: “The truth is, my dear Brother, I am willing to pray for you all I can, go where you will. ... But I could do you much more good if I could see you and see what you do. ... I wish I could see you one hour—then pray with you another.” (Weisberger, *op. cit.*, 124 [no reference provided])

⁴⁸³ McCauley, *op. cit.*, 128. John Wolffe concurs that Finney’s “importance lay in transmitting to the more spiritually cautious and socially respectable churches of the North and Northeast a comparable revivalist energy to that” of frontier camp meetings. (Wolffe, *op. cit.*, 77) See also Carwardine 1978, 17; Marty 1970, 105; McLoughlin 1959, 41.

⁴⁸⁴ Finney, *Lectures*, 93. See also Chapter I, note 392.

⁴⁸⁵ “You see from this, that it must be very difficult for those in fashionable life to go to heaven. What a calamity to be in such circles!” (*ibid*)

⁴⁸⁶ A revival is needed, Finney lectured, “when there is a worldly spirit in the church. It is manifest that the church is sunk down into a low and backslidden state, when you see Christians conform to the world in dress, equipage, parties, seeking worldly amusements...” (*ibid*, 25)

⁴⁸⁷ *ibid*

deterioration in relationships was the most threatening impediment to prayer⁴⁸⁸ and reason number one for when a revival of religion is needed.⁴⁸⁹

Finney believed the relational nature of prayer emanated from the relational character of God. “God loves society,” he wrote, and “greatly enjoys the communication of himself to those who delight themselves in him.”⁴⁹⁰ God, in fact, allows prayer to become a burden from which we become desperate for relief in order to draw us near⁴⁹¹ and into a depth of personal fellowship that is the very heart of Christian life.⁴⁹² “Christ in this relation”—knowing his abiding affection and undying interest in us personally—is “not apprehended spiritually, as a reality”⁴⁹³ except by those who grow to value prayer as “the most intimate and confidential interchange of views and feelings that can be conceived.”⁴⁹⁴ And these feelings of prayer, Finney insisted, are real on both sides of the exchange. Right human feelings in prayer, which are crucial as we have seen,⁴⁹⁵ are joined by all the feelings attributed to God in the Bible which are “the real exercises of his mind” and are “infinitely intense.”⁴⁹⁶ Finney summoned petitioners to relate to God as “feelingly alive, ... to conceive of God as he really is”:

... a being who not only knows but pities, and deeply yearns over you with all the feelings of a heart of infinite sensibility. Go pour out your tears, your prayers, your confessions, your souls before him; and his heart shall rejoice over you, and his soul be moved for you to do you infinite good.⁴⁹⁷

⁴⁸⁸ Finney, Sermon 37, “Prayers Not Hindered,” on 1Pet 3:7-9 (1858), The Charles Grandison Finney Papers, Oberlin College Archives.

⁴⁸⁹ Finney, *Lectures*, 24.

⁴⁹⁰ Finney, “(Delighting in the Lord)”, *The Oberlin Evangelist* VII, *op. cit.*, 106. “It is most honourable to God to hear prayer. Some think it disgraceful to God. What a sentiment!” (Finney, “On Prayer”, *The Oberlin Evangelist* XVII, *op. cit.*, 2)

⁴⁹¹ “The soul of a Christian, when it is thus burdened, must have relief. God rolls this weight upon the soul of a Christian, for the purpose of bringing him near to himself.” (Finney, *Lectures*, 66)

⁴⁹² “Religion is an experience. It is a consciousness. Personal fellowship with God is the secret of the whole of it.” (Finney [1984], 38)

⁴⁹³ Finney 1855, 157-58.

⁴⁹⁴ Finney, “Communion with God” (part 2), *The Oberlin Evangelist* II, 19, September 19, 1840, 146.

⁴⁹⁵ See note 140.

⁴⁹⁶ Finney, “Affections and Emotions of God”, *The Oberlin Evangelist* I, *op. cit.*, 169-70. Finney believed that travailing prayer brings petitioners into such profound sympathy with God that prayer’s intensity can “illustrate the strength of God’s feelings. They are like the real feelings of God for impenitent sinners.” (Finney, *Lectures*, 65)

⁴⁹⁷ *ibid*, 170

The heart-melting effect of a relationship this emotionally tender cannot help but send the soul flowing “into a most sacred private interview with God.”⁴⁹⁸

This urge for the prayer closet was, for Finney, not only the instinct of travailing prayer⁴⁹⁹ but also an authentication of all prayer: “Taking more delight in public meetings than secret communion with God, is another evidence of a declining state. Those who enjoy religion, enjoy themselves nowhere so well as in secret with God.”⁵⁰⁰ Finney had observed the spirit of prayer to be sometimes so overpowering that petitioners thought it unwise to venture into public.⁵⁰¹ And he considered it equally unwise for any minister to venture into the pulpit except by way of the closet.⁵⁰² Finney was so personally familiar with prayer’s seclusion⁵⁰³ and had witnessed its necessity among those with whom he had been yoked most closely⁵⁰⁴ that he sometimes challenged anyone who speculated that revivals could be “surprising” or unexpected:

I have been amazed to see such accounts as are often published about revivals, as if the revival has come without any cause—nobody knew why or wherefore. I have sometimes inquired into such cases... Now mark me. Go and inquire among the obscure members of the church, and you will always find that somebody had been praying for a revival, and was expecting it—some man or woman had been agonizing in prayer for the salvation of sinners, until the blessing was gained.⁵⁰⁵

⁴⁹⁸ Finney, “Communion with God” (part 1), *The Oberlin Evangelist* II, *op. cit.*, 138. “Every true Christian knows what it is to feel a secret moving of heart toward God; a silent, but deep, powerful melting, drawing of soul away from the world, from society, from business, from every thing else... In such cases the soul seeks to be alone with God. It naturally follows, crying after God, and its desires are like a liquid stream, flowing and flowing. ... His soul seems to be all liquid, and flowing and gushing, and drawn into the deep waters of his love.” (*ibid*)

⁴⁹⁹ “Such persons, when in such a state of mind, are generally not disposed to see company, or to go anywhere, more than they can help.” (Finney, “How to Prevail with God”, *The Penny Pulpit*, *op. cit.*, 117)

⁵⁰⁰ Finney 1948, 24. Legalistic Christians “do not pray in their closets because they love to pray, but because they think it is their duty, and they dare not neglect it.” (Finney 1985 [1837], 78)

⁵⁰¹ “The Spirit of prayer was poured out powerfully, so much so that some persons stayed away from the public services to pray, being unable to restrain their feelings under preaching.” (Finney, *Memoirs*, 316)

⁵⁰² “Be full of prayer whenever you attempt to preach, and go from your closet to your pulpit with the inward groanings of the Spirit pressing for utterance at your lips.” (Finney 1895b, 42) “Now I wish I could succeed in making the impression ... upon the minds of all the brethren that we cannot expect to succeed in promoting true revivals of religion any farther than we are truly revived ourselves.” (Finney 1861, 107)

⁵⁰³ The young Finney had frequently gone “somewhere entirely by myself” to pray (Finney, *Memoirs*, 39), and he would later recall one of his most wrenching seasons of travail to have occurred on his voyage at sea when “there was no one on board to whom I could open my mind or say a word.” (*ibid*, 372)

⁵⁰⁴ See note 323.

⁵⁰⁵ Finney, *Lectures*, 32. An aspect of Finney’s Blackfriars’ address was to trace the fruit of revival back to its root in prayer: “The fact is, as we shall see, this great work of God has not been the sudden springing of a mine of miracles upon the church, but the development and steady growth through the use of special prayer and the appropriate means, up to a point when it forced an account of its phenomena into the daily papers.” (Finney, *The*



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Yet, as we have seen, corporate petition was also vital in forging unity, convincing sceptics, and passing the spark of the spirit of prayer.⁵⁰⁶ Praying with others was the only way to overcome the pride and self-consciousness that had thwarted Finney's conversion,⁵⁰⁷ what may have been the factor above all others leading him to adopt the "mourner's bench" and catalyse what Noll has called "'a Copernican revolution' in making religion 'audience centered.'"⁵⁰⁸

Prevailing Prayer-Meeting: A Sermon Delivered in Blackfriars' Street Congregational Chapel, Glasgow, on 4th September 1859, op. cit., 8) "Probably in the day of judgment it will be found that nothing is ever done by the truth, used ever so zealously, unless there is a spirit of prayer somewhere in connection with the presentation of the truth." (Finney, *Lectures*, 53)

⁵⁰⁶ See notes 441 and 449.

⁵⁰⁷ "All suddenly, a leaf rustled and I sprang, for somebody must be coming and I shall be seen here at prayer. ... Closing my eyes again for prayer, I heard a rustling leaf again, and then the thought came over like a wave of the sea—'I *am* ashamed of confessing my sin!' What! thought I, ashamed of being found speaking with God! O, how ashamed I felt of this shame! I can never describe the strong and overpowering impression which this thought made on my mind. I cried aloud at the very top of my voice, for I felt that though all the men of the earth and all the devils in hell were present to hear and see me I would not shrink and would not cease to cry unto God; for what is it to me if others see me seeking the face of my God and Saviour?" (Finney 1877, 171-72)

⁵⁰⁸ Noll 2002, 191.

In the end, Finney viewed private and public prayer as absolutely complementary and mutually beneficial. Within the space of a few paragraphs, he could say, “If [Christians] pray exclusively *in their closets* for themselves, they will not get the spirit of prayer.” And “Christians who do not pray in secret, cannot unite with power in a prayer meeting, and cannot have the spirit of prayer.”⁵⁰⁹ Eyewitnesses perceived a symbiosis of secret and social prayer in Finney’s spirituality, as when Leonard Parker of Ashburnham, Massachusetts, recounted a prayer meeting at Oberlin where Finney “poured out a mighty stream of supplication” for leavers: “Sometimes he seemed to be leading us, again he seemed to be alone with God.”⁵¹⁰ This seamless coupling of private and private prayer was the basis for Finney promoting partnerships like “a closet concert of prayer” in which petitioners could be alone together, praying secretly yet in a joint, synchronised design.⁵¹¹ Such partnerships were mission-critical for Finney. Observers could sense how convinced he was that his public revival work hung on the concealed prayers of “the few hidden ones [who] got down into the deep places with God.”⁵¹² One of these was “a free colored man, Richard Hardy, who came from Kentucky to attend school” at Oberlin and developed such a keen collaboration in prayer with Finney as to be like “spiritual telegraphy.”⁵¹³

⁵⁰⁹ Finney, *Lectures*, 136-37.

⁵¹⁰ [] 1876, *Reminiscences of Rev. Charles G. Finney*..., 48-49.

⁵¹¹ To a group of women “in the State of New York, near the line of Massachusetts, ... I related some facts to encourage them, and told them to go home and agree, together with other ladies of their acquaintance, to observe a closet concert of prayer for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.” (Finney, *The Prevailing Prayer-Meeting: A Sermon Delivered in Blackfriars’ Street Congregational Chapel, Glasgow, on 4th September 1859*, *op. cit.*, 7)

⁵¹² Matson, *op. cit.*, 61. “These Mr. Finney considered his most important allies in carrying on a revival.” (*ibid*) See also Thompson 1877, 154.

⁵¹³ “One Sunday when Mr. Finney was in England, Richard attended church as usual in Oberlin, and it was observed that during the entire service his head was bowed and he seemed to be lost in wrestling, agonizing prayer. When he went to his boarding place, at the close of the service, some one remarked that ‘Richard certainly prayed for the preacher this morning,’ meaning the one to whom they had just listened. ‘Oh no,’ Richard quietly replied, ‘I was praying for Mr. Finney in England. I think he needs spiritual help to-day.’ Mr. Finney was just then in the midst of a great revival in the heart of London, and we may know by that spiritual telegraphy God communicated to His humble servant, Richard, that he must ‘keep his hand upon the throne,’ for the great preacher whose fervid eloquence was stirring thousands of souls. Richard often shut himself in the barn and spent the whole day in prayer, coming forth with a face radiant with glory, and praising God for answers to prayer.” (Matson, *op. cit.*, 62)

This level of intimate alliance Finney believed was innate to travailing prayer, having witnessed repeatedly one petitioner become laden with a burden only bearable by two:

I heard of a person in this state, who prayed for sinners, and finally got into such a state of mind, that she could not live without prayer. She could not rest day or night, unless there was somebody praying. Then she would be at ease; but if they ceased, she would shriek in agony till there was prayer again. And this continued for two days, until she prevailed in prayer, and her soul was relieved.⁵¹⁴

Similarly, Finney ascribed almost creedal value to prayer alliances between laity and clergy and all denominations. Again, each side of the relationship was critically important. Over time, Finney had been able to see how “each great revival has called out and employed more and more of the laity of the church.”⁵¹⁵ Whether it was because they had “found the minister and the body of the church fast asleep”⁵¹⁶ and assumed quiet responsibility in prayer, or they had been moved by the minister’s exhaustion⁵¹⁷ to “weep in their closet, and pour out their souls in prayer for him,”⁵¹⁸ lay-initiated, lay-led prayer was the backbone of revivalism to Finney.⁵¹⁹ He advocated for it as a new measure without apology, despite those who “very extensively objected against a layman’s praying in public, and *especially in the presence of a*

⁵¹⁴ Finney, *Lectures*, 30-31. In the first months of 1826, Finney learned of a woman in Utica who “had literal travail of soul to such an extent that when her own strength was exhausted she could not endure the burden of her mind unless somebody was engaged in prayer with her, upon whose prayer she could lean—someone who could express her desires to God.” (Finney, *Memoirs*, 172) Finney himself had served in this support role to Abel Clary: “I barely entered the room, when he made out to say, ‘Pray, Brother Finney.’ I knelt down and helped him in prayer, by leading his soul out for the conversion of sinners.” (Finney, *Memoirs*, 333)

⁵¹⁵ Finney, *The Prevailing Prayer-Meeting: A Sermon Delivered in Blackfriars’ Street Congregational Chapel, Glasgow, on 4th September 1859*, *op. cit.*, 11.

⁵¹⁶ Finney, *Lectures*, 32.

⁵¹⁷ Only when the cyclical of revivals ceases, Finney predicted, “will there be no need that ministers should wear themselves out, and kill themselves, by their efforts to roll back the flood of worldly influence that sets in upon the church.” (*ibid*, 11)

⁵¹⁸ Finney 1985 (1837), 64-65. “Pray for ministers, that God would give them this wisdom to win souls. ... The church must *travail* in prayer, and groan and agonize for this. This is now the pearl of price to the church, to have a supply of the *right sort* of ministers.” (Finney, *Lectures*, 222)

⁵¹⁹ This is evidenced in the preponderance of lay anecdotes Finney draws from to illustrate the laws and effectiveness of prayer, for example: “Take a fact which was related, in my hearing, by a minister. ... There lived in a retired part of the town, an aged man, a blacksmith by trade, and of so stammering of tongue, that it was painful to him hear him speak. ... His agony became so great, that he was induced to lay by his work, lock the shop door, and spend the afternoon in prayer.” Finney goes on to describe a meeting that soon followed where many from the town confessed sin and were converted. “And what was remarkable was, that they all dated their conviction at the hour when the old man was praying in his shop. A powerful revival followed. Thus this old stammering man prevailed, and, as a prince, had power with God. I could name multitudes of similar cases...” (*ibid*, 70)

minister.”⁵²⁰ The unpleasant truth was that, in many cases, the minister “was far below the standard of what he ought to be, and in spirituality far below some of the members of his church.”⁵²¹ Finney deplored any attitude of self-satisfaction in the clergy allowing them to rely on some kind vicarious blessing of prayer,⁵²² saving some of his sharpest barbs for seminaries that failed to cultivate “devotional and fervid piety among their students”:⁵²³

This is one of the most prominent, and deeply to be deplored evils of the present day. ... It is a fact over which the church is groaning, that the piety of young men suffers so much in the course of their education, that when they enter the ministry, however much intellectual furniture they may possess, they are in a state of *spiritual babyhood*.⁵²⁴

As something of a lay-minister crossbreed himself,⁵²⁵ Finney could identify with both sides of this gap in issuing a call for a mature clergy that would “train up the entire laity to work for God” until the entire Church might “be marshalled into one great army.”⁵²⁶ A vision of prayer partnership that big, in its global **relationality**, through which “persons of all denominations, forgetting their differences, gave themselves to the work,”⁵²⁷ was Finney’s highest hope. He made it the climactic note of his address at Blackfriars’ Church in Glasgow, referring to reports he had received of prayer meetings all across America:

⁵²⁰ *ibid*, 258. Knowing that professional clergy were well-educated, cultural leaders who expected to be treated deferentially, Finney understood how critics thought lay leadership “was interfering with the dignity of ministers, and was not to be tolerated.” (*ibid*) McLoughlin comments, “The association of gentlemen at Princeton were not great admirers of the self-reliant common men who heard Finney so gladly. They suspected that the lower classes throughout the United States were somehow getting out of hand under Jacksonian leadership.” (*ibid*, xxxix)

⁵²¹ *ibid*, 117

⁵²² “Without the spirit of prayer, ministers will do but little good. A minister need not expect much success, unless he prays for it. *Sometimes* others may have the spirit of prayer, and obtain a blessing on his labors. Generally, however, those preachers are the most successful who have the most of a spirit of prayer themselves.” (*ibid*, 71)

⁵²³ Finney 1895a, 38. “Has it come to this, that our grave doctors in our seminaries, are employed to instruct Zion’s watchmen, to believe and teach that it is not to be expected that the prayer of faith is to be answered in granting the object for which we pray?” (Finney, *Lectures*, 82)

⁵²⁴ Finney, *Lectures*, 117. “It is all a farce to suppose that a literary ministry can convert the world. Let the ministry have the spirit of prayer, let the baptism of the Holy Ghost be upon them, and they will spread the gospel.” (Finney 1985 [1837], 106) See also Finney [1984], 36-39.

⁵²⁵ Weisberger notes how Finney “crammed in enough private study to be ordained by the Presbyterians, but in effect he always remained a layman. ... After him there would be no popular evangelist who was a graduate of a first-class university or seminary.” (Weisberger, *op. cit.*, 87, 94)

⁵²⁶ Finney, “Why London Is Not Converted”, *The Penny Pulpit* (London: J. Paul, c1853), June 5, 1850, 150, The Richard DuPuis Papers, Oberlin College Archive.

⁵²⁷ Finney, *The Prevailing Prayer-Meeting: A Sermon Delivered in Blackfriars’ Street Congregational Chapel, Glasgow, on 4th September 1859*, *op. cit.*, 13.

Think of that. A region of 2000 miles, along which the hands and hearts of the people were lifted up to God in prayer! ... The movement has come to Ireland, to Scotland, and to this city, and like a great wave I expect to see it go over Scotland, break upon the continent, and shake it. Pray for it; let the waters of eternal life roll; and let Christians all loving and confiding in one another, give their hearts unitedly to the work. I beseech Christians in Great Britain of all denominations to lay aside all sectarian prejudices and narrowness, and unite their hearts and hands in the promotion of this work.⁵²⁸

In light of this preferred future, perceived by Finney as entirely contingent upon Christian concord, it isn't surprising that one of his celebrated *Lectures* would target "The Necessity and Effect of Union."⁵²⁹ Here Finney disassembles the mosaic of unity into its manifold components, calling for petitioners to be agreed in desires and motives for revival; the faith for expecting it; its timing, necessity, and features; the use of measures and manner of conducting meetings; how to deal with the impenitent and discipline the backslidden; and "in making all the necessary preparations for a revival."⁵³⁰

In a word, if Christians expect to unite in prayer and effort, so as to prevail with God, they must be agreed in speaking and doing the same things, in walking by the same rule, and maintaining the same principles, and in persevering till they obtain the blessing, so as not to hinder or thwart each other's efforts.⁵³¹

Finney elevated the standard of unity expected of Christians to a level of making it hazardous, even coercive, according to some interpreters like Cross: "Under such assumptions, prayers became high-leverage presses for enforcing community opinion upon stubbornly impenitent consciences."⁵³² But Finney believed it was better to break fellowship than to pray without profound agreement⁵³³ nourishing the "mutual confidence"⁵³⁴ conducive to revival work. Whenever unity had been compromised, nothing could happen until a

⁵²⁸ *ibid.* McLoughlin highlights that "in the interests of promoting revivalism [Finney] purposely stressed a broad evangelical approach and avoided sectarian differences." (McLoughlin 1959, 54)

⁵²⁹ See Chapter I, note 403.

⁵³⁰ Finney, *Lectures*, 321.

⁵³¹ *ibid.*, 323

⁵³² Cross, *op. cit.*, 179.

⁵³³ "It is evident that many more churches need to be divided. How many churches there are, who are holding together, and yet are doing no good, for the simple reason that they are not sufficiently agreed." (Finney, *Lectures*, 326-37)

⁵³⁴ "When a person gets up to pray, some one says—'Perhaps he is a good man, but I don't like to hear him pray.' Oh, it is death to a prayer meeting, when there is this want of confidence! They must come together as little children. This disposition to be captious, was not at the disciples' meeting. One prayed and another prayed. Their state of mind was one of great simplicity, and strong love and confidence in each other. Let this always characterize a prayer meeting and it is surely to prevail." (Finney, *The Prevailing Prayer-Meeting: A Sermon Delivered in Blackfriars' Street Congregational Chapel, Glasgow, on 4th September 1859, op. cit.*, 6)

thorough repentance and restitution had been actioned.⁵³⁵ But Finney believed what relational sin had damaged, confession could quickly begin to cure, for “nothing tends more strongly to beget instantly the spirit of prayer.”⁵³⁶

⁵³⁵ “Go and be reconciled to the brother. Make peace with him, and then come and offer the gifts. When this is not the case, you can never expect to prevail.” (Finney, “How to Prevail with God”, *The Penny Pulpit*, *op. cit.*, 119)

⁵³⁶ Finney, “Mutual Confession of Faults, and Mutual Prayer”, *The Oberlin Evangelist* XI, *op. cit.*, 10.

OBJECTS OF TRAVAILING PRAYER

We have already observed how the **specificity of prayer's object** was a fulcrum of Finney's theology and practice of prayer.⁵³⁷ "All the history of the church shows that when God answers prayer," Finney lectured, "he gives his people the very thing for which their prayers are offered."⁵³⁸ The particular request of traveling prayer could never be random, generic, or off-the-cuff, but was spiritually informed with utmost intentionality, every petitioner "hav[ing] an object distinctly before his mind."⁵³⁹ This required some spadework, some investment in discerning what providence, prophecy, or Bible promises pointed to as God's agenda for our praying.⁵⁴⁰ To assist supplicants in these discoveries was the principal ministry of the Holy Spirit in prayer,⁵⁴¹ helping us to "see the signs of the times"⁵⁴² and fostering confidence then to persevere for "some particular thing we ask for"⁵⁴³ with unconquerable expectancy.⁵⁴⁴

Thus, the object of prayer should be definite and explicit. But it was also to be big,⁵⁴⁵ as vast and glorious as God Himself. Indeed, Finney made God Himself the supreme object of all prayer:

Many are startled at the thought of praying for God, because they think God lacks nothing. But the Bible is full of this teaching [that God] lacks all that is to be done for His glory and Kingdom on earth. ... We are to care supremely for his interests and glory.⁵⁴⁶

⁵³⁷ See notes 229-35.

⁵³⁸ Finney, *Lectures*, 79.

⁵³⁹ *ibid*, 54

⁵⁴⁰ *ibid*, 85

⁵⁴¹ See notes 399-404.

⁵⁴² Finney, *Lectures*, 95.

⁵⁴³ *ibid*, 74

⁵⁴⁴ See notes 199-202.

⁵⁴⁵ See notes 187-92.

⁵⁴⁶ Finney, Sermon 96, "All True Prayer Is for God," on Ps 72:15 (1863), The Charles Grandison Finney Papers, Oberlin College Archives. "This is the natural dictate of true religion, because true religion is supreme love to God and supreme concern for his interest and honor. The true spirit of prayer always prays in this way. In this is the difference between the prayers of saints and sinners." (*ibid*) "When persons really and truly use the name of Christ, there is a very important sense in which they pray for Christ." (Finney, "The Use and Prevalence of Christ's Name", *The Penny Pulpit* (London: J. Paul, c1853), May 24, 1850, 132, The Richard DuPuis Papers, Oberlin College Archive)

This was an idea Finney came to from exegesis of the Lord's Prayer: "Let God's kingdom come, and bear sway on earth as it does in heaven. This is the sum of all true prayer."⁵⁴⁷

And to him it meant that to pray for God was not only to will as God wills, but also "to feel as God feels,"⁵⁴⁸ to "sympathise with God's motives, plans, and designs" so that the object we desire in prayer is "for a reason for which God can consistently give."⁵⁴⁹ Praying "with a heart in full and deep **sympathy with God**"⁵⁵⁰ was the counterpart of unreserved "disinterestedness"⁵⁵¹ and unselfishness in prayer. We "feel for Him,"⁵⁵² Finney sermonised, as God has been so lovingly sympathetic toward us.⁵⁵³ And again, Finney believed sympathy with God would eventuate in travail like Christ's⁵⁵⁴ just as "agonizing prayer ... forms such a bond of union between Christ and the Church. It creates such a sympathy between them."⁵⁵⁵ All these were two sides of the same imperative: "Let me say again: that all the hindrances of prevailing prayer, may be summed up in one, which is one of the greatest, if not the greatest of the difficulties—I refer to a want of sympathy with God."⁵⁵⁶

⁵⁴⁷ Finney, "An Approving Heart—Confidence in Prayer", *The Oberlin Evangelist* IX, *op. cit.*, 34. "Oh, how the heart pours itself out in the one most expressive petition: 'Thy will be done on earth as in heaven!' All prayer is swallowed up in this." (Finney 1877, 409) Such was Finney's personal experience later in life: "My prayer that had been so fervent and protracted during so long a period, seemed all to run out into, 'Thy will be done.'" (Finney, *Memoirs*, 459)

⁵⁴⁸ Finney, "Prayer and Labor for the Gathering of the Great Harvest", *The Oberlin Evangelist* XV, *op. cit.*, 1. Gresham notes, "This 'sympathy' or union with God is not only a matter of sharing God's feelings, but includes as well a union of will." (Gresham, *op. cit.*, 47-48)

⁵⁴⁹ Finney, "The Conditions of Prevailing Prayer", *The Penny Pulpit*, *op. cit.*, 109. One who sympathises with God "must adopt his principles, enter into his views and feelings, and be able to respond a hearty amen, to all the announcements of his word, to all the dispensations of his providence, to his character, works, and ways." (Finney, "[Delighting in the Lord]", *The Oberlin Evangelist* VII, *op. cit.*, 105)

⁵⁵⁰ Finney, "An Approving Heart—Confidence in Prayer", *The Oberlin Evangelist* IX, *op. cit.*, 33.

⁵⁵¹ Finney, "The Conditions of Prevailing Prayer", *The Penny Pulpit*, *op. cit.*, 108. "Disinterestedness is a condition of prevailing prayer. ... A selfish petition, therefore, will have no influence with God. It would disgrace him if it should. Petitions must be free from selfishness. We must rise above mere selfish considerations, and take into view the great reason for which God answers prayer." (*ibid*)

⁵⁵² "Let the humblest subject in his universe feel sincere regard for the honor and glory of God and the well being of his kingdom, and how suddenly is it reciprocated by the Infinite Father of all! ... But if you will not feel for him and will not take his part, it is vain for you to ask or expect that he will feel for you and take your part." (Finney, "Conditions of Prevailing Prayer" (part 3), *The Oberlin Evangelist* IX, *op. cit.*, 115)

⁵⁵³ "Whatever or whoever afflicts one whom God loves, afflicts God." (Finney, Sermon 476, "Afflictions of God," on Isa 63:9 (1871), The Charles Grandison Finney Papers, Oberlin College Archives)

⁵⁵⁴ Having been filled with the Spirit, "you will know what it is to sympathize with the Lord Jesus Christ. ... O how he agonized in view of the state of sinners! how he travailed in soul for their salvation!" (Finney, *Lectures*, 116) "Without this spirit [of prayer] there can be no such sympathy between you and God." (*ibid*, 104)

⁵⁵⁵ *ibid*, 68

⁵⁵⁶ Finney, "How to Prevail with God", *The Penny Pulpit*, *op. cit.*, 117.

To gain God's heart **for oneself** and His concerns for our intercessions was an object worthy of travail in its own right,⁵⁵⁷ Finney believed, "entreating him to reveal himself yet more and more."⁵⁵⁸ From the anguish of the "mourner's bench,"⁵⁵⁹ travailing prayer for oneself continued throughout life in "panting for holiness"⁵⁶⁰ and "longing for perfect likeness to God,"⁵⁶¹ the work of spiritual enlargement that "will cost the poor soul many prayers, and tears, and groans."⁵⁶² Along this journey, any personal need could be a legitimate cause for travail, from the restoration of one's marriage⁵⁶³ to deliverance from addiction.⁵⁶⁴ But Finney plainly perceived agonising in prayer **for others** as even more acceptable. God might sometimes put off responding to our prayers to deepen our compassion for others we intercede for⁵⁶⁵ to the point that when a petitioner "goes on his knees to pray about his own sins, that sinner with whom he has been talking comes right upon before his mind, and he can hardly pray for himself."⁵⁶⁶ Finney believed it was innate for human beings to cry out to God for others in distress,⁵⁶⁷ whatever the need.⁵⁶⁸ But the

⁵⁵⁷ Finney describes in his sermon, "Boldness in Prayer," the value of wrestling and agonising for the graces of travailing prayer. (Finney, Sermon 516, "Boldness in Prayer," on Heb 4:14-16 [1871], The Charles Grandison Finney Papers, Oberlin College Archives)

⁵⁵⁸ Finney, "On Divine Manifestations", *The Oberlin Evangelist* VIII, *op. cit.*, 43. In *Guide to the Savior*, Finney lamented how "many stop short of any thing like intense hunger and thirst ... for the soul-satisfying revelation of Christ." (Finney 1855, 73-74)

⁵⁵⁹ See note 476.

⁵⁶⁰ Finney, "Mutual Confession of Faults, and Mutual Prayer", *The Oberlin Evangelist* XI, *op. cit.*, 9. "Christ draws the souls of His people into such union with Himself, that they become 'partakers of the divine nature,' or as elsewhere expressed, 'partakers of His holiness.' For this the tried Christian pants." (Finney 1877, 407)

⁵⁶¹ Finney, Sermon 482, "Hunger and Thirst After God", on Mt 5:6 (1871), *op. cit.*

⁵⁶² Finney, "Blessed Are the Poor In Spirit", *The Oberlin Evangelist* VI, *op. cit.*, 194.

⁵⁶³ See note 431.

⁵⁶⁴ "I once knew an individual who was a slave to the use of tobacco. At length he became convinced that it was a sin for him to use it, and the struggle against it finally drove him to God in such an agony of prayer, that he got the victory at once over the appetite, and never had the least desire for it again." (Finney 1985 [1837], 263)

⁵⁶⁵ "Another reason for delay may be, that you may become more deeply unified with the subject of your prayer. Sometimes you pray for a person till you become so unified with him that you say—If that soul goes to hell, I must go with him. I have heard men say this as their own experience of prayer. ... Now, God loves this spirit and often waits till it comes up." (Finney, "On Persevering Prayer for Others", *The Oberlin Evangelist* XVII, *op. cit.*, 10)

⁵⁶⁶ Finney 1985 (1837), 149.

⁵⁶⁷ "Even the wickedest of men and of women pray for their children in distress, and indeed for others besides theirs. They have an innate conviction that God should be sought in prayer, and that he will hear and help." (Finney, "On Persevering Prayer for Others", *The Oberlin Evangelist* XVII, *op. cit.*, 9)

⁵⁶⁸ Physical healing of others, for example, was an obvious reason for travailing prayer: "I knew a father at the west... At length his son sickened, and seemed about to die. The father prayed, but the son grew worse, and seemed sinking into the grave without hope. The father prayed, till his anguish was unutterable. ... He poured

conversion of sinners was his singular passion⁵⁶⁹ and the object of prayer commanding uppermost urgency and priority. “The great object of all the means of grace is to aim directly at the conversion of sinners,” Finney lectured.⁵⁷⁰ We may labour in prayer for this globally,⁵⁷¹ sobered by the reality that “we have no right to believe that all men will be converted in answer to our prayers.”⁵⁷² Every Christian, however, was “responsible for the salvation of his neighbor,” neglect of which Finney considered the greatest of crimes, like “soul murder.”⁵⁷³ It was this personal concern for sinners, what motivated Christ in Gethsemane,⁵⁷⁴ that was the mark of a true Christian⁵⁷⁵ and “the real *revival* spirit.”⁵⁷⁶

Likewise, “travail of soul in prayer is the only real revival prayer. ... Until [any Christian] understands this agonizing prayer he does not know the real secret of revival power.”⁵⁷⁷ Finney could recall his own agony at sea in travail **for revival**⁵⁷⁸ and the fervent praying of others grieved over the condition the church⁵⁷⁹ and the world.⁵⁸⁰ But revival was a

out his soul as if he would not be denied, till at length he got an assurance that his son would not only live, but be converted.” (Finney, *Lectures*, 87) See also note 109.

⁵⁶⁹ “For Finney the one great end of the salvation of individual souls infused every practice that accomplished it with a sacred importance that gave direction and meaning to whole lives.” (Smith 2007, 64) See also Fletcher, *op. cit.*, 191.

⁵⁷⁰ Finney, *Lectures*, 139.

⁵⁷¹ To pray according to Mt 9:38 [KJV]—“Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth laborers into his harvest”—involved “a sense of personal responsibility in respect to the salvation of the world.” (Finney, “Prayer and Labor for the Gathering of the Great Harvest”, *The Oberlin Evangelist* XV, *op. cit.*, 1) See note 187.

⁵⁷² Finney 1878a [1846], 43.

⁵⁷³ Finney, Sermon 266, “Our Responsibility for the Souls of Others,” on Prov 24:11-12 (1866), The Charles Grandison Finney Papers, Oberlin College Archives.

⁵⁷⁴ “His heart was gushing with real compassion for dying souls, and he was conscious that his own was a right state of mind. Therefore He could not do less than require the same state of mind of all his people.” (Finney, “Prayer and Labor for the Gathering of the Great Harvest”, *The Oberlin Evangelist* XV, *op. cit.*, 1)

⁵⁷⁵ “Roll on them this great object. Show them how they can convert sinners, and their longing hearts beat and wrestle with God in prayer, and travail for souls, until they see them converted and Christ formed in them, the hope of glory.” (Finney 1985 [1837], 66)

⁵⁷⁶ “The real *revival* spirit is a spirit of agonizing desires and prayers for sinners.” (*ibid*, 154)

⁵⁷⁷ Finney, “Prevailing Prayer”, *The Independent of New York* XXVI, *op. cit.*, 3.

⁵⁷⁸ “But let the reader remember my agony at sea, the long day of travail of soul that I spent in praying that God would do something to forward the work of revival...” (Finney, *Memoirs*, 377) See note 178.

⁵⁷⁹ “Nothing is more common than for spiritual Christians to feel burdened and distressed at the state of the ministry.” (Finney, *Lectures*, 116-17)

⁵⁸⁰ “The first ray of light that broke in upon the midnight which rested on the churches in Oneida county, in the fall of 1825, was from a woman in feeble health, who, I believe had never been in a powerful revival. Her soul was exercised about sinners. She was in an agony for the land.” (*ibid*, 32)

nonstarter without **the Holy Spirit**, whose every influence “must be sought by fervent, believing prayer.”⁵⁸¹ G. F. Wright wrote that Finney believed that

nothing could be effected in promoting a revival of religion except through prayer, and by the special aid of the Spirit. His first aim, therefore, was always to secure united prayer for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.⁵⁸²

Finney’s desire for the Spirit’s outpouring⁵⁸³ and “endowment with power”⁵⁸⁴ extended yet differed from how Edwards understood them as objects of travailing prayer. Such contrasts help to reveal facets of a pattern of preparedness for revival in travailing prayer as Edwards and Finney understood and practiced it, interpretation of which we turn to now to conclude.

⁵⁸¹ *ibid*, 96. “That is the great blessing which you need. Oh, if we could only have more of the Spirit! Christians live as if God had but little of the Holy Spirit to give. But is this the representation of the Scriptures? No, indeed; but infinitely the reverse of this.” (Finney, “The Reward of Fervent Prayer”, *The Penny Pulpit*, *op. cit.*, 70)

⁵⁸² Wright, *op. cit.*, 26. See Gresham, *op. cit.*, 13-14.

⁵⁸³ As we have seen, “the primitive prayer-meeting” described in Acts 1:14 was the paragon of corporate prayer for Finney, and “the special object of this meeting was to pray for the outpouring of the Spirit upon themselves and the world.” (Finney, “The Primitive Prayer Meeting”, *The Oberlin Evangelist* XVI, *op. cit.*, 185)

⁵⁸⁴ In an appendix to Mahan’s *The Baptism of the Holy Ghost, to which is added The Endowment with Power by Rev. C. G. Finney*, Finney wrote, “We shall receive the promised endowment of power from on high, and be successful in winning souls, if we ask in faith and fulfil the plainly revealed conditions of prevailing prayer.” (Mahan 1876, 234)

TRAVAILING PRAYER AS A PATTERN OF
PREPAREDNESS FOR REVIVAL

INTRODUCTION

Jonathan Edwards and Charles Finney have provided church historians with one of their most conventional contrasts in American theology and praxis.¹ Whether tracing Edwards' influence on Finney all the way forward to our day,² or looking back at the Great Awakening as a contrivance designed to "traditionalise" nineteenth-century revivalism,³ historians and theologians have typically found little common ground between these two leaders.⁴ Finney has been seen as the fault-line between the "prayed down" revivals of Edwards and the "worked up" revivalism of frontier-influenced "new measures,"⁵ the demarcation of where evangelicalism began to deteriorate.⁶ This study, however, has been exploring space inside the Edwards-Finney polarity to discover affinities which, in regard to the agony and potency of prayer, introduce new, subtle opportunities for fresh interpretation. In-depth, inductive examination of what both Edwards and Finney experienced and communicated about traveling prayer has revealed how their views could collide here but

¹ Guelzo observes how "the prevailing currents of interpretation of both Finney and Edwards meet more for the purposes of contrast than comparison." (Guelzo 1996, 160)

² "Of course, it was the evangelical Arminianism of the Methodist movement ... that became the chief engine of experiential religion in the early nineteenth century. ... Later in the nineteenth century, the Holiness and then Pentecostalism at the turn of the twentieth century carried revivalism forward in ways that contain echoes of the Connecticut Valley in 1734-35 and 1740-42. The issues with which Jonathan Edwards wrestled in his pastoral career, as he strove to share with others the 'inward, sweet sense' of Christ that gave his own life meaning—sometimes with glorious success, sometimes in agonizing failure—remain fundamental issues for believers and for the church in the twenty-first century." (Hambrick-Stowe 2003, 94-95)

³ "New Divinity men initiated the development of an Edwardsian structure of authority as part of the effort to transform the largely New England colonial awakening into a great, general and formative *American* event that could be invoked to influence the course of the Second Great Awakening. ... Antebellum evangelicals created an American religious tradition around Edwards's figure. They 'classicized' Edwards and his writings and in turn used his religious authority to 'traditionalize' nineteenth-century piety, revivalism, and theology." (Conforti 1995, 36, 38) See also Chapter II, note 285.

⁴ Laurence is representative: "Edwards is best understood as a critic of the tradition of conversion that would dominate American Protestant evangelicalism in the nineteenth century." (Laurence 1979, 277)

⁵ "The difference between Edwards and Finney is essentially the difference between the medieval and the modern temper. One saw God as the center of the universe, the other saw man. One believed that revivals were 'prayed down' and the other that they were 'worked up.'" (McLoughlin 1959, 11) "Any idea that a revival could be planned or 'got up' was entirely foreign to Edwards' whole theology." (Murray 1987, 127)

⁶ "While their establishment of camp meetings and of altar calls arose from the best of motives, it was the result of an erroneous theology and it led to a system with consequences that they failed to see. ... Could a revival ritual replace real revival? ... They believed that God had set his own seal on their work, and to question such success appeared to them akin to blasphemy. So, in due course, 'The seemingly miraculous new revival technique was disseminated throughout the length and breadth of the southern states.' Revivalism had been born." (Murray 1996, 190 [Boles 1996, 89])

overlap there, even sounding nearly identical at points. Such nuances have helped jettison stereotypes and surface possibilities for traversing the standard chasm between Edwards and Finney to make critical insight into travelling prayer as a pattern of preparedness for revival.

While likely the most crucial factor of preparedness in the minds of both men, travelling prayer for revival has, before now, not received historical analysis. We have noted, in fact, how critical consideration of the relationship of prayer and revival, and the history of prayer more broadly, are concerns often overlooked by scholars. Very little scholarship has concentrated on Edwards' theology of prayer,⁷ and no previous focus has been given to what he believed and said about travelling prayer. The same and more have also been found to be true of research on Finney. The current project, then, has been unique in making more than a hortatory or devotional approach. It has been an effort instead to drill down for critical discovery at the crossroads of travelling prayer as *human action* allowing for *supernatural cause* of revival.⁸ Originality has been enhanced by first-ever transcriptions of some of Edwards' sermons with comprehensive use of both his published and digitised corpus alongside thorough reading of Finney's handwritten sermon "skeletons," often passed over by researchers. The findings emerging are what this final chapter attempts to narrate: similarities and differences between how Edwards and Finney understood travelling prayer, discovery of which can delineate its function as a pattern of preparedness for revival and point to opportunities for further research.

⁷ See Chapter I, note 83.

⁸ *ibid*, 6

INTERPRETATION OF HOW EDWARDS AND FINNEY UNDERSTOOD AND EXPERIENCED TRAVAILING PRAYER

They were both pastors and both eventually college presidents. Both Edwards and Finney were prolific authors and became preeminently influential and well-known. But Edwards was more the intellectual and Finney the pragmatist; one the denominationalist and the other the iconoclast; theologian and evangelist; traditionalist and innovator. Such have been among the standard categories for scholarly and popular consideration of Edwards and Finney, tracking through stages⁹ of their personal and spiritual development. What we have been discovering in this project, however, has been the extent to which passionate prayer for revival was common ground between them and a common theme across their lifetimes. Both Edwards and Finney appear to have settled on the essentials of their theology and practice of earnest prayer as young men. They never stopped refining these convictions, skillful as they were in the constant empiricism which was their instinct. Nevertheless, the kernel of what Edwards and Finney believed and experienced of travelling prayer seems to have been markedly consistent over time in the full range of their work and writing. It was the purpose of the previous two chapters to give these values voice, letting both men, to every extent possible, speak for themselves in comparable ways about the great necessity of prayer. Now having heard them, we can attempt to interpret what they said.

Both Edwards and Finney, along with others before them and since, were agreed that prayer was necessary and preparatory to revival. But returning to a key question posed in Chapter I, this project has been curious to understand what they may have really meant by that: at a deeper level, what pattern of “prayer” for revival has been sought?¹⁰ What manner of petition did Edwards and Finney believe was requisite and most fruitful for revival?

⁹ See Chapter II, note 157. After Finney’s death, John Morgan commented, “When he became old he could not maintain the tenor of thought with that mighty energy with which he could when he was younger; but his praying was always mighty.” ([_____] 1876, *Reminiscences of Rev. Charles G. Finney...*, 58-59)

¹⁰ See Chapter I, 7.

Responses to these questions are now more clear. A pattern of travailing prayer as preparedness for revival can be traced from research using a model of twelve historical traits that has proven to be a dynamic, interactive tool for comparative study. Boldness was a clear link, for example, between the daring and contending of travailing prayer's content and the importunity of its practice. We found overlap between the limits of labour's exertions and physical manifestations in the form of this praying. And correlations like these have helped reveal how remarkably multifaceted and comprehensive travailing prayer was in its association with these two awakenings, sufficient in many ways to form the common ground mentioned above that we have been examining between two leaders who were otherwise very different. In travailing prayer as a pattern of preparedness for revival, both Edwards and Finney wrestled with God to forge unity rather than to be at odds with Him. Both commended Jesus in Gethsemane as the archetype of intercession for the lost. Both relied upon the Holy Spirit to enflame the affections and lead petitioners to the specifics of effective prayer. Their theology and practice of travailing prayer for revival was both many-sided and central to everything, the pattern of which we can now observe.

Similarities and Differences in Content

Neediness and Brokenness Finney was rooted¹¹ in the Puritan orthodoxy to which Edwards was wholeheartedly devoted.¹² When Finney preached about the “quagmire of despairing works” a sinner pursues until “he comes at last to see that all this avails nothing, [and] he begins to take some right views of his case,”¹³ he could sound almost indistinguishable from Edwards or Stoddard expounding on the humiliation phase in the

¹¹ “Although Finney preferred to efface his early associations with Edwardsianism in his *Memoirs* at the end of his life, he was actually born in the thick of the Connecticut New Divinity country in 1792 and raised among the New Divinity-influenced ‘Presbygational’ union churches of frontier New York; and he received his mature education in Warren, Connecticut, under the eye of the New Divinity minister Peter Starr, one of Joseph Bellamy’s theological pupils.” (Guelzo, *op. cit.*, 163)

¹² See Chapter II, notes 15-17.

¹³ Finney 1877, 403.

Puritan morphology of conversion, “whereby the sinner is brought out of himself, and off from all his *carnal confidences*, to yield himself a prisoner to God: until the soul be thus humbled he is not capable of faith.”¹⁴ Both men, however, believed that even deeper trenches of brokenness and heart-wrenching neediness in prayer defined the *post*-conversion experience, every intercessor’s calling to a burden far heavier than self-oriented prayers of those under conviction.¹⁵ The visceral, permeating need for what only God can do, what Edwards identified as the essential stimulus of prayer, paralleled the engulfing recognition of need for prayer that could come crushing in upon Finney and those near him. They emphasised dependence on God as the underpinning of travailing prayer,¹⁶ a threshold of reliance Edwards believed petitioners should be “sensible” of in their feelings, to the point, Finney added, that it showed in their faces. Both saw pride as prayer’s great obstruction, and prayer as pride’s ultimate disablement, cultivating and habituating the degree of submission to God that prepared the way for His mercy.

Finney, however, would have nothing to do with the Edwardsean “inability” doctrine¹⁷ he believed had led to the “cannotism”¹⁸ he fiercely opposed at every turn. While for Edwards our neediness and brokenness in prayer was because of all we *cannot* do, for Finney it was because of all we *can* do, but do *not*. Comparing, as Edwards did through the lens of his Reformed theological inheritance, our dependence on God to the earth’s for rain¹⁹—that for which we urgently plead and helplessly wait—prayer’s purpose in revival

¹⁴ Stoddard 1804 [1729], 212.

¹⁵ “The convicted man is ready to put himself to hard labour and mighty effort. At first he works with great hope of success, for he does not readily understand why selfish efforts will not be successful. He prays, but all in a selfish spirit.” (Finney 1877, 402)

¹⁶ “Without the teachings of experience, you can scarcely expect any man to be so sincere and heartily earnest in praying as to prevail. It seems indispensable that every Christian should know, past all doubt or demurring, that he needs God’s aid, and can do nothing to the purpose without it.” (Finney, “Prayer for a Pure Heart”, *The Oberlin Evangelist* XI, 6, March 14, 1849, 41)

¹⁷ See Chapter III, note 112.

¹⁸ See Chapter II, notes 102-05; Chapter IV, notes 37-40.

¹⁹ See Chapter III, note 113.

was framed chiefly around its preparative operation in the petitioner for receiving. To this

Finney retorted in *Lecture I*:

Even in New England, it has been supposed that revivals came just as showers do, sometimes in one town, and sometimes in another, and that ministers and churches could do nothing more to produce them, than they could to make showers of rain come on their own town, when they are falling on a neighboring town. ... It is only within a few years that ministers generally have supposed revivals were to be *promoted*, by the use of means designed and adapted specially to that object. ... Men cannot do the devil's work more effectually, than by preaching up the sovereignty of God, as a reason why we should not put forth efforts to produce a revival.²⁰

Spiritual poverty was not paralysis to Finney; utter dependence on God did not preclude human initiative, but rather integrated it through introspection leading to earnest prayer expressing the severity of our need. Edwards, too, could preach that Christians should “not only be much in searching and watching” but also “much in doing, ... crying mightily to God, ... praying with all prayer.”²¹ But to him our motive in this sprung from the shattering recognition of our utter helplessness aside from *divine* agency; brokenness in prayer to Finney, conversely, was recognition of all the good that could be happening but isn't when *human* agency is neglected.

Urgency and Agony In either case, insouciance or procrastination in prayer was deplorable to both Edwards and Finney. They called for urgency from petitioners under an imperative of immediacy, with any nonchalance considered tantamount to contempt for God by Edwards, as evil and intolerable by Finney. Both considered Jesus in Gethsemane the apogee and paragon of travailing prayer, with Edwards emphasising Christ's successive experiences of praying “more earnestly”²² as evidence of urgency intensifying to agony, even to the brink of death. He challenged ministers to prayer this sacrificial, the life-threatening, “unutterable agony” which Finney confessed to have witnessed among some intercessors. Both acknowledged serious psychological risks intrinsic to such extreme piety, conceding

²⁰ Finney, *Lectures*, 20.

²¹ Sermon 595 on Mt 11:12(b), WJEO 45:L30v.

²² Lk 22:43-44 [KJV]; see Chapter III, note 153-59.

that travailing prayer could be mentally overwhelming for some. This contributed to Edwards' rationale later for eschewing terror preaching, just as Finney "learned to be afraid" of emotional excesses in revival settings, both men over time developing wise practitioners' respect for human finitude. But neither Edwards nor Finney would allow the hazards of prayer's potential agonies to diminish their centrality in the petitionary enterprise.

Finney, however, was sometimes willing to risk more in this regard due to his association of real prayer with right feelings.²³ He elevated feeling as prayer's primary authentication, doubting that urgency ever actually takes hold of the supplicant through teaching or exhortation. One doesn't learn real prayer by instruction as much as by being stirred to gain the right feelings that ultimately produce it, Finney believed. Such accent on subjectivity was what Edwards had tempered by emphasising that "gracious and holy affections have their exercise and fruit in Christian practice."²⁴ This difference, too, could be traceable to contrasts in temperament, Finney having a more innately impassioned and fiery spirituality than the studious, reflective Edwards. Finney could readily illustrate agonising prayer from his own life experience, whereas Edwards tended to draw his examples from the life of David Brainerd and others. Brainerd exemplified for Edwards the principle of desire in prayer increasing with saintliness: the farther we grow in grace, the more urgent and agonising our petitions must become. Finney, by contrast, associated intensification in prayer with the valuation petitioners placed on prayer's object. In other words, for Edwards, our prayers should grow as large as our gracious desires—inward fervour shaping outward expression in prayer. For Finney, our desires in prayer should grow as large as its object—outward estimation shaping inward intensity. And for Finney, the object of inestimable value in prayer was the human soul, which was why he likened the sinner to the loved one caught in a burning house as basis for intercessory alarm. Finney could sometimes seem to presume

²³ See Chapter IV, notes 137-41.

²⁴ WJE 2:383; see Chapter III, note 387-89.

omniscience of his hearers' interior in venturing that their apparent apathy in prayer derived from failure to share in God's love for perishing souls.²⁵

Daring and Contending The intensity of prayer Edwards and Finney advocated called for language petitioners were often reluctant to employ. Finney particularly modelled a vernacular in prayer more conversational and informal than what most were accustomed to, sparking controversy among some while challenging others to believe God was capable of allowing such "familiarity" with Him. Both preached an assurance that daring audacity, even obstinate tenacity, in prayer was not an irreverence, not insulting to God, but what He welcomed according to Scripture. Edwards and Finney returned continually to the story of Jacob wrestling, one of Edwards' favourite typologies, as proof of God's willingness to endure our grappling and pressing, our reminders and protests in prayer. Edwards vouched by Scripture's injunction that the Kingdom advances only by spiritual violence in prayer, and Finney charged clergy to make the provisioning of ministry their constant argument with God.²⁶ Both, in fact, understood such struggle as the actual substance of Christian living.

The import of prayer's wrestling, however, was interpreted differently by each man, pivoting on the function of evidence. To Edwards, God could give the impression of opposing prayer or delaying an answer because of what such contention could reveal of us. Evidence would emerge from wrestling in prayer convincing us more decisively of our need, or our unworthiness to receive, or of God's great mercy to bestow, all promoting self-knowledge making supplicants more ready to be given the blessing. But for Finney, evidence was not *from* praying, but *for* it. In other words, the struggle of prayer was not as much for producing self-knowledge as it was a petitionary battle for what the Spirit had revealed the will of God to be. To Finney, daring and contending in prayer, never attempted recklessly,

²⁵ "I have often thought that the reason why so many pray only in form and not in heart for the salvation of souls, is that they lack this love, like God's love, for the souls of the perishing." (Finney, "Prayer and Labor for the Gathering of the Great Harvest", *The Oberlin Evangelist* XV, 1, January 5, 1853, 1) See Chapter IV, note 153.

²⁶ See Chapter IV, note 205.

were based on the evidence of Bible promises, prophetic revelations, providential indications—all discerned from Spirit-assisted perspicacity—to provide the petitioner reasons for not taking no for an answer. Finney betrayed his legal training in this impulse for building a case and fighting for it in prayer. For Edwards, then, God wrestled to sift us and reveal the evidence of our true motives, while for Finney, we wrestled based on evidence God had revealed as our basis for not letting go in prayer until He responded. Such indomitable expectancy became a hallmark of the “prayer of faith” upon which Finney believed revival was conditioned.

Similarities and Differences in Form

Labour These exertions in prayer were instinctual to Edwards and Finney. Both men were made of diligent, industrious stock, so that labour in prayer was simply the overflow of their constitution. While both disdained any association of prayer’s work with a theology of works, they cultivated around them an ethos of zero-tolerance for slothfulness or insipidity in the high calling of earnest petition. “Travail” understood as arduous labour defined what Edwards and Finney considered necessary for surmounting prayer’s obstructions and exploiting this crucial means of promoting revival. Sobering them was also their firsthand knowledge of how prayer’s labour could break the supplicant: just as its agonies might overwhelm the emotions, the toil of prayer could become greueling enough to outstrip all bodily strength. But as with this and every other facet of travailing prayer, for both men, the potential always outweighed the perils.

Other facets of travailing prayer have also revealed a thematic variance we see restated here: how, for Edwards, labour functioned to reveal the petitioner’s limits while, for Finney, labour expressed the praying person’s capacities. With one, diligence in prayer was most effective in convincing a supplicant of human limitations and his or her dependence on God; with the other, prayer’s toils derived from application of “voluntary powers” inherent in

human agency, which was “just as indispensable to a revival as divine agency.”²⁷ Here again, Finney relentlessly repudiated any tinge of the powerlessness he believed had been promulgated in the “traditions of the elders.”²⁸ While Edwards preached that men should work as hard in prayer as they did in their occupation, Finney took it further to commend those willing to close up their shops and set aside their daily work for the labours of prayer. Fueling and framing such spiritual industry was Finney’s distinctive accent on specificity, insisting that petitioners bring their prayers to a near laser-like focus on particular persons or places. Edwards, on the other hand, understood spiritual striving as a general grace summoning all persons, even the unconverted, to draw upon their God-given endowment for labouring broadly in revival prayer. And the outworking of these two views parallels what we shall observe in their teaching and practice of importunity: how Edwards believed prayer’s labour should never end, even into heaven, while Finney described recurrent respite in faith’s assurance that God’s answers were on the way.

Gender Both Edwards and Finney related the labour of prayer to the labour of childbirth, emphasising maternal imagery as a primary representation of the church’s travail for the Kingdom’s advance and the petitioner’s travail for the conversion of sinners. We have seen how they also drew upon male metaphors of wrestling and violence, but the gender emphasis of earnest prayer for both was remarkably female, owing in part to the prominence of women in their lives and ministries. Both men were married to prayerful women and believed women in general, more than men, were distinctively oriented to the praying life. Edwards reared eight learned daughters, and Finney helped initiate coeducation in the United States. In their preaching and writing, both returned again and again to exemplary women as models for the ideals in prayer they sought to illustrate.²⁹

²⁷ Finney, *Lectures*, 318; see Chapter IV, notes 218-19.

²⁸ Finney 1836, 81; see Chapter IV, note 221.

²⁹ See Chapters III, notes 254-56; Chapter IV, note 265.

Finney, however, endured more censure than did Edwards for the elevated role he assigned women in revival prayer. In his time the patriarchy of colonial Puritanism was giving way to broadening democratisation across post-revolutionary America, a change Finney helped drive by relying heavily on women for financial support and leadership in prayer for revival through various female societies and associations, and also in mixed assemblies. Disowning any connection with the origins of public prayer by women in the presence of men, Finney nevertheless fully embraced it, what was perhaps the most opposed of all new measures. Common sense taught him every person should take their turn in prayer, and he cared little about resulting effects upon the social order. Edwards, by contrast, never crossed a line of controversy in this regard. Considered by some scholars to be more feminine in spirituality with his emphasis on affections and emotion, Edwards advanced female typology to the full limit of Puritanism, but not beyond it. Yet more than Finney, he called attention to the church's mother-like travail as the archetypal precursor to the eschaton, being as assertive in this signal of revival's imminence as Finney was bold in empowering praying women to embody it.

Physicality One reason childbirth imagery seemed particularly suitable to Edwards and Finney was that it conveyed the physical magnitude of travailing prayer. Seizing cramps, heavy breathing, heat and sweat were not uncommon among those engaged in this kind of strenuous petition. Supplicants were often unable to stand or sit, reduced instead to kneeling or prostration and an overflow of tears—all bodily manifestations of travailing prayer, along with others, observed in virtually identical patterns around Edwards and Finney. Tears especially were regarded as the heart language of this kind of praying, legitimising it in Finney's view,³⁰ but also endangering it with pride Edwards warned. Fasting, too, in both corporate and private expressions, was held in equally high regard by

³⁰ See Chapter IV, notes 290-91.

both men.³¹ But here both also met with equally fierce opposition. The corporeality of travailing prayer breached the margin of propriety in the judgement of Puritan politesse and urbane clergy in Edwards' and Finney's times. Acknowledging such risks of excess, both men firmly denounced any kind of manipulated or feigned physicality in prayer, rejecting bodily effects as adequate measures of prayer's goodness or efficacy. But again, they would not budge in championing the benefits of remaining open to physical manifestations of the Spirit of prayer in people, Finney going so far as to cast off all criticisms as unwarranted.

Finney went on to allow prayer's physicality to bear an almost uncontrollable nature³² at times, unrestraint somewhat beyond what Edwards endorsed. Finney's conversion had been a prayer experience imprinted by uncontainable, electric-like "waves of liquid love"³³ resonating with the uninhibited frontier religion that was to shape his early itinerancy. Edwards' personal experience of bodily manifestations in prayer, by contrast, was slightly more subdued, the more dramatic effects being what he observed in those around him, especially in his wife, Sarah. Controversial expressions of prayer Edwards witnessed and interpreted became rationale for what Finney later experienced and defended.

Similarities and Differences in Practice

Sound or Silence Not surprisingly, prayer this forceful could also be loud, which was again both Edwards' and Finney's duplicate observation. Neither of them was willing to muzzle prayer or forbid it becoming noisy at times;³⁴ "strong crying and tears" (Heb 5:7 [KJV]) could not be wrong if they had been the nature of the Lord's prayers, Edwards reasoned. But in a similar way, neither were they willing to make high volume in prayer programmatic or to sanction it without clarification, Finney consistently pointing to great

³¹ See Chapters III, notes 313-21; Chapter IV, notes 295-302.

³² See Chapter IV, note 288.

³³ Finney, *Memoirs*, 23; see Chapter IV, note 289.

³⁴ See Chapter III, notes 292, 326.

intercessors often being the quiet type³⁵ and Edwards applying the criteria of proportion and balance.³⁶ The two also urged that prayer be kept short and to the point,³⁷ which was somewhat counter-cultural for Edwards, against the grain of Puritan norms. Nevertheless, the loudness of travailing prayer was always another lightning rod of controversy for both men as critics unremittingly disparaged it as shrill and overly boisterous, critique informing Edwards' and Finney's leadership—but never to the point of reversing course.

Finney, in fact, found strategic value in loud prayer³⁸ for convincing unbelievers of God as real; Edwards did not think or speak of it in such a way, which could have been due in part to personality differences. Finney described himself as of a loud³⁹ and more outgoing disposition, and the early influences on his style of praying had been known (and maligned) for their high volume and intensity.⁴⁰ Edwards by contrast, of a somewhat more quiet and private temperament, had seen clamorous prayer spread like a contagion around the meeting house enough times to become cautious of it as a senseless habit fomenting more human pride than divine blessing. Finney, instead, was more concerned about pride in prayer's silence than in its volume, remembering his own reticence prior to conversion, masking vanity,⁴¹ to which the best antidote, he believed, was a good, strong voice.

Importunity and "Praying Through" Whether it was pride or some other hindrance to prayer, importunity, Edwards and Finney were agreed, was one of God's best ways for bringing such impediments to the surface. They believed God sometimes delayed answering to expose change needed first in the petitioner. Both men were united in appreciating importunity's usefulness for divesting petitioners of all selfishness, in stimulating faith, and generally improving the manner and content of prayer. They fundamentally shared the same

³⁵ See Chapter IV, note 313.

³⁶ See Chapter III, notes 340-44.

³⁷ *ibid*, notes 336-39; Chapter IV, notes 229-35.

³⁸ See Chapter IV, note 323.

³⁹ *ibid*, notes 317-19

⁴⁰ *ibid*, notes 320-22

⁴¹ *ibid*, note 315

understanding of importunity's features: repetition (though not rote), tenacity, holy boldness, here overlapping in quality with daring and contending. They cited the same Scriptures⁴² to preach of giving God no rest, of remaining watchful in perseverance, of continuing to pray until it was clear not to. And there was little about importunity that detractors could find fault with: Edwards and Finney received no criticism for this.

Their agreement would have been airtight had it not been for a crucial dissimilarity: importunity's actual duration. Edwards reckoned it to be perpetual, that a lifetime was not too long to pray. Finney, on the other hand, from his experience of "praying through" to relief and rest, preached of the decrescendo of importunity into the conclusive assurance of God's "yes."⁴³ Edwards, too, could speak of faith "resting" in an "acquiescence of the mind" in Christ,⁴⁴ just as Finney understood prayer as never-ending, continuing even into one's dreams.⁴⁵ But Finney had tasted of that mysterious interlude⁴⁶ between an inner knowing of prayer having been answered in the heavenly realms while the petitioner still waits, but no longer prays, for it to become manifest on earth. Though this accent did not originate in his time,⁴⁷ Finney's stress on "praying through" may have been an innovation of the Second Great Awakening and one of his pioneering contributions to revival prayer.⁴⁸ Likewise, Edwards' unique application of this trait of travailing prayer might have been how he associated importunity so indispensably with the eschaton, considering "the glorious peace and prosperity of the Messiah's reign" as practically contingent on the church importuning for it.⁴⁹

⁴² E.g., Isa 62:7 and Lk18:1-8; see Chapter III, notes 345-46; Chapter IV, note 325.

⁴³ See Chapter IV, note 354.

⁴⁴ WJE 13:408.

⁴⁵ Finney preached that petitioners who prevail "see the difficulty, and betake themselves to God, literally besieging his throne, as Daniel did; even in their dreams they pray; all their waking hours they pray, until they are really borne down." (Finney, "How to Prevail with God", *The Penny Pulpit* [London: J. Paul, c1853], May 22, 1850, 118, The Richard DuPuis Papers, Oberlin College Archive) See also Finney, *Lectures*, 30, 93-94.

⁴⁶ See Chapter IV, note 347.

⁴⁷ See Chapter III, note 372.

⁴⁸ See Chapter I, note 341; Chapter IV, note 356.

⁴⁹ WJE 11:279; see Chapter III, notes 361-63.

importunity or other facets of travailing prayer, Edwards and Finney were kindred souls in their aversion for any petitioner attempting to contrive or self-generate them. Both men conveyed a keen interest in the authenticity of earnest prayer, Edwards merely appropriating his Puritan pedigree in this regard; for Finney, settling on what he believed was “real prayer” had been a decisive factor in his conversion.⁵⁰ Each man was exquisitely attuned to how easily people could be deceived, thinking their prayers were valid and effective when they were neither, which called up the need for penetrating introspection. Edwards and Finney summoned supplicants to self-examination as a way of life, a willingness even to do violence to oneself⁵¹ for gaining the requisite self-awareness of fruitful prayer. But in both of their minds, much more mission-critical than anything else to prayer’s genuineness and power was the role of the Holy Spirit, operating in Christians as a Spirit of Prayer.⁵²

Edwards’ “theology of prayer stands or falls with the Person and work of the Spirit,” Beck declares.⁵³ While pneumatology had been a growing interest he inherited from Puritanism, Edwards emphasised and extended it in ways to be considered by some historians “the greatest theologian of the Spirit in early America.”⁵⁴ From the late sixteenth century,⁵⁵ Puritan divines gave increasing attention to the work of the Holy Spirit, intensifying in colonial America as pastors became convinced that renewal had not come due to their powerlessness without the Spirit.⁵⁶ Edwards developed an expansive pneumatology, viewing

⁵⁰ See Chapter IV, note 363-64.

⁵¹ *ibid.*, note 372

⁵² See Chapter I, note 360.

⁵³ Beck 2010, 187; see Chapter III, note 564.

⁵⁴ Taylor 1988, 218. “No Puritan theologian before Edwards explored as deeply as he did the Augustinian conception of the Spirit as the love between the Father and the Son. ... This was nearly a truism in Puritan thought, but it fixed itself in Edwards’s mind like a blinding light and colored all his thinking.” (*ibid.*)

⁵⁵ “From the time of Richard Rogers, who wrote in the 1570s, an increasing interest in the doctrine of the Holy Spirit allowed for a kind of enthusiasm which orthodox Reformed theology had not known.” (Pettit 1966, 10) See also Hambrick-Stowe 1982, 177-78.

⁵⁶ See Chapter I, notes 26 and 204. See also Crawford 1991a, 23.

the Spirit as “the sum of all good,”⁵⁷ “the greatest blessing”⁵⁸ and “choicest gift”⁵⁹ the church can pursue in its praying.⁶⁰ The Spirit aided petitioners not by supplying an “immediate suggesting of words to the apprehension,” Edwards believed, but by “warming the heart and filling it with a great sense of those things that are to be spoken of, and with holy affections, that that sense and those affections may suggest words.”⁶¹ If Christ was God *seen*, Edwards analogised from fire as both light and heat, then the Spirit was God *felt*,⁶² enflaming the ardour to which prayer gave voice. In these ways, Finney was not far from Edwards in perceiving the Spirit as igniting feelings that lead to prayer by bringing “a subject into warm contact with [the heart] of a Christian,” so that it is “just as impossible he should not feel, as it is that your hand should not feel if you put it into the fire.”⁶³ Both Edwards and Finney could speak almost interchangeably of the fervent sense (Edwards) or “praying state of mind”⁶⁴ (Finney) of the *spirit* of prayer and the inestimable worth and empowering leadership of the Holy *Spirit* of prayer. Finney virtually equated prayer with the Holy Spirit, believing that “the Spirit in the hearts of saints is pre-eminently a spirit of prayer, and of course to restrain prayer must always quench the Spirit.”⁶⁵ The Spirit assisted Christians, in his view,

⁵⁷ WJE 21:188. See also Chapter III, notes 565-68, 578-79. Finney could sound similar saying “that the gift of the Holy Ghost comprehends all we need spiritually.” (Finney, “On Prayer for the Holy Spirit”, *The Oberlin Evangelist* XVII, 11, May 23, 1855, 81)

⁵⁸ WJE 19:785.

⁵⁹ *ibid*, 17:97

⁶⁰ Summarising Edwards’ pneumatology, Caldwell writes, “As the Spirit is the source of prayer for the Christian, so too is he the greatest good and reward that the church can seek after in their praying. Through prayer, the Spirit draws Christians into fellowship, communion, and union with God the Father as they are united to the Son. Yet he is also the reward of prayer, for he replicates the excellency of his immanent Trinitarian being in the life of the church by uniting their hearts in love.” (Caldwell 2006, 160)

⁶¹ WJE 4:437.

⁶² “[God] is seen by his image, the Son, and is felt by the Holy Spirit, as fire is perceived only by its light and heat, seen by one and felt by the other. Fire, by its light, represents the Son of God, and by its heat, the Holy Spirit.” (WJE 15:387)

⁶³ Finney, *Lectures*, 91.

⁶⁴ Finney, “Prayer and Labor for the Gathering of the Great Harvest”, *The Oberlin Evangelist* XV, *op. cit.*, 1. See Chapter IV, note 385.

⁶⁵ Finney 1877, 254. See also Finney, *Lectures*, 53.

by drawing them into prayer through a “silent, but deep, powerful melting,”⁶⁶ enduing them with power to prevail,⁶⁷ and leading them to know or infer how specifically⁶⁸ to pray:

The plain truth of the matter is, that the Spirit leads a man to pray. And if God leads a man to pray for an individual, the inference from the Bible is, that God designs to save that individual. If we find by comparing our state of mind with the Bible, that we are *led by the Spirit* to pray for an individual, we have good evidence to believe that God is prepared to bless him.⁶⁹

So vitally necessary was the Spirit’s empowerment,⁷⁰ Finney urged supplicants to travail for it,⁷¹ having observed, as did Edwards, how the spirit of prayer can be thwarted⁷² and even lost.⁷³ And not to have a spirit of prayer amounted to enmity with God and people.⁷⁴

This sometimes tenuous nature of the spirit of prayer, acknowledged by both Edwards and Finney, reveals subtle variances in what they stressed about it. For Edwards, the spirit of prayer was all God’s initiative, though persons might use means to stimulate and sustain it.⁷⁵ Finney was more direct in insisting on the petitioner’s effort⁷⁶ in receiving while allowing that, ultimately, the spirit of prayer was an experience of divine impartation.⁷⁷ The two also differed in their emphasis on the spirit of prayer as first in a progression of causes leading to

⁶⁶ Finney, “Communion with God” (part 1), *The Oberlin Evangelist* II, 18, August 26, 1840, 137.

⁶⁷ “Enduement with power” was the principal motif of Finney’s pneumatology (Dayton 1987, 100-01) and a benchmark of how Finney was remembered by those close to him, as with his Oberlin colleague, John Morgan: “I think that all of us felt that his spiritual power was that in which he most excelled.” ([] 1876, *Reminiscences of Rev. Charles G. Finney*..., 58) Finney considered it “the great mistake of the Church” that Christians “rest in conversion, and do not seek until they obtain this enduement of power from on high.” (Finney [1984], 5)

⁶⁸ See Chapter IV, notes 537-44.

⁶⁹ Finney, *Lectures*, 94.

⁷⁰ “You never can expect to offer prayer according to the will of God without the Spirit.” (*ibid*, 58-59)

⁷¹ “How shall we get this influence of the Spirit of God? It must be sought by fervent, believing prayer.” (*ibid*, 96) See Chapter IV, note 378. “With such a command to convert the world ringing in our ears; with such an injunction to wait in constant, wrestling prayer until we receive the power; with such a promise, made by such a Savior, held out to us of all the help we need from Christ Himself, what excuse can we offer for being powerless in this great work?” (Finney [1984], 33)

⁷² “Suppose a man engaged in his worldly schemes, and that God should give that man the spirit of prayer. Of course he would pray for that which lies nearest his heart; that is, for success in his worldly schemes, to serve his own gods with. Will God give him the spirit of prayer for such purposes?—Never. ... The great thing necessary for the church is to break off conformity to the world, and then they will have power with God in prayer, and the Holy Ghost will descend and bless their efforts, and the world will be converted.” (Finney 1985 [1837], 24-25, 110)

⁷³ See Chapter IV, notes 376, 393. Brainerd also confessed to this susceptibility; see Chapter III, note 404.

⁷⁴ “If you know nothing about the spirit of prayer for sinners, you are not the true friend of God and man.” (Finney 1985 [1837], 63.)

⁷⁵ See Chapter III, notes 396-99, 405.

⁷⁶ “God is not going to pour these things on you, without any effort on your own.” (Finney, *Lectures*, 97)

⁷⁷ See Chapter IV, note 368.

revival. While Edwards may have moved away from the *ordo salutis* of Puritan orthodoxy, he clung firmly to an order of revival, orienting around a clear sequence with the spirit of prayer dispatched at the outset as one of God's "preceding providences."⁷⁸ Finney did not speak or write in this way, though he did tend to look first for those exhibiting the burden of the spirit of prayer upon arrival to any locality where he was invited to preach.⁷⁹ Finney also referred to the spirit of prayer in ways Edwards did not as a vocation and crucial specialty which could come on the gifted unexpectedly. The spirit of prayer as calling, as sudden, as empowering application of Scripture or revealing that which the Bible does not specify in leading the petitioner to travail in prayer for a particular individual: innovations such as these have provided basis for some historians suggesting Finney moved "considerably beyond" Edwards in comprehending the role of the spirit of prayer in revival.⁸⁰

Similarities and Differences in Context

Setting Both Edwards and Finney believed the Spirit could animate travelling prayer in any setting, though the family, the church, and gatherings called explicitly for intercession were the contexts they preferred. Neither could tolerate any kind of humdrum praying at home but challenged parents to pray desperately for the conversion of their children. The same was true of the church. True to their anti-formalist ecclesiology, Edwards and Finney considered non-liturgical worship to be the only acceptable environment for real prayer, welcoming both lay and clergy voices alike. And both men were prominent advocates of organised prayer movements as platforms for earnest revival prayer in their day. Edwards endeavoured to link existing prayer societies with the trans-Atlantic concerts of prayer initiated by his Scottish friends, while Finney sought to marshal the energy of

⁷⁸ WJE 5:353; see Chapter III, notes 396.

⁷⁹ See Chapter IV, note 396.

⁸⁰ Lyrene posits how Finney went "considerably beyond" Edwards "in advocating that Christians be open to the leadership of the Spirit in making fervent intercessions for the conversion of particular individuals." (Lyrene 1985, 183)

maternal associations in support of prayer meetings arranged in the vicinity of where he preached.

For Finney, the prayer meeting, if led properly, was not only the atmosphere where the right feelings of effective petition could flourish transmissibly, but also where a sense of the reality of God could radiate compellingly, even to the persuasion of the unregenerate. Finney was strikingly unlike Edwards here in how he employed the prayer meeting as a setting where travailing prayer functioned apologetically, as visible proof of God's existence and His passionate concern for nonbelievers.⁸¹ This led to another difference of Finney's exacting concern over the logistics of prayer meetings and his high standard of precise convictional unity among participants, all of which was groundbreaking at the time and contributed to his reputation as a revival "engineer." During his five years in New York City, Finney refitted buildings implementing architectural insights garnered from years of itinerancy to create prayer settings conducive to the drama and intimacy he considered necessary.⁸² Edwards, by contrast, embraced the sombre ambience of the Congregational meeting house, striving to infuse the ingrained rhythms of Puritan fast days and sabbatarianism with vigorous, fresh urgency for earnest prayer.

Locality Travailing prayer, however, was not meant to be confined within the walls of any church edifice, regardless of its design or the mood it projected. Based on their observation and personal experience, both men endorsed a broad assortment of venues and localities for revival prayer. Finney expanded this variety to include practically any site—domestic, professional, privileged, modest, recreational, or industrial—insisting that a petitioner's willingness to pray anywhere promoted the necessary humility for prayer's effectiveness. In particular, Edwards and Finney both expressed a strong personal penchant

⁸¹ 1 Cor 14:25

⁸² See Chapter IV, note 429.

for nature⁸³ as the locality where unguarded, open-hearted prayer could pour forth. Edwards highlighted the value of self-discovery resulting from the candor that secret prayer in the remote outdoors allowed. Here, too, one could “read” nature as God’s communiqué in all its typologies.⁸⁴ Finney did not look at nature for what it symbolised, but both he and Edwards went to and longed for the forests and fields where they could cry out to God with abandon foreshadowing the freedom of prayer in heaven. Edwards looked ahead to that ultimate locality where the ecstasies of travailing prayer would be utterly unobstructed—prayer’s sweetness unbound. Finney anticipated joining the saints in heaven where sympathy with God would be entirely known—prayer’s right feeling perfected.

Finney’s concern for locality, however, appears to have been much more earthbound than Edwards’. Disdaining the distractions that “divert the attention and grieve the Spirit in cities,”⁸⁵ he drew attention to rural places as prime sites for earnest prayer. Then within that focus, Finney believed the Spirit would help tighten the viewfinder of prayer upon the locality where revival was occurring, even down to particular individuals for whom petitioners were given the burden to travail. This localisation continued to narrow until it reached ground zero—the “anxious bench,” the crossroads of revival prayer—where saints in agony for souls and sinners under conviction of sin met. As Edwards has been understood to have approached prayer and all of life from a sweeping “God-entranced vision of all things,”⁸⁶ how Finney, by contrast, tapered intercession and narrowed its focus could be viewed as an aspect of his contribution to prayer for revival.⁸⁷

Relationality If the anxious bench was a key juncture of travailing prayer, the closet was, for both Edwards and Finney, its epicentre, earnest petition’s native soil. Prayer

⁸³ See Chapter III, notes 444-51; Chapter IV, notes 475-79.

⁸⁴ See Chapter III, notes 458-60.

⁸⁵ Finney, *Lectures*, 93; see Chapter IV, note 484.

⁸⁶ This phrase is the title of a book on Edwards’ legacy edited by John Piper and Justin Taylor (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2004).

⁸⁷ See Chapter IV, note 464.

of this intensity, both men believed, was rooted in deep relationship with God and in His profoundly interpersonal and compassionate nature, a closeness best discovered and sustained one-on-one in secret places. Such was the hallmark of Puritan spirituality in Edwards' instincts. Finney added the awareness of how a charism of travailing prayer could temporarily engulf the petitioner so as to make it unwise to venture into public view. At the same time, both leaders possessed a soaring, sprawling dream of global prayer for revival, involving Christians in all traditions united in fervent, federated intercession. Earnest, corporate prayer on a universal scale, Edwards believed, was compulsory groundwork for the eschaton. And both men advocated for full collaboration of laity with clergy as peer-petitioners, praying together, trailblazing a level of ecclesiastical equality that made many skittish. For Edwards and Finney, finally, the private-public and lay-clergy relationality of travailing prayer was never an either-or consideration, but a firmly asserted both-and necessity of the revival enterprise. On both theological and practical grounds, they promoted the essential complementarity of solitude and symbiosis in prayer.

But whereas Edwards urged laypersons to pray *for* ministers, Finney enabled the laity to pray *with* them, even to take the crucial leadership role⁸⁸ in prayer meetings where clergy were present, one of the new measures that drew much more criticism than Edwards received for his democratising advances. Finney may have also been somewhat more flexible in spiritual temperament than the more introverted Edwards: he appeared to be similarly energised in both public and private prayer contexts, recognising how each could be an antidote to pride inherent in the other. Willingness to pray only in public indicated self-importance for which the closet was the only remedy, Finney taught, just as exclusive fondness for private prayer implied vain concern for reputation that public prayer might cure. Edwards and Finney can also be interpreted as having put right-angle accents on prayer's

⁸⁸ "A great responsibility rests on him who leads a prayer meeting." (Finney, *Lectures*, 137)

unity, with Edwards focusing on a horizontal, far-reaching agreement in prayer for universal advancement of the Church, and Finney adding to that a vertical, detailed union at every level of cooperation in prayer. Finney documented certain practical dimensions of prayer's partnerships in ways Edwards did not, sometimes recounting the tag-team character of travailing prayer,⁸⁹ other times referring to his reliance on unseen yokefellows interceding for him.⁹⁰ But where the two differed most dynamically regarding the relationality of prayer was in the actual interpersonal nature of communicating with God. Though he never named Edwards in association with the idea, it was downright preposterous to Finney to conceive of God as only appearing, "as it were,"⁹¹ to be moved by the prayers of His beloved ones. "Finney rejected the traditional doctrine of God's impassibility," comments John Gresham, defending biblical depictions of God's feelings as "not mere accommodations to human understanding but descriptions of the real emotions of God's heart."⁹² Finney preached that "the objection to prayer that God is unchangeable, and therefore cannot turn aside to hear prayer, is altogether a fallacy and the result of ignorance."⁹³ Prayer's fundamental relationality was to him the outgrowth of a kind of communion in which prayer "really influences God to do what otherwise he would not do by any means."⁹⁴

Similarities and Differences in Objects of Travailing Prayer

Knowing God as One with "feelings of a heart of infinite sensibility"⁹⁵ made Him approachable for petitioners to pour out their hearts in their need for conversion, their desire for spiritual growth, and above all their concern for others. Edwards and Finney thought alike about these as primary categories of the objects of travailing prayer. For both, however,

⁸⁹ See Chapter IV, note 514.

⁹⁰ *ibid.*, notes 512-13

⁹¹ Sermon 958 on Neh 1:3-4, WJEO 68:L.5r.; see Chapter III, notes 193-95, 351.

⁹² Gresham 1987, 47.

⁹³ Finney, "On Prayer", *The Oberlin Evangelist* XVII, 1, January 3, 1855, 1. See also Chapter IV, notes 497-98.

⁹⁴ Finney, "Conditions of Prevailing Prayer" [part 1], *The Oberlin Evangelist* IX, 11, May 26, 1847, 82.

⁹⁵ Finney, *Lectures*, 170.

the conversion of others stood out predominantly among their concerns in prayer, with Edwards framing travailing prayer for this purpose as articulation of the highest love one could ever have for another person. Finney, too, could speak of the agonies of prayer in this way, warning hearers that “mere impressions” of what to pray for, “unconnected with love and deep compassion, be strongly guarded against.”⁹⁶ Edwards heightened this love for sinners to the point of being willing even to die for their conversion, which Finney witnessed some intercessors actually do: a yearning for souls both men held to be embodied in the travailing prayer of Christ in Gethsemane. The only aim of earnest prayer that could be deemed higher than this was God Himself, Who is “the great object of prayer.”⁹⁷ It was here that their purposes in prayer began to diverge. Travailing for God, for Edwards, was for *knowing* Him, to sense more of His presence and perceive His communications. Travailing for God, for Finney, was for *helping* Him, “to care supremely for His interests”⁹⁸ and pray for what His work lacked in the world.

Here is where Finney expounded a theology of sympathy with God, his core concept of how petitioners know what to desire in prayer by coming to feel as God feels and to identify with his intentions. Sympathy with God typically translated into agony in the suppliant, both in heart and voice, as the orienting impulse of travailing prayer for Finney. Edwards, by contrast, balanced prayer’s distress in a spirituality of enjoyment⁹⁹ that often found utter delight in the ravishing joys of ardent prayer. Though Finney had also experienced the “sweetness and tenderness”¹⁰⁰ of travail in his conversion, and Edwards never appears to apply travail’s raptures to petition for revival, an agony-ecstasy contrast

⁹⁶ Finney 1861, 69. “Besides the words [of prayer] there must be a praying state of mind. ... What then is the true spirit of this precept? I answer, love for souls.” (Finney, “Prayer and Labor for the Gathering of the Great Harvest”, *The Oberlin Evangelist* XV, *op. cit.*, 1)

⁹⁷ Sermon 958, *op. cit.*, L.3r.; see Chapter III, note 537.

⁹⁸ Finney, Sermon 96, “All True Prayer Is for God,” on Ps 72:15 (1863), The Charles Grandison Finney Papers, Oberlin College Archives; see Chapter IV, note 546.

⁹⁹ “Under the broad theme of enjoyment, there is a complex of ideas that frequently recurs in Edwards’s writings and that interlock with one another—humility, happiness, holiness, heaven, beauty, affection, and participation.” (McClymond and McDermott 2012, 69) See also Chapter III, note 532.

¹⁰⁰ Finney, *Memoirs*, 22.

fairly generalises this aspect of their predispositions and intentions in prayer. Their goals in prayer likewise differed when it came to interceding for the church. Edwards tended to adopt a more capacious outlook challenging congregations to decentre and cry to God for a glorious advancement in the universal Christian movement. Finney, too, shared a global vision for revival, as did Edwards for local communities, but Finney's primary thrust appears clearly to have been in stirring and organising residents to travail for their family members and friends in neighbourhood churches where revival meetings were proceeding. This parallels a key divergence in their chief objective for travailing prayer. Principally, though obviously not exclusively, Edwards' dominant accent in earnest petition was for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, while Finney's was for the conversion of souls. Edwards was less specific in yearning for an inundation of the Spirit's presence leading to awakening, construing the Holy Spirit's work to be both the agent and object of travailing prayer. For Finney, the main work of the Spirit in prayer was His help in revealing or clarifying what particular person or identifiable need warranted the heartbreaks and exertions of concentrated intercession. Agony-ecstasy, global-local, outpouring-conversion distinctions all risk oversimplification of Edwards' and Finney's concerns yet point to the discovery in this project that, at least when it came to revival prayer, their differences were less polarities than subtle yet significant variances along multiple spectra of agreements.

POSSIBILITIES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Inductive and comparative analysis of a twelve-point pattern of traveling prayer, leading up to and continuing throughout the First and Second Great Awakenings, has introduced fresh, historical appraisal of the correlation between prayer and revival. Contrasts like the ones just described surface plainly, as do others. For example, Edwards seems to allow for “patient bearing and waiting” in earnest prayer a bit more than Finney, linking with the experience of God’s delay associated with a petitioner becoming increasingly daring and importunate: “don’t be impatient,” he preaches, “of the self-denial and difficulty and suffering that you meet with in the business of seeking heaven.”¹⁰¹ Finney, however, appears to celebrate how God had recently corrected the error¹⁰² of believing revivals were only that which we wait for. They were also to be vigorously promoted, a view which again Edwards had betokened,¹⁰³ but that Finney accentuated: “How can we be in real sympathy with Christ unless we love the work of laboring in the gospel of harvest, and long to be commissioned to go forth and put in our sickle with our own hand?”¹⁰⁴ Consistently, dissimilarities such as these show themselves to be a matter of degree, of slight distinction along a continuum of balance and accord.¹⁰⁵

In addition, it also seems possible now to circle back to where we began and take a more informed, critical look at the project’s framework for possible modifications or fresh

¹⁰¹ Sermon 595, *op. cit.*, L.31r.

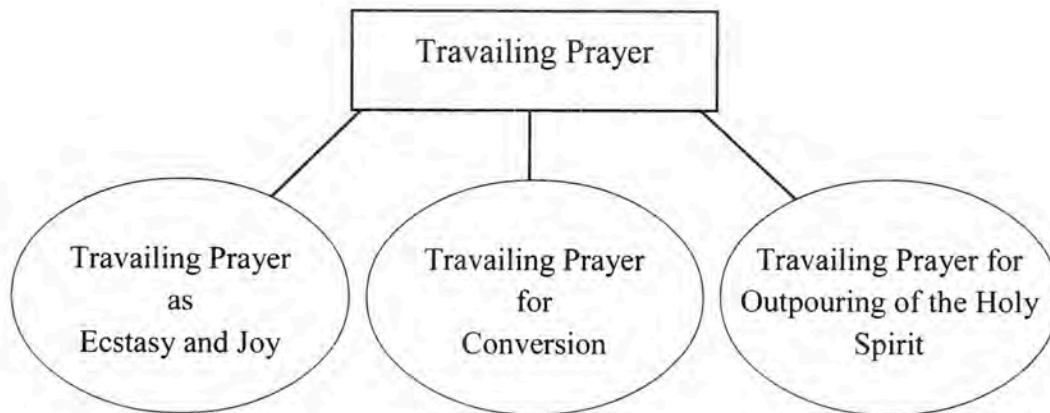
¹⁰² See above, note 20.

¹⁰³ “You should not only be much in searching and watching and contriving, but you must also be much in doing.” (Sermon 595, *op. cit.*, L.30.v.)

¹⁰⁴ Finney, “Prayer and Labor for the Gathering of the Great Harvest”, *The Oberlin Evangelist* XV, *op. cit.*, 1.

¹⁰⁵ Here, for example, Finney appeals for equilibrium of prayer and action: “Another mistake which often develops itself, is that of taking one of two extremes—either labouring a great deal, and losing sight of the indispensable need of special prayer; or—the opposite of this—having much prayer but no other labour. ... Waiting for the Holy Spirit without special believing prayer, is one great error, as if the sovereignty of God withheld the blessing. Waiting in a state of inactivity is a mistake, and so also on the other side, is attempting to go forth without the Holy Spirit.” (Finney, *The Prevailing Prayer-Meeting: A Sermon Delivered in Blackfriars’ Street Congregational Chapel, Glasgow, on 4th September 1859* [London: Ward & Co.] [transcription in research notes of Richard A. G. Dupuis in The Charles Grandison Finney Papers, Oberlin College Archives] 7-8)

applications in further research. For instance, Edwards is able to summarise a crucial recognition, drawn from his observations and recurring throughout his corpus, that persons who appeared to move into the depths of earnest prayer were ordinarily “of two sorts; either those that have been in great distress, in an apprehension of their sin and misery; or those that have been overcome with a sweet sense of the greatness, wonderfulness and excellency of divine things.”¹⁰⁶ Sweetness, delight, and joy persist prominently enough in his understanding of *travailing prayer* as to justify possible alteration of how this subgenre of prayer could be defined by Edwards, conceivably adjusting the illustration from Chapter I, p. 33, in this way:



It was acknowledged from the outset that though both Edwards and Finney respected and drew guidance from revival history, neither of them appeared to exhibit awareness of the full historical expanse of the *travailing prayer* tradition.¹⁰⁷ Clustering core attributes of *travailing prayer* as I did, adapting Hammerling’s rubric, was not to suggest conscious connections among the theologians and leaders whose writings and habits inform these traits. Nevertheless, it has been noteworthy how all twelve characteristics, identified from the broad

¹⁰⁶ WJE 4:264. See also Chapter III, note 529.

¹⁰⁷ See Chapter I, 69.

span of biblical and ecclesiastical history and applied here to the First and Second Great Awakenings, were all found recurring in full expression. Neither Edwards nor Finney, nor the history of revival, have been studied in this way before. Travailing prayer itself as a subgenre of Christian prayer has not, before now, been defined historically or examined critically in its relationship to revival movements. Findings from all these angles of analysis have produced insight that is both academically new and suggestive of meaningful expansion of the project for future research, regarding these two awakenings and in other case studies.

For example, two new trait combinations could possibly be employed for comparing the pattern of Edwards' and Finney's theology and practice of travailing prayer in preparedness for revival, the first of these being the suppliant's **imagination**¹⁰⁸ and **introspection**. "Judged in the light of the history that followed him," Conrad Cherry claimed, "[Edwards] represents a flowering of religious imagination,"¹⁰⁹ an output stemming from Puritanism,¹¹⁰ according to other historians, and rooted in Augustinian piety.¹¹¹ Imagination for Edwards was "that power of the mind, whereby it can have a conception, or idea of things of an external or outward nature, ... when those things are not present, and be not perceived by the senses."¹¹² Fending off critics who lumped his views in with errors of "the many kinds of enthusiasts" of his day, Edwards was keen to delineate true religious affections¹¹³ from "imaginary ideas" which "may be raised only by impressions made on the

¹⁰⁸ See Chapter I, 68. See also Chapter IV, note 406.

¹⁰⁹ Cherry 1975, 24. "Edwards's acceptance of the revivals of the Great Awakening as an occasion for imaginative construction amounted, then, to a dike stemming tides that would soon sweep over American Protestantism." (*ibid*)

¹¹⁰ "Finding his new world confusing, disappointing, or amorphous, [the New England Puritan] assimilates himself into the Bible world and outlook, dwells there imaginatively, sees through its windows." (Caldwell 1983, 178)

¹¹¹ "In the area of technique, as well, continuity existed between Catholic and Puritan practice. Most important was the use of imagination and the senses in the exercise known as composition of place, the usual point of departure in Catholic meditation." (Hambrick-Stowe 1982, 31)

¹¹² WJE 2:210-11.

¹¹³ Edwards acknowledged how the imagination could function as that "wherein are formed all those delusions of Satan" arising from "counterfeit graces and affections. Here is the devil's grand lurking place, the very nest of foul and delusive spirits." (*ibid*, 288)

body, by moving the animal spirits, and impressing the brain.”¹¹⁴ But for stirring zeal in prayer, Edwards drew deeply from vivid imagery to set before petitioners’ eyes of faith the urgency of their task just as God had set before their aesthetic sense His message in the wonders of nature. When Edwards wrote of ideas so “strongly impressed upon the mind” that it is “almost as if one saw them,”¹¹⁵ he foreshadowed the graphic “soul danger” Finney illustrated and which he believed the Spirit prompted in intercessors to travail with the same crisis-response of firemen “when fire breaks out in a great city.”¹¹⁶ And if imagination could denote the “power of the mind ... of an external or outward nature,” introspection was the inward turn of equal or even greater importance to both men in traving prayer. We have seen the importance Edwards and Finney gave to self-examination as a crucial aspect of that “engagedness of mind”¹¹⁷ required to attain the brokenness and ensure the authenticity of effective prayer.¹¹⁸ Prayer was to Edwards the expression of the mind to God¹¹⁹ and, for Finney, depended upon a certain state of mind.¹²⁰ Travail was to Edwards that point where great need engrossed the care of the mind,¹²¹ and was a great exercise of mind, led by the Spirit, to Finney.¹²² Clearly knowing one’s interior through the mind’s explorations was vital to both, and would be worthy of focused comparison in future research.

It could be similarly valuable to examine a combination of **duty and conditionality**,¹²³ contrasting Edwards’ perception of moral obligation with Finney’s ideas of compliance with spiritual laws as the operation of the human will in traving prayer.

Edwards structured his theology of prayer from a starting point of duty, it being materially

¹¹⁴ *ibid*, 215-16

¹¹⁵ *ibid*, 211

¹¹⁶ Finney, *Lectures*, 26. See also Chapter I, note, 194; Chapter IV, note 151.

¹¹⁷ Sermon 595, *op. cit.*, L.33v.

¹¹⁸ See Chapter III, notes 21, 383-85; Chapter IV, notes 132-36, 371-72.

¹¹⁹ See Chapter III, note 269.

¹²⁰ See Chapter IV, note 385.

¹²¹ See Chapter III, note 124.

¹²² See Chapter IV, 94.

¹²³ See Chapter I, 39.

the responsibility of all people, “both godly and ungodly,” to pray.¹²⁴ Finney acknowledged this general obligation as well but gave his attention to a different “class of prayers, namely, those which God has solemnly promised to answer”¹²⁵—promises fulfilled on the basis of conditions met. The conditionality of prayer was a linchpin of Finney’s theology that he felt compelled to stress because so many people either overlooked¹²⁶ their existence or failed to meet the conditions of prayer.¹²⁷ Consequently failing to receive answers, they effectively prayed “themselves out of all confidence in prayer.”¹²⁸ He understood the conditions of prayer as compulsory principles functioning within the moral government of God to draw petitioners nearer to Himself: “The great object of God’s administration is to assimilate moral beings to himself; hence he must make his treatment of them depend on their moral course towards him.”¹²⁹ What Finney discovered in Scripture¹³⁰ and observed in his own experience¹³¹ he itemised for his readers, cataloging twenty-two conditions of prevailing prayer in an article that appeared in *The Independent of New York*,¹³² prerequisites that other

¹²⁴ Edwards 2004, “God’s Manner Is First to Prepare Men’s Hearts and Then to Answer Their Prayers,” McMullen (ed.), 90. See also MS Sermon 1143 on Rom 12:12, June 1755, Gen. Mss. 151, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, L.1r., col. 1. See Chapter III, notes 31, 236, 346, 470.

¹²⁵ Finney, “Conditions of Prevailing Prayer” [part 1], *The Oberlin Evangelist* IX, *op. cit.*, 82. “When men pray aright, God will hear and answer; but if they pray as a mere duty, ... they fundamentally mistake the very idea of prayer.” (Finney, “Conditions of Prevailing Prayer” [part 3], *The Oberlin Evangelist* IX, 15, July 21, 1847, 114)

¹²⁶ “Many persons seem to overlook the fact that there are conditions of acceptable prayer revealed in the Bible.” (Finney, “Conditions of Prevailing Prayer” [part 1], *The Oberlin Evangelist* IX, *op. cit.*, 81)

¹²⁷ “Many do not fulfill the conditions so as to offer the prayer acceptably.” (Finney, “Prayer for a Pure Heart”, *The Oberlin Evangelist* XI, *op. cit.*, 42)

¹²⁸ “I have no doubt but it is a common thing for men to pray themselves out of all confidence in prayer, because they fail to fulfil the conditions on which God has promised them.” (Finney, “The Promises of God”, *The Penny Pulpit* [London: J. Paul, c1853], May 17, 1850, 72, The Richard DuPuis Papers, Oberlin College Archive)

¹²⁹ Finney, “On Prayer”, *The Oberlin Evangelist* XVII, *op. cit.*, 1.

¹³⁰ Finney’s touchstone of prayer’s conditionality was “the primitive prayer meeting” before Pentecost where the pattern was set that “if they would not meet the demand made by the condition, obviously the way would not be open for Christ to fulfill his promise.” (Finney, “The Primitive Prayer Meeting”, *The Oberlin Evangelist* XVI, 24, November 22, 1854, 186)

¹³¹ “Another mistake, 2. I fell into, and which I suppose is common among intelligent men, was, that I overlooked the fact that there are certain conditions expressed in the Bible, upon which prayer may be expected to be answered, and that there is a distinction between that which is commonly regarded as prayer, and that which God regards as such.” (Finney, “The Conditions of Prevailing Prayer”, *The Penny Pulpit* [London: J. Paul, c1853], May 21, 1850, 105-06, The Richard DuPuis Papers, Oberlin College Archive)

¹³² Finney lists these, lettering them from a) through v), in “Prevailing Prayer”, *The Independent of New York* XXVI, 1318, March 5, 1874, 2-3.

traits of travailing prayer could not offset.¹³³ For both Edwards and Finney, that God waits for us to meet all His conditions¹³⁴ placed the onus of prayer's effectiveness on the petitioner's will to a degree meriting further analysis.¹³⁵

David Crump has shown how Finney's ideas of the spiritual laws of prayer were elaborated throughout the nineteenth century as a way of countering the encroaching offensive of modern science, revival leaders believing that in this way they "had found firmer ground for defending God in the unassailable fortress of personal experience."¹³⁶ Those I met in the Hebrides, described in this dissertation's opening pages, would have recalled Duncan Campbell still appealing to the dependability of spiritual laws as God's promises to hear and answer travailing prayer:

I believe we have only to regard and observe those laws and limits within which the Holy Ghost acts, and we shall find His glorious power at our disposal. ... Surely that was the conviction that gripped an elder in the Isle of Lewis when, in a situation that was difficult and trying, he cried, "You made a promise, and I want to remind You that we believe that You are a covenant-keeping God. Your honour is at stake." That man was at the end of his tether, that man was in the place of travail.¹³⁷

These examples point to the potential adaptability of the research model of this project to other cases for future study, the Hebridean Revival being an obvious one. cursory observations we have made of various missionaries, such as Adoniram Judson,¹³⁸ John

¹³³ "In practice, the church, to a great extent, have overlooked, or at least has failed to meet these conditions. For example, they often pray for the Holy Spirit, for selfish reasons. ... Yet they come before God and urge their request often and long,—perhaps with great importunity; yet they are selfish in their very prayers, and God cannot hear." (Finney, "On Prayer for the Holy Spirit", *The Oberlin Evangelist* XVII, *op. cit.*, 82)

¹³⁴ "He expects us to be honest and truthful, willing ever to obey him, and ever anxious to meet all the conditions of acceptable prayer. Until this is the case with us, He cannot and will not hear us, however much and long we pray." (Finney, "Conditions of Prevailing Prayer" [part 3], *The Oberlin Evangelist* IX, *op. cit.*, 114)

¹³⁵ Contemporary application of this aspect of extended research would summon critique such as Ken Blue's of the idea that "the right kind of human effort can get God to do almost anything. This is not unlike the Babylonian belief in fertility gods. The Babylonians believed the gods would act if enough of the right offering was made in the proper fashion. Any view of prayer that subordinates the acts of God to the offerings of his creatures, even the offering of 'faith,' is contrary to biblical teaching." (Blue 1987, 47)

¹³⁶ Crump 2006, 286. See Chapter I, 16.

¹³⁷ Campbell 1962, 53-54. See Chapter I, notes 16, 394. Setting the stage for understanding the Hebridean Revival of 1949-52, Colin and Mary Peckham employ this idea of "spiritual principles": "Since the 1820s when Lewis was totally transformed in that mighty movement originating in Uig under Alexander MacLeod, all over Lewis these principles of prayer and of waiting upon God for His blessings are well-established principles." (Peckham 2004, 128)

¹³⁸ See Chapter I, note 157.

Hyde,¹³⁹ and J. O. Fraser,¹⁴⁰ would also invite deeper analysis of how travailing prayer has operated in cross-cultural settings of evangelism and revitalisation. Fraser particularly, influenced by Finney¹⁴¹ and in some ways similar to Brainerd,¹⁴² could be a source of profitable examination.

This might lead to research on travailing prayer as it has operated in settings outside of the West where the Christian movement has seen expansion and renewal throughout different regions of Africa, Latin America, and Asia. For example, David Aikman, in his book *Jesus In Beijing*, has described the strenuous praying of new Christian converts in China like “Xing Liaoyuan, thirty-nine, [who] was converted in 1978 at the age of fourteen and is today one of the top leaders in Tanghe”:

In July 2002 he described the early days of the Tanghe network: “We didn’t have Bibles. The Bibles that did exist were handmade copies, because so many printed copies had been burned by the Red Guards. People with disease came to church and they were healed. You could assume that when people said, “I believe in Jesus!” they suddenly got healed. Some people who were sick said they heard a voice or something, went to church, and were healed. We had dreams, visions, revelations from God. We called this period the “three-shedding period.” We shed blood in persecution, we shed tears in our prayers, and we shed nasal mucus because we wept for such long periods of time.”¹⁴³

Similar dynamics under the threat of persecution could be compared with the experience of travailing prayer among American slaves and more recently by African Americans during the Civil Rights movement.

Edwards and Finney would have been alert to how social strata affected a person’s readiness for travailing prayer. For example, Finney’s *Lectures* included a barbed wish that his Manhattan audience could become as spiritually open and humble as “Christians are in

¹³⁹ *ibid*, notes 158-59

¹⁴⁰ *ibid*, notes 160, 299, 400

¹⁴¹ In his journal, a twenty-year-old Fraser writes: “Tuesday, Jan. 4[, 1916]. Finished Finney’s autobiography; much help received from it. Finney’s strong point is the using of *means* to an *end*. My own leading is not a little along that line also. I do not intend to be one of those who bemoan little results, while ‘resting in the faithfulness of God.’ My cue is to take hold of the faithfulness of God and *use the means* necessary to secure big results.” (Fraser 2004, 4) See Chapter I, note 215

¹⁴² See Chapter I, note 396.

¹⁴³ Aikman 2003, 83. See Chapter I, note 32.

the country.”¹⁴⁴ Obvious potential exists for sociological examination of travailing prayer and its relationship to class distinctions in revival movements, an important stream of analysis acknowledged from the start as being beyond the scope of this project.¹⁴⁵ The same is true of additional study from the perspective of psychology. It could be worthwhile, for example, to evaluate interconnections in human emotion between the doctrine of compunction and the experience of the “anxious bench;” to compare travail for anxiety (“what are we going to do?”) with travail for guilt (“what have we done?”); or to explore how Finney’s all-important concept of the right “feeling”¹⁴⁶ of prayer evolved into his understanding of that word. Lastly, it might be valuable to examine the sustainability of travailing prayer through the lens of psychology. Both Edwards and Finney acknowledged how praying this intensely over time could be detrimental to the petitioner emotionally.¹⁴⁷ Yet they also both elevated Gethsemane as paradigmatic,¹⁴⁸ sometimes appearing to consider this climactic pinnacle to be the entirety of travailing prayer. Edwards’ extreme expectations of prayer’s agonies were tempered by his recognition of human limits and theology of enjoyment. One might also see a measure of moderation in how Finney referred to the rest of “praying through” and the relief found in exchanging prayer’s burden with other yokefellows. But in what manner periods of recovery should punctuate seasons of travail for the Spirit’s outpouring, how the fervour and sacrifice in petition for conversions could be folded into the ongoing disciplines of Christian life in ways that are emotionally maintainable—these are among many questions surfacing from this project that warrant continued study and reflection.

¹⁴⁴ Finney, *Lectures*, 67.

¹⁴⁵ See Chapter I, note 426.

¹⁴⁶ See Chapter IV, notes 139-41.

¹⁴⁷ See Chapter III, notes 172-74; Chapter IV, notes 156, 179-81.

¹⁴⁸ See Chapter III, notes 84, 153, 329; Chapter IV, notes 175, 574.

INTERPRETATION OF HOW EDWARDS AND FINNEY APPLIED TRAVAILING PRAYER AS A PATTERN OF PREPAREDNESS FOR REVIVAL

That one's thinking about prayer should also encompass the supplicant's emotions is one dimension of Edwards' thinking this project has helped to spotlight. He knew nothing of the "right-brain-left-brain" paradigm of our day, eschewing the faculty psychology outlook of his own¹⁴⁹ for a way of considering travailing prayer that was both logical and affective, rational and imaginal. All theology and practice, including that of travailing prayer, if it were true, had a certain aesthetic balance in Edwards' mind. Finney's thinking, by contrast, oriented toward practicality and matter-of-factness, was more inclined toward the dogmatic high ground. "Until [any Christian] understands this agonizing prayer he does not know the real secret of revival power"¹⁵⁰ was a statement typical of his thinking. A manifestation of travailing prayer in his experience or in those he observed might get his attention because it was unusual in some way; then after testing it with Scripture Finney would often argue it should be seen as "usual" and normative for all.¹⁵¹

For both, however, travailing prayer was much more than only something they thought about or promoted. Finney's *Memoirs* provide the type of chronological detail verifying how travailing prayer was an actual experience on the ground among the many townships¹⁵² of Jefferson, Oneida, and Monroe counties, and continuing in New York City, Boston, and throughout his time in Oberlin. These were settings, like Edwards' Connecticut River valley, where both men perceived an intensifying sense of spiritual desperation¹⁵³ producing an honest recognition of need and a "burning platform"¹⁵⁴ of motivation, culminating in the urgent expression of prayer for revival. Having meticulously compared

¹⁴⁹ See Chapter III, note 169.

¹⁵⁰ Finney, "Prevailing Prayer", *The Independent of New York* XXVI, *op. cit.*, 3. See Chapter IV, note 577.

¹⁵¹ See Chapter IV, note 294.

¹⁵² See Chapter IV, note 133.

¹⁵³ See Chapter III, notes 22-36; Chapter IV, notes 52-70.

¹⁵⁴ See Chapter I, note 53.

travailing prayer in the First and Second Great Awakenings as this expression, as action in response¹⁵⁵ to desperation, we are prepared now to garner insights into its pattern as a correlative influence in Christian revival.

As conclusions are drawn from in-depth comparison of Edwards and Finney regarding their theology and practice of travailing prayer as a pattern of preparedness for revival, it seems only prudent once again to acknowledge our limitations, recognising that two episodes do not necessarily a pattern make. But “it is patterns of recurrence that typically interest historians,” Howell and Prevenier point out, “the ways that events seem to repeat themselves, the ways that generalisations become possible. The ‘facts’ in such patterns thus acquire special importance.”¹⁵⁶ And for all the dissimilarities between the First and Second Great Awakenings examined by scores of scholars over time, earnest prayer remains a key feature linking them,¹⁵⁷ the “facts” of which we have been endeavouring to explore.

Travailing Prayer as Preparedness for Revival

That both Edwards and Finney considered travailing prayer crucial to preparedness for revival we can be sure. Research has revealed their conviction that travailing prayer was to them the manner of prayer most effective, the quintessential feeling of the true revival spirit. Why was this? “Why does God require such prayer,” Finney asked, “such strong desires, such agonizing supplications?”¹⁵⁸ Simply put, earnest prayer was, to Edwards, how God chose to work in the world and how He best prepared people to receive what He would bestow. Travailing prayer, penultimate to prevailing prayer for Finney, was to him the most effective means of uniting the faithful, sometimes convincing the heathen, and somehow

¹⁵⁵ See Chapter I, 12-13.

¹⁵⁶ Howell and Prevenier 2001, 84.

¹⁵⁷ Highlighting aspects of revival technique used by Finney, McLoughlin draws comparisons with “the eighteenth century, when revivals had been considered miraculous events” to recognise how “no special measures, except fasting and prayer, were employed to induce them.” (McLoughlin 1959, 92)

¹⁵⁸ Finney, *Lectures*, 65.

actually influencing God. Both men considered earnest prayer the chief antecedent to awakening. For Edwards, this was motivation to seek God fervently for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit whether petitioners ever saw this take place around them or not. Finney likewise urged intercessors to pray for the conversion of specific souls they knew with the assurance they would witness it come to pass if God's conditions were met. And urgent, ardent prayer was a posture of preparedness not only around them but also within them. Both men recognised how the increasing intensity of prayer made people more ready to pray, surfacing spiritual impediments and breeding deeper appreciation for the gift and its Giver when the blessing came. In both dimensions of preparedness, Edwards would have shrunk back from asserting that travailing prayer ever induces revival while Finney would have leaned into the mystery of how God may actually be affected by our agonised requests.

Observing Travailing Prayer's Pattern

Alongside its function in preparedness for revival, it is also possible to draw conclusions with some certainty regarding a pattern of travailing prayer in its content, form, practice, and context, owing in some measure to both Edwards' and Finney's inclination for making such observations themselves. We have seen how some historians look to Edwards as the veritable founder of the "science of revivals,"¹⁵⁹ established as original in his methods of data collection and scholarly observation.¹⁶⁰ Finney, too, asserted unique authority as a seasoned empiricist, having "been in the midst of these revivals for many years; I can speak as a personal witness."¹⁶¹ He claimed, for instance, the capacity to gauge the level of the spirit of prayer in a church by noticing his inspiration during study and monitoring his effect

¹⁵⁹ See Chapter III, notes 54-55.

¹⁶⁰ *ibid*, notes 387-89

¹⁶¹ Finney, *The Prevailing Prayer-Meeting: A Sermon Delivered in Blackfriars' Street Congregational Chapel, Glasgow, on 4th September 1859, op. cit.*, 9.

on hearers in delivery of his sermons,¹⁶² giving special attention to the observation of people's faces¹⁶³ and remembering what he saw with remarkable precision.¹⁶⁴ Though neither Edwards nor Finney formulated an orderly template categorising their myriad observations and persuasions regarding travailing prayer, research using this project's comparative model has surfaced insights into the nature of such a pattern, revealed in similarities and differences between the two and in Finney's expansion upon Edwards.

Corresponding Characteristics of Travailing Prayer

Both men were innately passionate and spiritually experimental. They would not allow the psychological agony, overwhelming exertion, or the sometimes noisy, even bizarre, physical manifestations of travailing prayer to set them back from an openness to the messy work of revival, even against harsh and unrelenting antagonism from their critics. Edwards and Finney knew these risks well, both undertaking to temper and steer the movements they led away from the brinks of enthusiasm or fanaticism. As we have seen, this kind of praying was fraught with peril, abounding with risks of harsh reproach and the possible contagion of pride caught from some whose tears or volume or acerbic tone betrayed the wrong kind of zeal. "A leader has no business to lead prayer meetings," Finney lectured, "if he is not prepared, both in head and heart, to do this."¹⁶⁵ But while travailing prayer for revival was risk-laden and leadership-intensive, both Edwards and Finney exhibited the skillful hands of

¹⁶² "Will you allow me to ask you in all faithfulness, Have you the spirit of prayer for others? As a preacher, I think I can tell when you pray by the light I experience in my own mind when I study my sermons, and by the effect my words produce on the minds of my hearers." (Finney, "On Persevering Prayer for Others", *The Oberlin Evangelist* XVII, 2, January 17, 1855, 10)

¹⁶³ "You go to a prayer meeting, or any other meeting where numbers who have this excitement are assembled, and you will see a dark cloud gathering on the faces of the excited ones. Instead of that open, sweet, calm, meek, but deeply solemn, and humble state of mind which invariably shows itself in the countenance, there is in the eye, and in all the features, a distracted, fanatical, determined look; a self-will, and denunciatory expression, which seems to say, 'Stand by thyself, for I am holier than thou.'" (Finney 1861, 63-64) See also Chapter IV, note 113.

¹⁶⁴ Rosell and Dupuis, editors of Finney's *Memoirs*, noting how "surprisingly accurate" Finney could be in his recollections, comment that "his ability to remember, in minute detail, scenes that had transpired years earlier is due in part to his frequently repeating them in sermons, lectures, and conversation. Constant recall kept them fresh in his memory." (Finney, *Memoirs*, xxvii)

¹⁶⁵ Finney, *Lectures*, 138.

those capable to steward the sense of magnified threat and prolonged disturbance it could produce.

Edwards and Finney were also both gravely concerned that the mysterious energies of travailing prayer not be artificially manufactured, always paying close attention to the danger of self-delusion among petitioners and prescribing self-examination as a remedy. The travailing prayer they observed was almost identical in its bodily expression and audacious language, its likeness to birthmothers in labour, its mix of clergy with laity, and its setting in family, church, and prayer meeting, both men finding their greatest personal abandon in prayer outdoors. Edwards and Finney were both convinced that, while a sinner under conviction might yearn for grace, a degree of pleading more urgent by far was reserved for the converted, especially as intercessors for the conversion of others. For both, travailing prayer's protracted nature served to bring any obstructions to light, to dismantle pride, and to reinforce the supplicant's radical dependence on God alone. They both believed the time for all-out sacrifice in prayer for revival, even to the point of death, was now. Edwards and Finney shared a common expectation of struggle in prayer as the lifeblood of Christian experience.

Differences Between Edwards and Finney Regarding Travailing Prayer

Yet with all these parallels, the contours of travailing prayer as a pattern of preparedness for revival become more apparent as we clarify differences between Edwards and Finney, particularly in their views of how God and humanity are actually in relationship through prayer. The impassible God of Edwards confronted a God of real feelings in Finney, with fervent prayer drawing the line between whether God was projecting a semblance of being affected or was genuinely touched and moved by the human heartcry. The invaluable spirit of prayer was, to Edwards, the sovereign grant of God but could be, for Finney, in some ways ushered in by those hungering for His unction and leadership. Edwards looked for the

general operation of the spirit of prayer as typically the earliest indication that revival was forthcoming. Finney believed the spirit of prayer could empower individuals with a vocational specialty and sometimes trigger the travailing impulse suddenly and unexpectedly. Strenuous petition for revival was more the voice of human inability and dependence *on* God for Edwards and of human capacity and responsibility *before* God to Finney, again revealing the contrast between their views of the finitude of our mortality and the “cannotism” of the “traditions of the elders.” Edwards’ pattern of travailing prayer bore the marks of continuity with his Puritan inheritance while Finney could be more innovative, building on Edwards and reasoning out his praxis from common sense pragmatism. Edwards knew ecstasies of travailing prayer beyond Finney’s agonies, with the intensity of prayer increasing according to the petitioner’s saintliness for Edwards and the petitioner’s valuation of prayer’s object for Finney. Edwards’ pattern of travailing prayer aimed more at the outpouring of the Spirit generally, Finney’s more at conversions locally, the former defined primarily by seeking and the latter by prevailing.

How Finney Built on Edwards

Coming second chronologically, Finney had the advantage of working out his ideas and methods of travailing prayer augmenting what Edwards had previously written and applied, which many in the Second Great Awakening were prone to do, as we have seen. Finney would have considered his recognition of the human role in revival prayer, for example, inclusive of Edwards’s emphasis on divine agency. In his mind, Finney’s localising, particularising impulse in prayer was not to the neglect of Edwards’ broader, universal concern for the Spirit’s outpouring, but rather assumed it and concentrated it. Both promoted travailing prayer as necessary for the conversion of souls, but Finney made this his all-consuming focus. Both called clergy and laity together in prayer, yet Finney allowed laymen, and even laywomen, to lead. Finney was willing to risk more, and he endured fiercer

reproach as a result, in straining the petitioner's physical and psychological limits. Importunity in prayer was fertile common ground between the two, but Finney believed it could eventually yield the respite of "praying through." Finney added to their shared conviction regarding the spirit of prayer an expanded role in enabling specificity and empowering prevalence. He matched Edwards' balance of both concealed and collaborative prayer but crafted new fusions of closet-concerts¹⁶⁶ and hidden partnerships, pointing to collective travailing prayer in action as a demonstration of God's reality. Mutuality in intercession was fed by Finney's idea of sympathy with God, which he illustrated out of his own personal experience more than did Edwards.

Pattern Does Not Equal Formula

Parsing the theology and practice of travailing prayer as we have sheds light on contrasts between Edwards' and Finney's temperament and personal style, their family and educational background, their denominational and spiritual affinities. And it has exposed both men as somewhat enigmatic. Even with all his observations from the Awakening, for example, Edwards remained unmoved in fidelity to God's impassibility, hanging the entire matter on the simple phrase, "as it were."¹⁶⁷ And Finney always seemed to occupy a theological no-man's land in awkward tension with his Presbyterian origins, as his first biographer remarked: "Finney's system preserves all the advantages of Arminianism in the pulpit, and all the strength of Calvinism in the closet."¹⁶⁸ But what this project has not revealed is either of these men stipulating any certain pattern of travailing prayer as a formula for revival success. The model this project has employed has been a tool for comparative analysis, assembling Edwards' and Finney's thoughts—drawn from a remarkably broad array of texts, some rare and newly available—into analogous groupings for scrutiny and

¹⁶⁶ See Chapter IV, note 511.

¹⁶⁷ See note 91.

¹⁶⁸ Wright 1996 [1891], 226. See Chapter IV, note 36.

reflection. But neither of them would have been familiar with it as a prescription or recipe: a model for research, perhaps, but not a model for praying. When Edwards wrote of the “endless variety in the particular manner and circumstances in which persons are wrought on”¹⁶⁹ by God, when Finney affirmed that “these bodily effects are not at all essential to prevailing prayer,”¹⁷⁰ both were admitting that travelling prayer was more than a pattern. What Edwards theorised in his study and sought from his parishioners Finney made programmatic in his revival meetings, forging replicability in the furnace of what worked.¹⁷¹ But our project suggests historians may have been shortsighted in labelling Finney a “mechanizer” of revival because of this, in light of the reliance on the Spirit he advocated¹⁷² and the variability of travelling prayer he witnessed and allowed. And looking through the lens of revival prayer as Edwards organised it in concert with kindred souls throughout New England and across the Atlantic,¹⁷³ we have detected hints of his trajectory toward a more instrumental approach to revival as well. This project has shown spiritual awakening to be less surprising than Edwards seemed to insist it was¹⁷⁴ but less guaranteed than Finney was sometimes willing to admit. Both believed revival was the remedy to all the world’s problems—from drought or slavery to materialism or decline of the church—and they called for a kind of praying that reflected an emotive recognition of these threats, pressed by the

¹⁶⁹ WJE 4:185; see Chapter II, note 90.

¹⁷⁰ Finney, *Lectures*, 67; see Chapter IV, note 304.

¹⁷¹ *ibid*, note 90

¹⁷² “I want you to have high ideas of the Holy Ghost, and to feel that nothing good will be done without his influences. 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.” (Finney, *Lectures*, 102)

¹⁷³ “Evangelicals of the 1740s were eager to prove the existence of good Scriptural and Reformation precedents for the coordination of prayer, and they cited chapter and verse to support their case. But their very strenuousness indicates an awareness that they were open to criticism for innovation. With benefit of hindsight, we can see that they had moved in the direction of a more instrumental approach to revivalism.” (O’Brien 1986, 830) Harry Stout has suggested that it was Whitefield, long before Finney, who introduced revival “engineering”: “In America as in England, ‘revival’ itself took on a new meaning as a staged, translocal event, held outdoors on weekdays in open competition with more secular entertainments and diversions. In the past, revivals were local, mysterious events that occurred once or twice in any generation and that remained within local communities. With the New Birth as his product and the promise of a transatlantic market, Whitefield introduced religion to a dawning consumer age. Wherever he encountered a ‘thriving place for trade,’ he would set up shop and market his revival.” (Stout 1991, 98-99)

¹⁷⁴ See Chapter IV, note 505.

impending judgement of God and the spiritual peril of loved ones all around. Edwards looked for initial signals of this manner of prayer showing itself, like Finney expected the fulfillment of God's conditions for prayer, as indications that revival was at hand. The pattern this project has attempted to anatomise was for them a cohesive quality or tenor of prayer that Edwards could sense and Finney felt when they explained or spotted it. It was what gave them confidence, above all, that they were prepared for revival when it came.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX I

Augustine of Hippo

- 1981 *Concerning The City of God Against the Pagans* [c413-26], Knowles, David (ed.) and Bettenson, Henry (tr.), (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, Ltd.) 1035-37 (emphasis mine).

There are surely only a very few at Carthage who know about the healing of Innocentius, sometime counsellor of the vice-prefecture. But I was present as an eye-witness; for when I came with my brother Alypius from overseas, when we were not yet ordained though already servants of God, Innocentius entertained us, and we were staying in his house at the time. The counsellor was a most devout man, and it was a very religious household. He was under treatment for fistulas, having a number of them intertwined in the rectum, and others more deep-seated. The surgeons had operated on some and were now proceeding with medical treatment; but the patient had suffered long-lasting and acute pain in the operation. Now there still remained one ulcer which had escaped the notice of the medical men, and it was so deeply hidden that they could not get at it, since it would require to be opened up by an incision. ...

To cut a long story short, after a considerable time spent to no effect, the doctors, exhausted and embarrassed, had to admit that no cure was possible without further use of the knife. The patient was aghast; he turned deadly pale, distraught with the extremity of terror. ... The operation was put off until the next day. But when the physicians had departed, the lamentations of the master of the house aroused such grief in the household that it resembled the mourning at a funeral; and we had difficulty in getting it under control.

Now there were some holy men who used to visit the sufferer every day, Saturninus of blessed memory, at that time bishop of Uzalis, Gulosus, a presbyter of the church of Carthage, and the deacons of that church; among those (and the only one of them still on earth) was Aurelius, now a bishop and a man to be mentioned by me with due respect. I have often recalled with him 'the wonderful works of God', and we have often spoken of this event, for I discovered that he had a vivid recollection of what I am now describing. When those holy men were paying Innocentius their customary evening visit on the day in question, he asked them, with piteous tears, to be good enough to come in the morning to be present at his death, instead of at his suffering. For his previous torments had so unnerved him that he felt sure that he was destined to perish under the surgeon's hands. The others tried to reassure him, and urged him to trust in God, and submit to God's will like a man. Then we betook ourselves to prayers; and when we knelt down, in the usual way, and bent towards the ground, **Innocentius hurled himself forward, as if someone had pushed him flat on his face; and he began to pray. It is beyond the power of words to express the manner of his prayer, his passion, his agitation, his flood of tears, his groans, and the sobs which shook his whole frame and almost stifled his breath. Whether the others were praying, whether they could take their attention from him, I could not tell; for my part, I was utterly unable to utter a prayer, all I could do was to say this brief sentence in my heart, 'Lord, what prayers of your people do you hear, if you do not hear these?' For it seemed to me that he could go no further, unless it was to breathe his last in prayer.** We rose from our knees and, after receiving the bishop's blessing, we left, the sick man entreating his visitors to come back in the morning, while they bade him be of good heart. The dreaded morning dawned; the servants of God arrived as they had promised; the surgeons entered. All preparations had been made which that fateful hour demanded; the fearful instruments were produced, while we all sat there in dumbfounded suspense. Those

of the visitors whose authority was greatest tried to raise the patient's drooping spirits with words of encouragement, while his body was being laid in position ready for the work of the surgeon. The bandages were untied; the place was bared. The surgeon examined it, and knife in hand ready for the incision, he searched for the fistula that was to be cut. He inspected it closely; felt it with his fingers; then he examined it in every way—he found it firmly cicatrized. The rejoicing that followed, the thanksgiving to God, the merciful and almighty, which poured from every mouth with tears of happiness—all this I have not the words to express. The scene can be better imagined than described.

APPENDIX II

Edwards, Jonathan

1972 *The Great Awakening*, Goen, C. C. (ed.), *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* 4 (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press), 305-06.

This excerpt is quoted in its entirety by Finney (*Lectures*, 60-63), with these comments preceding and following:

It was one of the great stumbling-blocks in those days, to persons who were opposed to the revival, that people used to pray till the body was overpowered with their feelings. I will read a paragraph of what President Edwards says on the subject, to let you see that this is not a new thing in the church, but has always prevailed wherever revivals prevailed with power. It is from his "Thoughts on Revivals": ...

I have read this to show that this thing was common in the great revivals of those days. It has always been so in all great revivals, and has been more or less common in proportion to the greatness, and extent, and depth of the work. It was so in the great revivals in Scotland, and multitudes used to be overpowered, and some almost died, by the depth of their agony.

There is one particular kind of exercise and concern of mind that many have been empowered by, that has been especially stumbling to some; and that is the deep concern and distress that they have been in for the souls of others. I am sorry that any put us to the trouble of doing that which seems so needless as defending such a thing as this. It seems like mere trifling in so plain a case, to enter into a formal and particular debate, in order to determine whether there be anything in the greatness and importance of the case that will answer, and bear a proportion to the greatness of the concern that some have manifested. Men may be allowed, from no higher a principle than common ingenuity and humanity, to be very deeply concerned, and greatly exercised in mind, at seeing others in great danger, of no greater a calamity than drowning, or being burnt up in a house on fire. And if so, then doubtless it will be allowed to be equally reasonable, if they saw them in danger of a calamity ten times greater, to be still much more concerned; and so much more still, if the calamity were still vastly greater. And why then should it be thought unreasonable, and looked upon with a very suspicious eye, as if it must come from some bad cause, when persons are extremely concerned at seeing others in very great danger of suffering the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God, to all eternity? And besides, it will doubtless be allowed that those that have very great degrees of the Spirit of God, that is a spirit of love, may well be supposed to have vastly more of love and compassion to their fellow creatures, than those that are influenced only by common humanity. Why should it be thought strange that those that are full of the Spirit of Christ, should be proportionably, in their love to souls, like to Christ, who had so strong a love to them, and concern for them, as to be willing to drink the dregs of the cup of God's fury for them. And at the same time that He offered up His blood for souls, [he] offered up also, as their High Priest, "strong crying and tears" [Heb. 5:7], with an extreme agony, wherein the soul of Christ was as it were in travail for the souls of the elect; and therefore in saving them he is said to "see of the travail of His soul" [Isa. 53:11]. As such a spirit of love to, and concern for souls was the spirit of Christ, so it is the spirit of the church; and therefore the church, in desiring and seeking that Christ might be brought forth in the world, and in the souls of men, is represented, Rev. 12:2, as a woman crying, "travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered." The spirit of those that have been in distress for the souls of others, so far as I can discern, seems not to be different from that of the Apostle, who travailed for souls and was ready to wish himself "accursed from Christ" for others [Rom.9:3]. And that of the psalmist, Ps. 119:53, "Horror hath taken hold upon me, because of the wicked that forsake Thy law." And vs. 136, "Rivers of waters run down mine eyes

because they keep not thy law.” And that of the prophet Jeremiah, Jer. 4:19, “My bowels! My bowels! I am pained at my very heart! My heart maketh a noise in me! I cannot hold my peace! Because thou hast heard, O my soul, the sound of the trumpet, the alarm of war!” And so chap 9:1, and 13:17, and 14:17; and Isa. 22:4. We read of Mordecai, when he saw his people in danger of being destroyed with a temporal destruction, Esther 4:1, that he “rent his clothes, and put on sackcloth with ashes, and went out into the midst of the city, and cried with a loud and bitter cry.” And why then should persons be thought to be distracted, when they can’t forbear crying out at the consideration of the misery of those that are going to eternal destruction?

APPENDIX III

Finney, Charles G.

1989 *The Memoirs of Charles G. Finney*, Rosell, Garth M., and Dupuis, Richard A. G. (eds), (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Academie Books of Zondervan Publishing House), 316-18, 333-34.

And here I must introduce the name of a man, whom I shall have occasion to mention frequently, Mr. Abel Clary. ... He had been licensed to preach; but his spirit of prayer was such, he was so burdened with the souls of men, that he was not able to preach much, his whole time and strength being given to prayer. The burden of his soul would frequently be so great that he was unable to stand, and he would writhe and groan in agony in a most wonderful manner. I was well acquainted with him, and knew something of the wonderful spirit of prayer that was upon him. He was a very silent man, as almost all are who have that powerful spirit of prayer. The first I knew of his being at Rochester, a gentleman who lived about a mile west of the city called on me one day, and asked me if I knew a Mr. Abel Clary, a minister. I told him that I did know him well. "Well," said he, "he is at my house, and has been there for so long a time,"—I forget how long, but nearly from the first of my being in Rochester. Says he, "I don't know what to think of him." I said, "I have not seen him at any of our meetings." "No," he replied, "he cannot go to meetings, he says. He prays nearly all the time, day and night," said he, "and in such an agony of mind that I do not know what to make of it. Sometimes he cannot even stand on his knees, but will lie prostrate on the floor and groan; and then throw himself upon the bed and roll from side to side, and groan and pray in a manner that quite astonishes me." I inquired what he said. He replied, "He does not say much. He cannot go to meeting he says; but his whole time is given to prayer." I said to the brother, "I understand it; please keep still. It will all come out right; he will surely prevail." I knew at that time a considerable number of men who were exercised in the same way. A Dea. Pond, of Camden, Oneida county; a Dea. Truman, of Rodman, Jefferson County; a Dea. Baker of Adams in the same county; this Mr. Clary, and many others among the men, and a large number of women, partook of the same Spirit, and spent a great part of their time in prayer. Brother, or as we called him, Father Nash, a minister who in several of my fields of labor came to me and aided me, was another of those men that had such a powerful spirit of prevailing prayer. This Mr. Clary continued in Rochester as long as I did, and did not leave it until after I had left. He never, that I could learn, appeared in public, but gave himself wholly to prayer.

— o —

I have spoken of Rev. Abel Clary as the praying man who was at Rochester. He had a brother, a physician, living in Auburn. I think it was the second Sabbath that I was at Auburn this time that I observed in the congregation the solemn face of this Rev. Abel Clary. He looked as if he was borne down with an agony of prayer. Being well-acquainted with him, and knowing the great gift of God that was upon him, the Spirit of prayer, I was very glad to see him there. He sat in the pew with his brother, the Doctor, who was also a professor of religion, but who knew nothing by experience, I should think of his brother Abel's great power with God. At intermission, as soon as I came down from the pulpit Brother. Clary, with his brother the Doctor, met me at the pulpit stairs, and the Doctor invited me to go home with him and spend the intermission and get some refreshment. I did so. After arriving at his house we were soon summoned to the dinner table. We gathered around the table, and Dr.

Clary turned to his brother and said, "Brother Abel, will you ask a blessing?" Brother Abel bowed his head and began audibly to ask a blessing. But a sentence or two had escaped him when he broke instantly down, moved suddenly back from the table, and fled to his bedchamber. The doctor supposed he had been taken suddenly ill, and rose up and followed him. In a few moments he came down and said, "Mr. Finney, Brother Abel wants to see you." Said I, "What ails him?" Said he, "I do not know; but he says *you* know. He appears in great distress, but I think it is the state of his mind." I understood it in a moment, and got up and went to his room. He was in one of his seasons of travail of soul. He lay groaning upon the bed, and tossing from side to side; the Spirit making intercession for him and in him with groanings that cannot be uttered. That is, his desires were altogether too great to be expressed in words, and his groans could be heard all over the house. I had no more than fairly got into the room when he made out to say, "*Pray*, Brother Finney." I knelt down and helped him in prayer by leading his soul out for conversion of sinners. I continued to pray until his distress passed away, and then I returned to the dinner table. I think that Brother Clary did not make his appearance at the dinner table again, and I do not recollect that I spoke with him again that day. But I understood that this was the voice of God. I saw the Spirit of prayer was upon him, and I felt his influence upon myself, and took it for granted that the work would take on a powerful type. It did so. I believe, but am not quite sure, that every one of those men that signed that paper, making a long list of names, was converted during that revival.

APPENDIX IV

Cymbala, Jim

1997 *Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire: What Happens When God's Spirit Invades the Heart of His People* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House) 63-65.

February came. One cold Tuesday night during the prayer meeting, I talked from Acts 4 about the church boldly calling on God in the face of persecution. We entered into a time of prayer, everyone reaching out to the Lord simultaneously.

An usher handed me a note. A young woman whom I felt to be spiritually sensitive had written: Pastor Cymbala, I feel impressed that we should stop the meeting and all pray for your daughter.

I hesitated. Was it right to change the flow of the service and focus on my personal need?

Yet something in the note seemed to ring true. In a few minutes I picked up a microphone and told the congregation what had just happened. "The truth of the matter," I said, "although I haven't talked much about it, is that my daughter is very far from God these days. She thinks up is down, and down is up; dark is light, and light is dark. But I know God can break through to her, and so I'm going to ask Pastor Boekstaaf to lead us in praying for Chrissy. Let's all join hands across the sanctuary."

As my associate began to lead the people, I stood behind him with my hand on his back. My tear ducts had run dry, but I prayed as best as I knew.

To describe what happened in the next few minutes, I can only employ a metaphor: *The church turned into a labor room*. The sounds of women giving birth are not pleasant, but the results are wonderful. Paul knew this when he wrote, "My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you..." (Gal. 4:19).

There arose a groaning, a sense of desperate determination, as if to say, "Satan, you will *not* have this girl. Take your hands off her—she's coming back!" I was overwhelmed. The force of that vast throng calling on God almost literally knocked me over.

When I got home that night, Carol was waiting up for me. We sat at the kitchen table drinking coffee, and I said, "It's over."

"What's over?" she wondered.

"It's over with Chrissy. You would have had to be in the prayer meeting tonight. I tell you, if there's a God in heaven, this whole nightmare is finally over." I described what had taken place.

Thirty-two hours later, on Thursday morning, as I was shaving, Carol suddenly burst through the door, her eyes wide. "Go downstairs!" she blurted. "Chrissy's here."

"Chrissy's *here*?"

"Yes! Go down!"

"But Carol—I—"

"Just go down," she urged. "It's you she wants to see."

I wiped off the shaving foam and headed down the stairs, my heart pounding. As I came around the corner, I saw my daughter on the kitchen *floor* rocking on her hands and knees, sobbing. Cautiously I spoke her name.

"Chrissy?"

She grabbed my pant leg and began pouring out her anguish. "Daddy—Daddy—I've sinned against God. I've sinned against myself. I've sinned against you and Mommy. Please give me—"

My vision was so clouded by tears as hers. I pulled her up from the floor and held her close as we cried together.

Suddenly she drew back. "Daddy," she said with a start, "*who was praying for me? Who was praying for me?*" Her voice was like that of a cross-examining attorney.

"What do you mean, Chrissy?"

"On Tuesday night, Daddy—who was praying for me?" I didn't say anything, so she continued:

"In the middle of the night, God woke me and showed me I was heading toward this abyss. There was no bottom to it—it scared me to death. I was so frightened. I realized how hard I've been, how wrong, how rebellious.

"But at the same time, it was like God wrapped his arms around me and held me tight. He kept me from sliding any farther as he said, 'I still love you.'

"Daddy, tell me the truth—*who was praying for me Tuesday night?*"

I looked into her bloodshot eyes, and once again I recognized the daughter we had raised.

APPENDIX V: THEOLOGICAL GROUNDWORK

(This expansion of Section IIB was completed in fulfillment of revisions assigned from final examination.)

Critical comparison of Edwards and Finney introduces a measure of theological complexity. At different levels, both found spiritual origins in the Calvinist legacy. Yet they wrote, preached, and prayed from perspectives that were often, though not always, strikingly dissimilar. Plotting these theological coordinates will support interpretation of how Edwards and Finney understood travailing prayer, which is the purpose of this section of Chapter II. Beginning with a brief overview of the approach each man took to the theological task, examination follows of the structure of their thought pertaining to divine/human agency, soteriology, pneumatology (particularly in relation to Edwards' Trinitarianism), eschatology, and their theology of prayer. This section then concludes with critical reflection on Edwards' and Finney's central concerns, offering a view of what could have been the theological core which drove their understanding of travailing prayer.

Edwards and Finney as Theologians

Jonathan Edwards has long been appreciated for his philosophical ruminations and his place in the annals of colonial American literature. He has been studied as a seminal character in early American history and as a revival leader and pastor. Many scholars, however, would agree with Stephen Holmes' assertion that "Edwards' life and writings make sense only when it is realised that the controlling vision was theological, ... that what Edwards had to say was explicitly and irreducibly theological."¹ His was a theology forged in the furnace of challenge, from the rise of deism in late seventeenth and early eighteenth-century England and New England, to the debates with both Arminians and Old School Calvinists emerging from the Awakening, all in the broader intellectual context of the Enlightenment, which Thomas Taylor has pointed out, "would eventually challenge theology

¹ Holmes 2000, 18, 30. See also McClymond 1998, 27-36. "Edwards was a typical New England theologian," Holifield comments, "a Calvinist concerned about piety in a local congregation. Yet no theologian in America would equal him in intellectual depth or enduring influence on generations of successors." (Holifield 2003, 102)

for primacy in New England thought.”² Edwards immersed himself in the thinking of his day, and his theology exhibited what his admirers recognised as genius sufficient to confront and, in some ways, exploit the Enlightenment, inaugurating a distinct Edwardsean theological tradition in America. However, for his detractors, Holifield notes, “he became the source of errors that threatened the integrity of Calvinist orthodoxy.”³

Edwards was fundamentally a Calvinist theologian, but not blindly so. While claiming as his own the heritage of his New England forebears, he did “utterly disclaim a dependence on Calvin, or believing the doctrines which I hold, because he believed and taught them; and [I] cannot justly be charged with believing in everything just as he taught.”⁴ Rather than forwarding his inheritance uncritically, Edwards “chose to broaden, impregnate and sometimes alter his Calvinist theology,”⁵ Conrad Cherry has observed, being willing both to confront established and explore pioneering ranges of Christian thinking. In the preface to a book by his friend and former student, Joseph Bellamy (1719-90), Edwards persuaded against always remaining comfortably settled in familiar theological territory:

They ... who bring any addition of light to this great subject, *The nature of true religion, and its distinction from all counterfeits*, should be accepted as doing the greatest possible service to the Church of God. ... We cannot suppose that the Church of God is already possessed of all that light, in things of this nature, that ever God intends to give it; nor that all Satan’s lurking-places have already been found out.⁶

Though a member of New England’s theological aristocracy, Edwards recast conventional categories⁷ to develop a vision of divine excellency perceived through the “sense of the

² Taylor 1988, 210. How “Edwards knew what to make of the great eighteenth-century Enlightenment,” Jenson theorises in *America’s Theologian: A Recommendation of Jonathan Edwards*, determined largely the ways in which “America and its church are the nation and the church the Enlightenment made.” (Jenson 1988, 3)

³ Holifield 2007, 144.

⁴ WJE 1:131.

⁵ Cherry 1990, 4.

⁶ Bellamy 1804, iv.

⁷ “Edwards agreed with Calvin on the nature and grounds of justification, but added an ontological foundation rooted in dispositions. Like Calvin, Edwards highlighted God’s sovereignty but placed that doctrine within a larger vision of God’s beauty. Like his Puritan predecessors, Edwards departed from Calvin’s amillennialism and developed an elaborate eschatology that was distinctly postmillennial. The Book of Revelation was the only New Testament text on which Calvin did *not* write a commentary, and the only text to which Edwards devoted a full-length exposition.” (McClymond and McDermott 2012, 323-24)

heart,”⁸ innovations which were among ideas that became known as the New Divinity, developed by Edwards’ successors, primarily Bellamy and Samuel Hopkins (1721-1803).⁹

Near the end of the eighteenth century, an ongoing dilemma facing Edwardseanism was how it might be possible to expound a mediating theology which could harness revival energies to the stability and order of Calvinism. Pressure toward reasonableness to counter Unitarianism and Methodism forced the issue of freedom—the extent to which sin was voluntary and thus worthy of blame—into deliberation. The greenhouse of such adaptive thinking was New Haven, Connecticut, where Nathaniel Taylor (1786-1858) was teaching at Yale and attempting a gradual transition into the view that held in tension sin’s certainty with the sinner’s liberty to break from it.¹⁰ “Then in 1825,” Cohen writes, “there suddenly appeared a religious leader who simply refused to be careful. He didn’t ignore Calvinism nor did he try to interpret his way around it. He confronted it with Yankee common sense, decided it didn’t work, and said so in no uncertain terms.”¹¹ Though clearly descended from the New Divinity¹² and influenced by New Haven theology, **Charles Finney** has been found difficult by scholars to categorise theologically,¹³ in part, at least, due to his reluctance to acknowledge his intellectual debts.¹⁴ Nevertheless Finney did more than anyone else to popularise Taylorite views,¹⁵ transforming them through his revivalism “from a minority to a

⁸ See Chapter III, notes 49-52

⁹ See Chapter III, note 454, and Chapter IV, note 33. “In short, New Divinity adherents purposed to retain the spiritual vitality unleashed by the Great Awakening within the structures of Edwardsean thought. They envisioned themselves as the guardians of evangelical Calvinism, the self-appointed heirs of Jonathan Edwards.” (Kling 1993, 24-25)

¹⁰ See Chapter IV, note 35.

¹¹ Cohen 1975, 76.

¹² “[Finney’s] writings are teeming with New Divinity vocabulary, and they demonstrate a substantial debt to earlier thinkers. The major themes in Finney’s theological writings—human volition, conversion, holiness, atonement, God’s moral government, and so forth—are staples of the New Divinity.” (McClymond and McDermott, *op. cit.*, 610)

¹³ See Chapter IV, note 36.

¹⁴ Sweeney 2003, 150. “Finney himself was no more forthcoming in his *Memoirs* about his connections with Taylor than he was about his debts to the New Divinity. (Taylor’s name barely appears in the *Memoirs*...)” (Guelzo 1997, 86) Chesebrough concludes that “though Taylor developed his theology prior to Finney’s conversion, there is no doubt that Finney developed his position without knowledge of Taylor’s work.” (Chesebrough 2002, 69)

¹⁵ Sweeney 2003, 150. See also Johnson 1969, 340-41.

majority religion,” McLoughlin observes. “By mid-century it was in fact the national religion of the United States.”¹⁶

It might be safe to say that Finney came to fame before he came to a theology.¹⁷ By the 1840s, however, with the accumulation of sharpened observation and astute reflection, Finney became a leading voice in a “theological exchange of extraordinary vigor”¹⁸ that engaged a broad field of academics and revivalists, clergy and lay volunteers. Finney’s central theological thesis envisioned a perfected society ordered according to a comprehensive system of moral government.¹⁹ Stability of character was crucial in this system because such a government could only exist, Finney believed, through the obedience of moral agents to moral law. The essential question, then, was how such personal holiness was to be formed and sustained. Was obedience a matter of human ability and will, or was it the work of God’s governing Spirit? Was holiness a decision or a gift?²⁰ Finney rejected a view of the atonement as ransom or deliverance from bondage, passionate to convince his hearers they were not helpless victims of the sins of Adam. Sin was not a misfortune but a crime²¹ against the government of God, for which each individual was personally responsible.²² But in later phases, as will be explained in this chapter, Finney’s theology evolved to comprise divine aid alongside human natural ability in producing and sustaining

¹⁶ McLoughlin 1959, 66. “Though Finney was not a disciple of Taylor, his revivalist emphases on natural ability and immediate repentance served to ingrain the potent dye of Taylor’s theology into the fiber of the evangelical mind.” (Sweeney 2003, 151)

¹⁷ “Not only was his doctrine” during the years of his early evangelistic itinerancy “by no means distinctive or original, but it is fair to question whether he had at the beginning anything whatsoever which deserves the title of a theology.” (Cross 1950, 158) “It would be accurate to say that he really had no theology at first but that the outline of an evolving theology was faintly visible.” (Johnson 1969, 356)

¹⁸ Noll 2002, 263

¹⁹ See Chapter IV, notes 73-75, 81.

²⁰ Reeve 1990, 313.

²¹ See below, note 91.

²² “Finney did not deny that man was a sinner or that there was a certain agency of God connected with conversion. Sin exists, but it consists simply and solely in the overt and voluntary acts of the mind. Man, he taught, has not inherited a corrupt nature, nor is there anything sinful in man’s disposition or constitution, but rather sin is the positive choice of the mind for evil. These views ... were considered by the Calvinists of his day as fundamentally a revival of Pelagianism.” (Thornbury 1977, 161) See also Hardesty 1991, 36.

Christian character.²³ Such was the outworking of continued engagement with the theological flashpoint of his day—divine and human agency—the dilemma which set Finney most at odds with Edwards.

Divine and Human Agency

Though the designation “Calvinist” had, **Edwards** believed, become in his day “among most, a term of greater reproach than the term ‘Arminian’,” yet, he wrote, “I should not take it at all amiss, to be called a Calvinist, for distinction’s sake.”²⁴ Edwards the apologist for Calvinism sought the sharpest possible distinction from the “mood of rising confidence in man’s ability to gain some purchase on the divine favor by human endeavor,” as Goen defined the Arminianism of mid-eighteenth-century New England.²⁵ And at the heart of this great error, Edwards believed, was a misunderstanding of the human will.²⁶ When Arminians referred to the freedom of the human will, Edwards took that to mean “that a man can will as he wills” by perfect chance or contingency, the same as saying that “a thing should be without any cause or reason,” which was impossible.²⁷ “What a contradiction is this,” he wrote, “to say that God knows a thing will come to pass, and yet at the same time knows that it is contingent whether it will or no!”²⁸ Edwards advocated, instead, a dichotomy between “natural ability” and “moral inability,”²⁹ meaning that all people have full natural ability of human agency, even though spiritual depravity has made them morally unable to

²³ “It seems that from his understanding of God’s moral government and the principles of moral law under that government, Finney could only describe sanctification in terms of consecration of the will; but, from the perspective of Christian experience, Finney finds sanctification to include something beyond consecration.” (Gresham 1987, 69-70)

²⁴ WJE 1:131.

²⁵ WJE 4:10.

²⁶ “There is no one thing more fundamental in [Arminians’] schemes of religion: on the determination of this one leading point depends the issue of almost all controversies we have with such divines.” (WJE 3:375) McClymond and McDermott comment that “although Arminianism is usually known for its opposition to classical Calvinism’s notions of predestination, depravity, and limited atonement, Edwards thought the idea of a self-determining will was what tied the whole Arminian system together.” (McClymond and McDermott, *op. cit.*, 340-41)

²⁷ WJE 13:228-29. See McClymond and McDermott, *op. cit.*, 337-38.

²⁸ WJE 13:208.

²⁹ See Chapter III, note 137.

will freely. Here was basis in the New Divinity for allowing sinners to be called to repentance in revival due to natural ability while protecting Calvinist integrity by insisting depravity ensured the inability to repent unaided by divine grace.³⁰

This is how Edwards could see the Awakening as no human project but a “surprising” work of God, “a divine and mysterious plan,” Westra describes it, “administered in God’s own time through human instrumentality, ... the more fully to reveal God’s sovereignty and glory.”³¹ One notices this in reading the *Faithful Narrative*, how Edwards makes skillful use of the passive voice to chronicle the unfolding of events, giving the impression of the revival’s participants being acted upon as much or more as being actors.³² In the events of revival, as with the process of conversion, Edwards wrote, “the Holy Ghost convinces by arguments, he enlightens the reason, and makes use of the gospel.”³³ Edwards’ was a kind of dispositional soteriology involving the impartation by divine agency of a “new principle of action” to human beings *first* by the Spirit.³⁴ “The prime alteration that is made in conversion,” he wrote, “that which is first and foundation of all, is the alteration of the temper and disposition and spirit of the mind.”³⁵ And here is where Edwards drew the line with Arminianism, asserting that conversion originated in this internal shift occurring through *divine agency*, the effectiveness of which was not subject to the acceptance or rejection of *human agency*.³⁶ Conversion unfolded from a grace-induced change of disposition, not the mere persuasion or volition of the will. Otherwise, Edwards explained in *Freedom of the Will*, any real motive for earnest prayer would be quenched:

³⁰ Guelzo 1997, 65-66.

³¹ Westra 1999, 137-38.

³² Taylor 1988, 228-29. Historians have recognised, however, how a turn toward human instrumentality in revival was beginning during the First Great Awakening. See Chapter V, note 173.

³³ WJE 14:393. Edwards understood both God and human persons to be active in this process: “We are not merely passive in it, nor yet does God do some and we do the rest, but God does all and we do all.” (WJE 21:251)

³⁴ WJE 21:40.

³⁵ WJE 13:462.

³⁶ WJE 21:41.

This notion of self-determination and self-dependence, tends to prevent, or enervate, all prayer to God for converting grace; for why should men earnestly cry to God for his grace, to determine their hearts to that, which they must be determined to of themselves. And indeed it destroys the very notion of conversion itself. There can properly be no such thing, or anything akin to what the Scripture speaks of conversion, renovation of the heart, regeneration, etc. if growing good, by a number of self-determined acts, are all that is required, or to be expected.³⁷

Disdain and refutation of such ideas expounded in “that injurious monstrosity and misnomer, ‘Edwards on the Freedom of the Will,’”³⁸ poured from **Finney’s** pen and pulpit:³⁹

Every one knows with intuitive certainty that he has no ability to do what he is unable to *will* to do. ... If there is no ability to will, there is, and can be no ability to do; therefore ... the Edwardean natural ability is no ability at all, and nothing but an *empty name*, a *metaphysico-theological FICTION*.⁴⁰

Finney believed that an imputed righteousness induced antinomianism and presumption.⁴¹ And he credited Edwards’ doctrine of inability⁴² with encouraging passivity⁴³ and making earnest prayer for sinners an “insult to God, charging him with infinite injustice, if he continues to exact from sinners a duty which they are unable to perform without that aid which he will not grant.”⁴⁴ Early on, Finney, like Taylor, echoed Edwardsean themes in his theology,⁴⁵ but with time he became more overt in repudiating the principle of moral inability apart from grace,⁴⁶ perceiving conversion as the result of a person’s innate voluntary powers.⁴⁷ “Edwards I revere,” Finney decided; “his blunders I deplore.”⁴⁸

The first two of Finney’s *Sermons on Important Subjects* (1836) were “Sinners Bound to Change Their Own Hearts” and “How To Change Your Heart,”⁴⁹ elaborating the “natural adaptation in the truth,” his first biographer explained, “to persuade the soul into changing its

³⁷ WJE 1:470.

³⁸ Finney 1847, 30.

³⁹ See Chapter IV, notes 40, 222.

⁴⁰ *ibid*, 14

⁴¹ Guelzo 1997, 79.

⁴² See Chapter III, note 112, and Chapter IV, notes 118, 220.

⁴³ See below, notes 79-80. “I am persuaded there never would have been such multitudes of tedious convictions, and often ending in nothing after all, if it had not been for those theological perversions which have filled the world with *cannot-ism*.” (Finney, *Lectures*, 379)

⁴⁴ Finney, *Lectures*, 317.

⁴⁵ Guelzo 1996, 163-66.

⁴⁶ McClymond and McDermott, *op. cit.*, 624, 685-86.

⁴⁷ See Chapter IV, note 218.

⁴⁸ Finney 1847, 27. “I speak thus of this Treatise on the Will. ... It has bewildered the head, and greatly embarrassed the heart and actions of the church of God. It is time, high time that its errors be exposed.” (*ibid*)

⁴⁹ Finney 1836, 3-28, 29-56.

ultimate choice—that is, to make for itself a new heart.” In revival meetings, Wright continued, Finney would throw “upon the soul the responsibility of immediately accepting or rejecting the truth as then apprehended.”⁵⁰ Here we have two hallmarks of Finney’s application of human agency: decisionism and immediatism. Another eyewitness recalled how Finney characteristically summoned hearers to a well-defined decision in his preaching:

“‘Behold, I set before you life and death; therefore choose life.’ You *can* choose life, or God would not have commanded it; you must choose life, or perish forever. Or he would say, ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.’ You can believe, or the command is unjust; you must believe, or be lost.”⁵¹

Finney stressed choice as the individual’s own act which no one else, not even God Himself, could perform; correspondingly, unbelief was also a voluntary act and sin.⁵² And this choice was a verdict to be reached now: “Where the truth is made perfectly clear to the sinner’s mind,” Finney lectured, “and all his errors are torn away, if he does not soon submit, his case is hopeless.” After actually speaking these words, Finney then turned from his outline to the audience: “If there be sinners in this house, and you see your duty clearly, TAKE CARE how you delay.”⁵³ His high view of human agency left Finney open to accusations of anthropocentrism in his theology which he rebutted by employing, as did Edwards at times,⁵⁴ a kind of double vocabulary that held divine and human agency in combination.⁵⁵ “There are *always two* agents, God and the sinner, employed and active in every case of genuine conversion,” Finney taught. The sinner “is influenced to this by the agency of God, and by the agency of men.”⁵⁶ Such an amalgam, and the role of the Spirit’s direct operation

⁵⁰ Wright 1996 [1891], 166-67.

⁵¹ [] 1876, *Reminiscences of Rev. Charles G. Finney*..., 21. (Dt 30:19; Acts 16:31 [KJV])

⁵² Finney insisted that “Adam’s sin merely aggravated our temptations but did not give us a sinful nature. There could be no sin apart from transgression, and no person could be sinful until he exercised his powers of moral agency.” (Johnson 1969, 355)

⁵³ Finney, *Lectures*, 378-79.

⁵⁴ See above, note 33.

⁵⁵ See above, notes 95-97; Chapter IV, note 42.

⁵⁶ Finney, *Lectures*, 17-18. See Chapter IV, note 219.

in making the truth persuasive, was worked out chiefly in the urgency with which Finney insisted upon prayer as essential to success in his revival efforts.⁵⁷

Soteriology

In-depth analysis of the conversion experience as just described had been a longstanding concern of the Puritanism **Edwards** inherited. Converts were almost “pre-sanctified”⁵⁸ under the expectations Puritans loaded into initial steps of belief, which they believed could be traced through a measurable sequence of self-discoveries and sensations distilled from observation⁵⁹ over time. The classic “morphology of conversion”⁶⁰ of Puritan orthodoxy comprised a downward movement of understanding God’s judgement and human damnation followed by an upward movement of understanding God’s grace and human hope and assurance,⁶¹ forming a linear, affective paradigm of characteristic emotions.⁶² In the trough of this deep arc of “preparationism”⁶³ was a step of emotional harrowing when incipient saints moved from sorrow over sin to intense hatred of it and the despair of perceiving one’s unqualified incapacity to achieve salvation.⁶⁴ Here is where, as sinners gave

⁵⁷ Wright notes how it always “seemed extremely important to [Finney] that we maintain correct views upon this point [of the importance of prayer], because thus only is the Holy Spirit duly honored without disparaging the truth and the other agencies effective in converting the world.” (Wright 1996 [1891], 166-67)

⁵⁸ Lovelace 2004, 301.

⁵⁹ “The pattern was repeated in hundreds of other [cases]. The marks of faith in a Puritan were painful to behold and sometimes deceptive, but they ran so much according to form, and ministers became so accustomed to advising men about them, that Calvin’s injunction against seeking to discover a particular man’s condition seemed to be overstated.” (Morgan 1963, 72)

⁶⁰ Talbot defines the morphology as “a step-by-step analysis of what sinners would normally experience up to and through the moment when God regenerated their hearts.” (Talbot 2004, 224) Although some template of the *ordo salutis* was a standard component of Protestant theological treatises, Campbell notes, the Puritans “are distinguished both by the stress they laid on it as lying at the center of the theological enterprise, and more particularly by their concern with the question of how a woman or man could *know* they were elect to eternal life.” (Campbell 1991, 47) See also WJE 4:25-32.

⁶¹ Taves 1999, 22.

⁶² Caldwell 1983, 164. Morgan summarises stages of the morphology as “knowledge, conviction, faith, combat, and true, imperfect assurance.” (Morgan 1963, 72)

⁶³ See Chapter I, note 29.

⁶⁴ Cohen 1986, 76. “While the details of the morphology varied from one Puritan teacher to another, the unquestioned assumption was that the sinner would only receive grace after becoming aware of his or her spiritual impotence and utter helplessness before God.” (McClymond 1998, 40) Tracy highlights how this “work of humiliation was the central tenet of Stoddard’s doctrine of conversion. ... The point Stoddard was making ... was that men should try their best to save themselves, because *only by having done so would they*

voice to their agonised strivings, prayer took on the earnestness and urgency of travail that Edwards believed only increased after conversion in intercession for others.⁶⁵

It was significant, however, that Edwards' own conversion experience did not follow the well-worn orthodox Puritan pathway.⁶⁶ Eventually he stopped attempting to fit experience to doctrine and instead altered his soteriology, concluding "there is an endless variety in the particular manner and circumstances in which persons are wrought on. ... 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."⁶⁷ Edwards "repudiated the old morphology," McClymond explains, "by making the *nature* of one's spiritual experiences rather than their *order* the discriminating factor in determining whether or not they were gracious."⁶⁸ And the nature of Edwards' conversion had been more one of joy⁶⁹ than terror,⁷⁰ a "sense of the heart"⁷¹ exceedingly different from any natural sensation, more of an emotional apprehension and felt perception of beauty.⁷² Such relish for divine things, and the spring of diffusive love for others that resulted, was a catalyst of the spirit of prayer Edwards considered so vital to revival.⁷³

really understand that it wasn't sufficient. Any man who didn't try his utmost could always tell himself that a better effort on his part would have conquered his innate sinfulness." (Tracy 1980, 33-34)

⁶⁵ See Chapter III, notes 130-31, 231-32.

⁶⁶ As a twenty-year-old, Edwards worried about this: "The chief thing that now makes me in any measure to question my good estate is my not having experienced conversion in those particular steps wherein the people of New England and anciently the Dissenters of Old England used to experience it." (Dwight 1830, 93; WJE 10:269-70; Laurence 1979, 268, note 3)

⁶⁷ WJE 4:185. See Nichols 2001, 97-98.

⁶⁸ McClymond 1998, 42. Edwards wrote in *Religious Affections*: "As a seeming to have this distinctness as to steps and method, is no certain sign that a person is converted; so a being without it, is no evidence that a person is not converted. ... Nothing proves it to be necessary, that all those things which are implied or presupposed in an act of faith in Christ must be plainly and distinctly wrought in the soul, in so many successive and separate works of the Spirit that shall be, each one, plain and manifest, in all who are truly converted." (WJE 4:160-61) See also Heimert 1966, 38-39; Holifield 2003, 119.

⁶⁹ See Chapter III, notes 47, 536.

⁷⁰ See *ibid*, note 177, regarding the significance of Edwards' departure from the terror preaching he had adopted from Stoddard.

⁷¹ See above, note 8; Chapter III, notes 47-52.

⁷² For Edwards, conversion consisted "in a new and unwonted inner harmony achieved through the feeling discovery of a 'divine excellency' wholly different from anything perceivable by the eye of mere reason." (Heimert, *op. cit.*, 41-42) See also Miller 1959, 139.

⁷³ Edwards, like most Puritan preachers, considered the creation of a spirit of prayer "to be the major spiritual accomplishment of the conversion process." (Hambrick-Stowe 1982, 178)

Though **Charles Finney** could cite Edwards liberally as vindication of his revival measures,⁷⁴ in soteriology he undertook to differentiate himself as sharply as possible from those “traditions of the elders”⁷⁵ that assumed “sinners must have a season of protracted conviction, and that those conversions that were sudden were of a suspicious character.”⁷⁶ Finney contended against what he believed were Old School Calvinism’s⁷⁷ absurd distortions of “the sovereignty of God, inability, physical regeneration, and constitutional depravity”⁷⁸ which lulled people into inaction through a doctrine of “cannotism,”⁷⁹ the idea of humanity’s incapacity to do good without gracious assistance.⁸⁰ Many people had been stranded in a “state of ‘betweenity’”⁸¹ by these old errors, Finney protested, “halting and doubting whether they should reject them or not.”⁸² Such strain was at the heart of controversy⁸³ that followed Finney throughout his ministry, the primary demarcation⁸⁴ between Edwards and Finney historians have continued to examine.⁸⁵

⁷⁴ See Chapter IV, note 7.

⁷⁵ *ibid*, notes 220-23

⁷⁶ Finney 1836, 38. “Formerly it had been supposed necessary that a sinner would remain under conviction for a long time... We taught the opposite of this.” (Finney, *Memoirs*, 191)

⁷⁷ Finney had determined that “ministers and Christians who had adopted the literal interpretation of the Presbyterian Confession of faith, had found it very difficult to deal with inquiring sinners.” (Finney, *Memoirs*, 190)

⁷⁸ *ibid*, 40-41

⁷⁹ See Chapter IV, note 40.

⁸⁰ “This is the legitimate tendency of cannotism, if they believe it, they certainly will not repent; and how can revivals prevail, how can the world be converted while so many are vehemently contending for these traditions of the elders.” (Finney 1836, 81)

⁸¹ *ibid*, 80. “There is such a sticklishness on the part of many, for these crippling errors; such a constant effort to maintain these traditions of the elders, as to paralyze the influence of a great portion of the church.” (*ibid*)

⁸² *ibid*

⁸³ Describing the firestorm of controversy surrounding Finney’s revival measures, Murray summarises: “At the heart of the matter lay a different doctrine of conversion.” (Murray 1996, 244)

⁸⁴ Thomas Kidd points to this polarity as delineating the “cusp of change between a Christian orthodoxy that emphasized the unpredictability of God’s ‘providences,’ and a newer evangelical emphasis on the efficacy of human action to bring a divine response.” (Kidd 2004, 28)

⁸⁵ “Historians have been at odds for over a century concerning the degree of Finney’s departure from the theology of Edwards and its significance to the evolving tradition of evangelical revivalism. The principal point of disagreement appears almost invariably to have centered upon the issue of Finney’s doctrine of conversion, the key question being whether he perceived salvation to be the work of self-sufficient man or Calvin’s ‘sovereign God.’ From the very beginning, the character of the historical examinations of Finney’s life and ministry have been markedly influenced by the polarities imposed by this particular controversy.” (Mattson 1970, 1)

The clearest statement Finney made of his soteriology came in his sermon, “Sinners Bound to Change Their Own Hearts,”⁸⁶ which he adapted *in toto* to become Lecture XII of his *Lectures on Revivals*. Here Finney explained how it would be possible for a person, in their “zeal to recognize and honor God as concerned in this work” of conversion, to leave out the fact

that a change of heart is the sinner’s *own act*, [leaving] the sinner strongly intrenched, with his weapons in his rebellious hands, stoutly resisting the claims of his Maker, and waiting passively for God to make him a new heart. ... God commands you to do it, expects you to do it, and if it ever is done, you must do it.⁸⁷

“Whereas Jonathan Edwards had opened up religion to all who would love,” Leonard Sweet observed, “Finney opened it up to all who would act. Finney talked more in terms of a conversion decision than a conversion experience.”⁸⁸ And this decision, resting on an act of the will,⁸⁹ had to be pressed through preaching⁹⁰ that convinced the sinner his condition was not unfortunate but criminal⁹¹ and required action now.⁹² Yet Finney’s experience had also taught him that, in the end, “no human persuasion, no motive that man or angel can get home upon his mind, will cause [a sinner] to turn; therefore the Spirit of God must interpose to shake his preference, and turn him back from hell.”⁹³ And it was this convicting, convincing

⁸⁶ Finney 1836, 29-56.

⁸⁷ Finney, *Lectures*, 197.

⁸⁸ Sweet 1976, 215.

⁸⁹ “Under the leadership of Charles Finney, revival effected a significantly different form of religious consciousness from that evoked by Edwards’ preaching. For Finney conversion represents the resolution of a crisis of will.” (Weddle 1977, 426-28)

⁹⁰ “A prime object with the preacher must be to make *present obligation* felt. I have talked, I suppose, with many thousands of anxious sinners. And I have found that they had *never before felt* the pressure of present obligation. The impression is not commonly made by ministers in their preaching that sinners are expected to repent NOW.” (Finney, *Lectures*, 206)

⁹¹ “Rather than pity sinful man then, the lawyer-evangelist instead declared all disobedience to be not a tragedy, but an outright crime.” (Mattson, *op. cit.*, 225) Finney’s terms here were in keeping with the governmental theory of atonement he favoured, countering the substitutionary theory in “hyper-Calvinism” he had rejected during his earliest days of being tutored by George Gale. (Noll 1992, 177; Opie 1963, 370; Wright 1996 [1891], 20-21)

⁹² Describing the revival at Utica in early 1826, “We told them the Spirit was striving with them to induce them *now* to give him their hearts, *now* to believe, and to enter *at once* upon a life of submission and devotion to Christ... We insisted then, as I have ever done since, on immediate conversion as the only thing that God could accept at their hands; and that all delay, under any pretext whatever, was rebellion against God. ... Among those sudden conversions were some of the most powerful Christians that ever have been known in that region of country; and this has been in accordance with my own experience through all my ministry.” (Finney, *Memoirs*, 191) See Chapter IV, notes 143-48.

⁹³ Finney 1835b, 18-19.

work of the Holy Spirit that constituted the essential focus of travailing prayer.⁹⁴ In practice, Finney, like Edwards,⁹⁵ roused intercessors in the context of this paradox, sometimes advocating for human agency to the point where he could say that “if Jesus Christ were to come and preach, and the church contradict it, he would fail,”⁹⁶ and other times promoting divine agency to the point that “if Jesus Christ were to come down here and preach to sinners, not one would be converted without the Spirit.”⁹⁷

Pneumatology and Edwards’ Trinitarianism

“Not one would be converted without the Spirit” is a phrase either Edwards or Finney could have spoken, but with different meanings and theological understandings. And for **Edwards**, it would have been an outgrowth of the profound and far-reaching trinitarian theology that provided essential architecture for his doctrine of God.⁹⁸ Perhaps the most salient passage revealing the significance of the Trinity to Edwards’ thought is a short resolution he outlined for a proposed treatise entitled “A Rational Account of the Main Doctrines of the Christian Religion”:

To explain the doctrine of the Trinity before I begin to treat of the work of redemption; and of their equality, their equal honor in their manner of subsisting and acting, and virtue. But to speak of their equal honor in their concern in the affair of redemption afterwards, after I have done with all the doctrines relating to man’s redemption.⁹⁹

The supremacy Edwards assigned here to the doctrine of the Trinity is striking: “not only does [it] precede all discussion of the work of redemption,” Danaher notes, “but all reflection on the work of redemption culminates in a reconsideration of the Trinity.”¹⁰⁰ Amy Plantinga

⁹⁴ See Chapter IV, 266-67.

⁹⁵ “Jonathan Edwards and Charles Finney assume that the Holy Spirit works in and through natural factors, and hence that it is appropriate to describe a given revival in terms of both divine and human aspects.” (McClymond 2004, 45-46)

⁹⁶ Finney, *Lectures*, 153.

⁹⁷ *ibid*, 102

⁹⁸ “God had appeared glorious to me, on account of the Trinity. It has made me have exalting thoughts of God that he subsists in three persons; Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.” (WJE 16:800) McClymond and McDermott observe that “Edwards usually started his doctrine of God with the divine Three rather than the divine essence.” (McClymond and McDermott, *op. cit.*, 198)

⁹⁹ WJE 6:396.

¹⁰⁰ Danaher 2004, 5.

Pauw concurs that Edwards “simply proceeded on the assumption that the Trinity is in fact at the center of Christian faith.”¹⁰¹ It was, for him, the “supreme harmony of all.”¹⁰²

A starting point theologically for Edwards was the essential nature of God as a “communicative being,”¹⁰³ “having from eternity from his infinite goodness designed to communicate himself to creatures.”¹⁰⁴ Deductions from this divine communication, chiefly from biblical revelation, required little more than “naked reason” to discover the divine trinity.¹⁰⁵ Edwards boldly affirmed “plurality in God,”¹⁰⁶ that the Godhead is not three variant forms of one divine Person but three Persons in community and perfect co-equality.¹⁰⁷ It seemed reasonable to Edwards that all knowledge, even God’s knowledge, was “by idea,” and that God must have an “idea of Himself” or else lack self-awareness.¹⁰⁸ But God’s ideas were perfect, and “an absolutely perfect idea of a thing is the very thing,” for it lacked nothing that was in the thing.¹⁰⁹ Thus God’s idea of Himself was God, the Son, the “substantial image of God” produced in divine self-reflection.¹¹⁰ “And because the Father and the Son necessarily delighted in one another,” Holifield explains, “the begetting of the Son issued in a perfect act of mutual love—or Spirit—which was distinct from both the Father and the Son.”¹¹¹ This was the logic of what has been viewed as the “psychological model” of the Trinity, which Edwards employed alongside the “social model” that emphasised relationality within God by representing the Godhead as a society or family of

¹⁰¹ Pauw 2002, 8. “In his trinitarian thought the various facets of [Edwards’] life and genius—his philosophical explorations, his vital interest in discerning true religious affections, his critical appropriation of the Reformed tradition, and the affective, mystical element of his faith—moved toward harmonious resolution.” (*ibid*, 3)

¹⁰² WJE 13:329.

¹⁰³ WJE 13:410. See Chapter III, note 217; Daniel 1999, 56-57; Studebaker 2005, 327

¹⁰⁴ WJE 18:389.

¹⁰⁵ “I think that it is within the reach of naked reason to perceive certainly that there are three distinct in God, of which is the same [God].” (WJE 13:257) See Holifield 2003, 113.

¹⁰⁶ WJE 13:284. See Pauw, *op. cit.*, 58.

¹⁰⁷ The three Persons of the Trinity, Edwards believed, “are all the same God, and it is impossible there should be any {inferiority}. They are all the same substance, the same divine essence; and therefore whatsoever perfection, dignity or excellency belongs to the divine essence, belongs to every one of them.” (WJE 14:379)

¹⁰⁸ WJE 13:257.

¹⁰⁹ WJE 13:258.

¹¹⁰ *ibid*

¹¹¹ Holifield 2003, 113; 2007, 148-49.

persons.¹¹² Defending the doctrine of the Trinity as reasonable against incipient deism¹¹³ and suspicions about Arminianism,¹¹⁴ Edwards sought to cast his Puritan theological heritage forward¹¹⁵ believing that now, revival was bringing glory in abundance to all three Persons in the Trinity, for “all is *of* the Father, all *through* the Son, and all *in* the Holy Ghost.”¹¹⁶

Edwards also adapted the Reformed tradition in his emphasis on the Holy Spirit,¹¹⁷ believing his Puritan predecessors had narrowed the Spirit’s role in redemption by limiting it to the appropriation of the work of the Father and the Son.¹¹⁸ But in fact, Edwards claimed, the Holy Spirit had “superiority” among the Three, as the “principle that as it were reigns over the Godhead and governs his heart, and wholly influences both the Father and the Son in all they do.”¹¹⁹ He viewed the presence and work of the Holy Spirit as equivalent in value to the death of Jesus Christ, whose principal role in the history of redemption had been to purchase our communion with God, which is the Holy Spirit. “Christ has brought it to pass,” Edwards wrote,

that those that the Father has given him should be brought into the household of God, that he and his Father and they should be as it were one society, one family; that his people should be in a sort admitted into that society of the three persons in the Godhead.¹²⁰

¹¹² “Edwards used both the psychological and social analogies in a synthetic way” (McClymond and McDermott, *op. cit.*, 198), “alternat[ing] or modulat[ing] between them depending on the immediate theological and cultural context of his writing, but never repudiated either one” (Pauw, *op. cit.*, 11). Studebaker challenges this scholarly consensus, arguing that “Edwards did not employ two models of the trinity, but one—the Augustinian mutual love model.” (Studebaker 2003, 268)

¹¹³ “The deists simply rejected the doctrine of the trinity as irrational. Thinkers such as [Samuel] Clarke [1675-1729] and the deists shared the view that the unity of God precluded the traditional doctrine of the trinity.” (Studebaker 2003, 283)

¹¹⁴ “Arminian tendencies in New England, at least among the seekers of a more ‘reasonable’ faith, proved to be harbingers of antitrinitarianism.” (Pauw, *op. cit.*, 25)

¹¹⁵ “Edwards was a New England Puritan, keenly aware of those theological roots while seeking to move beyond them by contextualizing the gospel in light of the newly dawned age of Reason. ... Though Edwards always sought to think under the final authority of Scripture, he undoubtedly shows a commitment to the use of reason in ways that led him to be unafraid to make exploratory journeys beyond what had been said in the Tradition, especially with regard to the doctrines of the Trinity, Christology, and pneumatology.” (Hastings 2015, 9)

¹¹⁶ WJE17:212. See Beck 2010, 167.

¹¹⁷ See Chapter V, note 55.

¹¹⁸ McClymond and McDermott, *op. cit.*, 200.

¹¹⁹ WJE 21:147.

¹²⁰ WJE 18:110. Caldwell summarises Edwards’ wider theological vision “anchored in the bedrock of a trinitarian theology that prominently featured the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. ... Edwards conceived of the Holy Spirit as the personal divine love of the Godhead, a love which binds the Father and Son together in a union of infinite affection and which can be communicated to the hearts of created beings in such a way that they too can be united to God and participate in this divine affection.” (Caldwell 2006, 3)

And our participation in this fellowship of the Trinity is by the Spirit, indwelling the elect, who is the bond “of all holy union between the Father and the Son, and between God and the creature, and between the creatures among themselves.”¹²¹ As “the act of God between the Father and the Son infinitely loving” each other,¹²² the Holy Spirit operates within believers as a “sweet energy”¹²³ infusing this love as “a principle of spiritual life into them”¹²⁴ to sanctify¹²⁵ and beautify¹²⁶ human experience with “true holiness and happiness.”¹²⁷ Prayer is the instinctual response to this indwelling,¹²⁸ as the Holy Spirit, operating “in a remarkable manner as a spirit of prayer,”¹²⁹ draws the petitioner into earnest depths of sharing in divine fellowship and intercessory concern.¹³⁰ As the Spirit is the wellspring of prayer for the Christian, so too is He the greatest “blessing that can be asked”¹³¹ in their praying.¹³² For Edwards, then, the Holy Spirit was the start and finish of prayer, the nexus of communion within the Godhead, and the agent of the saints’ union with God: one might be tempted to agree with Hastings that “in effect, Edwards’ theology is a pneumatology.”¹³³

¹²¹ WJE 21:186. “‘Tis in our partaking of the Holy Ghost that we have communion with the Father and Son and with Christians: this is the common excellency and delight in which they all [are] united.” (WJE 13:448)

Hastings calls Edwards “a theologian of participation par excellence.” (Hastings 2015, 3)

¹²² WJE 13:260.

¹²³ *ibid*

¹²⁴ WJE 17:127. “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.” (WJE 21:194)

¹²⁵ “The saint always has the Spirit of God dwelling in his heart to sanctify him.” (Edwards 2003, “The Way to Obtain the Blessing of God Is Not to Let Him Go Except He Bless Us,” McMullen [ed.], 112) See Wilson-Kastner 1978, 44.

¹²⁶ “True, spiritual original beauty” existed, Edwards wrote, “in a mutual propensity and affection of heart,” (WJE 8:564) made possible among the saints by the Spirit. “The Holy Spirit is the harmony and excellency and beauty of the Deity, as we have shown; therefore ’twas his work to communicate beauty and harmony to the world.” (WJE 13:384) Patrick Sherry comments how Edwards “is rare among Christian theologians in giving the concept of divine beauty and glory a leading role in his work.” (Sherry 2002, 61) See Chapter III, note 293.

¹²⁷ WJE 22:214.

¹²⁸ See Chapter III, note 393.

¹²⁹ See Chapter III, note 32; also notes 391-93, 577.

¹³⁰ See Chapter III, note 547, 550.

¹³¹ WJE 22:214. See Chapter III, note 566; Chapter V, notes 57-60.

¹³² Caldwell 2006, 160. See Chapter III, notes 559-69, 576-79.

¹³³ Hastings 2015, 4. “Edwards developed an understanding of the Holy Spirit that was an expression of his personal experience, a response to the religious revivals of his day, and an original contribution to Christian theological reflection.” (McClymond and McDermott, *op. cit.*, 262) See Chapter III, note 564; Chapter V, note 54.

Finney could sometimes preach and write in a manner, using phrases like “the gift of the Holy Ghost comprehends all we need spiritually,” that reverberated with Edwardsean language and themes.¹³⁴ But Finney’s pneumatology was markedly dissimilar in crucial ways, not the least of which was its nonattachment to any developed trinitarian structure. He lambasted the notion of conversion as a constitutional or dispositional change effected by the Spirit, assuring his listeners there was nothing essentially wrong with their mind and the heart to begin with. Consequently, there was no need for supernatural impartation of a new, “vital principle” of spiritual life which, Finney argued, only disregarded human freedom and the sinners’ responsibility to change their own hearts. He acknowledged, however, that this change did involve the influences of the Spirit through the preached Word.¹³⁵ In his *Memoirs* Finney recounted how, at Evans Mills, his message “did go home by the power of the Holy Ghost. The sword of the Lord slew them on the right hand and on the left.”¹³⁶ And in Stephentown, “at first the people chafed a little under the preaching but with such power was it set home by the Holy Spirit that I soon heard no more complaint.”¹³⁷ A starting point, then, in Finney’s pneumatology was the work of the Spirit as a Persuader, convincing and motivating persons to make the right choices. “The Spirit of God, by the truth, influences the sinner to change,” he preached. “But the sinner actually changes, and is therefore himself, in the most proper sense, the author of the change.”¹³⁸

However, as Finney increasingly confronted the disappointment of attrition from the ranks of his revival converts, his attention gradually turned more to the problem of Christian stability. He had become convinced, he wrote in *The Oberlin Evangelist*, “that converts would die” and that

¹³⁴ See Chapter V, note 57.

¹³⁵ See above, note 93.

¹³⁶ Finney, *Memoirs*, 75.

¹³⁷ *ibid*, 239

¹³⁸ Finney 1836, 22.

revivals would become more and more superficial, and finally cease, unless something effectual was done to elevate the standard of holiness in the church. ... I have felt as strongly and unequivocally pressed by the Spirit of God, to labor for the sanctification of the Church, as I once did for the conversion of sinners.¹³⁹

With this turn, Finney's pneumatology added to persuasion the Spirit's work of empowerment, as he progressively took up the language of Pentecost to more specifically illustrate the Spirit's role in preserving holiness and enabling the ongoing effectiveness of revivals. What all people "need and must have, before they will have power with God or man, is the baptism of the Holy Ghost," he wrote, which was "to be endued with power from on high."¹⁴⁰ Finney's personal experience of the Spirit in conversion¹⁴¹ and in subsequent "enlargements"¹⁴² profoundly influenced his theology from the beginning so that his doctrine of baptism of the Holy Spirit "was the fruit of a gradual development," Gresham notes, "rather than the sudden adoption of a new idea."¹⁴³ Smith adds that contributing to Finney's adoption of baptism terminology was his discovery of "logical and historical links between covenant and promise" in the Old and New Testaments which he concluded had been fulfilled in the Pentecostal experience.¹⁴⁴ Finney's pneumatology, Reeve proposes, can be understood as contributing to a shift in the nineteenth-century holiness movement from Wesleyan ideas of entire sanctification as Christian perfection to the language of Pentecostal theology and experience.¹⁴⁵ Gresham goes as far as to "call Finney the grandfather of Pentecostalism."¹⁴⁶

¹³⁹ Finney, "To the Christian Readers of The Oberlin Evangelist", *The Oberlin Evangelist* I, 4, January 30, 1839, 25.

¹⁴⁰ Finney 1980, 263-64. See Chapter IV, note 581, 584; Chapter V, note 67. See Chapter IV, note 524, regarding Finney's concern that ministers receive this empowerment.

¹⁴¹ See Chapter IV, notes 289, 379-80.

¹⁴² During the winter of 1842-43, Finney recalled "the Lord gave my own soul a very thorough overhauling, and a fresh baptism of His Spirit." (Finney, *Memoirs*, 456)

¹⁴³ Gresham, *op. cit.*, 12.

¹⁴⁴ "This study of the promises inspired Finney's decisive turn to the language of Pentecost to expound the covenant of grace." (Smith, Timothy L., "How Finney Helped Americans Discover the New Covenant: Righteousness Through Grace", from the introduction to Finney 1980, 22)

¹⁴⁵ Finney's adoption of the phrase, "baptism of the Holy Spirit," is "interesting because of its later introduction into 'Pentecostal' theology and experience. ... Finney is commonly viewed as the historical and theological link between Wesley and Pentecostalism." (Reeve, *op. cit.*, 232-34) Smith notes that "the transfer of Finney's Pentecostal language into American Methodism was direct and immediate." (Smith 1978, 106) However,

More germane to the current project, however, is how Finney's evolving pneumatology revealed a growing emphasis of human dependence upon divine assistance, a theme resounding, as we shall see, in his understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit in prayer.¹⁴⁷ "Nowhere is Finney's commitment to divine ability more clearly seen than in his doctrine of the baptism of the Holy Spirit," Reeve concludes.¹⁴⁸ Finney deduced from Scripture study and personal observation the need for empowerment by the Holy Spirit for sanctification to be attainable and revivals sustainable. Yet he never truly adjusted the moral rigourism that defined his reflections and commitments, unwilling doctrinally to compromise his emphasis on the absolute freedom of the human will. Consequently, and ironically, for all of the accent on the Spirit in his theology and practice, Finney has never escaped perennial critique as semi-Pelagian.¹⁴⁹

Eschatology

A degree of tension also balanced **Edwards'** theology of the apocalypse in which he viewed the eternal glory of the Church as the final goal of Christians, but one that God would accomplish only through the earthbound, human instrumentalities of preaching and prayer.¹⁵⁰ "There is yet remaining a future glorious advancement of the church and kingdom of God in this world," he preached in 1747, responding to a memorial from his Scottish friends calling for a worldwide concert of prayer. "It becomes us to be earnest and constant in praying for

Guelzo argues that "if Finney neither inaugurated his own personalized theology, nor borrowed his notion of 'entire sanctification' from Wesleyan or other non-Calvinistic sources, then many of the recent efforts to identify Finney as the pioneer of modern Wesleyan or Holiness theologies must fall considerably short of the mark." (Guelzo 1997, 94)

¹⁴⁶ Gresham, *op. cit.*, 78. "Finney was the first important figure to emphasize the Baptism in the Holy Spirit as a subsequent experience, and in at least some way, he influenced all of these various movements within late-nineteenth century Evangelicalism thereby providing the source of Pentecostalism." (*ibid*)

¹⁴⁷ See Chapter IV, notes 116, 194, 368, 378, 389-90, 399-404, 484, 541; Chapter V, notes 172

¹⁴⁸ Reeve, *op. cit.*, 318.

¹⁴⁹ Hardesty, *op. cit.*, 36; Zikmund 1968, 350-53.

¹⁵⁰ WJE 5:53.

this glorious event.”¹⁵¹ Stein notes in his introduction to Edwards’ *Apocalyptic Writings* how eschatology was a lifetime interest of Edwards’ and a significant factor in his theological vision.¹⁵² He preached a series of sermons in 1739 that were published in 1774 as *A History of the Work of Redemption* in which he marked out the *heilsgeschichte* through three stages of history—from the fall of Adam to the incarnation of Christ, from the incarnation to the resurrection, and from the resurrection to the end of the world—illuminating a pattern of adversity and deliverance recurring as the kingdom of God gradually prevailed.¹⁵³ Edwards viewed the third, current phase as a time of “the suffering state of the church.”¹⁵⁴ But through revival and the conversion of all peoples of the world,¹⁵⁵ a “glorious work”¹⁵⁶ would eventually bring about “glory and prosperity to the church,”¹⁵⁷ an era of fulfillment that would last for a thousand years. And as the Northampton awakening became more widespread in the late 1730s and early 1740s, Edwards began to believe this millennial reign of God could be imminent:

’Tis not unlikely that this work of God’s Spirit, that is so extraordinary and wonderful, is the dawning, or at least a prelude, of that glorious work of God, so often foretold in Scripture, which in the progress and issue of it, shall renew the world of mankind.¹⁵⁸

For Edwards, the most important thing people could do to bring forward the eschaton was to travail in prayer.¹⁵⁹ The saints travail¹⁶⁰ just as Christ travailed,¹⁶¹ and the church’s

¹⁵¹ WJE 25:197, 202-03. Kidd surveys how several of New England’s leading “pastors had previously suggested that vigorous prayer could hasten the millennium.” (Kidd 2004, 29) Davidson concurs: “In focusing on prayer as a central means for enlarging the kingdom, Edwards placed himself in the center of New England’s apocalyptic tradition.” (Davidson 1977, 167) See also Winiarski 2005, 713.

¹⁵² WJE 5:50. Pratt has classified 143 of Edwards’ sermons as pertaining to eschatology. (Pratt 1958, 244)

¹⁵³ Holifield 2003, 123.

¹⁵⁴ “The suffering state of the church is in Scripture represented as a state of the church’s travail.” (WJE 9:373)

¹⁵⁵ “What the church has from Christ’s time till now been travailing, has been the conversion of all nations. ... [The whole creation] will continue to groan and travail in pain, under the wickedness of its inhabitants, till its inhabitants are generally converted from their wickedness to Christianity.” (WJE 5:178, 182) In the *Miscellanies*, Edwards anticipates “that there will be a vastly more glorious propagation of the true religion before the end of the world.” (WJE 18:145)

¹⁵⁶ WJE 4:353.

¹⁵⁷ WJE 9:373.

¹⁵⁸ WJE 4:353. “God seems to be as it were coming forth out of his place to do some extraordinary thing. We may go too far in positively determining what God is about to do or predicting future events, but there is no danger of our going too far in preparing for what may be.” (WJE 22:372) See also Marsden 2003, 267, 315, 335-37; Talbot, *op. cit.*, 223-24.

travail¹⁶² is joined with that of the whole world¹⁶³ for “God’s event” at the sounding of the seventh trumpet (Rev 11:15) when “the kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord”:

The mighty struggles and conflicts of nations, and shakings of kingdoms, and those vast successive changes that are brought to pass, in the kingdoms and empires of the world, from one age to another, are as it were travail pangs of the creation, in order to bring forth this glorious event.¹⁶⁴

Until that time, Christians will be interceding sacrificially through “great commotion and tumult”¹⁶⁵ just as a woman agonises purposefully through the labour and delivery of a child,¹⁶⁶ which was why Edwards so closely associated the word “travail” with his eschatological vision. The coming of the millennium would be like a birth,¹⁶⁷ prayed into reality through the Church’s travail, after which would come a long-anticipated rest.¹⁶⁸

In contrast, Lyrene has noted, “Noticeably absent in **Finney**’s approach to prayer was Jonathan Edwards’ emphasis on prayer for the coming millennium.”¹⁶⁹ Edwards’ distinctive contribution¹⁷⁰ to the tradition of millennialism gaining momentum in America was

¹⁵⁹ “There is a time spoken of, wherein God will remarkably and wonderfully appear for the deliverance of his church from all her enemies, and when he will ‘avenge his own elect’: and Christ reveals that this will be in answer to [the saints] incessant prayers, or crying day and night. ... God seems now, at this very time, to be waiting for this from us.” (WJE 4:515-17)

¹⁶⁰ See Chapter III, note 342.

¹⁶¹ “At the same time that he offered up his blood for souls, [he] offered up also, as their High Priest, ‘strong crying and tears’ [Heb. 5:7], with an extreme agony, wherein the soul of Christ was as it were in travail for the souls of the elect; and therefore in saving them is said to ‘see of the travail of his soul’ [Isa. 53:11].” (WJE 4:305)

¹⁶² “In order to Christ’s being mystically born into the world, in the advancement and flourishing of true religion, and great increase of the number of true converts, who are spoken of as having ‘Christ formed in them,’ the Scriptures represent it as requisite, that the church should first be ‘in travail, crying and pained to be delivered’ (Rev. 12:1-2, 5).” (WJE 5:351)

¹⁶³ “When God is about to bring to pass something great and glorious in the world, nature is in a ferment and struggle, and the world as it were in travail.” (WJE 4:318)

¹⁶⁴ WJE 5:346.

¹⁶⁵ WJE 16:197.

¹⁶⁶ See Chapter III, 154-55.

¹⁶⁷ *ibid*

¹⁶⁸ “The church’s labor and travail is not over, nor her rest come, till this event be accomplished.” (WJE 5:182) See Chapter III, note 104.

¹⁶⁹ Lyrene 1985, 185-86. See Hatch 1980, 559.

¹⁷⁰ Goen has proposed that Edwards drew on the exegesis of Daniel Whitby and Moses Lowman to advance a postmillennial vision marking a “new departure” in American eschatology. (Goen 1959, 25-40) Edwards’ ultimate significance, Dayton summarises, was “that he contributed to the expectation of a literal millennium and helped generate a tradition of millennial thinking that would grow in force over the next century.” (Dayton 1987, 154) See also Smith 1992, 40-88.

“Arminianised” under the influence of Oberlin perfectionism,¹⁷¹ to make “the inauguration of the millennium contingent on human effort,” Dayton suggests, “and riding the crest of the Second Great Awakening, would link themes of perfection, reform, and millennial expectation.”¹⁷² The centrepiece of such human effort for Finney was the work of revival. What drove him was a passionate belief that conversion of individuals was the way to a better society which, secondarily with wide-ranging reform efforts,¹⁷³ would usher in the millennium.¹⁷⁴ It was a vision that had germinated in Finney’s itineracy across New York’s “burned-over district,” known for its receptivity to millenarian aspirations,¹⁷⁵ and came to fruit in the effort at Oberlin

to educate a generation of ministers who will go forward and convert the world. The church must *travail* in prayer, and groan and agonize for this. This is now the pearl of price to the church, to have a supply of the *right sort* of ministers. The coming of the millennium depends on having a different sort of ministers, who are more thoroughly educated *for their work*.¹⁷⁶

This shift of responsibility for bringing about the millennium from a sovereign God to the evangelistic and social reform work of individuals gained traction in the atmosphere of growing optimism about America’s emergence as the milieu and means of worldwide improvement.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷¹ Zikmund points out how the first issue of *The Oberlin Evangelist* included in its “reasons for publication” the need “to call the attention of Christians to the fact that the Millennium is to consist in the entire sanctification of the church.” (Zikmund, *op. cit.*, 130; *The Oberlin Evangelist* I, 1, March 3, 1847, 8) See Sandeen 1970, 176-77.

¹⁷² Dayton 1987, 155. See also Wolfe 2007, 81.

¹⁷³ “Finney remained primarily a winner of souls until his life’s close and never connected himself with the various reform movements that owed so much to his influence, but he had sketched in almost classic form the evangelical imperative for social activism: that the moral energy unleashed by Christianity had to be channeled into the reform of specific abuses.” (Moorhead 1978, 14)

¹⁷⁴ “Only perfect individuals could implement a perfect society, and whatever optimism Finney entertained about a perfect society was grounded in his optimism about the reforming effects of salvation and sanctification.” (Sweet 1976, 218-19) McLoughlin underscores the point that, for Finney, “the first step toward the millennium was to convert men to Christ; the rest would follow automatically from this.” (Finney, *Lectures*, xlv) See also McLoughlin 1959, 110, 112.

¹⁷⁵ “Millenarian and utopian fires burned across much of the northeastern United States, from New England to the Western Reserve of Ohio, but nowhere with greater intensity than in the belt of upper New York State called the Burned-over District.” (Barkun 1986, 2)

¹⁷⁶ Finney, *Lectures*, 222. McLoughlin comments, “When [Finney] accepted the post as professor of theology at Oberlin early in 1835 (while still in the midst of writing his lectures on revivalism), he expressly did so in order to help educate ‘a new race of revival ministers,’ who would constitute the advance guard of the world-wide evangelistic movement.” (Finney, *Lectures*, xli)

¹⁷⁷ “[Finney] was a confirmed postmillennialist who believed Christ would return at the end of the Millennium. He also believed that the Millennium had already begun, or would begin shortly, and that life on earth would become better and better until the day Christ returned. His mood fitted that of many early nineteenth century

All this was within close reach, Finney urged.¹⁷⁸ “If the church will do all her duty, the millennium may come in three years,” he lectured.¹⁷⁹ If only Christians could become united around this, Finney yearned, “and be agreed as to what ought to be done for the salvation of the world, and the millennium will come at once.”¹⁸⁰ And at times, as in Rochester, Johnson has observed, it seemed this was happening: “They saw divisions among themselves melt away, and they began to sense that the pre-millennial unanimity was at hand—and that they and people like them were bringing it about.”¹⁸¹ After the horrors of the Civil War, however, revivalist postmillennial hopes were dealt successive lethal blows, from growing pluralism in waves of immigration to the rise of biblical criticism and new sciences, all unfolding in the context of harsh urbanisation and industrialisation. “The nation, stubbornly, would not be saved,” Noll writes, and “this combination set the stage for significant transitions”¹⁸² to a starker pessimism about the potential of humanity that could ultimately be remedied only by the premillennial advent of Christ.¹⁸³

Prayer

While Edwards and Finney were worlds apart in family background, education, temperament, and theological assumptions, they were both intensely spiritual men, known for their fervent habit and advocacy of prayer. From a prodigious childhood of prayer¹⁸⁴ to what

Americans.” (Cohen 1975, 97-98) This mood, which “paralleled and reinforced secular notions of human progress during this time,” was one which held to a vision of the American future as the fulfillment of divine purpose. (Lobue 1972, 43-48) See also Hardesty, *op. cit.*, 43; Marty 1970, 93; Thomas 1989, 76.

¹⁷⁸ Finney believed that “if conversion wrought righteousness and if society was but the sum of souls within it, the revival tide would bring a new day indeed. Logically, the American millennium was within reach.” (Bratt 1998, 58) See also McLoughlin 1959, 105-06.

¹⁷⁹ Finney, *Lectures*, 306.

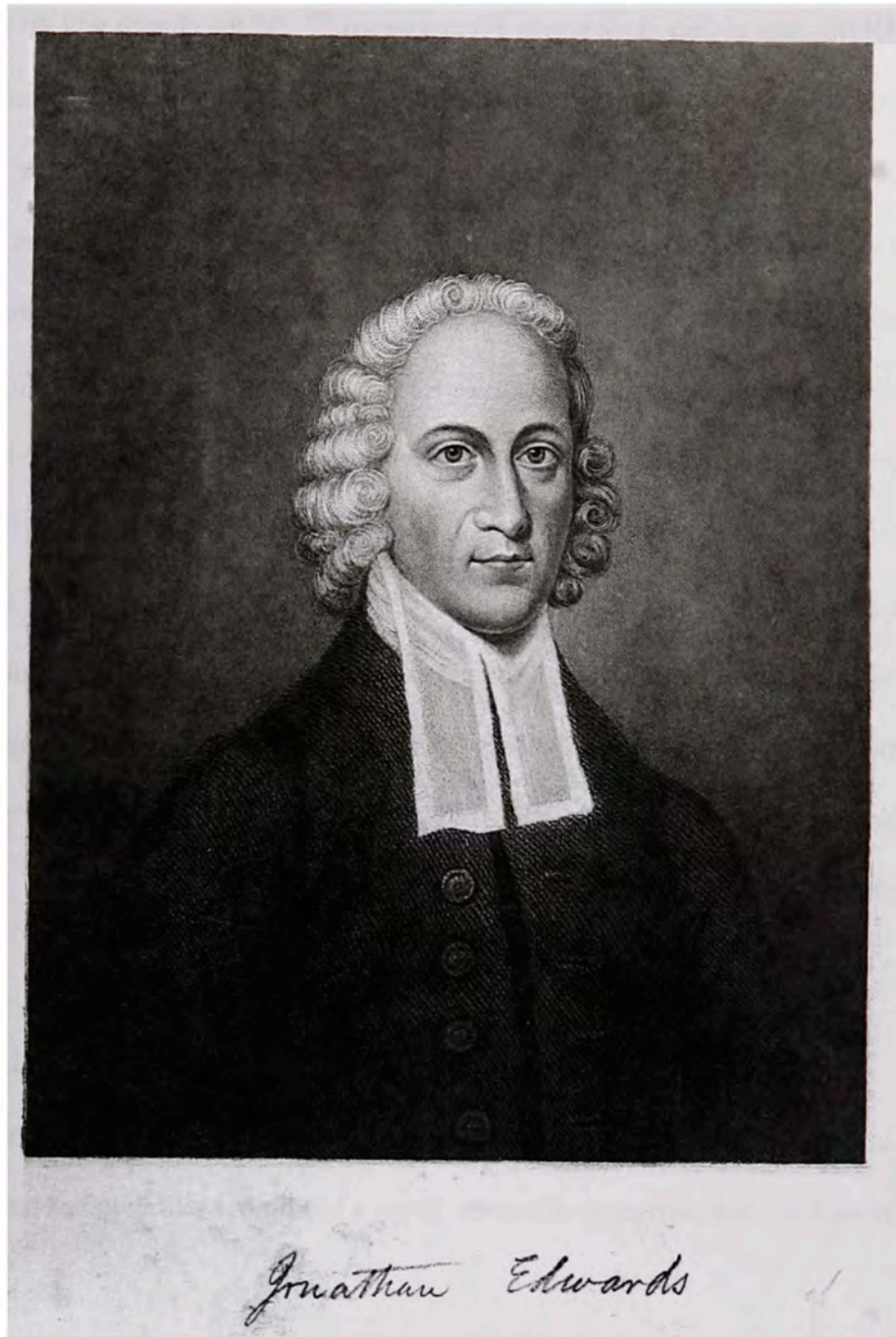
¹⁸⁰ *ibid*, 328

¹⁸¹ Johnson 2004, 109.

¹⁸² Noll 2002, 184.

¹⁸³ “The radical shift that took place in the mainstream of Evangelical revivalism between Charles G. Finney and Dwight L. Moody is one of the most remarkable developments on the religious scene in the nineteenth century.” (Dayton 1987, 162)

¹⁸⁴ See Chapter III, note 444.



Jonathan Edwards

Courtesy of Forbes Library, Northampton, Massachusetts.

observers considered an exemplary devotional life as an adult,¹⁸⁵ **Jonathan Edwards'** experience of prayer developed through stages¹⁸⁶ that would later help him have footing and

¹⁸⁵ Edwards' great-grandson, Sereno Edwards Dwight, records that Edwards "often kept days of fasting and prayer in secret... It appears from his Diary, that his *stated* seasons of secret prayer were, from his youth, three times a day,—in his journeys, as well as at home. ... And his constant, solemn converse with God, in these exercises of secret religion, made his face, as it were, to shine before others." (Dwight 1830, 592) One

clarity through the upheavals of revival.¹⁸⁷ Both his diary entries and *Personal Narrative*¹⁸⁸ reveal a young lad for whom prayer seemed instinctive,¹⁸⁹ a piety tested through strenuous resolutions¹⁹⁰ and personal trouble¹⁹¹ to become a principal channel¹⁹² of expressing the “inward, sweet delight”¹⁹³ constituting the core of Edwards’ conversion and lifelong Christian experience.¹⁹⁴ What Hambrick-Stowe characterised as an “intensely personal spirituality of evangelical Calvinism in the Puritan tradition,”¹⁹⁵ Edwards’ contemplative piety¹⁹⁶ grew through melancholic¹⁹⁷ and mystical¹⁹⁸ inclinations to acquire an experimental, practical orientation.¹⁹⁹ His sermons, regardless of theme, often resolved in application to

eyewitness reported that Edwards’ prayers, “in respect to copiousness, appropriateness, tenderness, and sublimity surpassed anything he ever heard from mortal lips. He said he was accustomed to look upon him even then as belonging to some superior race of beings.” (Tarbox 1884, 623)

¹⁸⁶ McNerney delineates “three distinct awakenings, or stages in [Edwards’] religious development” from natural proclivity, to further understanding of Scripture and appreciation of solitude in nature, to a final strengthening “and deepening of beliefs already held.” (McNerney 1985, 21-24) See also Clebsch 1973, 25-26.

¹⁸⁷ “Edwards was an advocate of moderation; he was no wild-eyed fanatic. But unfortunately for him the emotionalism preached by other divines in the Great Awakening did not share the experiential base from which his thought emerged. ... Much of the revivalism that followed was ‘mere’ enthusiasm, without experiential base. And it was this bogus type of religious piety from which Edwards tried to dissociate himself.” (McNerney, *op. cit.*, 28)

¹⁸⁸ Drawn from a diary Edwards kept from 1722 through 1725, a list of forty-seven personal resolutions, and private “miscellanies” of theology and philosophy, the *Personal Narrative* was primarily a “literary act of synthesis for Edwards’s theology of solitude.” (Gilpin 2002, 530) See Hambrick-Stowe 2003, 80.

¹⁸⁹ “Prayer seemed to be natural to me; as the breath, by which the inward burnings of my heart had vent.” (WJE 16:794)

¹⁹⁰ McClymond and McDermott comment how the “Resolutions” reveal “an austere young man who lived his life with a kind of monastic or military discipline.” (McClymond and McDermott, *op. cit.*, 64)

¹⁹¹ “Indeed, I was at times very uneasy, especially toward the latter part of the time of my being at college. Till it pleased God, in my last year at college, at a time when I was in the midst of many uneasy thoughts about the state of my soul, to seize me with a pleurisy; in which he brought me nigh to the grave, and shook me over the pit of hell.” (WJE 16:791)

¹⁹² From Edwards’ early writings onward, Beck concludes that “prayer plays a central role in the definition and development of Edwards’s spiritual life.” (Beck, *op. cit.*, 62)

¹⁹³ See Chapter III, note 536.

¹⁹⁴ *ibid.*, note 533

¹⁹⁵ Hambrick-Stowe 2003, 88. See also Bremer 2006, 486-87; Lovelace 2004, 299-300; Nacher 1999, 291.

¹⁹⁶ Contemplation, which Edwards pursued throughout his life in a “complex regimen of solitude” (Gilpin, *op. cit.*, 524) was the “employment and happiness of Christians,” he believed, and what most differentiated humans from “brutes.” (Sermon 950 on Prov 6:22[c], WJEO 68:L.9r., col. 2)

¹⁹⁷ Commenting on Edwards’ admission that he had been occasionally “overwhelmed with melancholy” (WJE 16:765) as a young man, Parker notes how he “frequently accused himself of melancholy in his private writings without really analyzing the origins of his despair.” (Parker 1968, 199) Later in life, however, and in contrast to Brainerd, Weddle observes, “Edwards moved beyond the dialectic of melancholy and resolution to a form of spirituality shaped by a vision of divine beauty and issuing in consent to the harmony of universal being.” (Weddle 1988, 298)

¹⁹⁸ McNerney believes “all the elements of a classical mystical experience are present in Edwards.” (McNerney, *op. cit.*, 21). Taylor, however, argues that while Edwards “maintained an awe and reverence for the majesty and mystery of God, ... his ‘mysticism’ stopped there. ... To define Edwards or those like him as ‘mystics’ places them slightly beyond the mainstream, precisely where they do not belong.” (Taylor 1988, 219)

prayer,²⁰⁰ and to great effect,²⁰¹ though Edwards always longed for more of the spiritual intensity²⁰² he experienced to be found in his parishioners.²⁰³ But his motivations in the pulpit were the same as with his pen and in his study, for “praying was as indispensable to him as thinking was,” McClymond concludes.²⁰⁴ “Piety was the mainspring of [Edwards’s] exertions,” as one nineteenth-century admirer put it, “the moving force of his existence, the volcanic fire that fuses his theology.”²⁰⁵

Prayer—defined by Edwards variously as “faith expressed,”²⁰⁶ as “breathings of the Holy Spirit,”²⁰⁷ as “a great and principal means by which God carries on the designs of his kingdom in the world”²⁰⁸—was, in the end, our access to the “infinite fountain of good”²⁰⁹ Christians stood in need of:

[Prayer] is one of the greatest and most excellent means of nourishing the new nature, and of causing the soul to flourish and prosper. It is an excellent means of keeping up an acquaintance with God, and of growing in knowledge of God. It is a way to a life of communion with God. It is an excellent means of taking off the heart from the vanities of the world and of causing the mind to be conversant in heaven. It is an excellent preservative from sins and the wiles of the devil, and a powerful antidote against the poison of the old serpent. It is a duty whereby strength is derived from God against the lusts and corruptions of the heart, and the snares of the world.²¹⁰

¹⁹⁹ “Christian practice, taken in the sense that has been explained, is the chief of all the evidences of a saving sincerity in religion, ... much to be preferred to ... any immanent discoveries of grace whatsoever, that begin and end in contemplation.” (WJE 2:426) “For Edwards,” Breitenbach comments, “grace is an abiding principle of holy *action* in the heart.” (Breitenbach 1988, 183)

²⁰⁰ “There are few sermons in the Edwards’ collection on the doctrine of prayer. In the application of many a sermon he enjoined the saints to go to prayer...” (Pratt, *op. cit.*, 134)

²⁰¹ Commenting on “prayer bids” written and submitted in Sabbath worship by the Northampton congregation (see Chapter III, note 16), Stein suggests Edwards would have been “undoubtedly pleased” that “the bids are consistent with recommendations made repeatedly in his sermons and treatises.” (Stein 1980, 270)

²⁰² “As Edwards put it, true religion doesn’t consist in weak desires that barely move us beyond the point of indifference, but fervency of spirit that vigorously engages the very center of our being.” (McDermott 2000, 35)

²⁰³ See Chapter III, note 67, 74.

²⁰⁴ “Scholars generally have seen Jonathan Edwards as a Christian thinker, not as a practitioner of the Christian life. Yet the biographical evidence indicates that Edwards’s exercises of piety were just as pronounced and as regular a theme of his life as were his intellectual explorations.” (McClymond 1998, 46)

²⁰⁵ Sherman 1860, 149. “The cornerstone of Edwards’s legacy and his subsequent import for American culture is his writing about his personal religious experience and how it is constituted and evaluated. ... What most powerfully engaged subsequent readers of Edwards’s theology was how he understood the spiritual life.” (Gura 2005, 229)

²⁰⁶ See Chapter III, note 371.

²⁰⁷ WJE 17:303.

²⁰⁸ MS Sermon 809 on Ezk 36:36-37, Feb. 1746, Gen. Mss. 151, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, 14.

²⁰⁹ WJE 19:780.

²¹⁰ Edwards 2001, “Hypocrites Deficient in the Duty of Prayer,” *op. cit.*, 371-72.

Neglect of this great duty, the highest in all of religion, was “to dislike God,”²¹¹ to “live like atheists, ... as if there were no God.”²¹² For what distinguishes God as the true God, Edwards preached, was that He hears prayer: “There is scarce anything that is more frequently asserted of God in Scripture than this, that he stands ready to hear prayer.”²¹³ And observing God’s manner²¹⁴ in responding to what He hears is how we learn of His nature, God’s generosity and mercy.²¹⁵ Edwards conveyed these right notions of the nature of God as the foundation for his theology of prayer by framing it in explicitly relational terms as “mutual discourse” with “an Excellent Companion entertaining the mind with the most desirable conversation.”²¹⁶ God’s part in this interaction is to hear and answer; ours is to petition earnestly and in absolute dependence on God,²¹⁷ abiding in faith, which is prayer’s essence.²¹⁸ In order to teach supplicants this reliance and to prove His sovereignty,²¹⁹ God may withhold His responses for a time,²²⁰ Edwards taught, delaying bestowal of His blessing until we have become ready to receive it.²²¹ And often, as we shall see, this delay could continue until the pitch of trust and desire reached the level of travail.

²¹¹ MS Sermon 1143 on Rom 12:12, June 1755, Gen. Mss. 151, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, L.2r., col. 2.

²¹² Edwards 2004, “God’s Manner Is First to Prepare Men’s Hearts and Then to Answer Their Prayers,” McMullen (ed.), 89.

²¹³ WJE 22:215.

²¹⁴ “It has been God’s manner, when he accomplished any great thing for his Church, to do it in answer to prayer.” (Sermon 922 on Mt 6:9-10, WJEO 67:L.6v.)

²¹⁵ For Edwards, “prayer teaches us about God’s character and ours. God’s hearing and answering our prayer speaks volumes about his nature. ... Prayer reminds us that the Most High ‘is a God of infinite grace and mercy.’ And it reminds us of our desperate need for it.” (Nichols 2001, 211) “[Herein] lies the true heart of Edwards’s theology of prayer—the seeking and finding of God. God is the centre of prayer.” (Beck, *op. cit.*, 53)

²¹⁶ Sermon 950 on Prov 6:22(c), WJEO 68:L.1v., col. 2.

²¹⁷ See Chapter III, notes 112-23.

²¹⁸ “All real and true prayer is the voice of faith.” (WJE 19:787)

²¹⁹ Beck comments, “Just as unanswered prayer does not reveal a failing in God’s knowledge but the perfection of it, Edwards saw unanswered prayer as unassailable proof of the sovereignty of God. In choosing to answer some prayers as they have been prayed and pass over others, God reveals his sovereignty.” (Beck, *op. cit.*, 44)

²²⁰ “Tis one design of God in withholding mercies to teach us our need of his help and our dependence upon it.” (Sermon 142 on 1 Kgs 8:35-36, WJEO 44:L.4v.) See Kreider 2003a, 80-81.

²²¹ “When God defers for the present to answer the prayer of faith, it is ... for the good of his people sometimes, that they may be better prepared for the mercy before they receive it, or because another time would be the best and fittest on some other account.” (Edwards 1998, “The Most High a Prayer-Hearing God,” Hickman [ed.], 114)

Edwards was emphatic that prayer is not for God's good, but ours. It neither informs God²²² nor changes His mind.²²³ Being self-sufficient and happy in Himself,²²⁴ God is neither obligated to answer a sinner's prayer,²²⁵ nor harmed if we leave it off.²²⁶ Though He abounds in treasure,²²⁷ His blessings are not drawn by our prayers,²²⁸ for He is the self-moved Cause and Bestower of all things.²²⁹ Why, then, do we pray? Because in begging mercies, Edwards explains, we might prize them more and acknowledge God in them.²³⁰ Prayer stirs in us our sense of need and value for what God alone can do. Through fervent petition, God prepares our hearts for His mercies in order to secure His glory and promote our good, and this right preparation was essentially what Edwards understood prayer to be.²³¹ God may "present himself"²³² in a way to appear "as though"²³³ He were being prevailed upon by our

²²² "Why does God require prayer in order to the bestowment of mercies? It is not in order that God may be informed of our wants and desires. He is omniscient, and with respect to his knowledge unchangeable." (*ibid*, 115)

²²³ Nichols summarises Edwards' view: "Although this humbles us, God ordains the means of the prayers of his people in the carrying out of his will. We don't pray to change his mind; we pray so that we can be used of him." (Nichols 2001, 210) See also Haykin, *op. cit.*, 139.

²²⁴ "God himself enjoys infinite good and happiness, and the happiness that he enjoys is in himself. ... And as he is infinitely happy in himself and is self-sufficient, so he is all-sufficient." (Sermon 400 on Dt 28:12, WJEO 51:L.2r.)

²²⁵ "When he does answer, he will do it not ... because he has obliged himself by any promise, but only because 'tis his pleasure oftentimes according to the riches of grace to have respect to the sinful, miserable creature's earnest desires of its own happiness, though it does not deserve that God should have any respect to it." (Edwards 2004, "God's Manner Is First to Prepare Men's Hearts and Then to Answer Their Prayers," McMullen [ed.], 92)

²²⁶ "By our constancy in prayer, we cannot be profitable to God; and if we leave it off, God will sustain no damage: He doth not need our prayers." (Edwards 2001, "Hypocrites Deficient in the Duty of Prayer," *op. cit.*, 371)

²²⁷ "There is in this divine treasury laid up, as it were, a vast variety of good things, innumerable kinds of blessings, all sorts of good for the creature's supply." (Sermon 400, *op. cit.*, L.2v.)

²²⁸ "It is not to be thought that God is properly made willing and his mercy drawn by our prayers. The sending of God's mercy is wholly within himself." (Edwards 2004, "God's Manner Is First to Prepare Men's Hearts and Then to Answer Their Prayers," *op. cit.*, 86)

²²⁹ "God ... delights in bestowing, and therefore waits for our asking, and counsels us to it; not to move him to bestow the blessing, but that we may be prepared to receive it." (WJE 19:783)

²³⁰ "God's people, by earnestly begging mercies of him, are prepared for mercies. They will the more prize them as the gift of God, will be more sensible that they come from him, and will have their hearts more prepared to praise." (Sermon 142, *op. cit.*, L.5r.)

²³¹ "They think ignorantly who think that it is not worth the while for them to pray, for this is a principal means to prepare their hearts for the mercies they seek." (Edwards 2004, "God's Manner Is First to Prepare Men's Hearts and Then to Answer Their Prayers," McMullen [ed.], 94) Pratt summarises that, for Edwards, "prayer is for the preparation of the man praying so that he might be made right and ready to receive God's answer." (Pratt, *op. cit.*, 134)

²³² "For though, speaking after the manner of men, God is sometimes represented as if he were moved and persuaded by the prayers of his people; yet it is not to be thought that God is properly moved or made willing by our prayers." (Edwards 1998, "The Most High a Prayer-Hearing God," *op. cit.*, 114-16) "According to

prayers. Phrases like “as if”²³⁴ and “as it were”²³⁵ occur frequently in Edwards’ writings as conventions for interpreting Scripture that could otherwise suggest actual effect of prayer upon the divine will. It is God’s kindness to engage petitioners with these impressions, Edwards preached, to use prayer for directing our attention to Him. Indeed, it is God’s kindness to let us pray to Him at all,²³⁶ and certainly all the more to involve prayer as He does in accomplishing the “designs of Christ’s kingdom in the world.”²³⁷ But Edwards’ vision of this strategic function God had given to prayer was sweeping, truly cosmic, as he looked toward the approaching time when there would be

...given much of a spirit of prayer to God’s people, in many places, disposing them to come into an express agreement, unitedly to pray to God in an extraordinary manner, that he would appear for the help of his church, and in mercy to mankind, and pour out his Spirit, revive his work, and advance his spiritual kingdom in the world, as he has promised.

Such extraordinary prayer would gradually spread, Edwards predicted, leading to revival, thus producing more prayer until

...there shall, in process of time, be a vast accession to the church, so that it shall be ten times as large as it was before; yea, at length, all nations shall be converted unto God. ... And thus that shall be fulfilled, Psalms 65:2, “O thou that hearest prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come.”²³⁸

Edwards,” Kreider notes, “the anthropomorphic language of God’s responsiveness to prayer is further evidence of His graciousness.” (Kreider 2003b, 441) See also Sanders 2007, 280-84.

²³³ See Chapter III, notes 351-52. “God has been pleased to constitute prayer to be an antecedent to his bestowment of mercy and very often is pleased to bestow mercy in consequence of prayers as though he were prevailed on and moved by prayer.” (Edwards 2004, “God’s Manner Is First to Prepare Men’s Hearts and Then to Answer Their Prayers,” McMullen [ed.], 86) Here we have the crux of Edwards’ theology of prayer.

²³⁴ “If God needs no new information, has already determined the course of history and will unfailingly accomplish his goals, how can it legitimately be said that God answers the prayers of his people? ... The key to Edwards’s answer lies in the words ‘as if.’ From man’s perspective, it appears that God has been overcome by his prayers. God operates in this manner, Edwards maintained, as yet another act of grace, thereby encouraging man to come boldly to him. From God’s perspective, however, the prayers of men are ultimately lifted up in response to his sovereign will. ... Thus, while God has determined the course of events, he has done so in such a way that both the prayers of volitional agents and his answers to them are part of his larger, predetermined plan for history.” (Beck, *op. cit.*, 34-35)

²³⁵ “[That God is eminently One who hears prayer] appears in God’s being, as it were, overcome by prayer. ... In such cases, God is, as it were, overcome by humble and fervent prayer.” (Sermon 374 on Ps 65:2, WJEO 51:L.7r.)

²³⁶ “’Tis a great kindness in God to us that he will let us pray to Him.” (MS Sermon 1143 on Rom 12:12, June 1755, Gen. Mss. 151, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, L.1v., col. 2.)

²³⁷ WJE 4:516.

²³⁸ WJE 5:317-18. “Though Edwards defended a Calvinist doctrine of predestination, he also taught that prayer can change world history.” (Sweeney 2009, 113-14, note 13)

Charles Finney, too, was driven by a vision of the colossal potential of prayer, typified in a message entitled “The Reward of Fervent Prayer” delivered in London during his first preaching tour of England:

If Christians would but avail themselves of all the blessings which God has provided, and really become filled with the Spirit, what do you suppose would be the result? ... Could one Church be thoroughly awakened, another and another would follow, till the whole city would be aroused, and every chapel would be filled with devout inquirers after salvation. ... Let every Christian in this city be filled with the Holy Spirit, and what would be the result? London would move! Ireland would move! The world would move!²³⁹

This conviction that “a church living with God, and fully meeting the conditions of acceptable prayer, might have more power with God than so many angels”²⁴⁰ was one that grew²⁴¹ out of Finney’s own spiritual searching²⁴² and native intensity. His conversion had been a prayer event,²⁴³ branding all that flowed from it²⁴⁴ with a passion and priority for prayer for which Finney would become well-known.²⁴⁵ Recollections by Oberlin students of Finney’s habits of prayer²⁴⁶ would “come back through the long vista of years, a sweet and vivid memory”:²⁴⁷

He often told the students in college that he could not get on with less than four hours a day to be alone with God, and on one occasion he said that whenever he found himself alone in a room, his first impulse was to fall upon his knees and pour out his heart to God. He had so

²³⁹ Finney, “The Reward of Fervent Prayer”, *The Penny Pulpit* (London: J. Paul, c1853), May 15, 1850, 71, The Richard DuPuis Papers, Oberlin College Archive. See also Finney, *Lectures*, 69 [Ja 5:17-18].

²⁴⁰ Finney, “An Approving Heart—Confidence in Prayer”, *The Oberlin Evangelist* IX, 5, March 3, 1847, 35. Believing that the surest safeguard of revival’s fruit was the spiritual culture of churches, Finney laboured in prayer “with great earnestness and agony for a deeper work in my own heart, that I might be able myself to exhibit more spiritual religion to the churches, so far as I had access to them. ... I was greatly impressed with the importance of elevating the standard of piety in the churches.” (Finney 1861, 95)

²⁴¹ Finney recounted various seasons of personal spiritual renewal, as in the winter of 1842 when “the Lord gave my own soul a very thorough overhauling, and a fresh baptism of the His Spirit.” (Finney, *Memoirs*, 456) John Morgan, Finney’s long-time colleague at Oberlin, observed his lifelong growth in prayer: “I do not think that, in his earlier years, he had this power in prayer in the same degree as he had later on in life. In the latter part of his life, I thought his praying was better than his preaching.” ([_____] 1876, *Reminiscences of Rev. Charles G. Finney*..., 49) See also Beltz 1944, 42.

²⁴² “I can recollect how ... objections to prayer came up many years since before my mind, but were instantly answered and set aside, they seemed so absurd.” (Finney, “On Prayer”, *The Oberlin Evangelist* XVII, 1, January 3, 1855, 2)

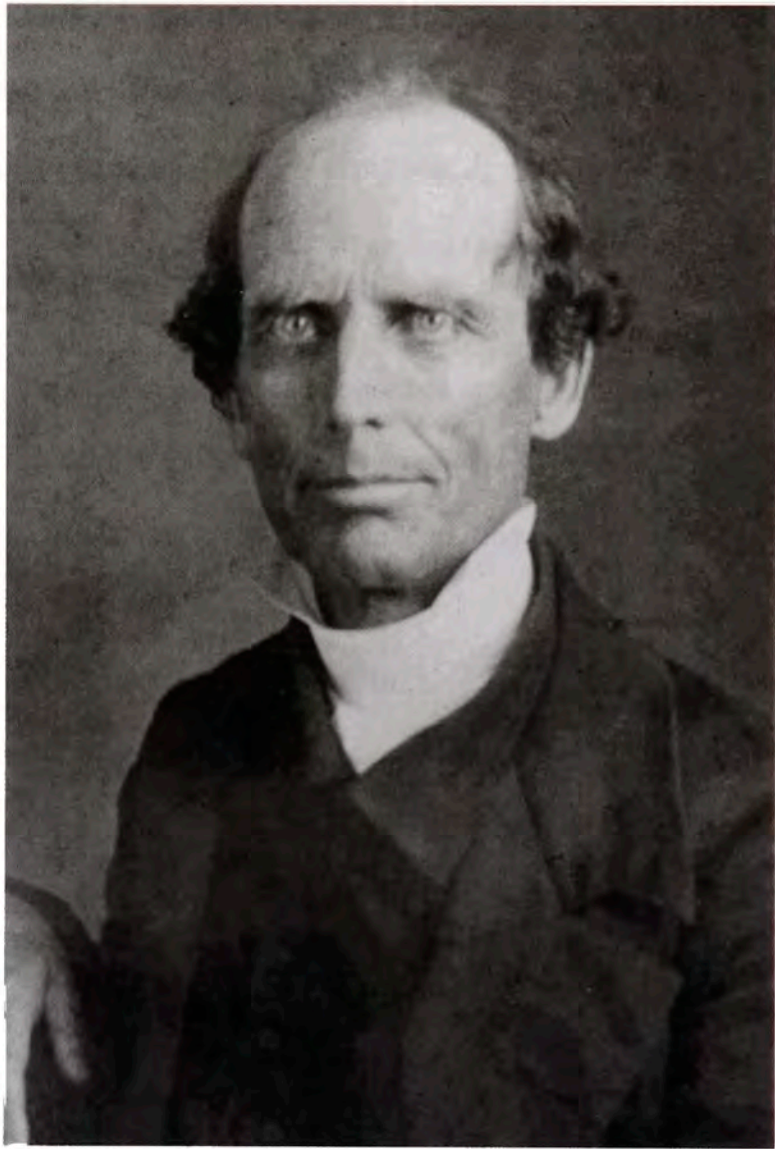
²⁴³ See Chapter IV, notes 122, 144, 218, 289, 315, 379-80, 451, 507.

²⁴⁴ “Throughout Finney’s career it would be prayer—especially what he called the ‘prayer of faith’ and ‘prevailing prayer’—that fueled his life and work.” (Hambrick-Stowe 1994, 24)

²⁴⁵ See Chapter IV, note 72.

²⁴⁶ “Intense prayerfulness seemed to be habitual on his own part, a state of mind that breathed out prayer without ceasing.” (Matson [n.d.], 33)

²⁴⁷ *ibid*, 10-11



Charles Grandison Finney

Photo courtesy of the Oberlin College Archives.

much to say to God, and he loved to use his voice in prayer, “to let himself out,” as he expressed it, and often this was with tears and groans in his travail of soul for others.²⁴⁸

By his own account, after conversion Finney regularly spent extended time²⁴⁹ in private prayer, sometimes trembling²⁵⁰ and “swallowed up”²⁵¹ in ecstatic visions which he kept, for

²⁴⁸ *ibid*, 31-32. Hambrick-Stowe notes how “students who later commented on their Oberlin experience uniformly cited class prayer as an unforgettable part of Finney’s theology classes.” (Hambrick-Stowe 1996, 196)

²⁴⁹ After evening services, Finney later recounted, he “would retire as early as I well could; but rose up at four O’clock in the morning, because I could sleep no longer, and immediately went to the study and engaged in prayer. And so deeply was my mind exercised, and so absorbed in prayer, that I frequently continued from the time I arose at four O’clock till the gong called to breakfast at eight O’clock.” (Finney, *Memoirs*, 456)

²⁵⁰ See Chapter IV, notes 280-81.

²⁵¹ Finney, “Conditions of Prevailing Prayer” [part 3], *The Oberlin Evangelist* IX, 15, July 21, 1847, 115.

the most part, to himself: “[Friends] would look surprised, and sometimes, I thought, incredulous; and I soon learned to keep quiet in regard to those divine manifestations, and say but little about them.”²⁵² However, people found his public prayers uniquely disarming in their childlike simplicity²⁵³ which lent to his teaching on prayer a plain-spoken freshness²⁵⁴ that appealed to many churchgoers who, McLoughlin notes, had become “emotionally and spiritually starved by the arid legalism and formalism of Old School Calvinism.”²⁵⁵ Finney’s was prayer freely expressed as “the conscious harmony of our conscience, will, and sensibility in God,”²⁵⁶ a spiritual posture²⁵⁷ or attitude²⁵⁸ he believed to be the acid test of true religion.²⁵⁹

While Finney believed the impulse of prayer to be a “universal necessity,” instinctive in all people,²⁶⁰ “prevailing prayer” which secures God’s answers was more than “the mere going aside and praying,”²⁶¹ but a perpetual yearning of the mind, an habitual presenting of the mind in a spirit of importunity. This is the true idea of prevailing prayer.”²⁶² If prayer is not

²⁵² Finney, *Memoirs*, 39.

²⁵³ Oberlin students recalled Finney’s services in which “the reading of the first hymn seemed like the first notes of the message that God had for His waiting people; and the prayer that followed! No words of mine can describe it...” (Matson, *op. cit.*, 10) “His prayers were simple and childlike. He told God exactly what he wanted, and seemed to expect what he asked.” (Ferguson, Fergus, “Re-opening of Blackfriars Street Chapel—Professor Finney,” *The Christian News*, September 10, 1859, 5 [clipping in research notes of Richard A. G. Dupuis in The Charles Grandison Finney Papers, Oberlin College Archives, 6])

²⁵⁴ “His mode of presenting the truth on this matter has a freshness and uncommonness in it that serve to imprint his sentiments on one’s mind; and his illustrations and anecdotes are always pointed and striking.” ([Kirk, John], “The Prevailing Prayer Meeting,” *The Christian News*, January 7, 1860, 6 [clipping in research notes of Richard A. G. Dupuis in The Charles Grandison Finney Papers, Oberlin College Archives, 10])

²⁵⁵ Finney, *Lectures*, xxxii.

²⁵⁶ Finney, Sermon 482, “Hunger and Thirst After God”, on Mt 5:6 (1871), The Charles Grandison Finney Papers, Oberlin College Archives.

²⁵⁷ “Prayer is the state of the heart.” (Finney, *Lectures*, 30)

²⁵⁸ “O then you would need only put yourself in an attitude to be blessed and you could not fail of receiving all you could ask that could be really a good to your soul and to God’s kingdom.” (Finney, “Conditions of Prevailing Prayer” [part 3], *The Oberlin Evangelist* IX, *op. cit.*, 115)

²⁵⁹ “[Any system of religion that] does not beget prayer, does not unify us with God, and bring us into fellowship and sympathy with Him, it is a lie.” (Finney 1877, 120)

²⁶⁰ “Indeed, mankind have given evidence of this in all ages and in every nation;—showing both the universal necessity, and that it is a dictate of our nature to look up to a God above.” (Finney, “On Prayer”, *The Oberlin Evangelist* XVII, *op. cit.*, 1)

²⁶¹ “Saying prayers is not offering prevailing prayer. The effectiveness of prayer does not depend so much on quantity as quality.” (Finney [1984], 41)

²⁶² Finney, “How to Prevail with God”, *The Penny Pulpit*, *op. cit.*, 114.

being answered, Finney pressed, either in “letter” or “spirit,”²⁶³ then it cannot be real prayer,²⁶⁴ and the petitioner was likely deluded:²⁶⁵

Much that is called prayer is not answered in any sense whatever, and *is not real prayer*. Much that goes under the name of prayer is offered merely for the form of it, with neither care nor expectation to be answered.²⁶⁶

Resolving this conundrum of why “so much that is called prayer is not answered” had been the linchpin of Finney’s conversion²⁶⁷ and became the springboard of his theology of prayer. He believed the essence of prayer to be petitionary, “asking favors of God,”²⁶⁸ but doing so according to the revealed will and way of God: “asking not only for such things as God is willing to grant, but also asking in such a state of mind as God can accept.”²⁶⁹ This meant praying as Jesus taught,²⁷⁰ but with “a corresponding sensibility—a state of feeling in harmony with [God’s will]” that Finney perceived as “governmentally necessary”²⁷¹ and spiritually expedient. Meeting God’s conditions in prayer was what rendered “it consistent for God to do as it would not be consistent for Him to do otherwise,”²⁷² thereby creating the atmosphere most conducive to revival, Finney’s greatest concern.²⁷³

²⁶³ Finney, “An Approving Heart—Confidence in Prayer”, *The Oberlin Evangelist* IX, *op. cit.*, 34. “The ways of the Lord are so much wiser than our own, that he kindly and most benevolently declines to follow our way, and takes his own. The great end, however, which we seek, if our prayer is acceptable to Him, He will certainly secure, perhaps more perfectly in his own way than he could in ours.” (Finney, “Conditions of Prevailing Prayer” [part 1], *The Oberlin Evangelist* IX, 11, May 26, 1847, 81)

²⁶⁴ “Great prevalence in prayer, then, is an evidence that we abide in Him. But a want of prevalence in prayer is conclusive evidence that we do not abide in Him.” (Finney 1855, 165-66)

²⁶⁵ As a young lawyer, Finney attended his first prayer-meeting and “became convinced they were under a delusion; that they did not prevail because they had no right to prevail. They did not comply with the conditions upon which God had promised to hear prayer.” (Finney, “Prevailing Prayer”, *The Independent of New York* XXVI, 1318, March 5, 1874, 3) See also Finney [1984], 51.

²⁶⁶ Finney, “Conditions of Prevailing Prayer” [part 1], *The Oberlin Evangelist* IX, *op. cit.*, 81.

²⁶⁷ “I do not think I ever could have been converted if I had not discovered the solution to the question, ‘Why is it that so much that is called prayer is not answered?’” (*ibid*)

²⁶⁸ Finney, Sermon 498, “Prevailing Prayer Meeting,” on Acts 12:5-17 [1871]; Sermon 684, “Prayer,” [n.d.]; The Charles Grandison Finney Papers, Oberlin College Archives.

²⁶⁹ Finney, “Prevailing Prayer”, *The Independent of New York* XXVI, *op. cit.*, 3.

²⁷⁰ See Chapter IV, note 547.

²⁷¹ Finney, “The Promises of God”, *The Penny Pulpit* (London: J. Paul, c1853), May 17, 1850, 69, The Richard DuPuis Papers, Oberlin College Archive. “The government of God” to Finney meant “all that is implied in the movements of the universe that shall secure the end at which he aims.” (Finney, “Acceptable Prayer”, *The Penny Pulpit* [London: J. Paul, c1853], May 12, 1850, 33, The Richard DuPuis Papers, Oberlin College Archive)

²⁷² Finney, *Lectures*, 52.

²⁷³ “[Finney’s] zeal for souls was the driving force behind his entire theology of prayer.” (Lyrene, *op. cit.*, 162, note 172)

If prayer was a condition of God for revival,²⁷⁴ then a pure heart was a condition of God for prayer.²⁷⁵ This meant not merely repentance, but renunciation of sin;²⁷⁶ “all professed prayer is an abomination,” Finney preached, “if it be not offered in a state of entire consecration of all that we have and are to God.”²⁷⁷ He denounced “prayer abomination” in extreme terms, whether that was trifling with rote prayer, the same as profanity to Finney,²⁷⁸ or negligence of any proviso of God for acceptable prayer,²⁷⁹ which was nigh on to letting God cease to exist.²⁸⁰ Surfacing and confronting any hindrances to prayer like these,²⁸¹ often so deeply embedded in the heart,²⁸² was how prayer prepares the petitioner to receive: “Prayer pleases God as Governor of the universe because it puts us in a position in which he can bless us and gratify his own benevolence.”²⁸³ Finney echoed Edwards here, teaching that

²⁷⁴ “God needs prayer from us as a condition of his doing to us and for us all he would.” (Finney, “On Prayer”, *The Oberlin Evangelist* XVII, *op. cit.*, 1)

²⁷⁵ Preaching on the need for a pure heart, Finney began, “The suppliant must understand what he needs, and have a practical and just apprehension of it. There can be no real prayer without this.” (Finney, “Prayer for a Pure Heart”, *The Oberlin Evangelist* XI, 6, March 14, 1849, 41)

²⁷⁶ “You cannot prevail in prayer, without renouncing all your sins. You must not only recall them to mind, and repent of them, but you must actually renounce them, and leave them off, and in the purpose of your heart renounce them all *for ever*.” (Finney, *Lectures*, 64)

²⁷⁷ Finney, “Prevailing Prayer”, *The Independent of New York* XXVI, *op. cit.*, 3. To pray sincerely, “there must be an entire consecration of the will and the whole being to him.” (Finney, “Acceptable Prayer”, *The Penny Pulpit*, *op. cit.*, 35)

²⁷⁸ “It is nothing better than mockery to use the Lord’s prayer as a mere form. ... In their senseless chattering of this form of prayer by the hour together, they as truly blaspheme God as if they had taken his name in vain in any other way. ... Prayer is a privilege too sacred to be trifled with.—The pernicious effects of trifling with prayer are certainly not less than the evils of any other form of profanity.” (Finney, “Conditions of Prevailing Prayer” (part 2), *The Oberlin Evangelist* IX, 12, June 9, 1847, 91)

²⁷⁹ “If there be the least sin in my heart, the Lord will not hear my prayer. Nothing short of entire obedience for the time being is the condition of acceptance with God.” (Finney, “An Approving Heart—Confidence in Prayer”, *The Oberlin Evangelist* IX, *op. cit.*, 34)

²⁸⁰ One whose motive in prayer is anything less than complete obedience to God “virtually says, *Let God cease to be*; let him not require what he does; let him not pursue the end that he does; let him not govern the universe; let not his will be universal law.” (Finney, “Acceptable Prayer”, *The Penny Pulpit*, *op. cit.*, 37)

²⁸¹ In a sermon entitled “Heart Sins Hinder Prayer,” Finney listed sixty-two attitudes and actions regarded as “iniquity in the heart” obstructing prayer. (Finney, Sermon 472, “Heart Sins Hinder Prayer”, on Ps 66:18 [1871], *The Charles Grandison Finney Papers*, Oberlin College Archives)

²⁸² “It is not these words, as mere words, that God regards, or that we should value. Words themselves, apart from their meaning, and from their meaning as used by us, would neither please nor displease God.—He looks on the heart.” (Finney, “Conditions of Prevailing Prayer” (part 2), *The Oberlin Evangelist* IX, *op. cit.*, 89)

²⁸³ Finney, “On Prayer”, *The Oberlin Evangelist* XVII, *op. cit.*, 1.

prayer changes the one praying by “mak[ing] us prize the blessing²⁸⁴ and love the Giver.”²⁸⁵

But unlike Edwards, Finney believed prayer could, in some way, also influence God:

In prevailing prayer, a child of God comes before him with real faith in his promises and asks for things agreeable to his will, assured of being heard according to the true intent of the promises; and thus coming to God he prevails with him, and really influences God to do what otherwise he would not do by any means. ... Nothing less than this corresponds either with the promises of scripture, or with its recorded facts in respect to the answers made to prevailing prayer.²⁸⁶

It is unconventional thinking like this—not prayer intrinsically, but prayer of the type Finney promoted in revival,²⁸⁷ examined in Chapter IV—that has persuaded some to view him as “a daring innovator in thought as well as practice.”²⁸⁸

Edwards’ and Finney’s Theological Framework for Travailing Prayer

A brief survey of Edwards’ and Finney’s theological commitments risks oversimplification and omission, while comprehensive evaluation of their theology is beyond the purview of this project, as was stated at the end of the preceding chapter.²⁸⁹ What is important, however, for proceeding with historical analysis of Edwards’ and Finney’s theology and practice of travailing prayer has been to make a comparative review of relevant streams of their thought which we can now step back from as this section closes. Here we attempt to reflect on the structure of their concerns as a way of identifying the theological core driving their view of and engagement in revival with travailing prayer.

²⁸⁴ “We can better appreciate the value of the blessing, by how much the more it costs us and the longer we have to pray for it. The more intensely we feel in our prayer for a given case, the more fully we appreciate the blessing when it comes.” (Finney, “On Persevering Prayer for Others”, *The Oberlin Evangelist* XVII, *op. cit.*, 10)

²⁸⁵ Finney, “On Divine Manifestations”, *The Oberlin Evangelist* VIII, 6, March 18, 1846, 41. See note 202 above.

²⁸⁶ Finney, “Conditions of Prevailing Prayer” [part 1], *The Oberlin Evangelist* IX, *op. cit.*, 82. “It might be wise and good for Him to do many things if sought unto in prayer, which he could not wisely do, unasked. You cannot, therefore, infer that prayer never changes the course which God voluntarily pursues.” (Finney 1877, 221)

²⁸⁷ “‘Old School’ revivalists of the early nineteenth century stood in the [Orthodox Puritan] tradition: they in no way rejected the use of means in securing revivals. Their conflict with the ‘New Measure’ men came over the type of means that could be legitimately used.” (Carwardine 1972, 329, note 8)

²⁸⁸ See Chapter IV, note 36.

²⁸⁹ See p. 74.

Edwards and Finney shared considerable common ground in their work as theologians. They both approached the task from a standpoint of critiquing Calvinism, Edwards in a more rooted, loyal way and Finney with more radical independence. They were both theological defenders, apologists for their views in the context of fierce challenge, as we shall see in the following section of this chapter. And yet both Edwards and Finney were in various ways pioneering theologically, unafraid to explore fresh biblical interpretation in response to their times and to their own experience. Especially their conversion experiences imprinted the outworking of their thought: Edwards' toward a theological aesthetic that valued delight and a sweet sense of divine excellency, and Finney's toward a theology of Spirit baptism that could be empowering and even electrifying. Both Edwards and Finney were an influence theologically upon the generations that followed them, as we have seen. Edwardsean convictions, developed by New Divinity advocates, held sway in seminaries and over revival leaders (including Finney) for a century,²⁹⁰ while Finney's legacy has been traced all the way to the Azusa Street meeting from which Pentecostalism exploded throughout the world²⁹¹. And yet, both men left crucial issues unresolved theologically, particularly in relation to the interaction of divine and human agency, contributing to schism in Edwards' wake²⁹² and persistent derision of Finney as a revival engineer.²⁹³ To a great extent, a theological keystone for both Edwards and Finney was the work of the Holy Spirit, which they saw as the culmination and climax of redemption and the fulfillment of the biblical witness to promised righteousness. Particularly as it pertained to earnest prayer for

²⁹⁰ See Chapter I, note 418.

²⁹¹ Gresham, *op. cit.*, 78.

²⁹² Holifield reflects on the irony that "Edwards, the theologian of unity and harmony, split his congregation and that his ideas would help fracture Reformed theology in America for almost a century." (Holifield 2003, 126) See Chapter III, note 506.

²⁹³ See Chapter IV, note 453.

revival, both men found great alignment around the critical importance of the ministry of the Spirit, as we shall see.²⁹⁴

Such commonalities are noteworthy in light of the enduring paradigm of an Edwards-Finney polarity applied conventionally to theological and historical interpretation of revival.²⁹⁵ Doubtless, theological divergence between the two is conspicuous, beginning from their own distinctive constitutions. Though a revival leader and lifelong pastor, Edwards was the more innately theologically-minded of the two, while Finney, of certainly no little consequence as a thinker, was a pragmatist through and through. Edwards' theological interests and reflective capacities were as broad as they were deep, whereas the perimeter of Finney's thought was generally set by spokes of interest radiating from the dominant hub of revival and the conversion of souls. Some evolution is detectable in both men theologically. But more striking is how resolute Edwards and Finney were from early stages around what they considered to be theological non-negotiables, particularly, as we have seen, in regard to the freedom or limitation of the human will. Prayer could be placed in this category as well: a dimension of Christian theology and practice Edwards and Finney drew conclusions around as young men, modifying them little over time. Both men understood prayer as crucial in helping the petitioner value prayer's answers and love their Bestower, though Finney went farther in seeing prayer as actually moving the divine will. Urgent prayer was an axiomatic posture of waiting²⁹⁶ on God for Edwards: whether that was in a protracted process of conversion, tracking the Puritan morphology or not, or whether that was participating in the travail of the church as she suffered for the millennial hope. Finney's soteriology and eschatology positioned him at the other extreme. Conversion involved the immediate decision to be rescued from a death-threatening criminality, not some kind of

²⁹⁴ See Chapter III, pp. 167-71; Chapter IV, 240-46; Chapter V, 283-86.

²⁹⁵ See above, notes 83-84; Chapter I, 71-72.

²⁹⁶ See Chapter V, 293.

halting “betweenity”²⁹⁷ or relish of divine excellency. And the millennium was something to be worked for, not waited for, by taking up the labour of travail for conversions which paved the path for the Lord’s imminent return.

Identifying the theological mainspring of travailing prayer for Edwards and Finney is complicated to some extent by who we have discovered them to be as theologians. Edwards’ sheer range of thought makes “isolating and identifying such a fundamental motif” in his theology difficult.²⁹⁸ Pauw argues for his trinitarianism,²⁹⁹ Holifield for the glory of God,³⁰⁰ Holmes for aesthetics,³⁰¹ Lloyd-Jones for revival,³⁰² Beck for prayer for revival,³⁰³ and Hastings for pneumatology³⁰⁴ as the key for unlocking the complex treasures of Edwards’ contemplations. And while the moral government of God can be interpreted as the canopy over much of Finney’s thought, it was held up with such a mixture of underpinnings as to make his theology elusive,³⁰⁵ even frustrating to scholars,³⁰⁶ many of whom have come to see him as little more than “a rather unusual and inconsistent New Haven-style Edwardsean preacher.”³⁰⁷

²⁹⁷ See above, note 81.

²⁹⁸ McClymond 1998, 28.

²⁹⁹ “In a figure as complicated as Edwards, it is unreasonable to expect to discover one interpretive window into all the facets of his life and thought. But some windows are bigger than others. I argue that Edwards’s trinitarianism provides an unusually wide view of his deepest philosophical, theological, and pastoral inclinations.” (Pauw, *op. cit.*, 3)

³⁰⁰ “The religious center for Edwards was his sense of the glory of God, a glory manifest especially in divine sovereignty, which Edwards learned to interpret by means of the idea of ‘excellency.’” (Holifield 2003, 104) Hastings concurs that “one could argue that doxology, glory, or God’s self-glorification, ... is the primary motif in Edwards’s theology.” (Hastings 2015, 4)

³⁰¹ Since Perry Miller’s work, Holmes observes how scholars have addressed “the challenge of finding an interpretation that will demonstrate the coherence that runs through [Edwards’] corpus. A recurrent theme has been aesthetics.” (Holmes, *op. cit.*, 20)

³⁰² See Chapter IV, note 3.

³⁰³ *ibid*

³⁰⁴ See above, note 133.

³⁰⁵ See Chapter IV, note 36.

³⁰⁶ “No major institution, denomination, or movement would be fully comfortable in honoring him. Finney is too Arminian for Calvinists, too Calvinistic for Arminians; too rationalistic for mystics, too pietistic for rationalists; too perfectionistic for Presbyterians and Lutherans, too limited in his views of Christian perfection for many followers of Wesley; too conservative for radicals, too innovative for traditionalists; too concerned with individual salvation for those who subscribe to the social gospel, and too committed to the social implications of the Gospel for fundamentalists.” (Hamilton 1975, 13)

³⁰⁷ Sweeney 2003, 151.

All this notwithstanding, it seems prudent to pinpoint pneumatology as the fulcrum of travelling prayer for both men. We have already observed the centrality of the Holy Spirit to their overall theological architecture, mediating the love of God (Edwards) and power of God (Finney) to Christians by indwelling and baptising them, producing and stabilising Christian character. Edwards and Finney understood prayer as the inevitable, irrepressible response to such an encounter, so that reception of the spirit of prayer was for both men the decisive sign of prayer's authenticity. The Holy Spirit, then, was the principal agent of prayer, but also prayer's great object and the worthiest yearning of every petitioner,³⁰⁸ concepts receiving fuller treatment in subsequent portions and the conclusion of this dissertation.³⁰⁹ So vitally necessary was the Spirit's enabling of prayer that Edwards and Finney allowed little to impede expression³¹⁰ of what they perceived to be the Spirit's promptings, even in the face of sometimes acerbic disapproval.

³⁰⁸ See Chapter IV, note 378.

³⁰⁹ See above, note 290; Chapter V, note 60.

³¹⁰ See Chapter IV, note 423.

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