



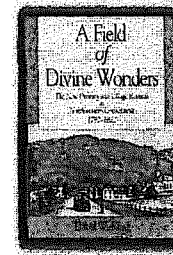
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REVIVAL:
A SOLUTION
OR A PROBLEM?

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BOOK REVIEWS



*A FIELD OF DIVINE WONDERS:
THE NEW DIVINITY AND VILLAGE
REVIVALS IN NORTHWESTERN
CONNECTICUT, 1792-1822*

David W. Kling
University Park, Pennsylvania:
The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993.
296 pages, cloth, \$38.50.

*F*ield of Wonders is the winner of the 1993 Kenneth Latourette Prize in Religion and Modern History, which honors "the historical study of religion's interplay with other elements of modern culture," David Kling's book is highly recommended. Kling starts with an effective personal disclosure that invites the reader to know the New Divinity men in a more personal way. The result is a delightful discovery into the lives and joys of the revival successes, as well as the sobering discovery of their theological convictions and movement's passing.

This 1985 doctoral dissertation matured into a significant volume for every friend or foe of revival. Kling's "primary purpose is to show how the complex phenomenon of religious revival occurred, how it was conveyed, and how it was appropriated" (14). Kling makes a significant contribution to historical studies by offering an interesting model for integrative history. The author integrates "a three-dimensional portrait" by weaving three profiles (13). The first profile (chapters 1-4) examines the New Divinity revival leaders and revival movement. The second profile (chapter 5) takes a microscopic lens to examine the "contentions" of revivals within the history of Farmington First Church. The third profile is a thoroughly researched portrait of the converts, conversion narratives,

demographics, economics, and politics of the awakening (chapters 6-7).

The title of the book comes from a letter used in William Sprague's published *Lectures on Revivals*. The New Divinity leader, Edwin Dorr Griffin, wrote, "I could stand at my doorstep in New Hartford, Litchfield County, and number fifty or sixty congregations laid down in one field of divine wonders" (3). This carefully selected quotation reveals Kling's in depth research and understanding of the revival leaders.

The reader will learn that the New Divinity revival leaders were born out of pastors' homes, where they were trained to be New Divinity men after graduation from Yale. These homes were called "schools of the prophets," "New Divinity finishing schools," "parish parlors," or "log colleges" (29-33). This wasn't an association of pastors based exclusively on geography. This was a revival movement with shared Scriptural language and spiritual fatherhood going back to their association with Jonathan Edwards. Kling writes, "A social portrait of these New Divinity pastors reveals a close-knit, homogeneous group whose background, education, theological convictions, and aspirations enabled them to work effectively together to promote revival" (20).¹ These men knew their legacy, and Kling gives a wonderfully traced legacy from the Puritans to the New Lights in the Great Awakening. Then with greater clarity, Kling uses a "family tree" to show that these leaders were the third generation removed from Jonathan Edwards, who trained prospective pastors out of his home (31). For example, Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) trained Joseph Bellamy (1719-1790) who trained sixty men, and Nathanael Emmons (1745-1840) trained ninety men (30)! Such a legacy shifted from an inherited economic status to an inherited spiritual status of brotherhood. Griffin is quoted at one point in his life as missing "that precious and united brotherhood of ministers" (34).

According to Kling, this New Divinity revival movement was organized "to resuscitate the concert of prayer, engage faithfully in pastoral visitations, and travel continually from village to village in preaching teams" (43).² Using *The*

Connecticut Evangelical Magazine and other primary and published sources, Kling makes the assessment that the revival "was primarily a clerical event" (229) versus the common historical assessment of this awakening as a "populist" movement. These leaders were unique for the democratization of American Christianity taking place in their day.³ They had a distaste for a "political clergy" (54-57). The New Divinity leaders, being men who were aware of the times, sought to promote revival in a more prophetic than political manner.

Kling gives the reader brief portraits of two popular preachers of the revival movement, Edwin Dorr Griffin ("the prince of preachers") and Asahel Nettleton ("the curer of souls"). Chapter 4 offers a focus on their more extemporaneous (117) preaching; a preaching described as more "evangelical" than "rational" (111). Again the three generations are used to study the development of this distinctive preaching. Griffin, the 6'3", 260-pound preacher, brought a "living, experimental religion . . . which fits the soul for the enjoyment of God" (127). Both Griffin and Nettleton did not remain long in any location. Griffin had a number of pastorates, a faculty position at Andover Theological Seminary, and a presidency of Williams College (1821-1836). Nettleton was an itinerant evangelist before founding the Theological Institute of Connecticut (later renamed Hartford Theological Seminary) to combat new measures revivalism and New Haven theology at the end of his life.

Using quantification techniques, Kling shows the relevance of social, political, economic, generation and gender factors among those awakened.⁴ The researcher doesn't overstep the evidence or over-generalize statistics, and cautions the reader against relying too heavily on economic (191), naturalistic (192), and sociological (193) data for historical interpretation. Although he applies Donald Mathew's hypothesis⁵ regarding the origins of the revivals, Kling ends with a fairly proportional and biblical interpretation of the increase of awakening in the village churches during the revivals (191-194).

Although there is much to learn from this revival-movement, the theological aspect of it is perhaps the most

enlightening. The main title of the book comes from an alliance with the Princetonians⁶ over their shared concern about the "noise" of Arminianism, Charles G. Finney's "New Measures," and the interpretation of revival.⁷ Yet the term "New Divinity" in the subtitle was not so Princetonian.⁸ "New Divinity" was a controversial term with multiple interpretations. Kling, after years of research, writes, "Whatever it was—metaphysical madness, pagan fatalism, or chaotic theology—the teachings of the New Divinity bore the fruit of revival" (75). Kling considers the process in the creation of their revivalist theology among these "farmer metaphysicians." He writes, "They created a revivalist theology—expressed in simple, evocative terms to their authors—but not before their hearty theological appetites had fed upon and digested a main course consisting of Calvinist meat marbled throughout with Edwardseanism and seasoned with salt of Enlightenment rationalism and humanism" (77). What the controversy boiled down to was an increasing denial of the doctrines of original sin and the particular atonement of Christ.

Amid the Methodist numerical gains, the bulk of New Divinity writings attacked the "Old Calvinists," paying particular attention to Nathaniel William Taylor. The New Divinity men never denied that God was the efficient cause of salvation, and disliked the overemphasis on secondary human actions and responses in salvation. The highly publicized "Tyler-Taylor controversy (1829-33)" became the center of theological efforts. New Divinity leaders, Bennet Tyler, Griffin, and Nettleton, joined against Taylor primarily to defend divine efficiency in salvation against the "Old Calvinist" rejection of regeneration as preeminently a matter of the intellect (85-103).

The book left this reviewer saddened to discover Griffin disconnected the decree of election from the doctrine of atonement and to learn of Griffin's governmental view of atonement (103-08).⁹ Kling is commended for his scholarship that truly exposed the content of the New Divinity. The book ends with the surprising discovery that this revival movement appeared to pass away. Kling offers two explanations in the concluding

chapter, and listed five reasons for the movement's decline in the book's introduction (3-4). Thanks to Kling's fine work, the New Divinity men used in the village revivals of Northwestern Connecticut from 1792 to 1822 will not be forgotten.

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Notes

1. Appendix One: "New Divinity Revivalist Clergy in Litchfield and Hartford Counties, 1798-1808" gives a list of names, births, father's occupation, theological teacher, career locations, accounts of revivals, theological works or sermons, and theological identity as within or without of the New Divinity (245-49).
2. The means of promoting revival were "the concert of prayer" (63-65), "visitation teams" (43), "the conference meeting" (67, 137), "the lecture on revival" (68), and preaching.
3. Kling is aware of the frontier differences and of Nathan Hatch's *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven, Connecticut, 1989), which he quotes twice.
4. Kling uses seven tables in chapter 6 and five tables in appendix 4 that give plenty of statistics of the converted and the churches effected.
5. "The Second Great Awakening as an Organizing Process, 1780-1830: An Hypothesis." *American Quarterly* 21 (Spring 1969): 23-43.
6. Charles Hodge in a pamphlet entitled, "The New Divinity Tried," wrote, "In the case of Dr. Griffin it is the less necessary, as his *Park Street Lectures* are so extensively known, and as he has so recently proclaimed his dissent from the New Divinity in his *Sermon on Regeneration*." See *Princeton Versus the New Divinity: Articles from the Princeton Review* (Edinburgh: Banner, 2001), 148.
7. This book did not intend to make the distinction between "revival" and "revivalism" in the way Iain H. Murray has in his excellent book, *Revival and Revivalism: The Making and Marring of American Evangelicalism, 1750-1858*, (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1994).
8. There was friction between the New Divinity men and the Princetonians over Edwards himself. Both were not satisfied with Charles G. Finney's claim that Edwards sanctioned some of the "new measures." Samuel Miller, Lyman Beecher, Albert Dod, and Asahel Nettleton led efforts to strip Finney of his Edwardsian pretensions as Sprague's book shows. Mark A. Noll has addressed the friction over Edwards between themselves. Noll writes, "To Princeton it seemed especially galling that the New Haven and other faulty New England systems would continue to call themselves the descendants of Edwards who, the Old Schoolers felt, had taught pretty much what they did. . . . New England responded

to assert its claim to Edwards, and for twenty years the battle was joined." "Jonathan Edwards and Nineteenth-Century Theology," in *Jonathan Edwards and the American Experience* edited by Nathan O. Hatch and Harry S. Stout (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 264.

9. David Calhoun brings additional light on the possible reasons for this. "By accentuating human agency, Taylor and his followers hoped to provide a way in which Calvinism could be reconstructed to appeal to the democratic American culture; but, by adopting presuppositions of their deistic and liberal opponents, they actually hastened the downfall of Calvinism in New England." See *Princeton Seminary: Faith and Learning, 1812-1868, Vol. 1* (Edinburgh: Banner, 1994), 215.



**THE GREAT AWAKENING: DOCUMENTS ON
THE REVIVAL OF RELIGION, 1740-1745**
RICHARD L. BUSHMAN, EDITOR.

Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of
North Carolina Press, 1989.
174 pages, paper, \$ 17.95

This is one of the excellent volumes in the Documentary Problems in early American History series that is sponsored by the Institute of Early American History and Culture at Williamsburg, Virginia. Richard Bushman's previous study of colonial Connecticut, *From Puritan to Yankee: Character and the Social Order in Connecticut, 1690-1765*, had just won the Bancroft Prize in 1968. The general introduction, though surprisingly brief, seeks to establish the social as well as the religious importance. As a professor of history at Boston University at the time¹ Bushman believed, "the Great Awakening was a major movement in the eighteenth century. It released forces that were to have lasting effect on American theology and church life, and, indirectly, on politics as well" (14).

When I was a young teen, our part of the nation had an expression for younger brothers who copied their older brother's way of speaking, his older brother's rap. We discounted the younger brother's imitations of his older brother's rap by labeling it, "secondhand rap." For, although the younger brother could use the same rap as his older brother, he really

did not understand the context, meaning, or source of his words.

Much of the popular evangelical writings on the subject of revival may be labeled as "secondhand rap." Ever since Charles G. Finney, evangelicals have used Jonathan Edwards' writings on revival to endorse their experiences, methods, and revival claims.² Other evangelical scholars, at times, have not challenged such "secondhand rap." As "younger brothers," we may regret writing or speaking some day without knowing the context, meaning, or source of our words on the subject of revival and the Great Awakening. One way to avoid "secondhand rap" is to read firsthand the actual documents wonderfully reprinted and available for us in Bushman's book. The introductions to each chapter of collected documents helpfully place the selections in context and are suggestive of their significance.

Chapter one, "Preparations," offers portions of three sermons leading up to the Great Awakening. All three give the same interpretation of the times and the need for revival of the church. The selected portions from Samuel Willard's sermon, *The Peril of the Times Displayed, 1700*, asked forty-nine very candid and direct questions about the condition of the churches in Boston. The alternative title for his sermon, *The Danger of Mens taking up with a Form of Godliness, But Denying the Power of it*, suggests his assessment of the need for revival. The next sermon, *Defects of Preachers Reproved, 1723*, offers two of Solomon Stoddard's "uses" as a "plea for fervent preaching." The third sermon is Gilbert Tennent's *Solemn Warning* that had great effect in 1735.

Chapter two, "The Itinerants," offers the important documents needed to better understand so much of the controversy surrounding the leaders of the Great Awakening. Eight of the documents concern George Whitefield, six of the documents are Eleazar Wheelock's correspondence as a Connecticut itinerant, five are directly concerning James Davenport, and two are in opposition to itinerancy. Bushman does an excellent job clarifying in the introduction to this chapter why the itinerancy was so controversial. I recommend reading

these documents and other early documents on this issue before arriving at an interpretation too quickly.³

Chapter three, "The New Birth," offers Nathan Cole's often referred to conversion narrative; Samuel Blair's careful revival narrative in "New-Londonerry and other parts of Pennsylvania" in 1744; and Jonathan Dickinson's explanation of the doctrine of the new birth (1741). Each of these is a well-chosen selection for the reader to understand the centrality of regeneration preached and experienced in the Great Awakening. What is often at the heart of the debates during the Great Awakening was the use of language. Edwards' self-proclaimed inability to represent the stirrings of grace in human language was yet required as his defense of God's immediate, internal, and invisible presence. Chauncy, and other opposers, wanted *a priori* judging of only the outward appearances, which appeared disruptive, enthusiastic, and disrespectful. Chapter three offers three of the best uses of language to express the immediate, internal, and invisible workings of the Holy Spirit upon the souls of people.⁴

In chapter four, "Trouble in the Churches," Bushman introduces the separations that occurred among the Presbyterians over the Log College men, among the individual congregations, and among those forming separatist churches. Bushman writes, "The established church was no more successful in collecting ecclesiastical taxes. . . . They [Separatists] went to prison rather than compromise. Relief came only gradually as individual town meetings found tax laws impossible to enforce and as many Separates became Baptists, a denomination officially tolerated and therefore exempt" (87). Friends of revival must come to terms with the fact that separatism, at times unholy, abounded in both the first and second Great Awakenings in America. Bushman's selection lets us read firsthand about the issues of separation. Read, for example, a number of written reasons for withdrawal from a number of individuals in "Explanations For Withdrawal, 1745" (102-103).

In chapter five, "Assessments," Bushman offers a perfect parallel of opposing assessments of the Great Awakening

between 1741-1743. Chauncy writes against the overheated passions in *A Letter . . . to Mr. George Wishart*, and Edwards writes in favor of the awakening showing "the distinguishing marks" present. Then the Congregational Church's annual convention of Massachusetts Bay offers "testimony against" the "antinomian and familistical errors" and "disorders in practice." Finally "an assembly of pastors in New England" offer "testimony and advice . . . occasioned by the late happy revival" in their area. On the latter, fifteen names were attested to the document, but Bushman adds, "ultimately 111 ministers subscribed to the testimony in one way or another" (132).

The last chapter, "New Directions," presents the continuity of issues that carried over into the next generation. Bushman selects eight documents under three headings: "Moralism and Piety," "Tolerance," and "The Good Society." Bushman's chapter title reflects the democratization of Christianity taking place in America. The selected documents reflect challenges to Calvinism, England's religious control of Virginia, growing tolerance, and the difficulty of social reform.

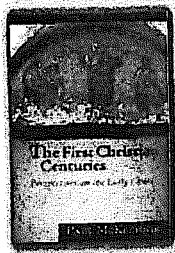
Although "Itinerancy" is spelled incorrectly in the Table of Contents (viii), and twelve of the forty selections fall outside the subtitle's stated period 1740-1745, this reviewer strongly recommends this book for an excellent resource on the Great Awakening and the subject of revival. Besides, who wants to be labeled as using "secondhand rap"?

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Notes

1. As of 1989, Richard L. Bushman was a professor of history at Columbia University.
2. Finney claimed Edwards was on his side of the "new measures" debate. "President Edwards," wrote Finney, was a "great man [who] was famous in his day for new measures." *Lectures on Revivals of Religion* by Charles G. Finney, 2nd ed. (New York, 1835), 241-42. The New Divinity revival leaders joined with the Princeton leaders to strip Finney of his Edwardian pretensions.

3. Another book offering early documents would be *The Great Awakening: Documents Illustrating the Crisis and Its Consequences* (New York and Indianapolis: Bobbs Merrill Co., Inc., 1967) edited by Alan Heimert and Perry Miller. For further reading on the effects and issues of itinerancy see *Contested Boundaries: Itinerancy and the Reshaping of the Colonial American Religious World* by Timothy D. Hall (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1994).
4. For clarification on why language was at the heart revival debates see, "A Flood of Errors": Chauncy and Edwards in the Great Awakening" by Amy Schrager Lang in *Jonathan Edwards and the American Experience* edited by Nathan O. Hatch and Harry S. Stout (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 160-173.



**THE FIRST CHRISTIAN CENTURIES:
PERSPECTIVES ON THE EARLY CHURCH**

Paul McKechnie

Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity (2001)

270 pages, paper, \$18.00

The study of the first three centuries of the Christian era has become a major academic enterprise over the past few decades. Historians and social scientists have produced a number of accounts that are often conflicting. One major issue in these studies has surrounded the question of consensus. How do we handle various texts from the early church? What can we really know about the culture, the lifestyle and the religious practice of people in general and Christians in particular?

In this readable and useful historical summary of the early church Paul McKechnie, professor of classics and ancient history at the University of Auckland, New Zealand, cuts through much present confusion and disagreement, allowing the reader to see what we can know and why. This work should be seen as an introduction to the subject, though it is not an elementary one. McKechnie follows a thematic approach, rather than a chronological one, and interacts quite effectively with older works in the field as well as newer hypotheses. The results are quite satisfactory.

The ten-page introduction is well worth the price of the

book, especially the brief outline of the ways to understand differences between various Christians and Christian churches in the early era. Following Rodney Stark's suggestions the author interacts with the proposition that the early church grew at a rate of about 40% per decade. (This supposition is built on the assumption that 10% of the population was Christian by the time of Constantine.) Following this approach it is estimated that there were 34,000,000 Christians by A.D. 350. In response to these projections Keith Hopkins has observed that the number Stark begins with in A.D. 100 is too small. (Stark says there were only 7,000 at this point.) One of the problems with these estimates is that many of those who make them assume the accounts in the Book of Acts are unreliable public relations accounts. What is astounding is the impact this fast-growing movement made within the Roman Empire. As early as A.D. 49 early historians are noting the presence of Christians within the wider culture. McKechnie suggest that there are things we do know. For example, by the 60s, Christianity was illegal and Peter and Paul died in Rome under Nero's persecution. The conclusion is that:

Christianity was more popular in its earliest decades than academic studies in recent times have wanted to allow. The balance of evidence for its first-century growth tends to point in the same direction as Acts, the biblical text most often suspected of exaggerating the size and importance of the apostles' following (64).

McKechnie convincingly places the *Didache* in the latter part of the first century. It is worth noting that this earliest of non-canonical works includes various instructions on eucharist, baptism, and death. It also prescribes some fairly straightforward liturgical instruction, including prayers to be used. It is the "earliest unambiguous quotation of part of a liturgy for worship in Christian churches" (70) which in itself makes it most important for us. And "The bipartite ministry (bishops/deacons) is close to the pattern in Titus 1:5-9, where there seems to be no distinction between elders/presbyters and overseers/bishops. There began to be a difference not

many decades later; in Ignatius of Antioch, writing about 106, bishops rank above presbyters" (71).

This much we know for certain. In its early years, Christianity grew very rapidly. From the time of Nero, for the next 250 years or so, state sponsored persecution, including laws banning the Christian faith as both idolatrous and seditious, were enforced in various ways. This persecution came in waves, ten of them really, for nearly the first three centuries of the church's development. The church's response to these periods of persecution, followed by brief respites, was always mixed. In some cases the faith became even more popular. In others, the result was division, and the problem of dealing with heresies was always right at the surface of every day church life. By the second century the church had developed a catholicity that made it both formidable and vibrant.

McKechnie provides a stimulating view of how the church grew in both numbers and influence until it made a great impact upon the surrounding culture. The reforming influence of the Christian faith intersected with a pagan culture to make an obvious difference in time. Finally, in the time of Constantine, the church was, for better or for worse, adopted as the official religion of the Empire. McKechnie provides a fresh perspective on the dating of the New Testament documents and handles the historical source material with care. Especially useful are his considerable treatments of Gnosticism, diversity within the church, and the developing impact of the gospel upon the lives of women.

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