

THE CALVINISTIC GROUND OF TRUE EVANGELISM*

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The Evangelism Debate of the 1830s

One hundred and fifty years ago there occurred among the Presbyterian and Congregationalist Calvinists along the eastern seaboard of the United States a very serious debate about the new methods which were being used to promote and carry on revival meetings in western New York state. This debate occurred during the years from 1826 to 1840, which is shortly after the period commonly designated as the "Second Great Awakening" in the history of American Protestantism. It is essential for American Calvinists today to understand the issues and results of this debate, because revivalism and evangelism in the United States were radically changed after 1840. We live today with the assumption that evangelism itself is to be identified with what were in 1830 rightly termed and opposed by Calvinists as the "new measures." We should pause to remember that the term "revival" had at first been used by Calvinists to describe the renewed Christian faith and commitment of churches and communities which resulted from earnest preaching about the need for sinners to repent, trust in Christ, and lead truly godly lives.

The debate itself arose when Charles Grandison Finney, a newly ordained Presbyterian minister who had been sent to western New York state, began to use as methods for revival those which had swept through the southern frontier areas of the new United States in "camp meetings." These meetings had become notorious for their wildness and for the strange actions of those supposedly influenced by the Holy Spirit. The term "holy roller" applies well to these manifestations

of human behavior under mob psychology. These methods, the "new measures" as they came to be called, had become the stock in trade of the Methodist and Baptist revivalists in the South who had attracted whole area populations to their camp meetings. The new measures caused no less excitement in western New York than they had in the South, but whether this excitement actually led to the salvation of sinners was a question that plagued the Calvinist Presbyterian and Congregationalist ministers who saw true religion as a far more lasting thing than a temporary excitement.

Although there had been a small debate in the South with the advent of camp meetings, there had been no strong opposition to them. The established church in that part of America was the Anglican, and since Methodism was at that time still a part of Anglicanism and the camp meetings at first resembled ordinary Methodist gatherings, opposition to them was neither strong nor sustained. In fact, one of the earliest southern revivalists was an Anglican rector by the name of Devereux Jarret, who had no Methodist connections.¹ More basically, however, there was no strong group of Calvinists in the southern churches to question the new methods on biblical grounds. Thus the methods used in the camp meetings became an accepted part of bringing some form of religion to the raw frontier areas. With notable exceptions, much of modern religion in the American South and on American television continues to manifest the exhibitionism of the camp meeting.

On the other hand, there had been a long and strong Calvinist tradition in New England and the central eastern seaboard area. It is here that the "new measures" ran into severe, if in the end unsuccessful, opposition. A strong personality in opposition to the new measures was a man who on any honest reading of history must be ranked with Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield as one of the most effective preachers in America's past, the staunch Calvinist evangelist Asahel Nettleton. It is an indication of the success of the new measures in overcoming the opposition of the Calvinists in this debate that while the name of Charles Finney is known far and wide, the name of Asahel Nettleton is not even to be

found in many religious encyclopedias; he rates only a brief paragraph in the voluminous Schaff-Herzog encyclopedia.

Finney's methods of revival have indeed become the "American way." Unfortunately, temporary excitement is no more equivalent to true Christianity today than it was a century and a half ago. And yet, just as in 1830, those today who in principle oppose these methods of evangelism are considered by many to oppose evangelism itself, and to be in disobedience to the Lord. Even worse than that, we live not only with Finney's methods, we live also with the truly devastating results of those methods in the attitude of the community toward biblical Christianity and the pastoral ministry. This is not to say that no one has ever come to true faith under the use of Finney's methods or from evangelism based on his methods. However, we do hold that this is one of those cases where we may not do evil that good may come, and that the Lord can use a crooked arrow to hit the target.

No one was in a better position by experience and practice to oppose Finney than Nettleton, for Nettleton had cut his evangelistic teeth in an area where certain excitement methods of evangelism had produced bitter fruit during the First Great Awakening. Nettleton knew firsthand the results in a community which follows excitement evangelism. But he was not a writer, and so while he met with Finney to try to dissuade him of his methods, his only writing on the subject was in the form of a letter and it was not followed up for some time, partly because of his own precarious health. Nevertheless, Nettleton's vigorous Calvinism and the truly amazing fruit of his efforts in evangelism make his opinions and methods worthy of our study, as well as our emulation.

Only when we fully understand the issues involved in the American debate on evangelism that occurred in these years from 1826 to 1840, will we as Calvinists really understand the so-called evangelism of today and be able to respond with biblical ideas and methods. To advance that understanding, let us now examine the Calvinistic beginnings of revival on the North American continent.

*The Calvinistic Beginnings of North
American Revival*

American religious historian William Warren Sweet, who spent his teaching career at the University of Chicago and at Southern Methodist University,² can hardly be called a Calvinist. Yet he makes eminently clear that the seeding, watering and pruning of the tree of the serious revival of Christianity in the new world was done by Calvinists. Sweet remarks with some surprise, "In the history of revivalism the outstanding individual revivalists have been Calvinists: exactly contrary to what might have been expected."³

Sweet's explanation for what he sees as an anomaly is worthy of note: "Fortunately, the great Calvinist preachers have not been consistent Calvinists; and they have gone ahead in spite of their doctrine of election, as though there was hope for every man."⁴ The great Edwards, and Nettleton too, would doubtless find this an extreme caricature of their doctrine; nevertheless it is one that even today is in various forms a part of the attitude of both Calvinists and non-Calvinists alike. "Calvinists are just not interested in evangelism," we hear; "You have to be an Arminian, or at least a semi-Arminian to be successful in bringing people to the Lord." The problem is that for some Calvinists, this picture has become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Calvinism is supposed to be incompatible with evangelism, so why be concerned about it?

Revival in North America had its beginnings first and foremost from the Dutch Reformed. Pastor Theodore Freylinghuysen became, at the age of 29, the pastor of three Dutch Reformed congregations in the Raritan Valley in central New Jersey. Born in Germany near the Dutch border, he learned the Dutch language and entered the ministry of the Dutch Reformed Church, where he associated himself with the pietist movement. From the copies of his sermons still extant we find that his preaching was very seriously directed toward individual faith, and was even abusive at times. Nevertheless, even though he was opposed by a number of fellow pastors, and the matter was appealed to the Netherlands, he was never proven to be anything but a standard

Calvinist. Thus, of course, Sweet's comment is appropriate.

Freylinghuysen produced five sons, all of whom followed in his ways in their ministries among the Dutch Reformed. Theodore's efforts to help bring the young Gilbert Tennant to be pastor for the Presbyterians in the neighborhood became a means to spread his influence to that denomination. Young Tennant, one of the sons of the Rev. William Tennant, Sr., who was the founder and teacher of ministerial students in the now famous "Log College," soon began to follow the senior Freylinghuysen's example in preaching personal repentance and righteous living. Subsequent history finds Gilbert Tennant's two brothers, as well as other graduates of the Log College, laboring for revival among those of Presbyterian background. We must remember that among the colonists in those days approximately one in seven was a member of a church, though with few exceptions they had been members of state churches in the countries from which they had emigrated. The fields of North America were white unto harvest.

One of the Log College evangelists, Samuel Davies, demonstrates the theology and practice that characterized this older Calvinist revivalism. Davies spent ten years in Virginia (1748-1758) where "unlike the revival elsewhere, the Virginia phase of the Presbyterian awakening was largely free from extravagances and excessive emotionalism."⁵ Davies' Calvinism made him of some concern to the Anglicans of Virginia, but he found few enemies among the non-revivalist Presbyterians. Davies ended his career as President of Princeton, the Calvinism of which institution in those days is not only unquestionable, but legendary.

Other revivals in New England under the leadership of such men as Jonathan Edwards, who graduated from Yale in 1720, and Jonathan Dickinson, who had graduated from the same institution fourteen years earlier, were under distinctly Calvinistic leadership and preaching. The only distinction from some of the other preaching by Calvinists in those days was that it was very personally directed and it most seriously called each hearer to make certain that he had believed the gospel in his heart. The notion of a personal "conversion

experience" as a necessary part of coming to true faith is one that was common in those days, especially among Calvinists of Puritan background. These Calvinist revivals happened, however, not as a result of preachers trying to produce such experiences in their hearers. Their very Calvinism kept them from attempting such a course. Indeed, at the beginning of this First Great Awakening Edwards and others proclaimed themselves to be most surprised at what had happened and declared clearly that it was a sovereign work of God which they had witnessed.⁶

There were those among the settled ministers of the Reformed and Presbyterian churches who opposed the works of Freylinghuysen and the Tennants, so much so that the revivalist New Brunswick Presbytery was expelled from the Synod of the Presbyterian Church in 1741, and Freylinghuysen was accused of heresy. This opposition was not without good reason, for both of their groups sometimes used abusive language in their preaching. In particular, Gilbert Tennant preached a sermon on the "Dangers of an Unconverted Ministry," in which he applied some choice and pungent similes to describe some of his colleagues.⁷ It is of note that Tennant later apologized and repented publicly for this abuse of fellow ministers and the Presbyterian Church was reunited in 1758.⁸ Nevertheless, the First Great Awakening occurred under the ministry of men who were all very Calvinistic in their theology.

The Second Great Awakening: Also Calvinistic

A study of the theology of those ministers who were responsible for the Second Great Awakening, as the period from 1792 to 1808 has come to be called, shows that they also were Calvinists. To be sure, the Calvinism of some of the leaders in this second awakening was somewhat modified in order to give more credence to the supposed abilities of the unregenerate man. Nevertheless, a large number of both Presbyterian and Congregationalist pastors continued to hold the robust Calvinism of the Westminster Confession.

Prominent in this modification of Calvinism was the Hopkinsian school of thought which denied the imputation of

Adam's sin and limited depravity to man's will, rather than ascribing it to his nature.⁹ A famous member of this school of thought, Timothy Dwight, who was president and professor of divinity at Yale after 1795, saw the conversion of one-third of the student body under his chapel preaching.

During this time a controversy arose among the students at Yale which demonstrates the nature of the division among these Calvinists. President Dwight held that the unregenerate might use the means of grace, particularly prayer as a means of grace, to good effect and without abusing it. Many of his students, including Asahel Nettleton, of whom we will hear more shortly, disagreed heartily with this view, as did most of the New England ministers.¹⁰ To Nettleton, Dwight's view destroyed entirely the difference between the regenerate and the unregenerate.¹¹ This was simply not acceptable.

The Work of Asahel Nettleton

The evangelistic ministry of Asahel Nettleton makes him a fitting capstone for the Second Great Awakening. He stands out in the view of his own contemporaries as the one major figure in that event, even though his ministry technically followed its usually given end date of 1808. Lyman Beecher, himself famous as a pastor and evangelist of this awakening, says of Nettleton, "Considering the extent of his influence, I regard him as beyond comparison, the greatest benefactor which God has given this nation; and through his influence in promoting pure and powerful revivals of religion, as destined to be one of the greatest benefactors of the world. . . ." ¹² J.F. Thornbury, Nettleton's most recent biographer (1977) remarks that Beecher's "high praise seems extravagant, but one who has read the first-hand accounts of what God accomplished through him [Nettleton] can understand why men like Beecher thought so highly of him."

Nettleton was strongly committed to the Calvinistic doctrines of grace. These doctrines were not peripheral, but central to his preaching and methods of evangelism. He avoided at all costs the idea that the unsaved could do anything for themselves. Even their prayer was sin, in his view,

because they would be praying out of an unregenerate heart. Furthermore, the purpose of their prayer would be to obtain personally the comfort of salvation for themselves, and not to bring glory to God by that possibility. Such prayer, Nettleton believed, could never expect God's approbation. To prove this, he pointed out that the unbeliever is by nature a "double-minded man," and then quoted James 1:7 concerning such a man, "Let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord." Nettleton's Calvinism was both serious and applied.

Though baptized in infancy in the Congregationalist Church and brought up with some religious instruction, Nettleton made no profession of faith until at the age of 18 he became more and more uncomfortable with his sins. Then during the ministry of a temporary pastor in the local church he found relief after a period of about ten months of uncertainty about his salvation. The death of his father in that same year made it imperative that he, as the oldest son, remain on the farm, so it was not until he was 22 years old that he was able to enter Yale in 1805.

Following college and further theological studies, Nettleton was licensed to preach on May 28, 1811, by the West Association of New Haven County, Connecticut. By this time he had purposed to spend his ministerial life on the foreign mission field rather than in his own country. However, the machinery for sending foreign missionaries was not available in 1811 and while Nettleton waited for it to be established, he began to preach in vacant congregations.

Several of Nettleton's first assignments in vacant congregations were in an area of eastern Connecticut where the villages had become known as religious "waste places." These places had been laid waste, that is, made inhospitable to any kind of religious movement, as a result of the work of the Rev. James Davenport.¹³ Davenport had been one of the later workers in the First Great Awakening and shortly after his ordination in 1738 had become acquainted with George Whitefield, who was then on a preaching tour of the Colonies. Davenport, however, did not follow the sober and conservative methods of the other revivalists. He began

immediately to single out people who had professed repentance at his meetings by calling them "Brother" or "Sister," while addressing other Christians simply as "Mr." or "Mrs." On one occasion he preached to his congregation for 24 hours without stopping. It was not long before he looked at other pastors as being "dead wood" and attempted revivals in their areas without seeking their permission or cooperation.

It did not take Nettleton long to realize that the deadness to religion he found in the area was a direct result of these "excitement" methods of revivalism. While he was unable to penetrate into the malaise of the region, he did learn very well what an evangelist should not do, and he learned the importance of the ministry of the Word of God by settled pastors. As a result of this experience and his own later work as an evangelist, Nettleton became absolutely convinced of the necessity of avoiding excitement methods. Furthermore, in 1820, after he himself had been laboring for nine years in preaching from place to place, he advised the General Association of Connecticut against a proposal to send out a number of "itinerant" evangelists.¹⁴

Nettleton began his work of itinerant evangelism by accepting invitations to preach in vacant congregations. He did not seek specifically evangelistic work at the beginning, and he never became a type of the modern one-week stand evangelist, even after he had spent many years in the work. He always spent at least six weeks in a place, usually about three months, and always when he did enter a town or city to help with a hoped-for revival, it was at the invitation of a settled minister of a Presbyterian or Congregationalist congregation. It should be remembered, parenthetically, that during this time the Presbyterians and Congregationalists in New England worked together cooperatively as denominations according to an agreement called the Plan of Union, which had been adopted in 1801.

Nettleton pursued throughout his ministry the work in which, contrary to his own wishes, he had now made his career. Opportunity to work in foreign missions never came his way, even though he did not give up the idea for at least

ten years. Later, after a bout with typhoid fever, such work became impossible, as his health never completely returned.¹⁵ He did, however, continue to preach as much as he was able and even made a preaching visit to England in 1831. In 1833 he was appointed Professor of Pastoral Duty at the Theological Institute of the newly-formed Pastoral Union of Connecticut. Though declining the appointment, he did move to East Windsor where the Institute was located, and gave lectures as he was able. He died in 1844 after several years of ill health.

The methods Nettleton followed in evangelism were crafted in accord with his Calvinistic theology and his conviction that evangelism is nothing more or less than preaching the Word of God. His contemporary biographer, Bennet Tyler, points out that he improved rather than detracted from the theology of the churches by preaching the doctrines of Calvinism most plainly and forcefully.¹⁶ He forbade outward manifestations of the emotional turmoil that sometimes accompanies the conviction of sins, and he advised those who expressed conviction or were beginning to trust in Christ, that they not make a public display but retire to the privacy of their own dwellings to think soberly of their future in this life and in eternity. He was ever on guard against counting converts and he opposed the use of the "anxious bench" where, in some revivals, those anxious for salvation were instructed to sit publicly so that they might receive the benefits of personal prayer for their souls. He rejected the naming of individuals in public prayer as well as the practice of allowing women to lead in prayer in a mixed gathering. His preaching was directly to the heart of the matter, to the reality of sin and of man's guilt before God, and to the work of Christ as the only way of atonement.

The preaching and methods of Nettleton were tremendously blessed with true converts. While he preached most often in small communities and never had the use of electronic media, it is recorded that somewhere between twenty and thirty thousand people became serious Christians as a result of his ministry. This estimate comes not from any so-called "revival statistics," but from the testimony of the

pastors of the churches in the communities where he had preached. Indeed, what is most impressive about this estimate is that it is declared again and again that these converts almost invariably continued to be sound church members twenty and thirty years later. The Holy Spirit used Nettleton's evangelism to produce lasting results and backsliders were the exception rather than the rule.¹⁷

Finney and the "New Measures"

It is into this long history of Calvinistic revival, toward the end of Nettleton's career, that Charles Finney arrived with his "new measures." We will leave the description of the life and work of Finney to his many biographers and admirers. But it must be pointed out that although ordained in the Presbyterian Church, he had not been theologically trained in the normal way, and his theology was decidedly Arminian. Finney had begun a career as a lawyer before he became seriously interested in religion. He underwent a conversion experience in 1821 and almost immediately felt a desire to preach.

After studying two years with his local pastor, the Rev. George Gale, Finney sought and obtained licensure from his local Presbyterian council. Six months later he was again examined and ordained, even though he later confessed that he had not read the Westminster Confession and had rejected his own pastor's theology.¹⁸ In fact, his theology was directly contrary to that of the Confession he had promised to uphold. His rejection of Calvinism was thorough. He rejected the teaching of man's depravity through the fall, the imputation of Adam's sin, the satisfaction theory of the atonement, and the inward and efficacious work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration.¹⁹ These ideas he considered to be "contrary to reason," and he took the typically Arminian line of reasoning against total inability by regarding it incredible that God would require men to do things they were not morally capable of performing.

Finney's methods of evangelism reflected his theology. If sin consists simply and solely in the voluntary acts of the mind, as he believed, it is not surprising that repentance and

faith are to be seen as nothing more than a voluntary change of mind. Indeed, Finney saw the work of the Holy Spirit as a mere "moral suasion" similar to that of a man standing on the bank of a river urging his friends in a boat to avoid the rapids toward which they are drifting. He considered the doctrine of depravity to be totally contrary to sound evangelism. "Successful preaching, he maintained, must be based on the proposition that men have the full ability to convert themselves."²⁰

A few brief quotes from Finney will serve to show how he believed people were to be persuaded to change their minds. His basic principle is the necessity of excitement. "God," he said, "has found it necessary to take advantage of the excitability there is in mankind, to produce them to obey."²¹ "Men are so sluggish," he continued, "there are so many things to lead their minds off from religion and to oppose the influence of the Gospel, that it is necessary to raise an excitement among them, till the tide rises so high as to sweep away the opposing obstacles."²² Even God was subject to this necessity: "And precisely so far as our land approximates to heathenism, it is impossible for God or man to promote religion in such a state of things but by powerful excitements."²³

Furthermore, Finney specifically rejected the idea that revival of true religion is a work of God. First of all he holds that "there is nothing in religion beyond the ordinary powers of nature. It consists entirely in the right exercise of the powers of nature."²⁴ Again he says, "A revival is not a miracle, nor dependent on a miracle in any sense. It is a purely philosophical result of the right use of the constituted means. . . ." ²⁵ Finney does express some need for God's blessing, just as God's blessing is needed to harvest a crop after having planted the seed, but he emphatically stresses that the harvest of souls is just as natural and just as regular when the right means are used, as is the harvesting of wheat. Actually Finney took for granted the blessing of God upon his methods, far more than most farmers do the coming of seasonal rains.

Where Are We Today?

Now this man, with his theology and methodology, is rightly called the "Father of Modern Evangelism." Through his particular use of the "anxious bench" he is also the father of the so-called "altar call." The Presbyterians of New England were simply not able to stem the tide of Finneyism, and Finney's theology as well as his evangelistic methods soon won the day and became institutionalized at Oberlin College where Finney became a professor of Theology in 1836.²⁶

Some of the Presbyterian and Congregationalist churches refused to accept Oberlin's graduates, but this resistance too eventually fell away and Finneyism swept away its rivals in most Protestant churches. By the end of the nineteenth century there remained fewer differences, either theological or methodological, among American churches, and Dwight L. Moody was able to mount immense evangelistic campaigns with the cooperation of many denominations.²⁷ No doubt the weakened Calvinism of the New England Theology is partly responsible for this capitulation. Lyman Beecher, the close friend of Nettleton quoted above, defected to the Finney side of the controversy soon after he and Nettleton had participated on the Calvinist side of a discussion with Finney and his followers.²⁸

Present Day Evangelism

That which constitutes "evangelism" in the minds of most Christians today follows the theology and methods of Charles Finney. The American churches have never escaped the disease of "Finneyism." As a result we have a situation throughout our nation similar to what Nettleton found in eastern Connecticut in 1811, a situation also repeated in Western New York state, which became known as the "burnt over" region as a result of Finney's revivals. Not only is there a real depreciation of the church and of the settled ministry, but the very word "Christian" has come to mean: someone "saved" at an "evangelistic meeting."

A further result of this kind of revivalism has been the rising of strange sects and cults from the ashes of the churches burned out with revival. This happened in the area of Davenport's work after the First Great Awakening, and on a far larger scale in western New York following the Finney crusades. Western New York state is the soil from which have sprung no less than four of the modern American pseudo-Christian cults, as well as several fringe denominations of Christianity. Mormonism, Seventh-Day Adventism, Christian Science and the Jehovah's Witnesses all grew up in the area of Finney's greatest activity and in the years immediately following that activity. Not surprisingly, a century and a half later, our whole nation has become a hotbed of strange cults and religions. This is in no small part due to the burnout effect of "new measures" evangelism in many of our larger cities.

The parallel between the situation that came with the rise of Finney's new measures and the present religious climate in the United States can be seen by looking briefly at the warnings of a contemporary of Finney. The Rev. W. B. Sprague published in 1832, at the height of the Finney controversy, his *Lectures on Revivals*. While Rev. Sprague was very much in favor of seeking revival through Calvinistic preaching, he saw clearly the dangers in the new measures. In his book there is a chapter on the dangers associated with revivals and the list he gives bears an uncanny application to the so-called "evangelism" of today.

Listed briefly, Sprague's dangers are these: 1) The cherishing of false hopes--for example that a particular body posture will be favorable to conversion, or even worse, that all that is necessary to be a Christian is the desire to be one. 2) Spiritual self-confidence in those who ought to bear themselves with the utmost humility before God and man. Sprague says, "Let anyone confidently ascribe his conversion to one moment, and you can expect little from him in the cause of Christ." 3) Censoriousness, particularly in looking down on others as "dead" Christians. 4) Inconstancy in religion, the here-today-gone-tomorrow kind that is epidemic in modern America. 5) Ostentation--the overstating of the

results of revival, either in the person or in the statistics reported. 6) Undervaluing divine institutions and divine truth; for example: undervaluing the church, and its ministry, and the Sabbath services. 7) Derogation of the ministerial office. How many pastors themselves do that by asking to be called by their first names? 8) Setting false standards of Christian character. The most glaring example of this is the "born again" movement in our country today. 9) Corruption of the purity of the church; for example: admitting people to the Lord's Supper with no probation.²⁹ These dangers are not only rampant around us but several of them are actually seen as virtues among those who promote so-called "evangelistic" ministries today.

Calvinism is the Sure Ground

Today, just as in the days of Nettleton and Sprague, Calvinism is the only sure and biblical alternative. As long as we look at our world through its own lenses, we will not see clearly and our evangelism will follow the wrong model. The viewpoint of our society, and particularly of that area of society that calls itself "Christian," is hopelessly tied to Finney's methods and to the Pelagian theology that lies behind them. Only by taking our stand upon biblical Calvinism can we expect to understand and even break through the modern morass.

Evangelism first of all must be defined Calvinistically, that is biblically, not as separate from but as a part of the regular preaching of the Word of God. The New Testament *euangelion* is not separated from the Word of God, but it is the Word of God "which by the gospel is preached to you" (I Pet. 1:25). The apostle Paul commands Timothy do "make full proof of his ministry" by doing the work of an evangelist (II Tim. 4:5). "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17). Scripture is abundantly clear: evangelism is not some esoteric work which settled pastors cannot perform but it is part and parcel of their central task of preaching God's Word. Asahel Nettleton was right in abominating the fact that many were seeking to be "evangelists" who were not fit to be settled pastors.³⁰

Secondly, evangelism is the work of the church, not of self-appointed itinerants or of television spectacularists. "How shall they preach except they be sent?" Paul asks. How indeed? Christ gave the great commission not to the world, but to the church. The book of Acts describes the work Christ did after his ascension in and through the church. Acts is a book of records, and of a church that kept records. The three thousand added following Pentecost were not revival statistics estimated by an expert on crowds; they were added to the number of those who were already members of the church. The real test of evangelism is not how many came forward, but how many from outside the church have now joined a congregation.

Thirdly, evangelism as a part of the preaching of God's Word must always be done in dependence that God will give the increase. Faith is the result of regeneration which is an act God accomplishes according to his schedule, not ours, when his Word is preached. The idea that a few sermons, even very good ones, are going to radically change a large number of those who hear in a very short time, finds no support in Scripture. Raising excitement may cause people to think they have undergone a radical change, particularly when conversion is seen as moving from the back to the front of the auditorium, but that is most often psychological deception. Preaching the Word of God *is* like planting crops: God does give increase, but he seldom does it instantaneously.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, preaching the gospel is dealing with sin. It is *not* persuading a morally neutral person to change the direction of his life. Calvinism swings on the hinge of total depravity; if this one is not true the others become unnecessary. In similar fashion, the beginning of the gospel is the preaching of sin by declaring the righteous demands of God's holy law. When the "evangelist" does not take sin as seriously as does biblical Calvinism, he will not understand his task. That is why the biblical call to "repent and believe the gospel" has been replaced by such moral persuasions as "invite Christ to be your personal savior," or "commit your life to Christ." That is also why

so-called "evangelistic meetings" are not worship services and they end with an "invitation" or an "altar call" rather than with a benediction.

Evangelism is part and parcel of the preaching of the word of God. When that Word is faithfully preached, evangelism is being done. It is our calling in this institution to train men for the task of officially preaching the Word of God. But this institution is also dedicated to the idea that God's Word teaches Calvinism. Let us never be ashamed of that dedication. Historic Calvinism is not beside the gospel; it is the purest form of the gospel ever stated by mortal man. It is, indeed, "Christianity, rightly so called."

*This is an edited version of the academic convocation address delivered Thursday, September 3, 1987, at the beginning of the 1987-88 academic year.

NOTES

1. William Warren Sweet, *Revivalism in America* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1944) 86.
2. Died 1958.
3. Sweet, *Revivalism*, 28.
4. Sweet, *Revivalism*, 28.
5. Sweet, *Revivalism*, 66.
6. Note the word "surprising" in the title of Edward's work *A Narrative of Many Surprising Conversions*.
7. Sweet, *Revivalism*, 56.
8. Sweet, *Revivalism*, 60.
9. Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia, Vol. V (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1950) 364.
10. Bennet Tyler, *The Life and Labour of Asahel Nettleton* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1975) 48-49.
11. Tyler, *Life and Labour*, 48-49.
12. John F. Thornbury, *God Sent Revival* (Grand Rapids: Evangelical Press, 1977) 23.
13. Cf. Thornbury, *Revival*, chapter 8 and Tyler, *Life and Labour*, p.55ff.

14. Tyler, *Life and Labour*, 62.
15. Tyler, *Life and Labour*, 232ff.
16. Tyler, *Life and Labour*, 331.
17. Thornbury, *Revival*, 13.
18. Thornbury, *Revival*, 160.
19. Thornbury, *Revival*, 160.
20. Thornbury, *Revival*, 161.
21. Charles Finney, *Revivals of Religion* (Virginia Beach: CBN University Press, 1978) 2.
22. Finney, *Revivals*, 2.
23. Finney, *Revivals*, 3.
24. Finney, *Revivals*, 4.
25. Finney, *Revivals*, 3.
26. Sweet, *Revivalism*, 136.
27. Sweet, *Revivalism*, 139.
28. Thornbury, *Revival*, 195.
29. William B. Sprague, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1978) 215-258.
30. Tyler, *Life and Labour*, 61.