



# Modern Christian Revivals



EDITED BY EDITH L. BLUMHOFER  
AND RANDALL BALMER

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS PRESS  
Urbana and Chicago



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TO ANDREW WALLS

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## Acknowledgments

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This book is dedicated to a historian who has dedicated his life to expanding our understanding of the cultural and spiritual significance of Christian revivals around the world.

## Introduction



EDITH L. BLUMHOFER AND  
RANDALL BALMER

The term *revival* has had various connotations throughout modern history. To cite two notorious examples on the American scene, the redoubtable Jonathan Edwards believed that revival was "a surprising work of God," while Charles Grandison Finney declared emphatically that revival was "a work of man." Edwards dedicated his considerable intellectual talents to understanding the gracious visitation of God upon his congregation at Northampton, Massachusetts, while Finney, believing that revivals came about through human agency rather than divine, produced the first in a series of manuals aimed at supplying a formula for the replication of revivals throughout antebellum America.

Such broadly divergent understandings of revival render the task of definition a difficult one.<sup>1</sup> Most Christian revivals have as their object some sort of conversion or experience of grace in the individual. Very often that experience is instantaneous and datable, after the manner of such spectacular conversions as those of Saints Paul and Augustine. Others are less spectacular, and some people prefer to see their spiritual lives as pilgrimages. Modern revivalism, particularly the strain that emphasizes pilgrimage over instantaneous conversion, owes a great deal to pietism, with its emphasis on personal probity and attention to the disciplines of spirituality.

Evangelicalism more generally, with its emphasis on the individual's direct relationship with God, has nurtured revivals throughout the modern period. Whereas Roman Catholicism and the high church traditions teach that God's grace is communicated continually and repeatedly through the sacraments, evangelical spirituality and soteriology is considerably more ephemeral. For most evangelicals the process of establishing, sustaining, or renewing a direct relationship with God is not so simple as being baptized, partaking of the Eucharist, or going to confession. Instead, they have to conjure the requisite

sentiments—sorrow for sin, humility before the Almighty, fear of perdition—in order to atone for their spiritual indifference and amend their lives. Revivalism, especially revival preaching, abets this process. Evangelical revivalists, moreover, historically have understood the importance of popular communications and group behavior to touch both the intellect and the affections, and, as these essays indicate, they have been remarkably adaptable to historical and social circumstances. Indeed, the relative absence of ecclesiastical hierarchies or liturgical rubrics among evangelicals has provided them greater latitude to tailor their message to particular audiences.

The essential characteristic of revival (and one implied in the term itself) is that it assumes some sort of decline, whether real or imagined, out of which the faithful are called to new heights of spiritual ardor and commitment. Finney, once again, was quite explicit. "A 'Revival of Religion,'" he wrote, "presupposes a declension."<sup>2</sup> Revivals, then, often build upon a sense of loss and the need to recover a former plateau of spirituality. There is an evocation of a golden, halcyon past that serves as an implicit rebuke to the spiritual languor of those who stand in need of revival.

Various revivals exhibit other characteristics as well. While individual, private regenerations are not unheard of, most revivals are communal events. A skilled and charismatic evangelist can whip a revival gathering into a frenzy, full of passion and excitement. The sheer force of group behavior in such an environment has a powerful influence upon the behavior of individuals. That is not to deny the workings of the Holy Spirit, but merely to suggest that such workings are beyond the ken of human understanding and presumably manifest themselves in particular circumstances.

The essays that follow, first delivered in 1989 at a conference entitled "Modern Christian Revivalism: A Comparative Perspective" at Wheaton College, provide a hint of the various forms that revivals have taken in the modern period as well as the influences that have animated them. In the opening essay, Randall Balmer charts the rise and spread of pietism on both sides of the Atlantic. The eighteenth-century revival of religion known to historians as the Great Awakening, Balmer argues, was not so much the death rasp of Puritanism as it was the confluence of New England Puritanism and the various strains of Continental pietism already flourishing in the Middle Colonies. Balmer goes on to show the continuing influence of pietistic impulses on the evangelical and revival tradition in America.

David Bebbington asserts that the Evangelical Revival in eighteenth-century England was not so antithetical to the Enlightenment as his-

torians have often supposed, an argument that will seem eminently plausible to students of the Princeton theology in the nineteenth century or fundamentalist theology in the twentieth. "Educated evangelicals," Bebbington insists, "were part of an Enlightenment cultural milieu." Indeed, they appropriated the Enlightenment's use of empiricism to understand their own spiritual experiences, and their millennial notions mimicked the optimistic temper of the Enlightenment. In addition, Bebbington contends that evangelicalism shared with the Enlightenment an emphasis on popular education, the duties of morality, latitudinarianism, and a common literary idiom. "The revival," he asserts, "did not turn its adherents into ignorant bigots."

In his essay on Puritan New England, Gerald F. Moran cites the importance of clerical professionalization and transatlantic correspondence as instrumental to the success of revivals in the eighteenth century. Although the scope of the revival itself caught many of the clergy by surprise, they eventually rebounded by "combining old pastoral practices, which they used to guide the revival and counsel their stricken parishioners, with fresh attitudes toward the proper role of the people in the church and the propriety of the pure church." Moran also argues that the revival known to historians as the "Great Awakening" was built upon the foundation of local, discrete revivals in New England dating back to the seventeenth century. He concludes that the Awakening attested to "the capacity of the Puritan system for self-renewal."

In his essay on the Old South, John B. Boles outlines the characteristics of religion during the Great Revival of the antebellum South and the long shadow that evangelical revivals have cast over southern culture, including such aspects as political rhetoric, family life, and even child-rearing. Southern evangelicalism, he argues, was marked by the lay control of the churches, by vernacular preaching, and by an interior faith. Antebellum revivals were social occasions punctuated by ritualized conversions and "rededications." The picture that emerges here is that southern religion was decidedly energetic and enthusiastic rather than contemplative. The Great Revival signaled the triumph of evangelical denominations in the South, particularly the Methodists, Baptists, and Presbyterians. Boles points out what he calls the evangelical churches' "principled compromise" with slavery, which he insists "was not simply a selling out to the forces of black exploitation for the sake of courting planter popularity." Rather, the early antislavery ministers recognized that their freedom to preach in many areas of the South would be circumscribed by their abolitionist stance. In a provocative thesis, Boles also argues that the

gradual Christianization of slaves made the entire institution of slavery a good bit more benign and humane by the nineteenth century than it had been previously. Beneath the roofs of many evangelical churches in the antebellum South, blacks even attained a kind of equality with whites, if only for a few hours a week.

In the early decades of the nineteenth century, Richard Carwardine argues, "the United States was not alone in experiencing a 'reformation' in popular religion." In the juxtaposition of the Second Great Awakening in both Britain and the United States, Carwardine finds several common elements. Both cultures were trying to adjust to a new economic order: the industrialization in Britain and the emerging market economy in America. The evangelical theology on both sides of the Atlantic moved dramatically in the direction of Arminianism—witness the transatlantic appeal and influence of Charles Grandison Finney and Methodism. "In both societies," Carwardine writes, "revivals were often the catalysts of progressive humanitarian and moral reform, drawing on and reinforcing established strains of millennial and perfectionist thought," although Britain endured nothing akin to the Civil War, "America's Holy War."

Frederick Hale uses a study of revivals in Norway to suggest the inadequacy of stereotypes of religious life in state-church-dominated cultures and the narrowness of the use of the term in the American setting. The word *revival* as used by American scholars is problematic when introduced into the Norwegian setting, raising as many questions as it answers. Hale focuses on personal spirituality rather than on revival in the churches in order to show how various phenomena usually associated with revival have contributed to the spiritual vitality of Norwegians in ways that conventional religious practices apparently did not.

Annual Keswick Conventions, held in England's Lake District since 1875, have had enormous influence on American evangelicalism. David Bundy examines the origins of the "higher Christian life" spirituality associated with Keswick, carefully documenting the interplay of streams of piety rooted in continental European and British Protestantism with American holiness teaching.

American pentecostalism emerged as a discrete movement at the turn of the century. Its early adherents understood revival somewhat differently than did most American Protestants, many of whom were praying for revival. Pentecostals believed that the last days would be marked by an intense revival that would issue in Christ's physical return. They regarded pentecostalism as that revival, so they announced the presence of long-awaited renewal and thought of themselves as

the sign that revival had come. Edith Blumhofer explores the early pentecostal understanding of revival, which differs markedly from later pentecostal expectations that tended to be more typically evangelical.

Early twentieth-century revivals in China, both under missionary auspices and under national leadership, are the focus of Daniel Bays's chapter. "Within a few years after 1900," he writes, "revivals reminiscent in tone and size of those of Finney and Moody were occurring in China. A major reason for this was the dramatically altered climate of receptivity to Christianity in China." He raises the question of whether or not revivalism is a handy and effective means for indigenous Christian leaders to break free of domination by foreign missionaries and concludes: "The tentative answer in the Chinese case is that, in the first part of the twentieth century, it was. This may also indicate the long-term historical significance of the phenomenon of revivalism in a global Christian context."

The rapid growth of evangelical and pentecostal movements across Latin America in recent years is common knowledge. Several important studies by social scientists have begun to address both the dimensions of the change and its social implications. Everett A. Wilson examines the social orientation of Latin American evangelicals. Despite allegations that these movements support oppressive regimes and oppose revolutionary politics and social progressivism, Wilson argues that "Latin American evangelicals are committed to taking control of their own destinies and are themselves effective agents of social change."

In an overview of revivalism in the past generation, David Edwin Harrell, Jr., offers a close look at several major players. "From Billy Graham to Pat Robertson," he notes, "we have witnessed the southernization of American revivalism and the Americanization of southern religion."

Finally, in a highly personal account appropriate to the emotional and personal nature of revivals, George A. Rawlyk, who delivered the keynote address to open the conference, reflects on the theoretical models that have informed his own work on Canadian revivalism. In addition, Rawlyk offers his thoughts on the professional perils he has faced within the Canadian academic community for challenging what he calls "the compelling power of secular bias" in the mainstream of Canadian historiography. Rawlyk cites the example and the support of religious historians in the United States—Nathan Hatch, Mark Noll, and especially George Marsden, among others—as critical in his own development as a historian of evangelical-



ism in Canada. "If neo-Marxists can write neo-Marxist history," Rawlyk asks, "why should not evangelical Christian historians—like Marsden—write from an evangelical Christian perspective?" In an intriguing coda to his address, Rawlyk makes clear that, despite his avowed religious sympathies, he is unwilling to remain uncritical of North American evangelicalism. Drawing on the work of Douglas Frank, Rawlyk adopts a Marxian critique of evangelicalism, which, he believes, has so capitulated to consumerism—"the insidious antithesis of essential Christianity"—that it has lost its prophetic voice.

## NOTES

1. The editors thank Russell E. Richey for the benefit of his reflections on the nature and definition of revival.
2. Charles Grandison Finney, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*, ed. William G. McLoughlin (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960), 9.

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Modern  
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## Eschewing the "Routine of Religion": Eighteenth-Century Pietism and the Revival Tradition in America

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RANDALL BALMER

THERE ARE OBSTACLES aplenty to appreciating pietism and the role it has played in shaping religion in America. First, there is the question of definition. The *Oxford English Dictionary* (1971 edition) defines *pietism* as a movement begun by Philipp Jakob Spener at Frankfurt am Main "for the revival and advancement of piety in the Lutheran church" and characterized by a "devotion to religious feeling, or to strictness of religious practice." Such a definition rightly points out the interiority of pietist faith, but it ignores the earlier development of Reformed pietism (or "precisianism") in the Netherlands.<sup>1</sup> It also slights the institutional dimensions of pietism and fails to suggest the ecumenical bias of the movement, a bias that only compounds the difficulties of definition because pietism transcended confessional boundaries and took different forms within different traditions.

Indeed, pietism covers the spectrum from conservative, orthodox, liturgical members of state-church traditions to separatist groups who reviled the "four dumb idols" of the state churches—baptismal font, altar, pulpit, and (in Lutheran lands) confessional—to radical prophetic groups alienated from both social and institutional church life. What they held in common was an emphasis on spiritual discipline and affective religion rather than mere intellectual assent, and a bias against ecclesiastical hierarchies and religious pretensions. Pietism, moreover, can also be viewed in the context of a larger revival of religious fervor and revolt against formality, ceremonialism, scholasticism, and moral laxity that (when defined broadly) encompassed quietism among Roman Catholics in France, Spain, and Italy, Wesleyanism in England, and even Hasidism in eastern Europe.

Another obstacle facing the student of pietism in the colonies is the dearth of pietistic literary records, at least relative to the Puritans of New England. In some instances the records are adequate, as in the case of Heinrich Melchior Mühlenberg's *Journals* or the sermons of Theodorus Jacobus Frelinghuysen.<sup>2</sup> Most of the extant literature, moreover, from Johann Conrad Beissel's mystical writings to Bernardus Freeman's "Mirror of Self-Knowledge," displays familiar pietistic themes: the call for experiential or "experimental" religion, the strong sexual imagery, and the emphasis on mystical introspection, known in the argot of eighteenth-century pietism as "self-knowledge."<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, such important pietists in the Middle Colonies as Peter Henry Dorsius and Guiliam Bertholf bequeathed little or nothing to historians, and the whole of John Henry Goetschius's sole published sermon has only recently been made available in English translation.<sup>4</sup> Accounts of contemporaries offer tantalizing glimpses of the lives and careers of Lars Tollstadius and Johann Bernhard van Dieren, but we have nothing from their own pens with which to render our judgments.<sup>5</sup>

The final obstacle is the general historiographical neglect of the Middle Colonies and the rich fabric of ethnic diversity therein. We are just now beginning to understand the variegated texture of ethnic life in the mid-Atlantic colonies—the Scots, the Dutch, the Huguenots, the Swedes, the Germans. It is becoming more and more apparent that religion played an important role in shaping the responses of these various ethnic groups to an eighteenth-century culture defined increasingly by the English.<sup>6</sup>

Having cataloged the difficulties in coming to terms with this subterranean world of eighteenth-century pietism, what are the benefits of perseverance?

First, an appreciation of pietism has implications for our understanding of the eighteenth-century revival of religion generally known as the Great Awakening. Even if you are not prepared, with Jon Butler, to dispense with the term *Great Awakening*, the revival of religion, at least in the Middle Colonies, looks more like an eruption of longer-term pietistic impulses than the last gasp of Puritanism.<sup>7</sup> Even a cursory examination of the extant pietist literature, much of it published in the decades before the Awakening, reveals some recurrent themes generally associated with the revival—the necessity of spiritual rebirth, for instance, or insistent calls for probity. The pietist view of the world, moreover, had been sustained in America since the late seventeenth century by irregular preaching and mostly unac-

companied hymn singing, which directed pietist expressions of faith into nonformal, nontraditional channels and thus helped to propel the movement toward acceptance of itinerant preachers and lay leadership. At the same time that Solomon Stoddard reported "harvests" in the Connecticut Valley, Guiliam Bertholf enjoyed considerable success in organizing pietistic congregations in northern New Jersey, and Lars Tollstadius created schisms among Swedish Lutherans in the Delaware Valley because of his pietistic preaching.<sup>8</sup>

Indeed, a whole range of pietists tapped into popular discontent among the rural peoples of the Middle Colonies. In addition to Bertholf and Tollstadius, the list includes Freeman, Mühlenberg, and Frelinghuysen, but also such lesser-known figures as Peter Henry Dorsius, Cornelius Van Santvoord, and Samuel Verbryck, among many others. Even Gilbert Tennent, schooled in pietism at the feet of Frelinghuysen when the two men were colleagues in the Raritan Valley, must be included in this camp—witness his evangelical vigor, his emphasis on a warmhearted piety, and his assault on the settled clergy in *The Danger of an Unconverted Ministry*.<sup>9</sup>

Tennent's liaison with Frelinghuysen underscores another characteristic of pietism, namely its ecumenical character. This cross-fertilization was certainly present in the Old World. The works of such English Puritans as William Perkins and William Ames had been translated into Dutch; Perkins, in turn, had been influenced by the ideas of Willem Teelinck, Godfridus Cornelisz Udemans, and Gysbertus Voetius.<sup>10</sup> In New Jersey, Tennent openly acknowledged his debt to Frelinghuysen, and the two men regularly traded pulpits and often officiated jointly. Both George Whitefield and Jonathan Edwards praised Frelinghuysen's efforts in New Jersey. Mühlenberg frequently preached in Dutch churches, and Frelinghuysen's partisans supported Lutheran evangelicals in the Middle Colonies. By the 1750s the distinction between pietistic Dutch and New Light Presbyterians was so slight that William Livingston, publisher of the *Independent Reflector*, remarked that "the different languages are the only criteria to distinguish them from each other."<sup>11</sup> Even that barrier eroded as the Great Awakening pushed Dutch pietists into the mainstream of eighteenth-century evangelicalism. Henceforth, the line between pietism and evangelicalism in American religion becomes considerably blurred.

Pietism in the eighteenth century was very much a transatlantic movement. Unlike the Puritans, whose settlement in New England—despite their protestations about remaining members of the Church of England—represented a break with Old World institutions, colonial pietists maintained ties with their confrères on the Continent

well into the eighteenth century. The Dutch Labadists, for instance, followers of a radical separatist named Jean de Labadie, sought to establish a colony in the New World; many among the colonial Dutch admired Jacobus Koelman, a sometime disciple, back in the Netherlands, of Labadie. When Frelinghuysen, who acknowledged his theological indebtedness to Koelman, sailed across the Atlantic toward his assignment in Raritan, New Jersey, he boasted that after he had worked "to secure a following" in America, "immediately many more would come from Holland to his support," as indeed they did.<sup>12</sup> Among German pietists, Halle supplied pastors to Pennsylvania under the loose supervision of Mühlenberg, while Württemberg emigrés created the congregations. The Moravians maintained a presence in both worlds.

American pietism, then, was not an indigenous movement. Instead, it had deep roots in the Old World and continued to draw its inspiration from those sources until New World pietists were able to develop indigenous leadership through individual tutorials, small "kitchen seminaries" like that of Peter Henry Dorsius in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, and, eventually, pietistically inspired institutions such as the Dutch Reformed Coetus (1747) and Queen's College (1766) in New Brunswick.

That is not to say, however, that pietism on the western shores of the Atlantic was identical to that back on the Continent. The possibility of keeping "orthodox" doctrinal churches and pietist renewal groups together was difficult enough in the European context, but once disparate groups of immigrants arrived in America the spectrum of pietism tilted sharply toward a more radical version of the movement, witness, for example, Johann Conrad Beissel's Ephrata Community in Pennsylvania, which combined pietistic impulses with a sort of Catholic mysticism and monasticism, or Samuel Verbrück's insistence on dispensing with the forms of prayer and preaching a sermon on the crucifixion for Easter Sunday in order to demonstrate his disregard for ecclesiastical holidays.<sup>13</sup> Some pietists, like Mühlenberg among the Lutherans, continued to insist on a balance between orthodox doctrine and pietist renewal. More often than not, however, what would have been regarded as somewhat daring in a European context was more or less unexceptional in the American setting, where radicalism of a sort almost nowhere tolerated in Europe took root and flourished.

Eighteenth-century pietism's most profound effect was certainly on the inner life of believers, who found religious renewal and assur-

ance amidst the ferment of revival. For historians, however, especially at a remove of more than two centuries, those effects are incalculable. We can point to certain heroic individuals—Gilbert Tennent, for instance, or John Wesley—whose lives and ministries were profoundly influenced by pietistic ideals, or we can identify congregations in the throes of revival, but we shall never know the full effects of pietism on the lives of individual "ordinary" colonists.

We do know, however, that pietism profoundly influenced the institutional life of eighteenth-century America, although its effects were oddly divergent because, once again, pietism, by its nature a very elastic movement, took on various characteristics within different traditions. Among the Dutch and the New Light Presbyterians, pietistic impulses reshaped colonial ecclesiastical structures and served as an almost iconoclastic movement. Pietism, however, generally did not serve the same radical function among the Germans, Reformed or Lutheran, as it did among the Dutch. There are only scattered references to the disruptions of pietism among the Germans. In 1709, for instance, the Governor's Council in New York learned that nineteen of the forty-seven Palatines along the Hudson River had "changed their religion become pietists and withdrawn themselves from the Communion of the Minister and ye Rest of ye said Germans."<sup>14</sup>

On the whole, however, pietism among the Germans was a source of unity, not division, and when the Lutherans finally organized their ministerium (or synod) in 1748, that body was controlled by Halle Pietists.<sup>15</sup> For the Lutherans, the influence of Mühlenberg and the Halle connection may have been critical. This influence domesticated pietism and made it both vibrant and a source for organizing congregations and promoting a deep personal and communal piety. But at the same time it was respectable and sustained by the transatlantic charities and pastoral supply at Halle that were disbursed through London. Those connections were hardly calculated to produce radical protesters against prevailing norms.

Among the German Reformed, pietist tendencies seem never to have been very pronounced, with the exception, perhaps, of Peter Henry Dorsius. The German Reformed were sustained by support from the Swiss and the Dutch and, unlike the Lutherans, never enjoyed the money or the clerical density of their fellow Germans. Moreover, there were so many free church and sectarian groups to their left that German pietists had little inclination or reason to be associated with those sorts of people. Moravians in particular were regarded with disdain, especially by the Lutherans, and those feelings were reciprocated. Furthermore, since the Moravians were thoroughly

steeped in an emotional pietism, the Lutherans and Reformed had ample cause to maintain their distance.

Unlike the Dutch, moreover, the Germans had an entire spectrum of ethnic religious options available to them to accommodate theological and ecclesiastical differences—the Amish, Mennonites, Schwenckfelders, Moravians, Lutherans, Reformed—whereas the pietistic Dutch, locked within the confining orbit of the orthodox Dutch Reformed Church, had fewer choices. Either they would join forces with the Presbyterians (as many threatened to do) or they would recast the Dutch Reformed Church in their own image. As their numbers and influence increased, the latter option grew more and more attractive.

Among the Dutch, then, pietism functioned as a theology of the people, a protest against the clerical establishment. Although pietism certainly had its own positive agenda—revitalization of liturgy and worship, closer attention to personal probity—it also represented a challenge to the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Pietists first organized themselves into conventicles, which, like John Wesley's "methodist" gatherings, sought the infusion of spiritual ardor into religious traditions that had grown stuffy and cold. In the Netherlands, pietists had challenged the corruptions of wealth attending the growth of Holland's commercial empire and the arid scholasticism into which seventeenth-century Reformed theologians had fallen. Indeed, pietism among the Dutch both in the Netherlands and in the New World issued in a rural protest against the urban elite and the urban clergy as well as the ecclesiastical hierarchy of the Dutch Reformed Church.<sup>16</sup> The Classes of Middleburg, Schieland, and Lingen, for instance, were pietistic, whereas the Classis of Amsterdam sought to frustrate the spread of pietism on both sides of the Atlantic. The universities of Utrecht and Groningen turned out pietists, who then very often clashed with graduates of the University of Leiden.

Frustrated in their attempts to dislodge the traditionalist clergy, who opposed the pietist renewal, Dutch pietists unleashed an attack against the ecclesiastical hierarchy in New York and especially against the Classis of Amsterdam, which sought to thwart the spread of pietism in the New World. Indeed, Dutch pietists regarded Amsterdam as the mortal enemy of true religion. Guiliam Bertholf, a cooper from New Jersey and a lay reader for some of the fledgling Dutch congregations on the frontier, knew that the Classis of Amsterdam would never pass on his ordination because of his pietistic leanings and his lack of formal education, so he circumvented Amsterdam completely and was ordained by the Classis of Middleburg. Upon his return to

New Jersey in 1694, Bertholf worked tirelessly to organize pietistic congregations on the New Jersey frontier.<sup>17</sup>

Bernardus Freeman, another pietist, also nursed a grudge against the Classis of Amsterdam. When the Dutch church at Albany needed a new minister in 1699, Freeman, a tailor by trade, submitted his name. The Classis, however, denied his application and belittled him as someone "who had only just come down from his cutting board, and who had neither ability for his own craft, much less for that demanded of a pastor."<sup>18</sup> With the help of Willem Bancker, an Amsterdam merchant and patron to pietists in the Netherlands, Freeman sought and received ordination from the Classis of Lingen and sailed for the New World to claim the pastorate at Albany. Amsterdam's candidate, Johannes Lydius, prevailed in that initial ecclesiastical skirmish, but Freeman took the church in nearby Schenectady; several years later, through a series of perfidious maneuvers, he insinuated himself into the Dutch churches on Long Island. Freeman steadfastly refused to submit to the Classis of Amsterdam, and he summarily dismissed those consistories that opposed him. His obstinacy precipitated a bitter schism that lasted the better part of a decade and markedly diminished the Classis of Amsterdam's grip on the colony's churches.<sup>19</sup>

Although Theodorus Jacobus Frelinghuysen came to the New World with Amsterdam's formal approbation, he made no secret after his arrival of his intention to flout his independence from the Amsterdam ecclesiastical authorities. Within days of disembarking in New York, Frelinghuysen insulted—and alienated—the traditionalist clergy in New York, declared his disdain for the Classis of Amsterdam, and announced his intention to flood the Middle Colonies with pietistic clergy. His clerical career in New Jersey was marked by bitter disputes between his evangelical followers and his generally more prosperous detractors both in New Jersey and New York. Because of Amsterdam's suspicions about pietism, moreover, Frelinghuysen's agenda for the New World implied a circumvention of Amsterdam's ecclesiastical prerogatives. He eagerly took that step. Frelinghuysen, moreover, together with Bertholf and Freeman, supported the incursion of other pietists in the Middle Colonies, once again over Amsterdam's objections.

Dutch pietists in general and Frelinghuysen in particular used the language of piety to assail the ecclesiastical establishment and their theological opponents. Frelinghuysen regularly taunted his adversaries. He restricted access to Holy Communion in his Raritan churches, excommunicated dissenters, and angered the more affluent of his auditors when he suggested that "it has been very true that the largest



portion of the faithful have been poor and of little account in the world."<sup>20</sup> Despite debilitating bouts of mental illness and unrefuted allegations of homosexuality, Frelinghuysen persisted in his attacks on the Classis of Amsterdam and the non-pietist Dutch ministers. When disaffected members of his congregations drafted a bill of particulars against him and took their case to the New York clergy, Frelinghuysen and his consistory became defiant; they resolved unanimously "that we will never suffer any church or pastor in the land to assume dominion over us."<sup>21</sup>

When his mental incapacities finally disabled him, Frelinghuysen's struggle against the ecclesiastical establishment was taken up by an entire cohort of younger men, including his sons and John Henry Goetschius, who became minister on Long Island, over the strenuous objections of the Dutch Reformed establishment. Once installed there, Goetschius vigorously assailed his ecclesiastical adversaries. On 22 August 1742, he preached a sermon entitled "The Unknown God," in the course of which he reviled the mere practice of religion, which he contrasted with true spirituality, and he warned his adversaries that "you will experience your religion in hell, and not in heaven, as you had hoped." When called before the New York ministers to account for his attacks, Goetschius remarked that his opponents "were plainly godless people" and that were it not for the Netherlands church authorities, "this country had long ago been filled with pious ministers."<sup>22</sup>

As the number of pietistic clergy increased, these desultory attacks on the ecclesiastical establishment evolved into an orchestrated assault on the Classis of Amsterdam in the Netherlands and the traditionalist clergy in New York. Freeman, Frelinghuysen, Goetschius, and other Dutch pietists openly defied the Classis of Amsterdam on matters of ordination, church polity, and ecclesiastical discipline. In the 1740s, amidst the fervor of the Great Awakening, they began agitating for an independent, indigenous ecclesiastical body, a *coetus*, that would govern the American churches. When gavelled to order on 8 September 1747, the Coetus consisted almost entirely of pietist clergy, all of whom were eager to distance themselves from the Classis of Amsterdam. Within a very few years, members of the Coetus circulated proposals for the formation of an American classis and an American academy for the training of pietistic clergy, and after the American Revolution they declared their formal independence from the Netherlands church authorities.<sup>23</sup>

This protest against the religious establishment among the Dutch soon took on political overtones, as contemporaries recognized. After

the pietists had banded together to form their Coetus in 1747, one anti-pietist predicted that if "we should complain about anything to the Classis or the Synod, that our Dutch churches were not regulated after the manner of the churches of the Fatherland, it would be said, 'Oh, the people of Holland govern *their* churches in *their* own way, and *we* find no fault with them; and *we* govern our churches, and we are no longer under obligations to give account of our doing to them.'" Others detected that "a spirit of independence is clearly manifest" in the pietists' machinations. In the 1750s, when Theodore Frelinghuysen of Albany proposed the establishment of a pietist American seminary independent of the Netherlands authorities, his conservative opponents asked if his next step was to "rebel against the king."<sup>24</sup>

Indeed, not long after the pietistic clergy in the Middle Colonies asserted their ecclesiastical independence from the Classis of Amsterdam by forming the Coetus, many of these same ministers—notably Theodore Frelinghuysen, Archibald Laidlie, Johannes Leydt, Dirck Romeyn, and Eilardus Westerlo—joined the chorus calling for political independence as well. During the throes of the Stamp Act crisis, for instance, Laidlie preached what at least one auditor considered a "sed[i]t[iou]s sermon" for the purpose of "exciting people to Reb[e]ll[i]o[n]." <sup>25</sup> The rhetoric about ecclesiastical "liberty" and the aversion to "subordination" that saturated the pietists' communications with the Netherlands very easily transferred to the political sphere.<sup>26</sup>

Even among more conservative German congregations, the discussions about ecclesiastical liberty and suspicions about the motives of wealthy and learned people, lay and clerical, erupted in the late 1750s and early 1760s, just as the imperial crisis was breaking. For these congregations, steeped in a pietist tradition, suspicious of church authorities, and controlled by the laity, the language of piety with its anti-authoritarian overtones served as a training ground for thinking in political terms—a first among a largely apolitical people.<sup>27</sup>

Pietism in the Middle Colonies, then, as articulated by those alienated in some way from the religious establishment, provided a radical critique of eighteenth-century authority structures, first religious and then political. The exercise of lay initiative and a suspicion of clerical prerogative were deeply imbedded in the pietist tradition, and words like *liberty* and *subordination* in the lexicon of piety became highly charged after mid-century. For Dutch pietists, at least, the assertion of ecclesiastical independence led quite logically, almost seamlessly, to the assertion of political independence. Pietism, then, the earliest harbinger of eighteenth-century revival, provides a new

paradigm for understanding both ecclesiastical and political activism in the Middle Colonies of the eighteenth century.

What happened to pietism in America? Along about the middle of the eighteenth century the trail turns cold and we begin to lose the scent. Aside from enclaves of intentionally insular Germans and the periodic influx of pietistic immigrants from Scandinavia and the Netherlands, Continental pietism largely disappears into the mainstream of American religious life, much the way that the Mohawk River flows into the Hudson or the Schuylkill into the Delaware.

These examples are not random. What we know today as evangelicalism in America traces its origins to the confluence of Continental pietism and New England Puritanism in the eighteenth century. This combustion (to shift the metaphor once more) erupted spectacularly in what historians have come to call the Great Awakening. The Middle Colonies, moreover, served as the tinder box for this new religious expression. Frelinghuysen's machinations in the Raritan Valley had produced both revival and reaction in the 1720s, and his friendship with Gilbert Tennent introduced the Presbyterian minister to pietistic traditions, disciplines, and techniques. Tennent then carried the message throughout the Middle Colonies and to New England during his several missionary sorties there.<sup>28</sup> The influences were reciprocal. Pietist congregations in the Middle Colonies welcomed Tennent and George Whitefield, and when Theodore Frelinghuysen of Albany, son of the redoubtable New Jersey pietist, preached a sermon to New England troops during the French and Indian War, it sounded for all the world like a Puritan jeremiad, full of lamentations and apocalyptic warnings.<sup>29</sup>

The Great Awakening, together with a number of circumstances and cultural changes thereafter, conspired to obfuscate the influence of Continental pietism on American religion. For the Dutch, internal conflicts, the desire to enjoy the commercial advantages of assimilation, and the general desuetude of the Dutch language combined to drive them away from their hereditary culture toward either Anglicanism or Presbyterianism, depending on their previous disposition toward pietism. Later, and on a larger scale, the importation and rapid success of Methodism in America largely co-opted pietistic expressions of faith (with the exception, once again, of the Germans). John Wesley himself had been influenced by such Continental pietists as Johann Albrecht Bengel, and he greatly admired the Moravians for their "faith and love and holy conversation in Christ Jesus."<sup>30</sup> Methodist itinerants in America, moreover, had come into contact

with pietist preachers. Late in the eighteenth century, then, the pietistic cudgels of protest against deficient personal morality, intransigent ecclesiastical establishments, and worldly elites were taken up by the Methodists and by other evangelical, populist groups in the early republic.<sup>31</sup>

What is the legacy of eighteenth-century pietism to American religion? Many pietists of German descent continue, against great odds, to retain their ethnic particularity, their cultural insularity, and their rootedness in Old World traditions. That is surely the most visible legacy of pietism in America. Evangelical fervor has also benefited from time to time from the continued infusion of pietistic groups from the Old World; witness, for example, the nineteenth-century immigration of Dutch Seceders who formed the Christian Reformed Church, the Janssonists from Sweden who settled Bishop Hill, Illinois, and the late nineteenth-century Scandinavians who eventually formed the Evangelical Covenant Church and the Evangelical Free Church denominations.<sup>32</sup>

But pietism has insinuated itself into the pastiche of American religion, especially evangelicalism, in other, less tangible ways. The evangelical prayer meeting today looks quite similar to the "methodist" gathering and the pietist conventicle of the eighteenth century or to the nineteenth-century prayer and Bible study conducted in a Scandinavian *Bede Hus* (prayer house).

The most profound influence of pietism is, once again, incalculable—its effect upon ordinary believers. For anyone reared within the evangelical subculture in America, with its parietal rules, its emphasis on personal piety, its proscriptions against alcohol, tobacco, and dancing, and its sabbatarian scruples, the continued influence of pietism is self-evident. Countless evangelists have summoned their auditors to exacting standards of personal probity and spiritual piety, even when they themselves, like Frelinghuysen, fell shy of those standards. The rubric of self-examination as prelude to conversion or rededication is common to both traditions, and in the hands of such acknowledged masters as Charles Grandison Finney, Dwight Lyman Moody, Billy Graham, and even Jimmy Swaggart, it has served as a powerful tool for revival.

The literature of colonial pietism and American evangelicalism also bears many similarities. Both pietistic and evangelical sermons are replete with graphic descriptions of the torments of hell and the perils of unbelief or, more subtly, the consequences of a false security among those who merely practice religion in its outward forms

and never know the experience of conversion. When Frelinghuysen implored, "O Sinner! abandon your Way which seemeth so right unto you, your careless and secure Tranquility, your own Righteousness, your Sins and Lusts, your own Thoughts and turn to the Lord," he might have been writing a script for Finney, Moody, Graham, Swagart, or any one of a thousand other evangelists.<sup>33</sup> The devotional literature of both nineteenth- and twentieth-century evangelicalism also echoes the introspective mode of eighteenth-century pietistic treatises. The potent sexual imagery of Beissel or Frelinghuysen reverberates in such staples of the evangelical hymnal as "Blessed Assurance," "Jesus, Lover of My Soul," "Just as I Am," and "Rock of Ages, Cleft for Me."

In America, moreover, evangelicals continue to use the argot of piety as a protest against ecclesiastical establishments. The fundamentalist-modernist controversy of the 1920s comes to mind, as does Carl McIntire's rhetoric directed against the "godless" Federal Council of Churches. Fundamentalists, frustrated in their attempts to reverse the drift toward modernism in mainline denominations, abandoned those institutions and built their own denominations, Bible institutes, colleges, and seminaries. Those actions would not be at all alien to the eighteenth-century progenitors of New Side Presbyterianism, the Dutch Coetus, Queen's College, or the College of New Jersey, nor would it surprise leaders of the Cumberland Presbyterians or the holiness movement. Throughout its history, evangelicalism, with its roots in pietism, has mounted strident—and quite effective—attacks on recalcitrant and unresponsive ecclesiastical bureaucracies.

Those attacks, very often, have been personal, directed against "unconverted" or "liberal" clergy. In that way, the rhetoric of McIntire or Billy Sunday or J. Gresham Machen recalls Gilbert Tennent's *Danger of an Unconverted Ministry*, Frelinghuysen's relentless verbal assaults on his clerical adversaries (as when he criticized them as "unprofitable sickmaking Physicians"), and John Henry Goetschius's *The Unknown God*, which lambasted the opponents of true piety as those who impose "their old, rotten, and stinking routine of religion."<sup>34</sup>

In its various guises, pietism in America, from the eighteenth century to the present, has assiduously sought to avoid the "routine of religion," preferring instead a vibrant, experiential piety. That characteristic, in turn, has meant that pietistic impulses almost by definition transcend institutional, confessional, and ethnic boundaries. Just as Frelinghuysen and Gilbert Tennent crossed those boundaries in the eighteenth century (much to the scandal of their antirevivalist

contemporaries), so too have evangelicals managed at various points in their history to submerge their differences. The ecumenicity of the Second Great Awakening comes to mind, as does the Evangelical United Front, the urban revivals of 1858, and the interfaith cooperation that attends Billy Graham crusades.

The confluence of Continental pietism and Great Awakening revivalism in the eighteenth century renders nearly impossible the task of tracing specific influences in the myriad tributaries of American evangelicalism. The currents, however, are unmistakable: ecumenicity; exacting standards of morality; a suspicion of liturgical formalism, theological scholasticism, and ecclesiastical structures; the insistent, plaintive calls for conversion juxtaposed with warnings about the torments of hell. Both traditions have insisted on a warm-hearted piety as the basis for salvation and the sign of regeneration. Without "true and experienced knowledge God is still unknown and all religion is idle," John Henry Goetschius preached in 1742.<sup>35</sup>

Billy Graham could not have said it better.

#### NOTES

1. See Martin H. Prozesky, "The Emergence of Dutch Pietism," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 28 (1977): 29–37; F. Ernest Stoeffler, *The Rise of Evangelical Pietism* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1971), especially 109–79; F. Ernest Stoeffler, s.v., "pietism," in *Dictionary of Christianity in America*, ed. Daniel G. Reid (Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity Press, 1990).

2. Henry Melchior Mühlenberg, *The Journals of Henry Melchior Mühlenberg*, trans. Theodore G. Tappert and John W. Doberstein, 3 vols. (Philadelphia: Evangelical Lutheran Ministerium of Pennsylvania and Adjacent States, 1942–53); Theodorus Jacobus Frelinghuysen, *Sermons by Theodorus Jacobus Frelinghuysen*, trans. William Demarest (New York, 1856).

3. A translation of Beissel's works appears in Peter C. Erb, ed., *Johann Conrad Beissel and the Ephrata Community: Mystical and Historical Texts* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 1985); a manuscript translation of Freeman's "Mirror of Self-Knowledge" is at the New York Historical Society, New York City; Freeman, for example, enjoined his readers to examine themselves and then "to lead a humble, virtuous, and Godly life." On pietistic introspection, see Carl J. Schindler, "The Psychology of Henry Melchior Mühlenberg's Pastoral Technique," *Lutheran Church Quarterly* 16 (1943): 54–55.

4. Randall Balmer, "John Henry Goetschius and *The Unknown God*: Eighteenth-Century Pietism in the Middle Colonies," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 113 (1989): 575–608.



5. Regarding Tollstadius, see Suzanne B. Geissler, "A Step on the Swedish Lutheran Road to Anglicanism," *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church* 54 (1985): 39-49; on van Dieren, see Douglas Jacobsen, "Johann Bernhard van Dieren: Protestant Preacher at Hackensack, New Jersey," *New Jersey History* 100 (1982): 15-29.
6. See, for example, Jon Butler, *The Huguenots in America: A Refugee People in New World Society* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983); Ned C. Landsman, *Scotland and Its First American Colony, 1683-1765* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), especially chapter 8; Randall Balmer, *A Perfect Babel of Confusion: Dutch Religion and English Culture in the Middle Colonies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).
7. Jon Butler, "Enthusiasm Described and Decried: The Great Awakening as Interpretive Fiction," *Journal of American History* 69 (1982): 305-25. On the subtle differences between Puritanism and pietism, especially on the issue of assurance, see Baird Tipson, "How Can the Religious Experience of the Past Be Recovered? The Examples of Puritanism and Pietism," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 43 (1975): 695-707.
8. Once again, the lack of literary records frustrates any certain conclusions about the ministries of Bertholf and Tollstadius. When Bertholf returned to the Netherlands to seek ordination, however, he went to the Classis of Middleburg rather than Amsterdam, most likely because he believed that Amsterdam would look askance at his pietistic leanings; Bertholf also endorsed other pietist ministers such as Freeman and Frelinghuysen. Tollstadius is even more shadowy, but it is clear that his appeal lay in great measure in his warmhearted preaching and in his willingness to challenge the Swedish Lutheran hierarchy (see also Geissler, "Step on the Swedish Lutheran Road").
9. On Tennent's relationship with Frelinghuysen, see Milton J. Coalter, Jr., *Gilbert Tennent, Son of Thunder: A Case Study of Continental Pietism's Impact on the First Great Awakening in the Middle Colonies* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1986), especially chapter 1. Tennent's sermon, first preached at Nottingham, Pennsylvania, 8 March 1740, appeared in print as *The Danger of an Unconverted Ministry* (Philadelphia, 1740).
10. James Tanis, "Reformed Pietism in Colonial America," in *Continental Pietism and Early American Christianity*, ed. F. Ernest Stoeffler (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1976), 34-35.
11. Quoted in Edward T. Corwin, ed., *Ecclesiastical Records: State of New York*, vol. 5 (Albany, 1901-16), 3460 (hereafter *Ecclesiastical Records*).
12. *Ibid.* 3:2182-83.
13. See Erb, ed., *Johann Conrad Beissel; Ecclesiastical Records*, 6:3928.
14. *Ecclesiastical Records* 3:1742.
15. Theodore G. Tappert, "The Influence of Pietism in Colonial American Lutheranism," in *Continental Pietism and Early American Christianity*, ed. F. Ernest Stoeffler (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1976), 17.
16. Prozesky, "Emergence of Dutch Pietism," 29-37; Stoeffler, *Rise of Evangelical Pietism*.

17. On Bertholf, see Randall Balmer, "The Social Roots of Dutch Pietism in the Middle Colonies," *Church History* 53 (1984): 187-99; Howard G. Hageman, "William Bertholf: Pioneer Dominie of New Jersey," *Reformed Review* 30 (1976): 73-80.
18. *Ecclesiastical Records* 2:1349.
19. For an account of this schism, see Randall Balmer, "Schism on Long Island: The Dutch Reformed Church, Lord Cornbury, and the Politics of Anglicization," in *Authority and Resistance in Colonial New York*, ed. William Pencak and Conrad Edick Wright (New York: New York Historical Society, 1988), chapter 4.
20. Quoted in James Tanis, *Dutch Calvinist Pietism in the Middle Colonies: A Study in the Life and Theology of Theodorus Jacobus Frelinghuysen* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1967), 54.
21. Joseph Anthony Loux, Jr., trans. and ed., *Boel's Complaint against Frelinghuysen* (Rensselaer, N.Y.: Hamilton Printing Co., 1979), 53.
22. Balmer, "Goetschius and The Unknown God," 604; *Ecclesiastical Records* 4:2896, 2881.
23. *Ecclesiastical Records* 5:3493, 3541. *Coetus* is pronounced SEE-tus.
24. *Ecclesiastical Records* 5:3533, 3499, 3649.
25. *Journals of Capt. John Montrossor, 1757-1778*, New York Historical Society, *Collections*, Publication Fund Ser., 14 (New York, 1881), 350.
26. The word "subordination" became highly charged among the Dutch Pietists at mid-century; see, for instance, *Ecclesiastical Records* 6:3945, 3950, 4005, 4021.
27. Anthony G. Roeber has developed these ideas and posited a connection between legal and charitable concerns and the American Revolution in "Germans, Property, and the First Great Awakening: Rehearsal for a Revolution?" in *The Transit of Civilization from Europe to America: Essays in Honor of Hans Galinsky*, ed. Winfried Herget and Karl Ortseifen (Tübingen: G. Narr, 1986), 165-84.
28. In one form or another, Isaac Backus, the Separate leader in Connecticut, imbibed pietist ideas; see William G. McLoughlin, *Isaac Backus and the American Pietist Tradition* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1967).
29. Theodorus Frielinghuysen [sic], *Wars and Rumors of Wars, Heavens Decree over the World: A Sermon Preached in the Camp of the New-England Forces* (New York, 1755).
30. Richard M. Cameron, *The Rise of Methodism: A Source Book* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1954), 204.
31. This point is made persuasively by Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).
32. See Paul Elmen, "Bishop Hill: Utopia on the Prairie," *Chicago History* 5 (1976): 45-52; James D. Bratt, *Dutch Calvinism in Modern America: A History of a Conservative Subculture* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1984); David Nyvall, *The Evangelical Covenant Church* (Chicago, 1954);