UNIVERSITY OF CINCINNATI

Date: May 14, 2009

I, Dustin A. Wood, hereby submit this original work as part of the requirements for the degree of:
Master’s of Arts
in Communication

It is entitled:
Rhetoric of Revival: An Analysis of Exemplar Sermons from America’s Great Awakenings

Student Signature: Dustin A. Wood

This work and its defense approved by:
Committee Chair: Dr. John Lynch
Dr. Steve Depoe
Dr. James Crocker-Lakness

Approval of the electronic document:
I have reviewed the Thesis/Dissertation in its final electronic format and certify that it is an accurate copy of the document reviewed and approved by the committee.

Committee Chair signature: Dr. John Lynch
Rhetoric of Revival: An Analysis of Exemplar Sermons from America’s
Great Awakenings

A thesis submitted to the
Graduate School
of the University of Cincinnati
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in the Department of Communication
of the College of Arts and Sciences
by

Dustin A. Wood

B.A. Western Kentucky University
May 2007

Committee Chair: John Lynch, Ph.D.
Abstract

Throughout America’s religious history, there have been periods of increased religious sentiments leading to times of religious revitalization known as America’s Great Awakenings. This thesis project performs a rhetorical criticism of exemplary sermons delivered by the prominent figure from each of America’s Great Awakenings. Previous rhetorical scholarship on the Great Awakenings has typically identified broad patterns in awakening sermons, but few have focused on the internal dynamics of individual sermons. This thesis supplements these studies with an examination of the internal dynamics of individual sermons. This thesis develops standards for identifying prominent preachers and representative or exemplar sermons, and focuses on the following sermons and figures: “Sinners in the Hands of An Angry God” by Jonathan Edwards, “Sinners Bound to Change Their Own Hearts” by Charles Finney, and “Lost and Saved” by Dwight Moody. Key rhetorical features include the organization of the sermon and use of appeals to emotions and values, specifically fear and responsibility. Shifts in the organization and appeals used by each speaker can be attributed to three major factors: the dominant theological perspective (i.e. Calvinist versus Arminian views of salvation), the training and background of each preacher, and the relative diversity and size of the audiences addressed.
Acknowledgments

This project would have been impossible without the help and support from a multitude of others. I express my deepest appreciation:

to Dr. John Lynch, my advisor, for complete, thoughtful, timely, and helpful guidance and feedback at every stage of this project’s development;
to Drs. Steve Depoe and Jim Crocker-Lakness, members of my committee, for their thoughtful insight and close reading;
to my colleagues in the graduate program, for their wisdom and companionship;
to my family and friends, for being consistent sources of encouragement;
to Heather, my wonderful wife, for her unfailing love, support, and understanding;
and finally, to Jesus, the author and perfecter of my faith, who awakened my life to the glorious Gospel.
# Table of Contents

Abstract iii

Acknowledgments v

Chapter One: Introduction to America’s Great Awakenings 1

Chapter Two: Jonathan Edwards 18

Chapter Three: Charles Finney 40

Chapter Four: Dwight Moody 61

Chapter Five: Conclusions 81

References 98

Notes 104
Chapter One: An Introduction to America’s Great Awakenings

“When anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, “‘Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.’”—Ephesians 5:14

At various points in America’s history, some Protestants have felt that Americans lost their religious faith and needed to be recalled to God. These concerns led to evangelistic efforts seeking religious reform and a reawakening of religious sentiment. The results of these successful revival campaigns are known as America’s Great Awakenings. Religious revival hinges primarily upon preaching. Preaching during the Awakenings attempted to renew people’s religious sentiments. This thesis explores the rhetorical dynamics of America’s Great Awakenings by examining exemplar sermons from a prominent figure from each Awakening. This chapter will define awakening and provide details on each of America’s Great Awakenings. Next, it will establish and apply criteria for identifying a prominent leader of each Great Awakening and the paradigmatic sermon used by that leader. Finally, it will review the previous literature on awakening rhetoric, outline the methodological approach used, and preview the remaining chapters.

Awakening & America’s Great Awakenings

Sometimes the gap between religious norms and people’s attitudes and actions becomes so wide, it seems that religious sentiment and belief must be reborn or reawakened. These conditions lead to attempts at religious revival or awakening. Coined in the 1700s, the term “religious revival” was used to “describe a new phenomenon in which churches experienced an unexpected ‘awakening’ of spiritual concern, occasioned by a special and mysterious outpouring of God’s saving grace, which led to unprecedented numbers of intense and ‘surprising conversions’ that
‘revived’ the piety and power of the churches” (Scott, 2000, ¶ 5). Religious revivals are times of revitalization, as they seek to restore religious sentiments while reinterpreting religion in light of new experiences.

A national religious revival is called a Great Awakening. A Great Awakening occurs when the day-to-day behavior of a society has deviated so far from its traditional norms that neither individuals nor the aggregate can sustain the familiar religious principles that inform their way of acting and believing (McLoughlin, 1978). Protestants view Great Awakenings as signs of the coming of God’s reign on earth and a divine manifestation of concern for the redemption of humanity (McLoughlin, 1978). Great Awakenings are “not brief outburst[s] of mass emotionalism by one group or another but [a] profound cultural transformation affecting all Americans and extending over a generation or more” (McLoughlin, 1978, p. 2). They have been “periods when the cultural system has had to be revitalized in order to overcome jarring disjunctions between norms and experience, old beliefs and new realities, dying patterns and emerging patterns of behavior” (McLoughlin, 1978, p. 10).

In American history, there have been three Great Awakenings: the First Great Awakening (1730-1770); the Second Great Awakening (1795-1835); and the Third Great Awakening (∼1850-1920).¹ Each of these awakenings arose out of unique circumstances necessitating a spiritual and cultural transformation. The following provides a brief summary of each Great Awakening that will be further examined in later chapters.

The First Great Awakening is unique in the sense that it was the “first ‘national’ event in America’s history” (McLoughlin, 2004, p. 14). More specifically, it was the first
national” spiritual event in America’s history (McLoughlin, 2004). Therefore, after briefly summarizing the Great Awakening generally, it will be important to consider the shift in American Protestantism resulting from the First Great Awakening that later provided opportunities for future Great Awakenings to occur.

The First Great Awakening began as a reaction to rapid social change and challenges facing the dominant theological framework of the time (McLoughlin, 1978). America’s increasing prosperity led many to abandon their modest lifestyles and devout reverence to God. As a result, religious leaders felt the need to re-call them to piety. However, religious leaders encountered a stumbling block because the newly dispersed population left many communities without the financial resources to support a local church. During the First Great Awakening, communities began relying on itinerant preachers to bolster religious sentiments. Theologically, Calvinism, the dominant theological framework of the time, began facing challenges from the increasing popularity of Arminian theology.

The Calvinism and Arminianism controversy rests in a divergent understanding of salvation. Followers of Calvinism believe, “God predestines some people to be saved and others to be damned, but salvation is God’s choice, not that of individuals. Human beings do not choose God, but rather God chooses them” (Hankins, 2004, p. 184). Implied in Calvinism is the belief that people are totally depraved, or tainted by sin, and incapable of possessing any religious affection for God unless God places that affection in them. As a result, people are dependent upon God’s grace for salvation. Arminian theology, however, emphasizes “that anyone can be converted at any time by merely deciding to submit to God” (Hankins, 2004, p. 183). Arminianism rejects the doctrine of
election by arguing that everyone can be saved. An Arminian view of salvation replaces humanity’s dependence on God with the human responsibility to choose God. Since each view presents a different understanding of salvation, which implies a different interpretation of the relationship between humanity and God, the tension between the two dominant theological frameworks is significant for American Protestants. The tension between Calvinism and Arminianism shaped evangelistic efforts and substantially influenced the rhetoric of preachers during America’s Great Awakenings. While Calvinist preachers preached that people were dependent on God’s grace to bring them salvation, Arminian preachers preached that every individual had the opportunity, and responsibility to choose God.

While the struggle between Calvinism and Arminianism continued into the Second Great Awakening, the First Great Awakening transformed America’s religious life. Prior to the First Great Awakening, America’s religious life was “conservative, derivative, and imitative” (Pearson, 1978). A majority of religion in the colonies was modeled after the Anglican or Puritanical types. However, after the First Great Awakening, “American religion had been set free from traditional restraints and to varying degrees and with considerable regional differences was moving toward a novel pattern in which it would be sectarian or denominational, individualistic, voluntary, and experiential” (Pearson, 1978, p.1). The First Great Awakening “shattered the traditional concept of the geographical parish and replaced it with that of the denominational church as a voluntary association of like-minded and like-hearted individuals” (Pearson, 1978, p. 12). With the increasing popularity of itinerant evangelism, the Great
Awakening changed the role and rhetoric of ministers by replacing impeccable orthodoxy for the emotional bombast of revivalists (Pearson, 1978).

While the First Great Awakening witnessed perhaps the most distinct shift in American Protestantism, the two subsequent Awakenings also had lasting impacts on American Protestantism and American culture. The Second Great Awakening continued trends associated with the First Great Awakening. Political and economic changes intensified “inter-denominational competition for members, which indirectly influenced preaching methods” (Reid, 1995, p. 8). Consequently, Protestantism operated in a “free-market in which all denominations could compete” (Reid, 1995, p. 8), which reduced the possibility for interdenominational collaboration. With emigration to the West accelerating, settlers were spread so thinly across a wide area that “individual communities rarely had the economic resources to support more than one church, if that” (Reid, 1995, p. 8). As a result, communities continued to rely on itinerant preachers. In addition to struggles between denominations and the increasing dependence on itinerant preachers, The Second Great Awakening marked a significant turning point in American Protestant theology. While some resisted the theological shift, The Second Great Awakening parted from the Calvinist tradition of the First Great Awakening in favor of Arminianism (McLoughlin, 1978; Noll, 1992; Reid, 1995).

America’s Third Great Awakening is not as easily defined as its first two. Some historians trace its beginning to the Great Prayer Meeting Revival of the late 1850s, some focus on the urban revival campaigns of Dwight Moody and Ira Sankey from 1875-1885, while still others suggest the Awakening did not begin until 1890 (McLoughlin, 1978). Leading up to the Awakening, American Protestantism began
facing new challenges associated with urbanism and Darwinism. The Third Great Awakening helped American’s to “understand the meaning of evolutionary science and industrial progress” (McLoughlin, 1978, p. 1). The ministers of the Third Great Awakening “had to redefine and relocate God, provide means of access to [God] and sacralize a new world view” (McLoughlin, 1978, p. 152). The Third Great Awakening experienced a clash between a new progressive orthodoxy, or Social Gospel, with Fundamentalists and a growing number of Pentecostals (McLoughlin, 1978).

Leading the Great Awakenings

The prominent figures or leaders of Great Awakenings are revivalists, itinerant preachers, and the pastors of local churches. Religious laypeople empower these figures by believing they fulfill messianic roles and should be treated as God incarnate (McLoughlin, 1978). During Awakenings, “these charismatic evangelists convey ‘the Word’ of God to large masses of people who, under this influence, experience what Protestants call conversion, salvation, regeneration, or spiritual rebirth” (McLoughlin, 1978, p. xiii). Since religious laypeople believe these leaders are communicating specific messages from God, sermons and preaching become the rhetorical vehicles of Awakenings.

For this study, the rhetoric and involvement of a prominent figure from each of America's Great Awakenings will be examined. The standard of “prominence” will be measured by three considerations. First, it considers the attention each figure has received in scholarly literature on America’s religious history. Second, it considers the role individuals played in their respective movements. Third, “prominence” is
established through considering the long-term effects each figure has had on the Protestant evangelical tradition.

Sermons are worthy of attention from rhetorical scholars for two reasons. First, they had a transformational influence in shaping thought and practice in American Protestantism throughout America’s Awakenings. Second, and coinciding with their influence on Protestantism, the effects of sermons in the Awakenings had lasting impacts on American culture in general. The rhetoric of the prominent figures of the Great Awakenings becomes especially important, as these preachers represent the heartbeat of their social movement. Therefore, this thesis performs a rhetorical analysis of an “exemplary sermon” delivered by the prominent figure associated with each Great Awakening. An exemplary sermon has three qualities: it is representative of a figure’s theology; it is representative of the rhetorical styles and strategies of the preacher; and it was repeated or viewed as a “well-known” speech, although this is of lesser importance than the theological and rhetorical components of the sermon.

Jonathan Edwards, the prominent figure of the First Great Awakening, was a devoted Calvinist. As a local pastor and frequent itinerant preacher committed to reviving religious sentiments, Edwards preached the preeminence of God in salvation while rejecting the Arminian doctrine of free will. His preaching stressed God’s sovereignty and the dangers of hell. As an apologist for The First Great Awakening, Edwards’ preaching and publishing defended the veracity of revivals. “Sinners in the Hands of An Angry God” was identified as Edwards’ exemplar sermon. Consistent with Edwards’ Calvinist theology, “Sinners” emphasizes God’s sovereignty and humanity’s
depravity. In an attempt to motivate his listeners to salvation, “Sinners” incorporates fear appeals focusing on God’s wrath and the dangers of hell that await the impenitent.

As the prominent figure of the Second Great Awakening, Charles Finney spent the majority of his career as an itinerant preacher. In congruence with the shift in the Second Great Awakening, Finney marked a theological break from Calvinism. An advocate for Arminianism, Finney’s preaching focused on human’s responsibility to choose salvation. Finney’s use of the mass revival meeting ushered in the age of modern revivalism. “Sinners Bound to Change Their Own Hearts” was identified as Finney’s exemplar sermon. Consistent with his Arminian tradition, “Sinners Bound to Change Their Own Hearts” emphasizes that salvation was available to all and the responsibility rests on the individual to choose God.

As a traveling evangelist, Dwight Moody—the prominent figure of the Third Great Awakening—organized successful revival campaigns across the nation. As a conservative, he rejected the new progressive theology and evolutionary science. Moody’s preaching stressed human’s responsibility in salvation and focused on the reality of a personal relationship with a loving God. His innovative revival techniques and principles for religious education are still used by Protestants today. Representative of Moody’s style and theology, “Lost and Saved,” was identified as his exemplar sermon. “Lost and Saved” emphasizes that God consistently pursues sinners and stresses the responsibility people have to choose a relationship with God.

Rhetorical Scholarship on Great Awakenings

America’s Great Awakenings have received extensive research and evaluation from scholars in religious studies, but they have received less attention from rhetorical
communication scholars. Rhetorical studies typically identify broad patterns in
awakening sermons that can inform general studies of awakening sermons, but few
have focused on the internal dynamics of individual sermons. Furthermore, while
Edwards has received attention from communication scholars, no specific studies have
examined the rhetoric of Charles Finney or Dwight Moody.

Scholarship on Edwards has explored general rhetorical strategies common to all
of his rhetoric, while focusing primarily on his use emotional appeals. Jackson's (2007)
essay analyzes Edwards' hell-fire rhetoric and compares it to modern-day hell-houses.
Hell-houses are dramatic attempts by religious communities to scare people into
repenting their sins by illustrating behaviors believed to send someone to hell. After
providing a history of hell-fire rhetoric, Jackson argues that Jonathan Edwards’ rhetoric
served as a prototype for hell-houses: “[The] strategy of terror in the evangelical
tradition has a genealogy that stretches back to the harrowing sermons of Jonathan
Edwards in eighteenth-century New England” (2007, p. 43). Hell-fire rhetoric is
categorized by language evoking fear through references to the torments of hell. The
hell-fire sermon has been an “American staple since colonial times” and “has been
employed in different ways to convince individuals of the reality of hell and scare them
enough that they change their wicked ways” (Jackson, 2007, p. 42).

Jackson (2007) also argues that Edwards’ rhetoric takes the form of an
argumentum ad baculum. The argumentum ad baculum is a “warning that some scary
outcome will occur if the respondent does not carry out a recommended action”
(Walton, 1996, p. 302). In American religious rhetoric, evangelicals, including Edwards,
have used argumentum ad baculum alongside hell-fire rhetoric to “invoke fear in
parishioners so that perceived dangers would be averted by pious humility and repentance” (Jackson, 2007, p. 44). Edwards assumed that “scaring people could save them from exquisite suffering, were they scared enough to escape God’s wrath through spiritual regeneration” (Jackson, 2007, p. 43). Jackson (2007) references “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God” as Edwards’ most notable use of hell-fire rhetoric.

In another essay, Longaker (2006) examines Edwards’ exemplary role in establishing the way people understand the relationship between persuasion and the revelation of divine knowledge. While Edwards is most often thought of as a theologian, Edwards merits rhetorical examination “because, for nearly two centuries, [Edwards’] writings affected how people imagined rhetoric’s relationship to revelation and persuasion” (Longaker, 2006, p. 284). Longaker (2006) discusses Edwards’ belief that preaching should include emotional appeals and argues, “Edwards developed a rhetorical theory that emphasized pathetic appeal as a necessary conduit to divine knowledge” (p. 284). According to Longaker, Edwards believed encountering the divine included appeals to emotions leading sinners to recognize the beauty of the divine. He suggests that Edwards’ “belief in the rational and the passionate faculties led him to a theory of emotional appeal” (Longaker, 2006, p. 290).

Adams and Yarbrough (1997) examine Edwards’ emotional appeals in the sermon, “Sinners in the Hands of An Angry God.” Adams and Yarbrough (1997) claim, “‘Sinners’ exemplifies what is called fire and brimstone preaching designed to terrify auditors with vivid depictions of hell’s torments” (p. 25). They argue that Edwards’ conversion experience, witnessing of other conversions, adherence to the doctrine of
original sin, and departure from Lockean sensationalism all contributed to the construction of “Sinners.” Adams and Yarbrough (1997) explain,

The doctrine of God’s sovereignty is especially important in sermons like “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God,” for the sense of God’s sovereignty—[God’s] total control over all existence—generates the sense of complete dependence and helplessness depicted in the imagery of the slipping sinner and dangling spider; and the perceived fact of God’s sovereignty—for if God is not sovereign [God] is not God—justifies the damnation of those souls who perceive themselves as independent and [...] self-reliant. (p. 27)

Through using suspense and vivid imagery, “Sinners’ functions primarily to heighten awareness of how salvation completely depends upon God’s arbitrary will” (Adams & Yarbrough, 1997, p. 28). Adams and Yarbrough (1997) explain that Edwards’ sermons encouraged Christians and led the unconverted to recognize their need for salvation.

Reid’s examination of the early Second Great Awakening places Edwards as an exemplar for Calvinist preachers at that time. The Second Great Awakening saw tensions between Calvinism and Arminianism, as well as emotionalism and rationalism, but within those tensions, some preachers believed “revivalism reached its apogee” with Jonathan Edwards, whom they would emulate (Reid, 1995, p. 7). Reid (1995) argues that Ebenezer Porter, a Congregationalist preacher who oversaw revival in Andover, New Jersey, considered Jonathan Edwards “one of the greatest preachers of all time” (p. 7), and praised his ability to use the Puritan sermonic structure, with its emphasis on rationalism and argument, while incorporating emotional appeals. Edwards appealed to
“the fear of hell and eternal damnation” (Reid, 1995, p. 7), and despite following the "traditional Puritan practice of writing his sermons and reading them from manuscript" and having a calm style of delivery, Edwards’ audiences’ responses “often verged on the hysterical” (Reid, 1995, p. 7).

Two additional articles focus on the life and preaching style of one of Edwards’ contemporaries, George Whitefield. White (1948) observes that a majority of Whitefield’s preaching during the First Great Awakening was done out-of-doors and suggests that the “effectiveness of [Whitefield’s] speaking is evidenced by the tremendous audiences that gathered to see him” (p. 34). It is documented that thousands of people followed Whitefield from church to church to hear him preach (White, 1948). Since Whitefield traveled from town to town as an itinerant, White (1948) argues that he had little time for formal sermon composition: “He wrote no sermons in manuscript form during the Great Awakening” (p. 37). As a result, Whitefield’s preparation typically involved meditation of scripture from which he would then select a text (White, 1948). Because he was an itinerant preacher, he could recycle sermons frequently, using similar content and delivery (White, 1948).

White (1948) explains that Whitefield’s sermons were clearly divided into three sections: introduction, body, and conclusion. As were most sermons during his era, Whitefield’s introductions were brief and included an opening statement, explanation of the text, and a preview of the main points that would follow (White, 1948). The bodies of Whitefield’s sermons were used to build up to the climax of the emotional exhortations that came in his conclusions. The conclusion typically composed one-
fourth of the entire sermon and included direct exhortations to “sinners” and frequent references to the “fortunate believers” (White, 1948, p. 39).

Whitefield’s sermons used personal appeals, logical content and basic arguments, and emotional appeals (White, 1948). In his personal appeals, Whitefield spoke directly to his listeners. The basic theme of his preaching was that “all humanity, having shared in Adam’s original sin, were vile creatures and incapable of doing ‘good works’” (White, 1948, p. 40). Whitefield’s use of logical appeals is evidenced through the structure of his arguments. Recognizing the growing dissatisfaction with dull rhetoric and the increasing desire parishioners had for drama and entertainment, Whitefield never “forced [listeners] to follow complicated patterns of thought” (White, 1950, p. 4). Instead, he simplified his rhetoric into easily understood “Biblical narratives and other illustrative material which supported his basic theses of original sin, regeneration, election, justification by faith only, and the inward experiencing of the spirit” (White, 1950, p. 4).

Believing that religion was a matter of the heart, not the head, Whitefield aimed at arousing passions for the divine. His emotional appeals relied on a “theology of hellfire, brimstone, and damnation” (White, 1948, p. 40). He preached about a God who was loving and vengeful while stressing humanity’s depravity and vileness. He spoke with certainty on the deservedness of eternal damnation for the impenitent and called on his listeners to repent and revere God (White, 1950). One of his most successful rhetorical devices for the emotional appeal was presenting “dramatic narratives based upon the Bible. He would dramatize the material and would spice the story with suspense, conflict, and climaxes” (White, 1950, p. 4). White’s (1948) examination of
Whitefield highlights qualities of First Great Awakening preaching that will be useful for examining Edwards.

While the broad thematics of awakenings have been identified, the specific rhetorical dynamics of exemplary sermons from prominent figures have not been sufficiently examined and compared against one another. The exemplary sermons of the Awakening’s prominent figures are important because they were one of the main ways, if not the main way, that the messages of the Great Awakenings were spread. Therefore, the most powerful sermons need to be examined to see how the internal dynamics of the sermon embodied the theology of the specific Awakening and the preacher as well as leading to the sermon’s prominence. As a result, this thesis will advance rhetorical scholarship in three ways. First, it will provide further examination of the rhetorical dynamics of America’s Great Awakenings. Second, it will provide an examination of the rhetoric of prominent figures in America’s Great Awakenings. Third, this thesis will advance scholarship by conducting a rhetorical analysis of prominent Awakening sermons as a means of comparing and contrasting rhetorical styles and strategies of revivalistic rhetoric.

Method and Research Questions

This project uses an inductive approach to rhetorical criticism primarily developed by Karlyn Kohrs Campbell (Campbell, 1979; Campbell & Burkholder, 1996; Campbell & Huxman, 2008). This approach is reflexive, dialectical, cognitive and evaluative (Campbell, 1979). The method starts with an identification of the prominent figure for each Great Awakening. This criticism begins with a reflexive examination of a text, a close reading that brackets theoretical and contextual concerns as much as possible to
focus on the internal dynamics of the text and guided by common textual features like purpose, persona, tone, audience, arguments, evidence and emotional appeals (Campbell, 1979; Campbell & Burkholder, 1996). Then, the rhetorical critic engages in a dialectical process where information gained by reflexive examination of the text is placed in relationship to contextual and historical information, while also moving between the text, rhetorical theory, and previous criticism on similar rhetorical objects (Campbell & Burkholder, 1996; Campbell & Huxman, 2008). In moving between these different sources, the purposes of the text and function of its various features can be inferred (Campbell, 1979). Finally, this combination of reflexive and dialectical examinations produces cognitive fruit in that we learn something new about the rhetorical object, its author, and/or the socio-historical context of the speech, as well as providing the grounds for evaluating the text and its attempt at persuasion (Campbell, 1979).

Before the rhetorical analysis can begin, the study needs to identify the preachers to be studied. Thus, the first research question is:

**RQ 1** Who is the prominent preacher for each Great Awakening?

While this chapter introduced the figures that have been identified, subsequent chapters provide further justification for each selection and provide context for the dialectical examination undertaken. In addition to identifying preachers, we must also identify the sermon:

**RQ 2** What is the exemplar sermons associated with the prominent preacher identified in each Great Awakening?
While each sermon was previewed in this chapter, subsequent chapters detail how each fulfilled the criteria established to determine an exemplary sermon. Next, this method moves into a rhetorical criticism of the exemplar sermons.

**RQ 3** What are the rhetorical strategies in prominent sermons from each Great Awakening?

A. Do the prominent figures from each Awakening use similar or different appeals in revival sermons?

B. Do the prominent figures rely upon similar or different evidence for their arguments?

C. Do Awakening sermons follow similar or different organizational principles?

**Preview of Chapters**

The subsequent Chapters in this thesis highlight the involvement of the prominent figures in America’s Great Awakenings, their general rhetorical strategies, and rhetorical analyses of the prominent sermon identified with each figure. Chapter Two focuses on Jonathan Edwards, the prominent figure identified for the First Great Awakening. After highlighting Edwards’ early religious experiences, the chapter details his role in the First Great Awakening. Next, the chapter moves into a discussion of Edwards’ rhetorical style. Finally, Chapter Two provides a rhetorical analysis of his sermon “Sinners in the Hands of An Angry God.”

Chapter Three centers on the prominent figure identified for the Second Great Awakening, Charles Finney. Starting with an account of Finney’s early experiences with religion, this chapter chronicles his involvement in the Second Great Awakening. Next,
the chapter discusses Finney’s rhetorical style. Chapter Three concludes with a rhetorical analysis of his sermon “Sinners Bound to Change Their Own Hearts.”

Chapter Four focuses on Dwight Moody, the prominent figure identified for the Third Great Awakening. This chapter begins by highlighting Moody’s early religious experiences. Next, Chapter Four details Moody’s role in the Third Great Awakening. After reviewing his rhetorical strategies, this chapter concludes with an analysis of Moody’s sermon “Lost and Saved.”

After considering the rhetorical dynamics of each sermon individually in Chapters Two, Three, and Four, Chapter Five compares and contrasts the rhetorical dimensions of all three sermons. Working from the proposed research questions, the last Chapter focuses on the structure, evidence, and appeals used by each preacher. Chapter Five concludes with a discussion of the study’s limitations and provides suggestions for future research on rhetoric and America’s Great Awakenings.
Chapter Two: Jonathan Edwards

"There is nothing that keeps wicked men at any one moment out of hell, but the mere pleasure of God"
-Sinners in the Hands of An Angry God

America’s religious history has produced a number of key figures. However, “during the past three hundred years, more attention has been paid to [Jonathan] Edwards than to any other figure in American religious history” (Hart, Lucas, & Nichols, 2001, p. 19). Edwards is generally considered the “chief prophet” and “leading theologian of the First Great Awakening” (McLoughlin, 1978, p. 70). As a result of his successful revival campaigns in the Great Awakening, he has become known as “America’s most famous and successful evangelical” (Gura, 2005, p. xii). Consequently, he is often labeled “America’s evangelical” and the “father of American revivalism” (Gura, 2005, p. xii). This chapter provides a brief biographical sketch of Edwards’ religious background, a review of his role and contributions to the First Great Awakening, an examination of his rhetorical strategies generally, and a rhetorical criticism of his sermon “Sinners in the Hands of An Angry God.”

The Life of Jonathan Edwards

Edwards’ upbringing and early religious experiences

Edwards was born to a family with a rich religious heritage. His grandfather, Solomon Stoddard, was considered the most renowned religious figure in the Connecticut Valley (Marsden, 2003; Miller, 2005; Gura, 2005). During his sixty-years in the ministry, Stoddard, the “Pope” of the Connecticut River Valley (Miller, 2005; Nichols, 2001), committed to reviving religious sentiments and, subsequently, oversaw more local revivals than any of his contemporaries (Marsden, 2003). Similarly, Timothy Edwards—Jonathan Edwards’ father—was “an effective preacher of revival” (Marsden,
Timothy Edwards preached with the intent of seeing souls converted with sermons focusing on hell’s tortures and humanity’s dependence on God (Marsden, 2003; Gura, 2005). During his childhood, Jonathan Edwards witnessed his father lead their parish through four or five periods of intense religious revival (Marsden, 2003; Stout, 2009).

Despite growing up in a family deeply concerned with religion, especially conversion, Edwards experienced continual doubts about the strength and purity of his faith throughout childhood and adolescence (Gura, 2005; Marsden, 2003). This occurred partly because of the stringent beliefs about faith and spiritual renewal held by his father (Marsden, 2003). Theologically, Edwards had trouble believing in a God with complete sovereignty—the foundational doctrine of his Calvinist upbringing (Marsden, 2003). For Edwards, a sovereign God seemed tyrannical. Finally, in 1721, after years of mulling over his spiritual condition, Edwards experienced a series of intense religious sentiments leading to a breakthrough he later attributed to the work of the Holy Spirit (Marsden, 2003). For the first time, he embraced the idea of God’s sovereignty, the obstacle that had long hindered his belief. In his own reflections, he recalled, “I thought with myself, how excellent a Being that was; and how happy I should be if I might enjoy that God, and be wrapped up to God in heaven, and be as it were swallowed up in him” (qtd. in Marsden, 2003, p. 41). After experiencing this revelation, Edwards explained,

My sense of divine things gradually increased, and became more and more lively, and had more of that inward sweetness. The appearance of everything was altered: there seemed to be, as it were, a calm, sweet
cast, or appearance of divine glory, in almost everything. (qtd. in Marsden, 2003, p. 44)

What was once the greatest deterrent of Edwards’ faith, God’s sovereignty, became the “theme uniting Edwards’ life, his preaching, and his writing” (Adams & Yarbrough, 2001, p. 276). Edwards believed

People [could] do nothing to save themselves, good works avail them nothing but are a glory to God alone, faith is a gift not to be achieved…He tested every idea and action by the doctrine of sovereignty. Every word he spoke from the pulpit was ultimately connected to it. Every pastoral initiative he took was motivated by it. (Adams & Yarbrough, 2001, p. 276)

For Edwards, “the triune eternally loving God, as revealed in Scripture, created and ruled everything in the universe” (Marsden, 2003, p. 4). He emphasized Christ’s work of redemption as the very purpose of creation. He believed “everything in the universe pointed ultimately to the loving character of the triune God” and considered nothing more important than one’s eternal relationship with God (Marsden, 2003, p. 4).

Edwards’ theology and understanding of humanity’s need for God would influence the remainder of his life.

Shortly after his conversion, Edwards began his first pastorate. While living in New York City from August of 1722 to April of 1723, Edwards served as an unordained interim, or “supply,” pastor to a small congregation that had recently broken off from a larger Presbyterian church (Ahlstrom, 2004; Marsden, 2003). After returning to Connecticut in April of 1723, Edwards had hopes of returning to New York to pastor. His father, however, wanted him to stay closer to home. After realizing there were no
open positions in New York, he took his father’s advice and agreed to become pastor of a church in Bolton, Connecticut in November of 1723 (Marsden, 2003).

Edwards’ pastorate in Bolton was brief. By the summer of 1724, he left Bolton to be a tutor at Yale (Ahlstrom, 2004; Minkema, 2009). Two years later, he began assisting at his grandfather’s church in Northampton, Massachusetts (Ahlstrom, 2004; Jensen, 1992). Following the death of Stoddard in 1729, Edwards assumed the role of full pastor at Northampton (Ahlstrom, 2004; Jensen, 1992; Marsden, 2003).

*Edwards’ role in The First Great Awakening*

Edwards’ role in the First Great Awakening is defined by his contributions to reviving religious sentiments in the Connecticut valley region (Logan, 2001). He became directly involved with revival activities in 1733 after recognizing the increasing popularity of Arminianism in his Northampton parish (Cherry, 1990; Logan, 2001, Jensen, 1992). Edwards feared Arminianism—a term “loosely applied to the belief that one could, through good works, proper living, righteous attention to religious ritual, and so forth, earn one’s way into heaven” (Adams & Yarbrough, 2007, p. 278)—posed a threat to the strict Calvinist theology he preached in Northampton (Cherry, 1990; Hart et al., 2001). As a result, he “responded with a series of sermons on ‘justification by faith alone’” and humanity’s dependence on God (Logan, 2001, p. 14). His preaching produced a revival that “outshone all his counterparts” (Marsden, 2003, p. 244). During the spring of 1735,

The entire town [of Northampton] was in a religious frenzy. Over 300 people were converted as Edwards continued to mix humiliation with consolation, God’s sovereignty with human dependency. Word spread

After experiencing a period of intense religious revival between 1734-1736, Edwards felt that Northampton suffered a “gradual decline of that general, engaged, lively spirit in religion” (Edwards in, Adams & Yarbrough, 2007, p. 279). However, revival sentiment was renewed in 1741 with the visit of George Whitefield to Northampton. Edwards was an advocate of itinerant preaching (Stout, 2001) and was particularly interested in the efforts of George Whitefield, a widely successful revivalist from England (Adams & Yarbrough, 2007; White, 1948; White, 1950). Whitefield’s visit to Northampton was representative of the growing popularity of itinerant preaching in during the First Great Awakening used to help spark religious revival (Marsden, 2003). Success revival campaigns during the Great Awakening revealed “that a strange voice was far more likely to stir an audience’s fervor than one grown too familiar” (Adam & Yarbrough, 2007, p. 281).

In contrast with Edwards, Whitefield delivered extemporaneous sermons flamboyantly with vigorous gesturing, shouting, weeping, and vocal variation. His assaults on emotions were direct, and his messages were simple and repetitive (Adams & Yarbrough, 2007; Yarbrough & Adams, 1993). Whitefield’s preaching in Northampton was successful, sparking a revival Edwards kept in motion that surpassed any Northampton had experienced before (Marsden, 2003). Edwards continued revival locally through weekly preaching and consistent meetings with parishioners who sought deeper understanding of their spiritual experiences (Gura, 2005). As the Great Awakening continued to “advance in amazing ways, so did Edwards’ prominence”
(Marsden, 2003, p. 227). Because of his reputation as a revivalist, Edwards was frequently invited to preach in other communities and spent much of his time on extensive preaching tours throughout New England (Adams & Yarbrough, 2007).

By 1741, Edwards had gained international recognition as a preacher of revival (Crompton, 2005; Marsden, 2003; Minkema, 2009). In Northampton, “the light of the awakening had been brightening…and Edwards was dealing every day with new confirmations that the work was truly of the Holy Spirit” (Marsden, 2003, p. 239). However, not everyone shared his positive view of New England’s increase in religious sentiments. These opponents, known as the “Old Lights,” tried suppressing the Awakening and argued that the revivals were products of impulsivity and emotionalism (Marsden, 2003). Charles Chauncy, the leading antagonist of the Awakening and head of the Old Lights (Cherry, 1990; Miller, 2005), and his supporters were troubled by “the extravagant outcries and bodily effects so common in the new awakening and about the widespread itinerancy of pastors whose work was precipitating many of these reactions” (Marsden, 2003, p. 229). The Old Lights feared that itinerants preached in the most extravagant ways, trying to frighten people and otherwise arouse passions. Using vulgar appeals to sentiment, they would generate mass hysteria that they encouraged people to regard as evidence of the work of the Holy Spirit. (Marsden, 2003, p. 269)

The remainder of Edwards’ role in the Great Awakening was defined by writing and preaching in defense of the genuineness of the Awakening activities (Kee et al., 1998; Marsden, 2003; Noll, 1992).
Prior to the doubts expressed by the Old Lights, Edwards was already concerned with distinguishing between true and false religious experiences. His first work on the Awakening, *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God in the Conversion of Many Hundreds of Souls* (1737), had “transformed him from just another provincial minister to one of the chief American spokespersons for transatlantic evangelism” (Gura, 2005, p. 79). *A Faithful Narrative* chronicled the Awakening activities of Northampton in 1733 and painted a vivid example of what happened when churchgoers’ longing for spiritual revival were answered by the Spirit (Gura, 2005; Tracy, 1980).

While Edwards later recognized some members of his parish were merely deceived during Northampton’s revivals chronicled in *A Faithful Narrative*, he was convinced that Awakening activities of 1740-1741 were genuine. In response to the Old Lights, Edwards wrote his first formal evaluation of the Awakening, *Distinguishing Marks of the Work of the Spirit of God* (Gura, 2005). *Distinguishing Marks* became “the first major volley in the battle to control the direction and meaning of the Great Awakening” (Gura, 2005, p. 120). In *Distinguishing Marks*, Edwards addressed what were and were not signs of a genuine religious experience. For Edwards, true conversion was evident when it increased people’s regard for Jesus, opposed Satan’s interests, and demanded a higher esteem for the Holy Scriptures (Gura, 2005). According to Edwards, the most recent Awakening revivals satisfied these criteria.

*Distinguishing Marks* received criticism from the Old Lights (Gura, 2005). Chauncy responded with *The Late Religious Commotions in New-England Considered*, “the most powerful antirevival sermon of that era” (Gura, 2005, p. 123). As the struggle between the Old Lights and Awakening supporters continued, Edwards made a final
attempt to win support from the Old Lights. In late 1742, he completed Some Thoughts Concerning the Present Revival, his lengthiest defense of the Awakening (Gura, 2005). Some Thoughts assembled nearly 400 pages of “scriptural and historical arguments to convince doubters to support the awakenings” (Gura, 2005, p. 126). Some Thoughts resulted in more opposition from the Old Lights, and by the end of 1742, Edwards was convinced that the disagreements would not be resolved (Gura, 2005).

Discouraged by the failing battle over the Awakening, Edwards directed his attention towards his own congregation. Throughout the remainder of 1742 and into the following year, he preached on material raised in Some Thoughts. Later, in 1746, he wrote A Treatise on Religious Affections. Religious Affections provided a synthesis for his thoughts on the Awakening. It included an evaluation of the effects of true conversion and argued, “True religion, in great part, consists in holy affections” (qtd. in Gura, 2005, p. 129). In 1750, Edwards left his Northampton parish and settled in Stockbridge, Massachusetts as a pastor and missionary to Native Americans (Crompton, 1995; Marsden, 2003). Edwards continued preaching and writing throughout the remainder of his life and was installed as the president of the College of New Jersey (now known as Princeton University) shortly before his death in 1758 (Marsden, 2003).

Jonathan Edwards’ Rhetoric

Edwards’ theology provided the foundation for his rhetoric. Influenced by his father and grandfather, Edwards preached the coming of Christ’s kingdom (Stout, 2001) with sermons focusing on “God’s sovereignty, man’s utter depravity, and the excellence of Christ” (Gura, 2005, p. 64). Edwards was unconcerned with dramatic delivery. For
most of his career, he relied heavily upon manuscripts, ignored vocal variety and emphasis, and scarcely gestured, or even moved, while preaching (Stout, 2001; Yarbrough & Adams, 1993). A “genius with words” (Stout, 2001, p. 42), Edwards overshadowed these deficiencies as an orator with his mastery of the human language. As a preacher of revival, he diligently “set himself to compose the ‘perfect idea’ of an awakening’ sermon” (Stout, 2001, p. 42). He “crafted his sermons so that his ideas might appeal to his auditors’ sensations and thus move their affection toward God” (Bailey, 2001, p. 76). He meticulously chose the “words most likely to convey the images and emotion he deemed necessary from the text” (Bailey, 2001, p. 76-77). The power of his preaching “came from his relentless systematic delineation of all the implication of his theme [God’s sovereignty and humanity’s dependence on God]” (Marsden, 2003, p. 206). His arguments were complex, traditional, structured, logically impeccable, and sent his listeners into hysterics (Adams & Yarbrough, 2001; Yarbrough & Adams, 1993).

Preaching during the First Great Awakening was characterized by intense appeal to emotions (Jackson, 2007). For Edwards, there was one obvious way to move the heart (Jackson, 2007). He believed “persons [were] first awakened with a sense of their miserable condition by nature, the danger they are in of perishing eternally, and that it [was] of great importance to them that they speedily escape” (Jackson, 2007, p. 48). To awaken people of the dangers of “perishing eternally,” sermons during the First Great Awakening shifted from “the history of heaven” and “the joys of redemption” to the “history of hell” and the “horrors of the damned” (Stout, 2001, p. 42, 43). As a result, Edwards, who had spent more time preaching on heaven in his early years, began
focusing heavily on hell (Stout, 2001; Stout, 2009). While sermons on hell were not uncommon during the First Great Awakening, Edwards' presentation of the subject matter was distinct from his contemporaries because he used images of fire and furnaces rather than portrayals of hell as a place of infinite darkness (Hart et al., 2001; Stout, 2009).

Edwards is considered an exquisite practitioner of fear appeals in religious revivalist rhetoric (Jackson, 2007). He recognized fear as a key emotional appeal for an awakening sermon because he believed eternal life could only be gained after a person was scared to death (Gerstner, 1995; Stout, 2001). Edwards believed the

Work of the preacher was to craft the words of the sermon so that the danger [was] so vivid, so stark, and so real that sinners would react physiologically with fainting, shrieks, fits, and groans, and then once back on their feet, [they would] be ready to worship… the preacher had to make the members of the congregation sense the awfulness of hell psychosomatically—in the body and the mind. (Jackson, 2007, p. 47)

Edwards' style was exemplary of hell-fire rhetoric—fear invoking rhetoric that relies upon references to the torments hell—and the argumentum ad baculum—a rhetorical strategy used as a “warning that some scary outcome will occur if the respondent does not carry out a recommended action” (Walton, 1996, p. 302). In religious rhetoric, preachers use hell-fire rhetoric and argumentum ad baculum to “invoke fear in parishioners so that perceived dangers [will] be averted by pious humility and repentance” (Jackson, 2007, p. 44). Edwards' well-known sermon, “Sinners in the
Hands of An Angry God” (Adams and Yarbrough, 2001; Noll, 1992; Tracy, 1980), is the consummate example of hell-fire rhetoric and the argumentum ad baculum.

“Sinners in the Hands of An Angry God” is exemplary of Edwards’ investment in God’s sovereignty, humanity’s dependency on God, and rhetoric that would scare his listeners into recognizing their desperate condition and need for God. His most renowned delivery of “Sinners” occurred during an itinerant visit to Enfield, Connecticut, a community Edwards perceived as particularly “stubborn to the gospel” and that had yet to experience the enthusiasm of the Great Awakening (Currid, 1992, p. 3). This preaching of “Sinners” precipitated a reaction so overwhelming that Edwards was unable to finish the sermon, as people were crying out hysterically for salvation (Marsden, 2003).

Edwards explicitly states the purpose of “Sinners” halfway through the sermon. He explains, “The use of this awful subject may be for awakening unconverted persons in this congregation. This that you have heard is the case of every one of you that are out of Christ” (¶ 20). Historical accounts provide evidence that Edwards preached “Sinners” to a number of different congregations, which helps explain why there are no references to an empirical audience in the sermon’s text (Marsden, 2003).³ Edwards aims his sermon at those who are “unconverted.” While all his audience members would have been nominally Christian as they have come to a church to hear a sermon, Edwards seems to aim at Christians who had not experienced religious rebirth or renewal, or, as Edwards describes them, those people who had “never passed under a great change of heart by the mighty power of the Spirit of God upon [their] souls;
all…that were never born again, and made new creatures, and raised from being dead
in sin to a state of new” (¶ 24).

“Sinners” is composed as a conventional New England sermon (Adams &
Yarbrough, 2007). Such sermons consisted of three sections: the text, the doctrine, and
the application (Adams & Yarbrough, 2007; White 1948; Yarbrough & Adams, 1993).
The text portion of such sermons typically included a “brief biblical passage, followed by
a literal paraphrasing, sometimes with historical background, and always a careful
teasing out of the apparently obvious thematic elements that will become the subject of
analysis in the doctrine” (Adams & Yarbrough, 2007, p. 286). The text portion was
followed by the doctrine (or observation), which provided the spiritual lessons the
preacher drew from the text. The doctrine was typically divided into major propositions,
typically numbered, and followed by subdivisions, or reasons (Adams & Yarbrough,
2007). An application, following the doctrine, indicated how the teaching points related
to audience members’ personal situations and experiences. In the application, the
preacher would explain to the audience exactly how the message should influence the
way they conducted their lives.

The format of “Sinners” allowed for an incremental development of fear appeals.
These appeals began with the biblical text chosen for the sermon: “Their foot shall slide
in due time” Deuteronomy 32:35. Edwards’ text provides the grounds for the remainder
of his sermon: He will focus on humanity’s dangerous condition and the sovereignty of
God in salvation. After stating the text, Edwards provides a brief comment about the
historical context of the scripture:
In this verse is threatened the vengeance of God on the wicked unbelieving Israelites, who were God’s visible people, and who lived under the means of grace; but who, notwithstanding all God’s wonderful works towards them, remained void of counsel, having no understanding in them. (¶ 1)

Edwards claims that the verse implies four things about the potential destruction of the Israelites. He explains that the Israelites “were always exposed to destruction” (¶ 2), that this destruction was “unexpected” (¶ 3), that they were liable to fall on their own (¶ 4), and that the only reason they did not fall already is because “God’s appointed time [had] not come” (¶ 5). In each of his implications, there is a subtext that although the punishment is unexpected, it is deserved because of the Israelite’s sin. From this brief exegesis, Edwards moves into the doctrine portion of his sermon where he applies the Israelites condition to the rest of humanity.

In the opening of the doctrine section, Edwards explains, “The observation from the words that I would now insist upon is this—‘There is nothing that keeps wicked men [sic] at any one moment out of hell, but the mere pleasure of God’” (¶ 6). The remainder of the doctrine is divided into thirteen propositions that are used to develop this thesis. Edwards’ thesis embodies his understanding of the sovereignty of God and the preeminence of God in salvation. As alluded to in the verse, sinners are completely dependent upon God to save them from an eternity in hell. Each proposition begins with a sentence extending the claim that “There is nothing that keeps wicked men at any one moment out of hell, but the mere pleasure of God” (¶ 6). Throughout the propositions, Edwards amplifies his fear appeals.
Edwards fear appeals throughout “Sinners’” doctrine section highlight God’s anger and the dangers of hell. When discussing God’s anger with humanity’s wickedness, he exclaims,

God is a great deal more angry with great numbers that are now on earth: yea, doubtless, with many that are now in this congregation, who it may be are at ease, than he is with many of those who are now in the flames of hell. (¶ 10)

Discussing the woeful condition of sinners, Edwards introduces his use of the imagery of the “flames of hell” when explaining the fate awaiting those who are under God’s anger. Building on God’s anger with imagery of hell’s torments, he admonishes,

The wrath of God burns against [sinners], their damnation does not slumber; the pit is prepared, the fire is made ready, the furnace is now hot, ready to receive them; the flames do now rage and glow. The glittering sword is whet, and held over them, and the pit hath opened its mouth under them. (¶ 11)

Using an argument ad baculum, Edwards emphasizes the imminence of hell for sinners. Extending beyond imagery of the “flames of hell,” Edwards stresses that the flames are raging and glowing, as if they are reaching upward to consume the sinners, and compares hell to a furnace that is prepared to receive them. Intensifying his imagery of God’s wrath and judgment, he warns them of the sharpened sword of judgment that is ready to cut them off and send them into the “mouth” of hell. Using scripture (Luke 6:12) to support his claims, he warns, the devil is ready.
To fall upon [sinners], and seize them as his own, at what moment God shall permit him…The old serpent is gaping for them; hell opens its mouth wide to receive them; and if God should permit it, they would be hastily swallowed up and lost. (¶ 12)

Reminding his audience that the only thing keeping them out of hell is God, Edwards describes Satan as a serpent whose mouth is opened ready to swallow them up if only God would permit. Later, he stresses again that God’s anger is as intense towards unrepentant sinners as it is towards those who are already in hell. He extends his fear appeals by emphasizing that sinners deserve to suffer in hell and are completely dependent on God to rescue them from eternal damnation. He explains,

Natural men are held in the hand of God, over the pit of hell; they have deserved the fiery pit, and are already sentenced to it; and God is dreadfully provoked, his anger is as great towards them as to those that are actually suffering the executions of the fierceness of his wrath in hell, and they have done nothing in the least to appease or abate that anger…the devil is waiting for them, hell is gaping for them, the flames gather and flash about them, and would fain lay hold on them, and swallow them up. (¶ 20)

In his most vivid description of hell to this point, Edwards combines images of God’s wrath, which is now provoked to the degree of holding them over the pit of hell, images of the continually growing flames, which are now gathering below them, and images of the devil who is waiting for them. He reminds them that if God were to remove his hand, they would be consumed by God’s wrath in hell. Edwards continues including
fear appeals by stressing that people are completely dependent upon God to keep them from going to hell and that God could send them to hell at any moment. He argues,

Unconverted men walk over the pit of hell on a rotten covering, and there are innumerable places in this covering so weak that they will not bear their weight, and these places are not seen. The arrows of death fly unseen at noon-day...God has so many different unsearchable ways of taking wicked men out of the world and sending them to hell, that there is nothing to make it appear, that God had need to be at the expense of a miracle, or go out of the ordinary course of his providence, to destroy any wicked man, at any moment. (¶ 14)

Edwards magnifies images of the imminence of sinners' destruction by comparing their condition to walking on a weak and rotten covering, as the Israelites walked on slippery places. Recognizing the enormity of God's wrath against them, Edwards explains that it will take a miracle to keep them from being destroyed by the "arrows of death."

Moving beyond the doctrine, Edwards opens the application section of "Sinners" by explaining the purpose behind addressing this "awful subject" (¶ 21). The remainder of the application section is characterized by a continued increase in the frequency and intensity of fear appeals. In them, he stresses the dangers of being unconverted.

Warning of the dangers of hell, he exhorts,

That world of misery, that lake of burning brimstone, is extended abroad under you. There is the dreadful pit of the glowing flames of the wrath of God; there is hell's wide gaping mouth open; and you have nothing to stand upon, nor any thing to take hold of; there is nothing between you
and hell but the air; it is only the power and mere pleasure of God that holds you up. (¶ 21)

Extending beyond his fire and flame language, Edwards compares hell’s torments to a “world of misery” and a “lake of burning brimstone.” Edwards places his audience in the position he previously attributed to all who were unconverted. Operating from his Calvinist understanding of salvation, his fear appeals focus on God’s wrath and people’s dependence on God to keep them from falling into the “dreadful pit.” Intensifying his imagery of the imminence of their destruction, Edwards argues that the only thing between them and hell is “air.” Later, when discussing the sinner’s woeful condition, he explains,

Your wickedness makes you as heavy as lead, and to tend downwards with great weight and pressure towards hell; and if God should let you go, you would immediately sink and swiftly descend and plunge into the bottomless gulf, and your healthy constitution, and your own care and prudence, and best contrivance, and all your righteousness, would have no more influence to uphold you and keep you out of hell, than a spider’s web would have to stop a falling rock. (¶ 23)

The images of weight and heaviness help the audience visualize the Calvinist understanding of salvation. Individuals naturally descend toward hell, and according to Edwards, there is nothing that they can do to save themselves. Only God’s power prevents their descent. He cautions the unconverted on the danger of being impenitent:

There are the black clouds of God’s wrath now hanging directly over your heads, full of the dreadful storm, and big with thunder; and were it not for
the restraining hand of God, it would immediately burst forth upon you…it
would come with fury, and your destruction would come like a whirlwind,
and you would be like the chaff of the summer threshing floor. (¶ 23)

Edwards uses stormy imagery to stress peoples’ helplessness compared in relation to
the wrath of God. Comparing their condition to chaff of the threshing floor, Edwards
cautions that the unrepentant will be swept away by the whirlwind of God’s fury.
Continuing this theme, he warns,

The wrath of God is like great waters that are dammed for the present;
they increase more and more, and rise higher and higher, till an outlet is
give; and the longer the stream is stopped the more rapid and mighty is its
course, when once it is let loose...your guilt in the mean time is constantly
increasing, and you are every day treasuring up more wrath; the waters
are constantly rising, and waxing more and more might...If God should
only withdraw his hand from the flood-gate, it would immediately fly open,
and the fiery floods of the fierceness and wrath of God, would rush forth
with inconceivable fury, and would come upon you with omnipotent power.
(¶ 24)

In his most striking illustration, Edwards' language warns that God's wrath “increase[s]
more and more, and rise[s] higher and higher.” Edwards compares God’s anger to
mighty waters that are dammed by a flood-gate. Just as dammed waters build in power
while waiting to rush out, so is the fierceness of God’s wrath waiting to burst forth on the
impenitent sinner. Edwards cautions that, once the flood-gates fly open, sinners will be
consumed by the inescapable power of God’s wrath. Later, he advises,
The bow of God’s wrath is bent, and the arrow made ready on the string, and justice bends the arrow at your heart, and strains the bow, and it is nothing but the mere pleasure of God, and that of an angry God…that keeps the arrow one moment from being made drunk with your blood. (¶ 25)

Continuing to stress the imminence of God’s wrath towards sinners, Edwards uses a metaphor of a bow and arrow. While God’s wrath is now restrained, Edwards reminds them that only God’s pleasure withholds the arrow of God’s wrath from piercing the sinner.

Edwards closes “Sinners” with a series of fear appeals encouraging his audience to recognize their need for God. He explains,

O sinner! Consider the fearful danger you are in: it is a great furnace of wrath, a wide and bottomless pit, full of the fire of wrath, that you are held over in the hand of that God, whose wrath is provoked and incensed as much against you, as against many of the damned in hell. You hang by a slender thread, with the flames of divine wrath flashing about, and ready every moment to singe it, and burn it asunder. (¶ 27)

From this excerpt, it is clear that Edwards wants his audience to realize that the dangers he has been speaking about throughout his sermon are awaiting them. Building on his previous descriptions of hell as a “pit,” Edwards elucidates that hell is a “bottomless pit” of God’s wrath. Intensifying the closeness of their destruction, Edwards argues that the sinners are merely hanging by a “thread” that at any moment could be singed by the
flames flashing around it, sending them into hell. Using scriptural evidence to justify his point, Edwards asserts,

   The wrath of the great King of kings, is as much more terrible than [the kings of the earth], as his majesty is greater. “And I say unto you, my friends, be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after than, have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom you shall fear: fear him, which after he hath killed, hath power to cast into hell: yea, I say unto you, Fear him”—Luke 12:4-5.  

Desiring to show his audience that the wrath of God is more serious than any earthly punishment, Edwards stresses that God has the power to sentence them to eternal punishment. Later, he provides more evidence of God’s power:

   It is the fierceness of his wrath that you are exposed to. We often read of the fury of God; as in “According to their deeds, accordingly he will repay fury to his adversaries”—Isaiah 59:18. So “For behold, the Lord will come with fire, and with his chariots like a whirlwind, to render his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire”—Isaiah 66:15. And in many other places. So, we read of “the wine press of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God”—Revelation 19:15

Stressing the intensity of God’s wrath, he explains, “It would be dreadful to suffer this fierceness and wrath of Almighty God one moment; but you must suffer it to all eternity. There will be no end to this exquisite horrible misery” (¶ 34). “Sinners” concludes with one last emotional appeal as Edwards pleas, “Every one that is out of Christ, now
awake and fly from the wrath to come. The wrath of Almighty God is now undoubtedly hanging over a great part of this congregation” (¶ 38).

Conclusions

From his contributions as a pastor in Northampton, an itinerant preacher, and an apologist for revival, Edwards is known as the leading figure of the First Great Awakening. As a Calvinist, Edwards’ rhetoric focused on God’s sovereignty and humanity’s depravity. For Edwards, salvation was entirely dependent upon God. The sermon, “Sinners in the Hands of An Angry God,” exemplifies Edwards’ theology and the rhetoric that embodies it. Using the New England sermon format, “Sinners” is divided into three parts: text, doctrine, and application. The structure of Edwards’ sermon allows for incremental fear appeals and implementation of an argument ad baculum. Beginning with his Biblical text from Deuteronomy, which emphasizes the dangerous condition of the Israelites, Edwards introduces his theme that humanity is prone to destruction and is saved from suffering in hell by God’s protective hand. Edwards uses a variety of images like the flames of hell, the flood of god's wrath, and the rotted covering barely separating sinners from hell to stress the woeful condition of sinners and the torments facing the impenitent. Edwards depiction of the punishment awaiting sinners is evidence of his use of the *argumentum ad baculum*. Furthermore, his language stressing sinners’ dangerous condition reflects his Calvinist belief in God’s sovereignty, specifically concerning the belief that God’s pleasure keeps sinners from plunging into hell at that very moment.

Edwards’ “Sinners” is representative of the dominant theological framework of the First Great Awakening. However, the Calvinist-Arminian debate heightened in the
Second Great Awakening, shaping the rhetoric of The Second Great Awakening’s preachers. The leader of the Second Great Awakening, Charles Finney, embodied the transition to Arminianism as American Protestantism’s dominant theological framework.
Chapter Three: Charles Finney

“God only requires of you to choose”
-Sinners Bound to Change Their Own Hearts

Charles Finney is considered the leading evangelical of the Second Great Awakening (Scott, 2002), as well as one of the “greatest revivalists in American history” (Hankins, 2002, p. 137). Often described as the “Father of Modern Revivalism” (Chesebrough, 2002; Hankins, 2004; McLoughlin, 2004), Finney transformed the process of evangelism with innovative techniques for promoting conversion and a new style of preaching (McLoughlin, 2004). This chapter highlights Finney’s early experiences with religion, details his role in the Second Great Awakening, reviews his rhetoric, and offers an analysis of his sermon, “Sinners Bound to Change Their Own Hearts.”

The Life of Charles Finney

Finney’s early experiences with religion

While now considered one of the most important figures in America’s religious history, Finney grew up largely ignorant of religion (Chesebrough, 2002; Hardman, 1987). Although his parents did not profess to be religious, the Finney family attended church with some regularity (Habrick-Stowe, 1996). As a young adult, Finney was largely unimpressed by the preaching he encountered at church services (Hambrick-Stowe, 1996) and considered himself a religious skeptic with no interest in becoming a Christian (Chesebrough, 2002).

At the age of twenty-nine, Finney purchased his first bible while studying for a career in law (Chesebrough, 2002; Hambrick-Stowe, 1996; Hardman, 1987). While somewhat familiar with the scriptures already, he became increasingly interested in the
In addition to a new interest in the Bible, Finney began attending weekly church services (Chesebrough, 2002; Hambrick-Stowe, 1996). However, he remained unaffected and disappointed by the unenthusiastic preaching (Chesebrough, 2002). The pastor, George Gale, was “an Old School Calvinist who believed in and proclaimed the absolute sovereignty of God. He denied the possibility of free will and the possibility that humans could control their own destinies” (Chesebrough, 2002, p. 10). Although he knew little theology at this time, Finney sensed Calvinism was “both unfair and illogical” (Chesebrough, 2002, p. 10). Despite their differences, Finney and Gale became close friends and often discussed theology (Chesebrough, 2002; Hambrick-Stowe, 1996).

In 1821, Gale took a leave of absence and invited Jedediah Burchard, an itinerant preacher, to fill the pulpit (Chesebrough, 2002; Hambrick-Stowe, 1996). Burchard’s revivalistic preaching caught Finney’s attention. Shortly afterwards, he began attending meetings about salvation under Gale before being “dramatically converted on October 10, 1821” (Chesebrough, 2002, p. 9). His conversion occurred on his way to the law office one morning when he decided to stop and pray in a wooded area outside of town. Upon his conversion,

Finney immediately began to tell all who would listen to him what had happened, always adding that it could happen to the hearer as well.

Young people in his choir, other townspeople, and his own family were soon converted through his testimony. Within a short period of time, sixty-
three converts were added to the little church in Adams. (Chesebrough, 2002, p. 12)

Wanting to reach more people with his conversion message, he decided to forego a career in law in favor of preaching (Bailey, 1971; Chesebrough, 2002). After refusing a seminary education, citing frustrations with the ineffective preachers that seminaries produced (Bailey, 1971; Chesebrough, 2002), he became an ordained layperson in 1823 and was granted a license to preach (Chesebrough, 2002).

**Finney’s role in the Second Great Awakening**

Finney’s career as a revivalist coincided with the final stage of the Second Great Awakening which existed in three phases: 1795-1810, 1810-1825, and 1825-1835 (Chesebrough, 2002). The first phase of the Second Great Awakening began with the boisterous camp meetings⁶ of Tennessee and Kentucky, and, more specifically, what has become known as “The Great Revival” of Gasper River and Cane Ridge, Kentucky (Chesebrough, 2002; Hankins, 2004). Kentucky was growing rapidly as settlers were moving west. As a result, the state was gradually becoming secularized, as churches were not keeping pace with the rising population (Hankins, 2004). An attempt by local preachers and revivalists to stimulate religious sentiments, “The Great Revival” was said to have witnessed the “greatest outpouring of the Holy Spirit since Pentecost” (Hankins, 2004, p. 10). The revival meetings were characterized by such intense emotional and physical responses that some have discredited the genuineness of the religious experiences (Hankins, 2004).

The second phase of the Second Great Awakening was largely a New England phenomenon (Chesebrough, 2002). Viewing the frontier revivals as “crude and
barbarous,” the key leaders of this phase promoted a “more sophisticated and less emotional style” of revivalism (Hankins, 2004, p. 15). This second phase was characterized by “a theology that broke away from the strict Calvinism of the past in order to make room for the human will in the process of conversion” (Chesebrough, 2002, p. 2). However, the leaders of this phase did not openly deny Calvinism, but instead advocated that it was redefined and reinterpreted” (Chesebrough, 2002, p. 2).

Finney is considered the most prolific preacher and revivalist of the Second Great Awakening (Hankins, 2004; Noll, 1992). His preaching “made his name synonymous with the final stage of the Second Great Awakening” (Hambrick-Stowe, 1996, p. xi). Marking a radical break from Calvinism (Bailey, 1971; Chesebrough, 2002), his rhetoric and revivals stressed that salvation was available to all (Bailey, 1971; Hankins, 2004). Finney’s “new measures,” which “focused on generating conversions at revival meetings” (Hankins, 2004, p. 137), transformed the very nature of revivalism. They included

- advance advertisement for revival meetings,
- the anxious bench where those who were agonizing over the state of their souls could sit while they contemplated their condition, praying for people by name in public prayer meetings held in conjunction with his revivals, and permitting women to pray publicly in the presence of men. (Hankins, 2004, p. 16)

Finney believed that God brought revivals (Hankins, 2004). However, in contrast to Calvinists who “taught that revivals were purely the work of God[,] Finney believed that the effort of human beings could help to generate revivals” (Hankins, 2002, p. 138).
His revival work began in small frontier towns and mid-sized industrial cities in western New York and eventually reached major cities throughout New England (Chesebrough, 2002; Hankins, 2004). From 1824 to 1827, “Finney’s revivals swept through northern New York toward the Hudson River and eventually to the border of New England” (Hankins, 2004, p. 16). Convinced that revivals were most successful when revivalists spent longer than a weekend, a week, or even two weeks in a community, Finney spent lengthy stays in Evans Mills, Gouverneur, and Dekalb, New York and facilitated conversion of many people in each town (Chesebrough, 2002).

After reviving the small frontier villages of Jefferson and St. Lawrence counties, New York, he began revivals in the more urban towns of Western, Rome, and Utica, New York. These urban revivals, known as the “Oneida County revivals,” launched Finney from a “backwoods missionary to that of a nationally known figure,” and ushered in eight years of widely successful evangelistic activity (Chesebrough, 2002, p. 16). The Oneida County revivals made Finney a “figure of national repute” (qtd. in Chesebrough, 2002, p. 17) and marked significant turning points in his preaching and handling of converts. After recognizing the methods used in his frontier revivals would not appeal to the urban demographic, Finney replaced fanaticism and excessive emotionalism with a logical, organized, and well-reasoned approach and became increasingly popular with professional people (Bilhartz, 1986; Chesebrough, 2002). He “learned that revivals, conversions, and deeply-felt spiritual experiences could take place on a large scale without being accompanied by unbridled emotions” (Chesebrough, 2002, p. 18). The Oneida County revivals also introduced some of Finney’s “new measures.” Women became increasingly encouraged to pray in public and Finney reconsidered how to deal
with converts (Chesebrough, 2002; Hankins, 2004). After preaching, he began asking those interested in salvation to come forward and report themselves for conversations about conversion (Chesebrough, 2002).

Finney’s rising fame brought invitations to preach in even larger cities. However, at the same time, he experienced increasing hostility from conservative clergymen. In addition to only being a convert for four years, Finney’s lack of ministerial training, radical break from Calvinism, and new methods of promoting and conducting revivals posed threats to the conservatives who still viewed him as an unruly and enthusiastic frontier preacher (Chesebrough, 2002; Hankins, 2004; McLoughlin, 1978). Finney’s most serious opposition came from two of the most prominent New England clergymen of the era: Asahel Nettleton and Lyman Beecher (Chesebrough, 2002).

Nettleton viewed Finney’s revivals “as a disgrace to evangelism” (Chesebrough, 2002, p. 23). Although admitting that some were converted during Finney’s revivals, he argued that the “bad far outweighed any good Finney may have done” (Chesebrough, 2002, p. 24). He accused Finney of intimidating local pastors and encouraged local ministers to keep control of their own local revivals (Chesebrough, 2002; Hardman, 1994). Fearing the negative impacts their disputes were having on the perceptions of evangelical, the opposing sides agreed to meet on July 18, 1827, in New Lebanon, New York to attempt to resolve their issues (Hardman, 1994). The New Lebanon Conference lasted a week, and although little was resolved, it “represented a victory for Charles Finney and his ‘New Measures’ of revivalism” (Chesebrough, 2002, p. 27). Finney convinced his opponents of the value of his revivals and shortly after the New
Lebanon Convention, Nettleton and Beecher invited him to hold services in Boston (Hankins, 2004).

In 1828, Finney preached for the first time outside of New York (Chesebrough, 2002). Another important change in 1828 occurred when Finney shifted from being a “local church revivalist”—that is, a revivalist who “would preach at local churches where he had been invited” (Chesebrough, 2002, p. 31)—to cooperating “with as many churches and clergymen as would join in a united work in a city” (Hardman, 1987, p. 171). This new approach allowed for a “truly cooperative effort among a number of churches to reach the entire populace, in the largest auditorium of the city” (Hardman, 1987, p. 171). These new methods played a vital role in his successful revival campaigns in Rochester, New York.

Finney began the greatest and most noted revival of his career in Rochester, New York, in September of 1830 (Chesebrough, 2002; Hardman, 1994; Noll, 1992). He maintained a busy schedule, preaching three times on Sundays and several times throughout the week (Chesebrough, 2002). While in Rochester, he introduced several more of his “new measures.” One of these was the popularization of the protracted meeting, used to promote revivals (Hambrick-Stowe, 1996). The protracted meeting was “an urban and village evangelistic program. Several ministers would join forces for an intensive campaign with meetings in the morning, afternoon, and evening” (Hambrick-Stowe, 1996). Another of the “new measures” introduced in Rochester, and perhaps his most famous, was the “anxious seat.” Prior to Rochester, Finney asked new converts to stand at the end of services to commit themselves publicly to God. However, in Rochester,
He invited inquirers to come to the front of the room where they would be prayed with and prayed for and receive instructions in spiritual matters. Such a practice, or something like it, has been common to mass evangelism services ever since. (Chesebrough, 2002, p. 35)

Also in Rochester, Finney began combining evangelism with social reform. Finney believed Christians were obligated to work for social change and incorporated topics including temperance, Sabbath reform, abolition, and reform for women into his preaching (Chesebrough, 2002; Noll, 1992). Finney himself declared that the revival in Rochester and the proceeding revival it sparked elsewhere, “the greatest work of God, and the greatest revival of religion that the world [had] seen in so short a time” (qtd. in Chesebrough, 2002, p. 37).

After reaching “the high watermark” of his career as a revivalist, Finney settled into his first pastorate in 1832 at the Chatham Street Chapel in New York City (Chesebrough, 2002; Reese, 1976). Finney’s preaching at the Chatham attracted great crowds. Often there was not enough seating to accommodate all who wished to attend services. While at Chatham, he also began publishing. His first book, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, provided a collection of twelve sermons, giving people who could not hear him in person a chance to read his sermons. His second book, *Lectures on Revivals*, was widely successful, selling thousands of copies in the United States and London (Chesebrough, 2002).

In 1835, Finney accepted an invitation to be a professor of theology at Oberlin College in Ohio (Bailey, 1971; Reese, 1976). In addition to teaching, he became the pastor of the First Congregational Church in Oberlin (Bailey, 1971; Reese, 1976). After
splitting his time between New York City and Oberlin for nearly two years, Finney
resigned from his New York pastorate in 1837 and spent the rest of his life teaching and
pastoring in Oberlin (Chesebrough, 2002).

Charles Finney’s Rhetoric

Finney represented a dramatic shift from the orthodoxy of the First Great
Awakening to the Arminian revivalism of the Second Great Awakening (Horton, 1993).
He shifted from Calvinism’s emphasis on God’s grace alone as the source of salvation
to the belief that humans had to choose to be saved, thus taking responsibility for their
salvation. Having rejected a seminary education, Finney derived his theology from his
own experiences, reading of Scripture, and personal inspiration (Chesebrough, 2002).

Finney’s theology informed his rhetoric. His preaching demonstrated breadth and depth
while remaining essentially consistent throughout his life focusing on conversion,
sanctification, and social reform (Chesebrough, 2002).

As a preacher, Finney developed a style that was “exciting, practical, powerful
and extemporaneous” (Chesebrough, 2002, p. xv). He spoke colloquially and
sometimes named sinners from the pulpit (McLoughlin, 1978). In contrast with Edwards
who diligently prepared manuscript sermons, Finney did not use notes (Hambrick-
Stowe, 1996) and often took to the pulpit without knowing what subject or text he might
use (Chesebrough, 2002). Rather than writing sermon outlines prior to preaching, he
made notes afterward, so as to not lose the Spirit’s revelation of the text (Beltz, 1944).

This unique approach to preaching was one of Finney’s “new measures.”

Over the course of his preaching career, Finney’s lines of argument and
arrangement of material were developed in a consistent manner (Chesebrough, 2002).
Much like the New England format utilized by Edwards, Finney’s sermons began with a biblical text and a brief introduction explaining the text (Chesebrough, 2002). After introducing the text, Finney announced the sermons propositions or themes (Chesebrough, 2002). Throughout his sermons, he reasoned with supporting material. He spoke to his audience directly, using “you” instead of “they” (Chesebrough, 2002). His contemporaries often emphasized that hearing him preach was “like observing a lawyer pleading his [sic] case in a court of law. The arguments [were] clearly defined, logical, and [could] be followed with relative ease” (Chesebrough, 2002, p. 97). The last part, sometimes composing half of the sermon, of Finney’s sermons was labeled “Remarks” (Chesebrough, 2002). During the “Remarks,” “Finney change[d] his manner of preaching from the logical lawyer to the emotional preacher. Similar to Edwards’ “Application” section, the sermon became personally applicable, with Finney pressing for a decision from his listeners” (Chesebrough, 2002, p. 97).

Finney believed his preaching should stress showing sinners their responsibility in salvation. Specifically, he made efforts to

persuade unbelievers that by an act of their own will they could be converted; that believers needed to work for the perfection [or salvation] of their lives as well as for the perfection of society; and that advocates of Old School theology, though prominent and well-educated, were wrong in that they espoused. (Chesebrough, 2002, p. 97)

Finney stressed the importance of emotional appeals in effective revivalistic preaching (Chesebrough, 2002). He preached with urgency, at times with the intention of shocking his audience by incorporating hell-fire rhetoric that stressed the dangers of hell
The religious themes of Finney’s sermons “were born out of the theological controversies of his time” (Chesebrough, 2002, p. 68). At the forefront of these controversies was the Calvinist-Arminian theological debate. Desiring to distance himself from traditional Calvinistic theology, Finney’s sermons offered a reinterpretation of themes such as total depravity and freedom the will. He preached that his hearers’ “destiny lay in their own hands, no matter what the old Calvinists told them. God gave men [sic] the free will to effect their own salvation whenever they chose” (McLoughlin, 1978, p. 123). Posing a challenge to the very roots of Calvinism, Finney’s signature sermon, “Sinners Bound to Change Their Own Hearts,” “spoke of the need, the demand, for man [sic] to choose God and salvation and by an act of will to turn away from selfishness and depravity” (Chesebrough, 2002, p. 71). According to Finney, salvation for the sinner was not a question of “can not” but “will not.” There was “no room for excuses or the placing of blame and responsibility on another source” (Chesebrough, 2002, p. 71).

“Sinners Bound to Change Their Own Hearts”

Preached on multiple occasions (Chesebrough, 2002; Hambrick-Stowe, 1996), “Sinners Bound to Change Their Own Hearts” was considered Finney’s trademark and most famous sermon (Hambrick-Stowe, 1996; McLoughlin, 1978). It that “represented the very heart of his theology, emphasizing the free will of human beings” (Chesebrough, 2002, p. 39). Following his standard structure—a text, brief introduction, announcement of themes followed by supporting material, and remarks—Finney makes
a case that impenitent sinners are in need of God and have the ability, and responsibility, to choose God. Finney builds his case through incorporating appeals to the responsibility of his listeners to make their hearts new by choosing God.

The biblical text for “Sinners Bound to Change Their Own Hearts”—“Make you a new heart and a new spirit, for why will ye die?” Ezekiel 18:31—highlights Finney’s evangelical intentions and provides the basis for the sermon’s themes. Following the text, Finney provides a brief introduction where he discusses that the verse was “addressed to the house of Israel, who…were evidently in a state of impenitency; and the requirement to make them a new heart and a new spirit, was enforced by the weighty penalty of death” (¶ 1). He emphasizes that the “death” mentioned in the text means an “eternal death, or that state of banishment from God and the glory of his power, into which the soul shall be cast, that dies in its iniquities” (¶ 1).

After providing historical context, Finney offers his first appeal to responsibility by relating the verse’s relevance to his hearers:

The command here addressed to the Israelites, is binding upon every impenitent sinner, to whom the Gospel shall be addressed. He [sic] is required to perform the same duty, upon the same penalty. It becomes, therefore, a matter of infinite importance that we should well understand, and fully and immediately obey, the requirement. (¶ 2)

Moving from this assertion, Finney asks the audience three questions, the answers to which will guide the remainder of his sermon. The first question asks, “What are we to understand by the requirement to make a new heart and a new spirit?” (¶ 3). The second deals with reasonability: “Is it reasonable to require the performance of this duty
on pain of eternal death? (¶ 4). The final question bids, “How is this requirement, that we should make to us a new heart and a new spirit, consistent with the often repeated declarations of the Bible, that a new heart is the gift and work of God?” (¶ 5).

Finney immediately proceeds to answer the questions he has identified.

While addressing the meaning of the requirement to make oneself a new heart and new spirit, Finney emphasizes the responsibility to conform one’s mind, motives, and actions, to God’s standards. He argues,

[Since holiness cannot be created it] must consist of voluntary obedience to the principles of eternal righteousness. The necessary adaptation of the outward motive to the mind, and of the mind to the motive, lies in the powers of moral agency, which every human being possesses. He has understanding to perceive and weigh; he has conscience to decide upon the nature of moral opposites; he has the power and liberty of choice. (¶ 20)

Finney underscores that each person must offer voluntary obedience to eternal principles in order to be holy. Finney’s understanding of “choice” becomes the bedrock for his appeals to choose salvation. While accentuating a person’s responsibility in making his or herself a new heart and new spirit, he affirms that the choice is voluntary:

The spiritual heart, is the fountain of spiritual life, is that deep seated but voluntary preference of the mind…It is evidently something over which we have control; something voluntary; something for which we are to blame, and which we are bound to alter! (¶ 21)
In contrast to Calvinist views of grace and salvation, like those found in Edwards’ famous sermon, Finney stresses that the condition of one’s heart is a matter of choice. Individuals must choose God over one’s selfish happiness. Thus, “A new heart consists in a preference of the glory of God and the interests of his kingdom to one’s own happiness...It is a change in the choice of a Supreme Ruler” (¶ 22-23). From his background in law, Finney uses a political analogy that compares Christ to a candidate that the sinner must choose and compares changing one’s preference to changing political parties. Finney uses the story of the temptation in the Garden of Eden to develop this point. Finney claimed that Satan proposed Adam to choose self-interest over God’s glory, thus creating a change of Adam’s mind and heart. Finney then makes a contemporary analogy comparing Adam’s rebellion against God’s created order to a political rebellion. From this retelling of the Genesis story, Finney draws the lesson for his audience:

[The person] who actually does prefer the glory of God, and the interest of his kingdom, to his own selfish interest, is a Christian; and that he who actually prefers his own selfish interest to the glory of God, is an impenitent sinner. (¶ 28)

Thus, Finney argues that a person must choose to say, “Whereas I once preferred my own separate interest to the glory of my Maker, now I prefer his glory and the interests of his kingdom, and consecrate all my powers to the promotion of them for ever” (¶ 31). By focusing on “preference” and “choice,” Finney makes the appeal to responsibility to the central feature of his sermon: Making oneself a new heart, as Ezekiel bids of the Israelites, is fundamentally a matter of personal choice.
Finney’s answer to his second question continues the emphasis on human responsibility and choice, while making explicit his opposition to the Calvinist traditions of the First Great Awakening and the conservative Protestant clergymen of his time. Finney clarifies what a new heart means in order to show that the penalty of the “pains of eternal death” for failing to create a new heart are reasonable. If people are meant to change the physical world or the metaphysical composition of the soul by willpower alone, then the demand to make a new heart is unreasonable. However, the penalty is reasonable if this change is a moral one and therefore, within human control:

[If] God requires men to make to themselves a new heart, on pain of eternal death, it is the strongest possible evidence that they are able to do it...[Therefore,] if the change is moral—in other words, if it be voluntary, a change of choice or preference, such as I have described, then the answer to the question, Is the requirement of the text just and reasonable? clearly is, Yes, it is entirely reasonable and just. (¶ 32)

Finney suggests that God expects people to make the choices about things they have control, which includes moral issues. Finney places the responsibility for choosing salvation on the sinner by arguing that making one’s self a new heart is voluntary. He concludes, “God only requires of [sinners] to choose and act reasonably” (¶ 35). To “act reasonably” means choosing God.

Finney transitions into his final question where he contemplates the apparent disparity between the requirement to make a new heart and declarations in scripture suggesting a new heart is a gift from God. For Calvinists like Jonathan Edwards, the sinner was completely passive in salvation; conversion was entirely dependent on God
creating a new heart for the sinner new heart. Finney asserted that the Calvinists who “fasten[ed] their eyes upon those passages that ascribe the work to the Spirit of God” seemed to “overlook those that ascribe it to man, and speak of it as the sinner’s own act” (¶ 39).

From his interpretation of scripture, Finney concludes there are three agents in salvation: God, the preacher, and the sinner. The first agent, Finney suggests, is the Spirit of God, which induces the sinner to change. A second agent is the preacher of the truth. The preacher brings the truth, which is the “instrument, or motive, which the Spirit uses to induce the sinner to turn” (¶ 38). Although Finney believed the Spirit and the preacher were important factors in a sinner’s conversion, he claims, “the actual turning, or change, is the sinner’s own act” (¶ 38). Appealing to human responsibility, he explains that if an individual’s heart is changed,

we should say that he had changed his mind, he has come over, he has repented. Now it is strictly true, and true in the most absolute and highest sense; the act is his own act, the turning is his own turning….a change of heart is the sinner’s own act. (¶ 39)

The last half of “Sinners Bound to Change Their Own Hearts” consists of a “Remarks” section composed of seventeen points of application for his audience. He begins his remarks by blaming sinners for making their own hearts wicked, a view he shares with Edwards. He argues, “Their preference of sin is their own voluntary act. They make self-gratification the rule to which they conform all their conduct….they seem to set their hearts fully to pursue their own happiness, and gratify themselves” (¶ 42). Briefly mentioning the consequences of the sinner’s choice to please his or herself,
Finney warns, “This preference of self-interest, is suffered by the sinner to grow with his growth, and strengthen with his strength, until this desperately wicked heart bears him onward to the gates of hell” (¶ 42).

After establishing that sinners make their own hearts wicked, Finney discusses the need for the sinner to be reconciled to God. To support his claim, he refers back to his proposition that the requirement to make oneself a new heart is a matter of choice or preference for God rather than one’s own selfish-interests. Finney uses two stories to illustrate his point, while at times evoking hell-fire rhetoric. He warns of the “terrors of hell” and the terrible “pains of the second death” that await those who do not change their preference (¶ 47). Following his illustrations, Finney argues that God requires sinners to change their own hearts. Placing responsibility on his hearers, he exhorts,

The fact is, sinners, that God requires you to turn, and what he requires of you, he cannot do for you. It must be your own voluntary act…Do not wait then for him to do your duty, but do it immediately yourself, on pain of eternal death. (¶ 52)

Again stressing the sinner’s responsibility, he suggests, “if the sinner ever has a new heart, he must obey the command of the text, and make it himself” (¶ 53). Later in his “Remarks,” Finney includes more hell-fire rhetoric and fear-evoking language. He argues that sinners are voluntary rebels “worthy of eternal death” (¶ 54) and warns of the “pain[s] of eternal death” (¶ 53) that await sinners who wait on God rather than making their own hearts new. Exhorting that it will be too late for the sinner to choose God in hell, he cautions,
Will [the sinner] not be converted in hell, where it is supposed that all the truth will burst upon his mind in all its burning reality….in hell the offer of reconciliation will be wanting; the sinner will be in despair….So in hell, the poor dying sinner will be shut up in despair; his character is gone; his fortune for eternity is lost; there is no offer, no hope of reconciliation; and punishment will but drive him further and further from God for ever and ever. (¶ 60)

Finney continues stressing the sinner’s responsibility to choose God, arguing that they “should not content them selves with praying for a new heart” (¶ 70). He exclaims, “Sinner! Instead of waiting and praying for God to change your heart, you should at once summon up your powers, put forth the effort, and change the governing preference of your mind” (¶ 72). Again appealing to the responsibility of his hearers, he suggests, “From this subject it is manifest that the sinner’s obligation to make to himself a new heart, is infinite” (¶ 73). As the obligation is infinite, so is the pending punishment. Finney stresses, “[Sinners,] cannot therefore for an hour or a moment defer obedience of the commandment in the text, without deserving eternal damnation” (¶ 74).

Finney’s sermon concludes with an increasing urgency placed on his hearers’ responsibility to make their hearts new. He cautions,

And now, sinner, if you go away without making up your mind, and changing your heart, it is most probably that your mind will be diverted…you will lose the clear view of the subject that you now have—
may grieve the Spirit, defer repentance, and push your unbroken footsteps to the gates of hell. (¶ 76)

In his closing remarks, Finney offers a final plea followed by an explicit call to action by restating the sermon text from Ezekiel:

Sinner, while the subject is before you, will you yield...."I beseech you, by the mercies of god, that you at this time render your body and soul, a living sacrifice to God, which is your reasonable service.” Let the truth take hold upon your conscience...fix your mind steadfastly upon the world of considerations that should instantly decide you to close in with the offer of reconciliation while it now lies before you. Another moment’s delay, and it may be too late for ever. The Spirit of God may depart from you—the offer may be made no more, and this one more slighted offer of mercy may close up your account, and seal you over to all the horrors of eternal death. Hear, then, O sinner, I beseech you, and obey the word of the Lord—“Make you a new heart and a new spirit, for why will ye die?” (¶ 81)

Incorporating a final hell-fire fear appeal by mentioning the “horrors of eternal death,” Finney makes it explicit that it is the sinners’ responsibility to avoid hell. Representative of the heart of his Arminian theology, Finney stresses a final time that it is the sinners’ responsibility to choose the “offer of reconciliation” that lies before them.

Conclusion

As a successful itinerant preacher and the innovator of modern revivalism, Finney is the prominent figure of the Second Great Awakening. “Sinners Bound to Change Their Own Hearts” is Finney’s exemplar sermon, as it represents his rhetoric
and theology. Reflecting his background in law, Finney provides a sermon that moves through the introduction of a Biblical text, identification of its themes and remarks linking the text to the audience’s lived experience, and he provides logical arguments and answers to questions about theological issues at the heart of the conflict between Calvinism and Arminianism. The structure of Finney’s sermon parallels Edward’s own clearly delineated structure, although Edwards might have learned this traditional organizational pattern from his father and grandfather who were preachers. In each case, the structure grounds the theology presented, whether Calvinist or Arminian, in a key text from the Old Testament. Finney’s choice of text, however, occurs at a different point in Israel’s history than Edwards’ reference. Finney’s text from Ezekiel highlights a sense of hope, as the Israelites are anticipating the restoration of Jerusalem. In the scripture Finney uses, there is an allusion to the responsibility the Israelites had to change their hearts towards God. Finney uses this reference as a basis for emphasizing his Arminian belief in human responsibility in choosing salvation.

Just as the sermon is organized around answering questions about the responsibility to change one’s heart, the primary appeal of Finney’s sermon is an appeal to responsibility, which mirrors his theological presuppositions. Finney argues that salvation is available to all, but people must choose that salvation. Finney’s appeals to responsibility also possess an argumentative tone, in part because they are presented as answers to questions raised about salvation and Christianity. This tone and the question-and-answer form that facilitates it is the result of Finney’s attempt to refute the dominant Calvinist traditions of mainstream American Protestantism during his time.
Finney does incorporate fear appeals in his rhetoric. While Edwards depended primarily on fear appeals and used them throughout “Sinners,” Finney uses them as a means of motivating people to choose salvation. The fear appeal appears as a final appeal to action after he established that people must choose God. Thus, fear appeals become important for Finney only when stressing the dangers of not choosing God. Fear appeals become even less important for Dwight Moody, the leader of the Third Great Awakening. Rather than motivate his audience to salvation, Moody motivates his audience by stressing their need to respond to God who loves them.
Chapter Four: Dwight Moody

“You can be saved—the Son of Man wants to save you. He wants to save every soul within these walls—everyone willing to be saved.”
-Lost and Saved

Dwight Moody is considered the instigating figure of the Third Great Awakening (McLoughlin, 2004). Often considered the “father of interdenominational evangelism,” he drastically influenced the way churches approached ministry, focusing on cooperative zeal, rather than denominational parochialism (Turnbull, 1971). Known as the “perfecter of urban evangelism,” Moody took principles of advertising, planning, and promotion from the business world and applied them to preparing and announcing revivals (Hardman, 1994). Through his innovative techniques, Moody made it possible “to promote city-wide interdenominational revivals at will” (McLoughlin, 2004, p. 166). This chapter highlights Moody’s early experiences with religion, details his role in the Third Great Awakening, reviews his rhetoric, and offers an analysis of his sermon, “Lost and Saved.”

The Life of Dwight Moody

Moody’s upbringing and early religious experiences

During the 1840s, protestant churches played a significant role in establishing the patterns for morality and organizing social life in Moody’s hometown, the rural community of Northfield, Massachusetts (Findlay, 1969). At this time, however, Protestantism in Northfield was an expression of conformity to community standards rather than a sign of strong religious sentiment (Findlay, 1969). Although his family attended church regularly and had him baptized at a young age, Moody did not develop an interest in religion until he was seventeen (Findlay, 1969; McLoughlin, 2004).
At the age of seventeen, Moody moved to Boston, Massachusetts (Findlay, 1969; McLoughlin, 2004). Unable to find a job on his own, Moody’s uncle who owned a shoe store agreed to hire him if Moody agreed to attend church on a regular basis; Moody obliged (Chapman, 2006; Harvey, 1997; Northrop, 2006). Reverend Edward Kirk, a well-respected and widely known evangelist in New England, pastored the church Moody attended (Findlay, 1969; McLoughlin, 2004). As a former itinerant preacher, Kirk’s preaching was known to have sparked religious sentiments among many congregants (Findlay, 1969, McLoughlin, 2004). However, Moody frequently slept through Kirk’s sermons (McLoughlin, 2004). Despite this, Moody’s interest in religion began to grow, primarily through attending bible study classes at the church (Findlay, 1969; McLoughlin, 2004).

Moody’s bible study teacher, Edward Kimball, played a significant role in his conversion. On the morning of April 21, 1855, while Moody was working in his uncle’s store, Kimball came in and asked him if he was ready to commit himself to Christ (Findlay, 1969; McLoughlin, 2004). As a result of his positive experiences with bible study, Moody expressed contrition and sought church membership the following month (Findlay, 1969; McLoughlin, 2004). As part of his candidacy for membership Moody presented himself to the church’s deacons for an examination of his spiritual condition, a fairly common procedure for determining protestant church membership during the time (Findlay, 1969; Harvey, 1997). While the committee believed he had good intentions, they denied Moody membership, citing insufficient evidence of conversion. The deacons were concerned with Moody’s inability to articulate clearly what it meant to be a Christian (Findlay, 1969). After the rejection, three members of the church were
appointed to mentor Moody. Under their guidance and instruction, Moody reapplied for membership in May, 1856, and was accepted into the church (Findlay, 1969; McLoughlin, 2004).

The late 1850s and early 1860s marked a time of increasing religious activity for Moody. He moved to Chicago in September of 1856 and became involved with Plymouth Congregational Church (Findlay, 1969; McLoughlin, 2004). In addition to attending services at Plymouth, Moody joined the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), an organization with which he originally became involved in Boston. Through the YMCA, he attended frequent bible study and prayer meetings. At this time, Moody also began street evangelism, passing out religious tracts, and inviting visitors to church on Sundays (Findlay, 1969). By 1858, he decided to start his own Sunday school (Findlay, 1969; McLoughlin, 2004). Moody quickly became “a prominent figure in Chicago’s evangelical circle” (McLoughlin, 2004, p. 175). His Sunday school grew so large that the mayor of Chicago agreed to fund construction of a building that provided enough room for all who wanted to attend (McLoughlin, 2004). Beginning in 1860, Moody devoted himself to religion and evangelism (McLoughlin, 2004; Northrop, 2006).

As an unordained pastor, Moody started the Illinois Street Church in 1864 (Findlay, 1969; McLoughlin, 2004). Moody and some of his followers wrote their own articles of faith, “consisting simply of Biblical texts strung together to spell out the doctrines of the trinity, the infallibility of Scripture, the sinfulness of man [sic], and the practice of communion” (McLoughlin, 2004, p. 176). Moody’s abilities to manage people, organize meetings, and raise funds helped him to extend his influence beyond that of a sedentary pastor (McLoughlin, 2004). In 1866, he encouraged his church to
obtain a regular pastor (McLoughlin, 2004) and devoted more time to evangelism outside of the Illinois Street Church.

Moody’s “most successful revivals occurred in the decade from 1873-1883” (McLoughlin, 2004, p. 169). In 1873, Moody and Ira Sankey\(^9\), a singing evangelist, traveled to Britain for a series of revival campaigns. What initially was scheduled to be a six-month tour turned into nearly a three-year stay. When Moody returned to the United States in 1875, he was “a public figure of considerable importance” (Findlay, 1969). The revival campaigns in Britain were estimated to have produced tens of thousands of conversions and marked a turning point in Moody’s career (McLoughlin, 2004). Upon his return to America, “he gave less attention to his YMCA work, his Chicago Church, [and] his Sunday school conventions. He had taken up the mantle of Finney as America’s foremost revivalist” (McLoughlin, 2003, p. 216).

**Moody’s role in the Third Great Awakening**

Moody was the foremost leader of a “group prominent professional revivalists who conducted city-wide mass evangelistic campaigns across the United States (and abroad) in the years 1875-1915…one aspect of what may properly be called America’s third great awakening” (McLoughlin, 2004, p. 168). During the Third Great Awakening, America experienced various social, economic, and political changes that precipitated a significant reorientation of American life. In this era,

the country shifted from a rural to an urban-centered population, from an anticolonial to an imperialistic nation, from a relatively homogenous to a polygenetic people, and from a system of relative laissez-faire to the first stages of governmental social control. The massive influx of millions of
immigrants whose cultural and religious outlook was so different than the prevailing culture, brought into new focus the traditions of American life and compelled a redefinition of them. (McLoughlin, 2004, p. 168)

The drastic changes in American life brought specific hardships on the "country-bred, evangelically oriented, intellectually unsophisticated, and sentimentally insecure individuals who made up the bulk of the nation’s churchgoers" (McLoughlin, 2004, p. 168). American Protestantism was challenged by evolutionary science and traditional orthodoxy was opposed by the new progressive orthodoxy, or Social Gospel (McLoughlin, 1978; McLoughlin, 2004).

Progressive orthodoxy challenged Moody and other fundamentalists by teaching a Gospel message with a different focus. The progressives believed

Jesus taught a social ethic, not an individualistic one. [Therefore, if] America was to revitalize its culture, it would have to severely modify the Protestant ethic...The starting point of the Social Gospel was its claim that Jesus taught a doctrine of community and fraternity, “the Fatherhood of God, the brotherhood of man, the coming of the Kingdom.” (McLoughlin, 1978, p.162)

As a movement, The Third Great Awakening included supporters of traditional and progressive orthodoxy “each in its own way hoped to use religion and science to ‘uplift the masses’ rather than leave them to the mercy of laissez-faire individualism” (McLoughlin, 1978, p. 163).

The leaders of the Third Great Awakening “had to redefine and relocate God, provide means of access to [God] and sacralize a new world view” (McLoughlin, 1978,
As one of the greatest defenders of conservatism, Moody believed that many of America’s difficulties were associated with the new progressive orthodoxy (Findlay, 1969). He adamantly rejected the social gospel’s doctrine of universal brotherhood and fatherhood, arguing that his only “brothers” and “sisters” were those who were in Christ (McLoughlin, 2004). Despite preaching a religion of social service, he believed charity was always secondary to proclaiming the Gospel (Kee, et al., 1998; McLoughlin, 2004). Moody’s answer to the social challenges of his day was Jesus. He rejected evolutionary science and desired to see all denominations come together in an attempt to Christianize the nation (Findlay, 1969).

Moody began his own efforts to Christianize the nation following his return from Britain in 1875. His successful revival campaigns in Britain had drawn national attention, and upon his arrival, churches from across the country desired his services (Curtis, 1962; Findlay, 1969; McLoughlin, 2004). He immediately began preaching in Northfield and the surrounding communities (Findlay, 1969; McLoughlin, 2004). The following month, Moody held meetings with representatives from Chicago, Philadelphia, New York City, and Brooklyn to determine where the first of his American revival campaigns should start (Findlay, 1969).

During these meetings, Moody requested several conditions: adequate facilities, unified support from the churches in the city, and no time restrictions (Findlay, 1969; McLoughlin, 2004). In future campaigns, he would also request that there be no competing activities in the community (i.e. church fairs or festivals) during his revivals (Findlay, 1969). By the middle of October, 1875, Moody outlined the plans for the first of his large-scale American revivals. Over the next two years, he held successful
revivals in each of the aforementioned cities, beginning with Brooklyn, New York (Findlay, 1969).

The religious climate of the 1870s made large-scale revivalism more accessible than during the previous Great Awakenings. Unlike the challenges Finney faced, Moody benefited from “growing interdenominational unity, the general acceptance of modern revivalism, the rise of lay influence, [and] improved methods of communications” (McLoughlin, 2004, p. 221). Considering the changing religious climate, much of the “wholehearted interdenominational support for Moody was the result of a growing sense of urgency felt in America…over the ‘the unchurched masses’ in cities” (McLoughlin, 2004, p. 220) and increasing concerns about the influence of evolutionary science and secular laissez-faire society. During the remainder of the 1870s and in the early 1880s, he held effective revivals in cities across the United States, including, Baltimore, Cleveland, St. Louis, and San Francisco (McLoughlin, 2004).

Like Finney, Moody believed revivals were not miraculous events outside of human control (McLoughlin, 2004). Although Finney had “established the theory of modern revivalism” (McLoughlin, 2004, p. 166), the divisive theological atmosphere of his time and inadequate facilities prevented him from achieving great success in cities with populations over 10,000 (McLoughlin, 2004). Moody, however, gained his fame from “his ability to galvanize the religious element of cities whose population was in the millions” (McLoughlin, 2004, p. 166). During his revivals in the 1870s and 1880s, he became famous for making revivalism a well-organized “big business” (McLoughlin, 2004). His revivals were organized and planned well in advance. Prior to each revival,
an executive committee made of prominent ministers and laypersons would handle preparatory work, beginning with holding weekly “revival prayer meetings” starting several months before the revival would begin (Findlay, 1969). The revival workers were also responsible for promoting the revival, and they would appoint chairpersons to various subcommittees that would each have specific tasks (McLoughlin, 2004).

Furthermore, calls would go out to local churches requesting the names of young men who could serve as ushers, and Sankey would hold choir tryouts and rehearsals (Findlay, 1969).

Like Finney, Moody spent extended periods of time in each city he visited (Findlay, 1969; McLoughlin, 2004). Once a revival began, he maintained a demanding schedule. On average, five to six days out of the week he would host three to five large meetings, supervise inquiry meetings, and attend meetings about the details of organizing the revival (Findlay, 1969). The ultimate purpose of Moody’s revivals was to reach out to the unconverted (Findlay, 1969). In order to achieve this purpose successfully, he and Sankey altered the patterns of traditional worship with innovative techniques (Findlay, 1969). One of the most popular of Moody’s new approaches was the way he conducted prayer meetings. His prayer meetings began with a hymn and a brief Bible reading and exposition; after that they were opened for requests for prayer and for “testimony”…Often Moody read touching letters accompanying these prayer requests or related some incident appropriate to them illustrating the power of prayer…[later] requests were accepted from the floor. Then Moody led the assemblage
in praying for divine help in the fulfillment of these worthy supplications.

(McLoughlin, 2004, p. 231)

Like Finney, Moody incorporated topics of social reform into his meetings. Friday prayer meetings, which were his most popular, were devoted to temperance (McLoughlin, 2004).

While Moody’s prayer meetings were popular, the nightly congregational meetings were his foremost attraction (McLoughlin, 2004). In a typical meeting, there were hymns, prayers, music, scripture reading, and a sermon (Findlay, 1969). Moody is considered “the first itinerant evangelist to employ a profession soloist to accompany him from place to place” (McLoughlin, 2004, p. 232). The majority of congregational hymns “were doctrinal in character, telling of God’s merciful salvation, free for all” (McLoughlin, 2004, p. 236). Sankey altered hymns with Calvinistic theology to fit the more Arminian nature of Moody’s sermons (McLoughlin, 2004). Moody also included hymns in collaboration with the conclusion of his sermons when he would invite new converts to the “inquiry rooms.” Inquiry rooms, another of Moody’s new techniques, allowed for new converts to meet with Moody and other Christians in an intimate setting to discuss salvation (Findlay, 1969; McLoughlin, 2004). Moody also made use of, and popularized, “decision cards.” A “major innovation in modern revivalism,” decision cards were issued to revivalist workers who used them to take down the contact information of all the inquirers (McLoughlin, 2004, p. 264).

While Moody continued to hold revival meetings throughout America and Britain until his death, he shifted his attention to Christian education throughout the remainder of the 1880s (Findlay, 1969; McLoughlin, 2004). By 1881, he had established a
seminary for girls and a school for boys designed to provide a Christian education based on biblical principles (Findlay, 1969; McLoughlin, 2004). In 1886, he founded the Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, which became “one of the fountainheads for training professional evangelists although this was not its primary purpose” (McLoughlin, 2004, p. 272). While not a seminary, the school focused on training men and women who were seeking careers outside full-time ministry how to share the gospel at their future places of employment (McLoughlin, 2004).

Dwight Moody’s Rhetoric

As a preacher, Moody’s actions “were quick and vigorous” (Findlay, 1969, p. 220). His pulpit technique was characterized by his ability to move his audience from “tears to laughter to solemnity and anxiety” (McLoughlin, 2004, p. 240). In contrast with hell-fire preachers like Edwards, Moody’s speech was calm. And unlike Finney, he never made a final plea with converts in his large meetings; rather he directed them to an inquiry room (McLoughlin, 2004). Instead of “delivering highly emotional sermons, he kept himself under control and spoke relatively unobtrusively” (Findlay, 1969, p. 220). Like Finney, Moody recognized emotionalism “was not the way to win the cooperation of urban ministers nor the most effective way to produce new church members” (McLoughlin, 2004, p. 245).

Moody captured his audience’s with his storytelling ability (Findlay, 1969; McLoughlin, 2004). He often supplemented his retelling of biblical stories with images drawn from personal experience and observation (Findlay, 1969; Reed, 1997). Like Finney, Moody knew how to make his audience feel like he was one of them (McLoughlin, 2004). His sermons were made up of “short, simple sentences, colloquial
rhythms and idioms, blunt, almost earthly, forthrightness, and a lively sense of rustic humor” (McLoughlin, 2004, p. 241).

Moody’s preaching warranted attention primarily because of his innovative techniques (Findlay, 1969). He saw himself as a “rejuvenator of dead churches” and made conscious efforts to “make his meetings as unlike the regular church services as he could without resorting to outright secularization” (McLoughlin, 2004, p. 241). When preparing his sermons, he would begin with a theme and then search the bible for all the times it appeared. From this, he would string together the verses in a meaningful order (McLoughlin, 2004). Moody kept his sermon notes in large manila envelopes labeled with the titles and into these he slipped poems, stories, newspaper clippings, or scribbled notes from time to time until he had amassed sufficient material for a sermon. The result was a hodgepodge of illustrations and texts all reiterating one simple idea over and over again. (McLoughlin, 2004, p. 244)

However, a lack of seminary education and informal training resulted in sermons prone to repetitiveness and a general lack of connectedness and structure (Findlay, 1969). In contrast with Finney, his sermons frequently lacked clear lines of argument (McLoughlin, 2004).

Moody’s power as a revivalist came from his ability to convey the reality of a personal faith in Christ to his audience (Findlay, 1969). Unlike Edwards who focused on God’s wrath, Moody more commonly preached on God’s love (Findlay, 1969; Hardman, 1994) and the rewards of heaven (McLoughlin, 2004). His sermons emphasized
salvation (McLoughlin, 2004) and his preaching “placed tremendous stress on man’s [sic] agency in achieving salvation” (Findlay, 1969, p. 243). He rejected the doctrine of election and advocated Arminianism even more openly than Finney (Findlay, 1969). Believing that salvation was open to everyone, he argued that

man, not God, was ultimately the one to determine the precise moment when the act of salvation was to occur...his whole revival system was predicated on exactly that assumption...[and by] the 1870s he was making this claim quite explicit in his sermons. (Findlay, 1969, p. 242)

Moody’s preaching on human responsibility in choosing salvation often climaxed in his sermon’s conclusions. Like Finney, he concluded his sermons with a call for an immediate decision to choose salvation (McLoughlin, 2004). While he rejected Finney’s use of the “anxious seat,” he emphasized the importance of new converts visiting “inquiry rooms” to discuss salvation (Findlay, 1969; McLoughlin, 2004). During Moody’s concluding remarks, Sankey began to play “invitation hymns” which were specifically written for the purpose of coaxing people out of their seats into the inquiry rooms. They pleaded with the sinner, hypnotically tugging him [sic] forward by repeating over and over again the words “come,” “trust,” “now” as he [sic] debated with his [sic] conscience. It was a vastly different atmosphere from Finney’s righteous warning to take the
anxious seat. (McLoughlin, 2004, p. 239)

Moody’s primary reason for using inquiry rooms was to insure that new Christians understood the theology of conversion (McLoughlin, 2004). He kept his own theology simple. He believed the
central and all-inclusive fact of Christian theology…was that sinful men [sic] could all obtain eternal life simply by believing that Christ died for their sins. If men [sic] did not “accept Christ” they would certainly spend eternity in hell. What Finney described as making a new heart, Moody called repenting and turning from sin. (McLoughlin, 2004)

Salvation through Jesus was the cornerstone of Moody’s theology and preaching. “Lost and Saved,” one of his popular sermons, stressed this theme and addressed human’s need to “accept Christ” as their Savior.

“Lost and Saved”

“Lost and Saved”¹⁰ is exemplary of Moody’s theology and revivalistic preaching. Grounded in the Arminian doctrine that people choose salvation, “Lost and Saved” emphasizes that Christ seeks sinners and will give them salvation upon their “consent.” “Lost and Saved” was originally published in a collection of Moody’s “new sermons” in 1880. Using the in-text reference to Moody’s conversion date, the sermon’s delivery can be dated to 1876 (Moody, 1880). In a latter publication, however, Moody claims to be a convert for twenty-nine years, which suggests a delivery date of 1884. The different dates mentioned in each manuscript suggest Moody used “Lost and Saved” on numerous occasions during the height of his career as a revivalist. For the purpose of this analysis, the original publication will be used.

Common to all of Moody’s sermons, “Lost and Saved” lacks the clear structure that can be found in sermons by Edwards and Finney. Rather than being divided into a doctrinal section and an application/remarks section, “Lost and Found” is a hodgepodge of illustrations and applications that reflect Moody’s belief that God loves all people and
is pursuing personal relationships with all of them. Perhaps the only similarity to Edwards and Finney, structurally, is Moody’s introductory and concluding statements.

Like Edwards and Finney, Moody begins with a biblical text. He states, “For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost”—Luke 19:10. However, rather than following the text with a brief exposition of historical context, Moody suggests, “A great many people tell you, ‘I will become a Christian when Christ comes and seeks me’” (¶ 1). Moody devotes the remainder of this sermon to challenging this belief. He tells the story of a man he met who “suggested that he would become a Christian when the Lord Jesus Christ came to him. He was waiting till [Christ] hunted him personally” (¶ 1). He follows this aside by implying that “there is a class like [that man] in every community” (¶ 1). Moody’s overarching purpose for the remainder of his sermon is to show his audience that they do not need to wait any longer because Christ has sought them personally and that it is up to them to choose a relationship with God.

From the onset of “Lost and Saved,” it is evident that Moody rejects the belief held by Edwards and Calvinists that suggests humans are passive in salvation. In response to those who claim to be waiting for God to come to them, he argues that God already sent the prophets, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit for that very purpose. He asks, Would you like [God] to send His Son again to earth to suffer for your sins? My dear friends, what are you waiting for? He has been looking for you and hunting for you from your cradle, and I would just like to tell you how He seeks. (¶ 1, emphasis added)

By asking his audience “what they are waiting for,” Moody implies that it is up to the sinner to make the next move towards conversion.
Making his point almost entirely through examples, Moody suggests that preaching, religious tracts, the bible, and God’s works are all different ways Christ seeks the lost. Furthermore, he explains that when people cannot sleep at night, when they begin to question whether or not they ought to be a Christian, and when they are at someone’s grave and hear a voice whispering, it is God seeking them. All of these examples direct the audiences’ attention back to the sermon’s text, which states, “[Christ] is come to seek and to save that which was lost.” By compiling example after example, a strategy typical of his repetitive style, Moody stresses that God has sought them personally and that it is their choice to accept a relationship with God.

After telling a story about a man who attended one of his revival meetings and felt that Moody was speaking directly to him, he explains,

> It was the Son of Man seeking for him, my friends, and I hope there will be a man here tonight—that man in the gallery yonder, that one before me—who will feel that I am talking personally to him. May you feel that you are lost, and that the Lord is seeking for you, and when you feel this, there is some chance of you being saved. (¶ 3)

Moody appeals to his audience by expressing the hope that they will recognize the Lord is seeking them. Moody explains that for those who feel he is talking directly to them there is a “chance” for them to be saved, implying that the individual has the option to choose or reject the offer of salvation.

Following another story related to this theme, Moody refers back to the sermon’s text. He explains,
There is one word in this text I wish you to observe, and that is the word “lost.” I wish you could realize its meaning thoroughly. If it was really understood I don’t think there would be a dry eye in this assembly, and one wail would go up from this hall to Heaven. (¶ 5)

In this exhortation, Moody divides his hearers into two categories: the “lost” and the “saved.” Moving from his claim that recognizing one’s lost state should move a person to tears, he begins incrementally building the importance of recognizing one’s need for Christ. Using several stories, he explains the tendency to pity people who lose riches, prestige, and loved ones. He reminds them, however, that all of these things fail to compare to losing one’s soul: “If a man loses wealth, character, reputation in the world, he may gain it again; but oh, friends, if he loses his soul he can never regain it “ (¶ 5).

After stressing the severity of losing one’s soul, Moody directs his audience’s attention to Jesus. He explains, “[Christ] came to save that soul; He stooped from the throne of glory to the manger to bring that lost soul back again” (¶ 7). He then pleads to his audience,

Oh, that you could realize what a lost soul is! [God] wants you to take the title of lost sinner: That’s what he wants you to do. “He came to seek and to save that which was lost;” and if a man will only know he is a sinner, and cry from the depths of his heart, the Lord will come right to where you are. (¶ 7)

Reiterating that conversion relies on human decision, he stresses that if only a person will cry out, God will bring him or her salvation. Continuing the theme that God is
waiting on people to call out for salvation, Moody tells another story about a person being lost in the woods and draws this lesson:

Oh, that some poor soul will feel that he has wandered out of the true pathway and will cry, “Lost! [L]ost!” and the Lord Jesus will hear you and come right down to where you sit. He is looking for you, and if there is one here who has got into the wilderness, but let Him hear your cry and He will find you. He came to this earth expressly to rescue you. (¶ 8)

After providing another example, Moody, like Finney in “Sinners Bound to Change Their Own Hearts,” claims that salvation is available to all. Exhorting his audience, he argues, “You can be saved—the Son of Man wants to save you; it will refresh the heart of the Son of God to-night. He wants to save every soul within these walls—everyone willing to be saved” (¶ 9, emphasis added). Shortly afterward, explains, “But give your consent and let the Lord save you in His own way. Give your consent and He will meet you. Just say, ‘O Lord, I consent to be saved; will You save me?’” (¶ 10, emphasis added). Moody uses the word “consent” repeatedly to stress his belief that people are ultimately responsible for the moment of their salvation.

After stressing that everyone has the opportunity for salvation, Moody tells a story describing the final destination of a woman’s soul to a bidding war between Jesus and Satan. He explains that after hearing the bids from Jesus and Satan, the woman chose Jesus. Moody then tells his audience,

[Jesus], the great and mighty Saviour, is a bidder for your soul to-night. He offers you riches and comfort, and joy, peace here and eternal life hereafter, while Satan offers you what he cannot give. Poor lost soul,
which will you have? [Christ] will ransom your soul if you put your burden upon Him. (¶ 11)

Returning to his recurrent theme of choice, Moody informs his audience that they, like the woman in his story, have the option to choose God or Satan. Using a metaphor with business connotations, Moody argues that in the great bidding war between God and Satan for their souls, they have the final decision as to who is the victor.

Continuing to stress a person’s role in salvation, he compares his own conversion to “making up his mind.” He explains, “Twenty-one years ago I made up my mind that Jesus would have my soul, and I have never regretted the step” (¶ 11). Later, he argues, “the Son of Man can purge you of all evil and take you right into the palaces of Heaven if you will only allow Him to save you” (¶ 11, emphasis added). In line with Arminian theology and traditions, Moody places all power in the hands of the sinner by describing salvation as “allowing” God to save the individual.

In his conclusion, Moody stresses that his listeners could choose their salvation that very day:

Dear sinner, Jesus is ready and willing to carry you over the mountains of sin, and over your mountains of unbelief. Give yourselves to Him; only grant your consent. It lies with your own will, and, if you but accept His offer, from the clouds of your transgressions you shall be lifted into the heaven of joy and peace that the world knows not of. (¶ 12)

Moody uses images of mountains to stress the immensity of his hearers’ sins and unbelief. However, unlike Edwards who compares sinners’ transgressions to weight sending them downward into hell, as a rock would fall through a spiderweb, Moody
compares the sinners’ condition to dense clouds from which they need to be lifted. Like Edwards and Finney, Moody’s closing statement includes a call for salvation. However, unlike Edwards, Moody stresses that his audience has the power to choose God. Using language even more explicit than Finney, Moody suggests that the power lays their “will” to “give themselves to God” and “accept [God’s] offer” of salvation. In contrast to Edwards’ and Finney’s conclusions, Moody’s call for salvation does not incorporate hell-fire rhetoric. Instead, he stresses God’s saving ability and the listeners’ responsibility to choose God in order to experience the “heaven of joy and peace that the world knows not of” (¶ 12).

Conclusion

Dwight Moody became the prominent figure of the Third Great Awakening because of the innovative techniques he used to host successful revival campaigns in large cities. Unlike Finney, whose revivals were met with opposition and never reached America’s largest cities, Moody benefited from an era of American Protestantism that encouraged innovation in organizing and conducting revival campaigns. When accommodating potential converts, Moody broke away from Finney’s use of the anxious seat and introduced the concept of discussion or inquiry rooms that provided an intimate setting for those interested in salvation.

The sermon “Lost and Saved” is representative of Moody’s theology and rhetoric. In it, Moody stressed that God pursued people in hopes of saving them and that people had the responsibility of people to accept that salvation. Rather than build his sermon from an Old Testament text, Moody uses a verse from the New Testament book Luke. Beginning with the sermon’s text, Moody emphasizes God’s desire for all to be
redeemed. While Edwards and Finney presented highly structured sermons that
derived the distinctive themes of their preaching and theology from the Biblical verse,
Moody’s “Lost and Saved” does not follow the rigid logical structure. Instead, Moody
interchanges examples used to illustrate his arguments and direct appeals to his
audience. Like Finney, Moody primarily appeals to human responsibility in choosing
salvation. Moody’s appeals to responsibility, however, are example driven, rather than
driven by argumentation and rhetorical questions as occurs in Finney’s sermon. In
contrast to Edwards’ representation of a wrathful God, Moody’s language is positive and
stresses how much God loves everyone and that God is constantly pursuing a
relationship with sinners. Instead of emphasizing the distance between God and
humanity, Moody compares Christ to a bidder who views the sinner as a prize to be
won. Using “accept” and “allow,” language even more overtly than Finney, Moody
accentuates that it is the individual’s responsibility to choose God, rather than Satan, in
the bidding war for his or her soul.
Chapter Five: Conclusions

America’s Great Awakenings have been times of religious revitalization, restoring religious sentiment while reinterpreting religion in light of new experiences. For some, the Great Awakenings are encouraging signs of God’s concern for the redemption of humanity. Each Great Awakening lasted roughly a generation and resulted in mass conversions throughout America. The Great Awakenings hinged primarily upon preaching aimed at leading people to renewed religious sentiment. Since Awakenings relied upon preaching, the prominent figures of the Great Awakenings were preachers.

The preceding chapters identified Jonathan Edwards, Charles Finney, and Dwight Moody as the prominent figures of the First, Second, and Third Great Awakenings, respectively. After identifying Edwards, Finney, and Moody as the leaders of the Great Awakenings, previous chapters analyzed their rhetorical strategies and offered a criticism of an exemplary sermon from each preacher. Edwards’ sermon, “Sinners in the Hands of An Angry God,” is representative of his theology as it stresses humanity’s depravity and the sovereignty of God, and it also is representative of his use of fear appeals to motivate people to seek salvation. Exemplary of his theology and rhetoric, Finney’s sermon, “Sinners Bound to Change Their Own Hearts,” emphasizes that salvation was available for everyone, and it appealed to human responsibility for choosing God and salvation. Similarly, as it stresses God’s love for everyone and underscores human responsibility in salvation, “Lost and Saved” is exemplary of Moody’s rhetoric and theology. This chapter offers a comparative analysis of the rhetorical dynamics of these exemplar sermons while giving specific consideration to the unique elements of the sermons’ structures, appeals, and evidence. After analyzing
the rhetorical dynamics of the exemplar sermons, this chapter discusses study’s limitations and concludes by offering some suggestions for future research.

As preachers of revival, Edwards, Finney, and Moody aimed to reignite religious sentiments by calling for spiritual rebirth. Each preacher attempted to motivate sinners to salvation by emphasizing their need for God. However, each preacher used distinct rhetorical approaches in the process. This criticism begins with a consideration of the factors leading to each preacher’s unique rhetorical approach. Building on the motivations behind each preacher’s style, this criticism considers the structure and evidence of the sermons. Finally, this analysis examines each figure’s use of appeals.

Three things influenced the preaching of Edwards, Finney and Moody. First, theological beliefs influenced the types of appeals each preacher would use. Second, the individual background and education of each preacher influenced the structure of the sermons and the use of argumentation. Third, concerns about audience dynamics worked alongside the training and theology of each individual to moderate the types of appeals, evidence and arguments they used.

The Calvinist-Arminian distinction provides one of the bases for understanding each Awakening and, furthermore, Edwards, Finney, and Moody’s preaching. Theology was one of the major influences on how each man approached preaching, and each preacher’s understanding of humanity and God informed the way he preached about salvation. Edwards’ Calvinist theology influenced his rhetoric. He believed that people were totally depraved and incapable of desiring God on their own. For Edwards, salvation was the result of God’s grace, as God chose who would be saved. Following his Calvinist tradition, Edwards’ rhetoric in “Sinners” focuses on God’s sovereignty and
humanity’s depravity. Edwards does not allow for the sinner’s role in salvation. Instead, his message stresses how much sinners are dependent on God. Edwards argues that the only thing preventing people from being cast into hell is God’s protective hand.

Following their Arminian theology and tradition, Finney and Moody’s preaching offers a vision of salvation different from Edwards’ understanding of it. Finney and Moody argued that everyone had the opportunity for salvation. As a result, their sermons highlighted salvation as a gift God offered to everyone. Finney and Moody denied the Calvinist belief that people were passive in salvation and preached the Arminian doctrine of free will, emphasizing human responsibility in salvation. Rather than inform their audiences how much they were dependent upon God for salvation, like Edwards did, Finney and Moody preached human responsibility to choose God.

In addition to theology, Edwards, Finney, and Moody’s personal backgrounds influenced the way they structured their sermons. Edwards observed effective preaching his entire life, and he was trained as a preacher in the Calvinist and New England traditions. As the son of a preacher, Edwards grew up observing his father compose and deliver sermons. While attending Yale, Edwards received additional preparation for a career as a preacher through taking classes in rhetoric and theology (Reid, 1995). Following his graduation from Yale, Edwards received further training under his grandfather, Solomon Stoddard, the famed preacher of the Connecticut Valley.

When composing “Sinners in the Hands of An Angry God,” Edwards used the traditional three-part New England sermon format that he had likely seen his father and grandfather use. The New England format included a text, doctrine, and application
section (Adams & Yarbough, 2007; White, 1948). After beginning with his biblical text from Deuteronomy, Edwards moved into a brief historical exegesis explaining the text. Following the text, Edwards develops a doctrinal section consisting of thirteen propositions explaining his argument that “There is nothing that keeps wicked men [sic] at any one moment out of hell, but the mere pleasure of God” (¶ 6). The remaining half of “Sinners” is an application section directed explicitly towards his audience. “Sinners” concludes with a direct exhortation to his audience urging them to consider their condition and flee from the imminent wrath to be suffered in hell.

Unlike Edwards, Finney did not receive any formal theological training prior to entering the ministry. Instead, Finney was trained as a lawyer. From his training to become a lawyer, Finney learned a distinct style of argumentation. While not following the precise New England sermon structure, Finney organized “Sinners Bound to Change Their Own Hearts” in a manner comparable to Edwards’ “Sinners”. Like Edwards, Finney begins his sermon with a biblical text, his from Ezekiel, followed by a brief exegesis. Finney then poses three questions that inform the remainder of his sermon. Following these questions, Finney moves through lines of argument, like a lawyer presenting a case, that function like Edwards’ doctrine section. Similar to “Sinners,” the last half of Finney “Sinners Bound to Change Their Own Hearts,” consists of an application section, labeled “Remarks,” directed explicitly towards his audience. Finney concludes his sermon recommending, “O sinner, I beseech you, and obey the word of the Lord—“Make you a new heart and a new spirit, for why will ye die?” (¶ 81).

Finney’s success as a revivalist despite not receiving formal training opened the doors for future preachers to begin careers as revivalist without theological training.
Moody, an aspiring businessman, began his preaching career without any theological training. Prior to his conversion, Moody was unimpressed by the traditional preaching of his day. Building on his lack of formal training and his desire to break from the traditional sermon, Moody composed sermons in his own unique way. However, his lack of training sometimes resulted in sermons with unclear organization and repetition. Moody’s “Lost and Saved” parted from the three-part organizational scheme used by Finney and Edwards. Like them, Moody begins with a biblical text, but unlike them, he does not provide an immediate exegesis of the verse. Instead, Moody moves through a series of exhortations to the audience to seek Christ. These exhortations combine examples with appeals to the audience to see the truth of these stories in their own lives. While the body of Moody’s sermon is structured differently than Edwards’ and Finney’s sermons, he concludes in a similar manner by calling for the audience to choose salvation.

Although each preacher’s sermons were structured uniquely, with Edwards and Finney’s sharing the most in common, they all functioned similarly and produced equally successful results. As hallmarks of persuasive preaching aimed at reviving religious sentiments, Edwards, Finney, and Moody’s sermons represent rhetorical strategies effectively leading to audiences’ response. Edwards’ three-part sermon style was undoubtedly familiar to his audience and allowed for a gradual building of his case that sinners were at the risk of suffering in hell at any moment unless they repented. Edwards’ audience would have recognized that the arguments in his doctrine section would later be applied to them and would have also been familiar with the use of fear appeals, a common practice in First Great Awakening preaching (Jackson, 2007). The
audiences’ familiarity with Calvinist views of salvation and the potential damnation of all people it implied allowed Edwards to concentrate on incrementally building his appeals to an evocative crescendo that would motivate his audience to salvation. Working in the context of conflicting theological values, Finney’s clear lines of argument and examples that would have appealed to people of diverse theological backgrounds guided him in making his case that sinners must make themselves new hearts. For those who preferred sermons using scripture, Finney accommodated them by incorporating biblical evidence. For those who may not have been familiar with scripture, he accommodated them by providing logical arguments. Moody’s practice of alternating between generic examples and application helped him to show the relevance of his message to the audience. Preaching to large audiences with people from assorted backgrounds, Moody’s hodgepodge structure of everyday examples could resonate with everyone.

While Edwards, Finney, and Moody’s sermons take their own form, they all begin with a biblical text. However, each preacher selected his sermon’s text from a different area of scripture. Therefore, it interesting to consider what is implied by the sermon text each preacher used as the basis of his sermon. Edwards’ text from Deuteronomy reflects his understanding of humanity and God. The text from Deuteronomy highlights humanity’s depravity and Edwards’ presentation of God based on this passage is consistent with his understanding of God’s character. From the Deuteronomy text, Edwards’ audience is informed of a wrathful God who is angry with the Israelites. Edwards’ sermon text and presentation of humanity, God, and salvation based on the text is consistent with his Calvinist theology.
While Finney also uses an Old Testament scripture as his sermon’s text, the passage from Ezekiel occurs at a significantly different point in Israel’s history. The book of Ezekiel includes prophecies about the condemnation and restoration of Israel. In light of the historical context of Ezekiel, Finney provides encouragement for his audience that God can restore them, if they will make their hearts new as the Israelites were called to make their hearts new. Finney’s sermon text allows him to present salvation in a manner that emphasizes peoples’ responsibility to choose to make themselves new hearts.

In contrast to Edwards and Finney’s, Moody’s sermon text comes from the New Testament. Moody’s sermon text from Luke emphasizes Jesus’ earthly purpose of bringing salvation to the lost. Moody’s text allows him to stress the New Covenant realized through Jesus’ redeeming work. Furthermore, the passage from Luke is consistent with Moody’s understanding of a loving God who desires to bring salvation to the lost.

After establishing the themes of their sermons with a biblical text, Edwards, Finney, and Moody built their cases with evidence. Comparing the evidence used provides insight into what each preacher believed established why the audience needed to seek salvation. While each figure based their sermons on a biblical text, their choice of sermon text, the amount—if any—of additional scriptural references, and non-scriptural uses of evidence, are all interesting rhetorical dynamics to investigate.

Edwards begins “Sinners” with a text from Deuteronomy about the dangers facing the Israelites as a result of their disobedience. Edwards proceeds to make his argument, using this scripture as evidence that all people are in danger of hell because of their disobedience. Compared to Finney and Moody’s sermons, Edwards’ relies most
heavily upon additional scriptural evidence to justify his arguments. While explaining what is implied by his Deuteronomy reference, Edwards directs his audience to scripture from Psalms that echoes the sermon’s text. Later, when arguing that all are condemned because of their sin, Edwards alludes to passages from the Gospel of Luke, Gospel of John, and Ecclesiastes, and he uses text from Isaiah, Ezekiel, Proverbs, Romans, and Revelation to support his claims about God’s power and anger.

Noticeably absent from “Sinners,” and perhaps related to Edwards’ own values and theology, is the use of any personal stories or illustrations. Edwards relies entirely upon truths derived from scripture. Arguably, everyday experiences were inconsequential to Edwards compared to the reality of hell. For Edwards, there was only one relevant story, which could be applied to everyone: humans were depraved and heading to hell unless God elected to save them. Edwards’ belief in God’s sovereignty could have also influenced his reliance on scripture for evidence. For Edwards, God provided the sole authoritative voice on the human condition, with everyone else’s opinions being secondary. Therefore, rather than using examples from everyday life to establish his point, Edwards elected to rely upon the authority of the Bible to build his case.

Finney combines scriptural references and clear lines of argument as evidence to support his claims. Beginning with the opening text from Ezekiel, Finney argues that all people are responsible for making themselves a new heart. Since Finney is suggesting his audience needs a change of heart, he uses evidence from the Gospel of Matthew, which discusses the heart’s deceitful nature. Finney often refers to the temptation of Adam when discussing people’s ability to change their preference. In the Creation
story, Finney argues, Adam changed his preference away from God. Arguing that the Creation story allows for peoples’ choice, Finney suggests it is his audiences’ responsibility to choose rightly by choosing God. Later, he compares Adam’s (and humanity’s in general) rebellion to a political rebellion, and elsewhere Finney compares choosing God to choosing a political candidate and changing one’s preference from Satan to God to switching political parties. Drawing from his background studying law, Finney’s analogy of a political rebellion, an offense his audience would have viewed as egregious, to explain Adam’s rebellion against God’s created order helped him build a case that easily made sense to his hearers. If Finney could convince his audience to view humanity’s rebellion against God as similar to a political rebellion, he could potentially get them to recognize why it was important for them to change their condition. While not explicitly stating the scriptural references, Finney alludes to other passages including those from Psalms, the letters of Paul, an epistle of John, and the Lord’s Prayer for evidence. Elsewhere, Finney uses logical arguments as evidence to support his claim that each person is his or her own primary agent in salvation.

Finney’s use of scriptural evidence and narratives arguably reflects the influence the changing landscape of American Protestantism during the Second Great Awakening had on preachers’ rhetoric. In a society experiencing interdenominational competition for membership, potential parishioners were endowed with a growing sense of empowerment. One could speculate that preachers and revivalists were under new pressures to make their messages seem more salient with their congregation’s preferences as a means of increasing membership. As a result, preachers might have been expected to adapt their rhetoric to appeal to parishioners who favored strict
adherence to scripture and also those who preferred examples. Although Finney spent the majority of his career as an itinerant revivalist who would not have been concerned with increasing the membership of his own congregation, this aspect of religious culture still might have shaped his rhetoric.

While Finney sometimes reached outside of scripture to support his sermon’s arguments, Moody relied almost entirely upon non-scriptural evidence. Outside of his sermon text from Luke, Moody uses no other scriptural evidence. Instead, “Lost and Saved” relies upon evidence drawn from a series of narratives that Moody relates to his text and argument that God is continually pursuing sinners. Moody’s stories drew from everyday experiences that would have immediate salience for almost everyone. The use of multiple stories insured that there was at least one story or idea that would likely resonate with every member of his audience. On more than one occasion, Moody told stories about people who attended revival meetings. If one of his other stories did not seem applicable, his audience potentially could identify with some of the other stories presented. Moody also used analogies to stress the seriousness of losing one’s soul to hell compared to other forms of loss, including one’s wealth, reputation, or a loved. Moody’s use of narrative and analogy as evidence invited members of his audience to see how his message directly applied to their lives. His reliance upon personal stories and experiences in his preaching likely reflect his lack of training as a preacher. Compared to Edwards who was trained as a preacher, Moody had significantly less familiarity with the scriptures. As a result, Moody’s messages were simpler, lacking the complexity of Edwards and Finney’s preaching.
The audiences to which Moody preached likely also shaped his rhetoric. Preaching to considerably more people than Edwards and Finney, including many that might not have had any familiarity with Protestant theology and, possibly, scripture, Moody may have recognized that everyday examples would have the greatest impact with the largest, diverse, urban audiences.

While presenting their evidence, Edwards, Finney, and Moody appeal to emotions and cultural values to encourage the reaffirmation of religious belief. Since Edwards believed people were moved to repentance only after being scared by the awfulness of hell, fear is the primary appeal of “Sinners.” The argumentum ad baculum stresses the danger of not repenting which creates fear in the audience. Edwards’ biblical text provides the seeds for an appeal to fear. The text from Deuteronomy claims that only God’s whim prevented the destruction of the Israelites. Just as the Israelite’s were in a dangerous condition because of walking on slippery places, Edwards asserts that sinners walk on a rotten covering, which they could plummet through at any moment into hell. Elsewhere, he compares his listeners’ sinful condition to a spider’s web trying to prevent a rock from falling downward, and argues that the sword of God’s judgment is sharpened and ready to send them to hell. Edwards’ comparison of the sinner’s condition to walking on a rotten covering emphasizes their helplessness and infers that sinners should be afraid they could be sent to hell at any moment. Edwards intensifies his fear appeals by comparing hell to a furnace with growing flames with a serpent whose mouth is gaping to swallow them up. Edwards uses images of storms, floods, and a bow and arrow ready to strike to emphasize the intensity of God’s wrath towards sinners whom are like mere insects in God’s eyes. Comparing God’s wrath to
images such as storms reiterates the enormity of God’s power and brings to mind things, like floods, that are out of humanity’s control. Furthermore, comparing sinners to insects infers something about the sense of worth Edwards’ attaches to humanity. Suggesting that God views sinners as bugs reveals just how insignificant humans are in God’s eyes. Edwards concludes “Sinners” with a final plea for sinners to flee from the fury and fierceness of God’s wrath.

While Finney incorporates fear appeals to motivate his audience to salvation, his use of fear appeals are distinct from Edwards’ use of them. Rather than making them the focal point of his sermon, Finney only briefly uses fear appeals as a final call to action. After building his case that sinners must choose God, Finney warns of the dangers of eternal death that await those who do not choose salvation. Moody’s sermon represents an even sharper break from fear appeals, as he does not use them at all. Instead of emphasizing appeals to fear, Finney and Moody’s sermons incorporate appeals to human responsibility. People must take up the responsibility to choose salvation.

Finney introduces this theme while explaining that his sermon text refers to the requirement the Israelites had to make themselves a new heart. Marking a break from Calvinism, Finney stresses that sinners must voluntarily choose to follow God. Suggesting that people must make the voluntary decision to choose God places significantly more power in the hands of sinners than the helplessness of sinners Edwards preached, a belief that might not have had as much appeal for revivals in the religious culture of Finney’s day. Instead of inferring that peoples’ fate is in God’s hands and that people are prone to destruction at any moment, Finney claims that sinners
have the ultimate power to determine their future. Finney reiterates his belief in choice by explaining that salvation is primarily a matter of preferring God over one’s own selfish interests. In his “Remarks,” the last half of his sermon, Finney intensifies his appeals to responsibility by stressing the urgency in which his audience needs to choose God. Finney concludes his sermon with a final call for his listeners to choose salvation.

Like Finney’s, Moody’s sermon emphasizes that sinners are responsible for their own salvation. Since he suggests God is always pursuing everyone, Moody argues it is the sinner’s responsibility to recognize this and to choose salvation. Moody provides illustrations of God’s pursuit of humankind and then asks his audience to recognize that God is seeking them also. Moody’s rejection of Edwards’ Calvinist understanding of salvation is even more explicit than Finney’s rejection of it. When appealing to responsibility, Moody uses words like “willing,” “consent,” and “accept” to explain what sinners must do to God’s offer for salvation. Moody’s language attributes even more power to sinners. Wherein Finney stressed choice, Moody, at times, places humans in a role that Edwards reserved for God. For sinners to “consent” implies that even though God might be pursuing them, they ultimately must grant God permission to save them. Breaking from the wrathful God presented by Edwards, Moody paints the picture of a loving God who desires all humanity to accept a personal relationship with Christ. In one illustration, Moody compares God’s pursuit of humanity to a bidding battle between God and Satan. Comparing sinners to the prize of a bidding war implies something radically different about the worth of humanity than what Edwards had preached. Rather than viewing sinners as insignificant bugs, Moody’s language implies that God views sinners as significant beings worthy of love.
One might speculate that another potential factor to shaping the rhetoric of America’s Great Awakenings is the relationship, if any, between the model, or size, of a revival and the type of structure and appeals used in preaching. As evidenced in the previous chapters, the size of revivals grew exponentially over the course of America’s Great Awakenings. Despite being a “national” event, the sites of the revivals during the First Great Awakening were typically individual church communities. In contrast, the nature of the Second Great Awakening moved revivals away from individual churches to the interdenominational setting in small towns and cities and revivals in the Third Great Awakening were vast interdenominational gatherings in large cities organized around business principles. Moody’s business-inspired model produced the largest revivals in the history of America’s Great Awakenings. Understanding that business principles are based on giving customers what they want and considering the incredible number of people who attended Moody’s revivals has interesting rhetorical implications. Moody’s preaching hinged upon choice appeals and even described Jesus as a “bidder” for peoples’ souls. Furthermore, Moody’s preaching was fairly unstructured and included multiple narratives attempting to relate to his audience as if he were trying to please as many “customers” as possible. While Finney uses some of these same principles, his language does not match the intensity of Moody’s, and Finney still uses structured lines of argument and requires his audience have some familiarity with scripture. Edwards, whose revivals were on a smaller scale than Finney and Moody’s, on the other hand, seems unconcerned with pleasing his hearers. Instead, Edwards compares his audience to insects, far from a prize to be won by Christ the “bidder,” a message that is clearly less popular.
The theological homogeneity or diversity of audiences is another factor that potentially influenced the popularity of revivals in America’s Great Awakenings. Since Edwards spoke at individual churches in New England instead of large meetings across different areas of the United States, it is probable that his audiences were homogenous in terms of their theological attitudes and assumptions, while Finney and Moody spoke to larger and, presumably, more diverse audiences. As audiences got larger and more diverse, one could speculate that Arminian theology with its focus on individual choice would appeal to large American audiences. If this is the case, there are significant rhetorical implications for the success or effectiveness of preaching. This could mean that the success of preaching hinged upon how preachers chose to speak about God, humanity, and salvation. While Moody’s preaching was popular across denominations, it is arguable that Edwards’ Calvinistic rhetoric may not have been as well received with diverse audiences, and thus, would not have produced as large-scale revivals as Moody’s.

Limitations

While this thesis compares the rhetorical dynamics of specific exemplar sermons in America’s Great Awakenings, there are limitations to the claims that one can draw from this analysis. An examination of the internal rhetorical dynamics of these sermons emphasized the theological debates over Calvinism and Arminianism as the primary force shaping each sermon. Thus, this study focuses on how theology informed the rhetoric of each preacher and how each figure preached in light of the theological environment of his era. Yet, other cultural dynamics were at play: from the pressures of colonial life in the First Great Awakening to the pressures of the Jacksonian era and the
struggles over slavery during the Second Great Awakening to the issues of Reconstruction and increasing industrialization and urbanization during the Third Great Awakening. While this study recognizes some of these issues, it does so in order to provide a context for the rhetorical analysis, and has not considered how these contextual issues impact the rhetorical modes of speaking and preaching available in each era. Nonetheless, while limited, this mode of rhetorical analysis provides insight into the rhetorical dynamics of singular persuasive speech acts that can help us evaluate those individual sermons, their relation to their theology and audiences and speculate about the reasons they were as effective and popular as they were.

Additionally, this study was also limited in the scope of sermons and figures that were considered. While each figure selected is identified as the prominent figure associated with his Awakening, they were not the only figures active at the time. Other preachers, revivalists and pastors contributed to the Awakenings and challenged the proponents of the Awakenings. Some of this rhetoric has been considered elsewhere (Reid, 1995; White 1948, 1950), but the contributions of these other speakers and the interaction between their efforts and the efforts of Edwards, Finney and Moody should be addressed. Similarly, singular exemplar sermons selected for this criticism were identified as exemplar of each figure’s rhetoric. While the assumption is that the rhetorical components of exemplary sermons will be found in other sermons by these individuals, criticism of additional sermons might require revising this assumption.

Contributions and Future Research

This thesis contributes to rhetorical scholarship in three ways. First, it provides further examination of the rhetorical dynamics of America’s Great Awakenings. Second,
it provides an examination of the rhetoric of prominent figures in America's Great Awakenings. Third, this thesis advances scholarship by conducting a rhetorical analysis of prominent Awakening sermons as a means of comparing and contrasting rhetorical styles and strategies of revivalistic rhetoric.

While this study advanced rhetorical scholarship on America’s Great Awakenings, further exploration of the rhetorical dynamics of the Awakenings is still important. Building on the limitations of this study, investigation of additional sermons delivered by Edwards, Finney, and Moody would be beneficial. Furthermore, although Edwards, Finney, and Moody were the leaders of their Great Awakenings, analysis of the specific rhetorical styles and strategies of other preachers and sermons in the Awakenings would provide an even deeper sense of rhetorical context to America’s Great Awakenings. Finally, the advertising techniques and promotional literature used to encourage revival and the hymns and songs used in revival meetings warrant attention in order to identify what role they could potentially play in persuading people to attend revival meetings and to engage in spiritual renewal.
References


Notes

1. Some scholars argue that a Fourth Great Awakening occurred during the latter half of the 20th century, although those historical claims are not generally accepted (Fogel, 2000).

2. Since Whitefield did not write his sermons in manuscript form, copies of his sermons rely upon records of those who attended meetings where he preached.

3. Edwards’ Northampton parish was the first to hear “Sinners” (June 1741), followed by the infamous preaching at Enfield (July 8, 1741). After the incredible success “Sinners” had in Enfield, it became “one of [Edwards’] standards” during his visits to other towns as an itinerant” (Marsden, 2003, p. 224).

4. Edwards uses the universal terms “men” and “man” throughout his sermon. In order to preserve the fluidity of the text, the improper gendering of audience will not be noted with every occurrence.

5. In the text of “Sinners,” Edwards states the scriptural reference prior to the verse in Roman numeral format. In keeping with the fluidity of the text, the citation format has been adjusted as follows.

6. “Believed to have occurred for the first time at Gasper River, Kentucky, in 1800, the camp meeting became a staple of the early Second Great Awakening….The camp meeting consist[ed] of many families gathered together in an encampment for a number of days for the purpose of religious worship, especially revivalist preaching. There were multiple services each day, and, if the encampment were large enough, many preachers conducted meetings simultaneously in different locations” (Hankins, 2004, p. 184).
7. Finney uses the universal “he” throughout his sermon. In order to preserve the fluidity of the text, the improper gendering of audience will not be noted with every occurrence.

8. In Finney’s retelling of the Genesis story, he focuses on Adam, rather than Eve, being tempted by the serpent.

9. Ira Sankey led the music portion of Moody’s revival meetings, and he would accompany him for remainder of Moody’s career as a revivalist.

10. Some, more recent, publications title the sermon “Lost and Found.”