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The Means of Revival: Charles Grandison Finney's Rhetorical Theory

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Abstract: Throughout the second and third quarters of the nineteenth century, Charles Grandison Finney distinguished himself as the most successful evangelical preacher in the United States. Trained as a lawyer before converting to Christianity and its ministry, Finney came to the pulpit with a fiercely rational and accusatory style that placed demands upon his listeners. In formulating his appeal, Finney also fashioned an innovative Protestant theology that challenged New England Calvinism. After establishing that each sinner has the power to self-reform, he spread the message to audiences across the Northeast, sparking a series of revivals that made his reputation. In the 1830s, Finney was asked to explain his method from his New York City pulpit, and did so across twenty-two lectures that detailed his revival strategy. This essay employs Finney's theory of individual conversion to examine his theory of mass revival, noting the essentially deliberative character of each and recognizing the lasting influence of both on evangelical life in the United States.

Keywords: Charles Grandison Finney, revival, Evangelicalism, deliberation

At a point in the early nineteenth century, in the "Burned-Over District" of western New York, nestled between austere New England and the wild frontier, mingled amid merchants and farmers, within the class strata and jostled by their shifts, the stern defenders of religious hierarchy and the defiant horseback itinerants saw their differences irreparably split by a blue-eyed country lawyer.[1] Charles Grandison Finney did not study at Harvard or Andover or Yale; neither did he act on enthusiasm alone. He did not benefit from inherited wealth or intellectual legacy; neither did he come from nothing at all. In 1821, just shy of thirty and by then established in the practice of law, Finney found Jesus and resolved to "plead his cause."[2] Then he set to work changing American Christianity.

Among many other facets of his fascinating career, Finney initiated a new phase in American revivalism, in which hearts and minds were understood to be pliable and conversions producible—perhaps at scale—by what he termed "the right use of constituted means."[3] William G. McLoughlin has distinguished "modern" revivalism from the pre-modern variety by noting that after Finney, revivalist preachers would grant human beings a degree of agency reserved previously for God alone.[4] Though the Puritans had for two centuries quaked before the awful and arbitrary majesty of the sovereign Lord, Finney empowered sinners with an obligation to "change their own

[1] For deeper historical background on the Burned-Over District, see Whitney R. Cross, *The Burned-Over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800–1850* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1950); Paul E. Johnson, *A Shopkeeper's Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815–1837* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2004).

[2] Charles E. Hambrick-Stowe, *Charles G. Finney and the Spirit of American Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 19.

[3] Charles G. Finney, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*, ed. William G. McLoughlin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard/Belknap, 1960), 13.

[4] William G. McLoughlin Jr., *Modern Revivalism: Charles Grandison Finney to Billy Graham* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2004), 10–11.

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hearts."[5] And whereas Jonathan Edwards had cast revivals as mysterious, divine interventions into the world, Finney saw them simply as logical outcomes of correct method.[6] Perhaps symptomatic of an ongoing process of national disenchantment, Finney's revivalism was practical—even mechanical—and therefore replicable. In his view, the "means" of revival in Christian contexts were no more enigmatic than the broader "means of persuasion" however situated.[7] With the right instruction, he argued, anyone could do it.

This essay revisits the Second Great Awakening to examine the rhetorical theory informing Charles Finney's art of mass conversion. Though Finney explained his model at length in his 1835 *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*, rhetorical scholars have shown little interest in his influential work.[8] To invite such attention, I first consider Finney's theory of individual conversion as it appears in his famous early sermon, "Sinners Bound to Change Their Own Hearts." Here he makes the case for an innovative view of human agency that allows—indeed, *requires*—people to play an active role in their own salvation, albeit in collaboration with a cast of other agents. With this schema established, I turn next to Finney's theory of mass conversion as asserted in the *Lectures*, drawing on his earlier work to argue that revivalism deserves consideration as a mode of deliberation. Because Finney always imagines conversion as the product of group discussion, and because his treatise on revivals emphasizes the roles played by audiences over those played by the speaker, I argue that his brand of evangelistic discourse is essentially deliberative. This approach, I conclude, merged important political and religious currents that would sustain Finney's influence for nearly two centuries of American Christianity, leaving his confrontational nineteenth-century ethos perfectly legible within the combative public evangelicalism of the early twenty-first century.

Theory, Theology, and Agency in "Sinners Bound"

Born in 1792, Charles Finney would emerge as an exemplary first-generation American, defined by, among other qualities, his common sense, hard work, skilled oratory, casual deference to class, and a seemingly inborn gift for publicity.[9] He was a self-made man in a self-made country, an innovative minister with a genius for subtlety and an easy talent for argument. Before an audience he was incendiary, and personally responsible for much of the revivalist "fire" that scorched the land between Cincinnati and Boston

[5] Charles G. Finney, *Sermons on Important Subjects* (New York: John S. Taylor, 1836), 3.

[6] Edwards's view on revivalism is recorded primarily in two texts, his *Narrative of Surprising Conversions* and *Thoughts on the Revival of Religion in New England*. See *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 1 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2000), 344–430.

[7] Aristotle, *On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse*, 2nd ed., trans. George A. Kennedy (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 19.

[8] Exceptions include Jonathan J. Edwards, *Superchurch: The Rhetoric and Politics of American Fundamentalism* (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 2015), 30–47; Jonathan J. Edwards, "Revive Us O Lord: Revival Rhetoric and the Revitalization of Religious Advocacy," *Proceedings of the Alta Conference on Argumentation* (2007): 211–21; Rollin W. Quimby, "Charles Grandison Finney: Herald of Modern Revivalism," *Speech Monographs* 20 (1953): 293–399.

[9] Such qualities garner Finney brief notice in Joyce Appleby, *Inheriting the Revolution: The First Generation of Americans* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard/Belknap, 2000), 118–9.

during the antebellum years.[10] Singularly focused on the saving of souls, he was both theorist and practitioner of "the work."[11]

Notably, the theory informing that dedicated labor owed more to practice than the other way around, and far more to the courtroom than to the divinity school. It is perhaps the definitive quality of Finney's rhetorical style that his arguments were formed and refined in real world use, first during an apprenticeship to a local attorney, and later through directed study under the Rev. George W. Gale. A graduate of Princeton Seminary, it was Gale who first roused Finney's antipathy toward an institution that, in his view, produced both a host of theological absurdities and an army of ministers to relay them uncritically. As he tells it, Finney's education under Gale amounted to an extended cross-examination of teacher by student, culminating eventually in the elder's remorseful admission that he had gotten practically everything wrong.[12] This sort of exchange marks a recurrent trope in Finney's *Memoirs*, in which the abrasive but principled evangelist confronts others with candor and then nods approvingly as they recant their most cherished beliefs. (He also claims that when members of the local presbytery generously offered to pay his way at Princeton, he told them "plainly" that "I would not put myself under such an influence as they had been under; that I was confident they had been wrongly educated, and they were not ministers that met my ideal at all of what a minister of Christ should be.")[13] In this way, Finney engages early and often in a funny sort of self-construction whereby he recalls absolutely brutalizing both friends and rivals at uncomfortable length before insisting that, nevertheless, he always held them in the highest love and respect. It seems clear enough from this vantage that Finney the lawyer-preacher was very difficult to work with even as his appeals were very difficult to resist, and these counterbalancing traits owed to a confidence and tenacity cultivated both in the Word and before the bar.

This much would have been established by 1827, if not before, when Finney arrived in Wilmington, Delaware, at the invitation of the Rev. Eliphant Gilbert for an indefinite season of preaching. Fresh from a confrontation with critics in New Lebanon, New York, Finney must have had important distinctions on his mind. His *Memoirs* cast Gilbert in sympathy with the antagonists, likening his views to those of Lyman Beecher and Asahel Nettleton, and lamenting that his congregants had been trained in "the oldest of the Old School views."[14] Biographer Charles Hambrick-Stowe has challenged this characterization, suggesting perhaps that Finney was either a little careless in his boundary-drawing or a little calculated in his scene-setting, and likely both.[15] But clearly Finney considered Wilmington an appropriate venue for an unequivocal statement of his brand of faith, because after "two or three weeks" spent conditioning Gilbert in

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[10] Though other metaphors may lend themselves to the heat, light, and concentric spread of revival energy, *fire* is by far the most common in the literature.

[11] Throughout his *Memoirs*, Finney characterizes his ministry in the most practical terms, reserving his highest praise for those allies and converts who proved themselves "efficient" and "useful" "laborers" in "the work." See, for example, Charles Finney, *The Original Memoirs of Charles G. Finney*, ed. Garth M. Rosell and Richard A. G. Dupuis (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 101, 142, 148, 152, 256, 324.

[12] Finney, *Memoirs*, 33–47.

[13] Finney, *Memoirs*, 36.

[14] Finney, *Memoirs*, 192.

[15] Hambrick-Stowe, *Charles G. Finney*, 77.

private conversation, he first delivered a version of "Sinners Bound to Change Their Own Hearts" from his host's apparently dusty pulpit.[16]

Arguably the most famous of Finney's sermons, "Sinners Bound" launched a volley into an Old School–New School divide in American Presbyterianism that itself recalled the larger and more ancient split between the Calvinists and the Arminians.[17] At issue in both fields was that vital question of agency, asking precisely who had any and in what proportion. An avowed New Schooler, Finney was persistently critical of the predestination of the elect, assailing the idea's key implications with enough vigor to throw his orthodoxy into doubt. (Reflecting later on how he had managed honestly to affirm the Westminster Confession during his ordination, Finney intimated that he may never have read it.)[18] To him there was something galling in the muddled claim that humanity had been "imputed" with sin from Adam onward, cast down and culpable in a state of total depravity for which they had not asked and from which they were practically powerless to escape. In Wilmington, Finney even argued that, were this noxious doctrine true, Christ's atonement was "no grace at all, but really a debt due to mankind on the part of God for having placed them in a condition so deplorable and so unfortunate." Instead, the scriptures revealed that God allowed for every man, woman, and child on the entire fallen globe to achieve salvation through individual striving, repenting of sins and living in faith and so changing the heart by an act of voluntary will. This was strong medicine. When the service adjourned, Finney claims, Gilbert was surrounded by several rattled ladies who pressed him for a reaction, and he shocked them further by assenting unconditionally to everything he had heard. When one of these ladies concluded in a huff that, in that case, Gilbert had "never preached the gospel," he confessed with regret that in truth he never had.[19]

One can read such accounts with a critical eye while accepting the broader truth reflected in their spirit, and here as elsewhere Finney's sharp memory of minds changed, souls won, and critiques unceremoniously demolished does impart something about the nature of his rhetorical appeal. Those first few decades of American life were lived in the

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[16] Finney, *Sermons*, 3–42, 29–56. For publication, Finney's sermon was split into two essays, "Sinners Bound to Change Their Own Hearts" and "How to Change Your Heart." They appear as the first two chapters in *Sermons on Important Subjects*, under baffling pagination that runs to 42, picks up at 29, and features duplicates of every number in between. In a footnote in the Harvard edition of the *Lectures* (p. 195), McLoughlin writes that Finney first delivered "Sinners Bound" in Boston in 1831, a claim that is contested both by Finney's *Memoirs* and Hambrick-Stowe's biography, each of which places the first delivery in Wilmington. The discrepancy may be owed to ambiguity over the name. Because Finney did not formally write the sermon out until its publication in 1834, it likely evolved over time and was delivered in various forms under various titles before assuming its final shape.

[17] In short, the New School–Old School split in the Presbyterian Church separated the orthodox Calvinists who opposed revivalism from the less rigid, more theologically diverse body of congregants who embraced it. Broadly speaking, the Calvinists of Finney's day believed that salvation was relegated to God's elect alone, while Arminians argued that human beings could claim salvation through their own efforts. Finney rose to prominence during a historical era that—in part because of his efforts—marked a seismic shift from Calvinist dominance toward something more Arminian in complexion. See Joseph Haroutunian, *Piety Versus Moralism: The Pass of New England Theology from Edwards to Taylor* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2007).

[18] In his *Memoirs*, Finney writes—incredibly—of his ordination committee: "Unexpectedly to myself, they asked me if I received the Confession of faith of the Presbyterian Church. I had not examined it—that is, the large work, containing the Catechisms and Presbyterian Confession. This had made no part of my study. I replied that I received it for substance of doctrine, so far as I understood it. But I spoke in a way that plainly implied, I think, that I did not pretend to know much about it." Finney, *Memoirs*, 40.

[19] Finney, *Memoirs*, 193.

shadow of great theologies and amid the bustle of commerce, especially in the Northeast and for a time even more especially along the route of the Erie Canal. In magisterial works, both E. Brooks Hollifield and Mark Noll have mapped the productive interplay between religious creeds and secular trends in that time and place, and Nathan Hatch has famously shown the means by which Old World Christianity became "democratized" in step with New World ideas and practices.[20] Finney was there in the thick of it, ready and willing to help usher his countrymen out of a worldview better suited to subjects of the Crown and into one befitting of republican entrepreneurs. Central to his case was the inspiring idea that people must act in their own interest—that they could cultivate their hearts, minds, and souls even as they cultivated forests and fields.[21]

It is in this respect that "Sinners Bound" speaks directly to the intersectional contexts in which Finney crafted his theory of persuasion. Throughout the address, he implored his audience in pragmatic language, descending from the hallowed remove of the pulpit to reason with them in an everyday idiom and so coaxing them toward agreement like a jury to a verdict. Contra the logic of election, Finney argued that salvation could be just only when *chosen*, and that it could be chosen only through a conscious act of human will. "All holiness," he declared, "in God, angels, or men, must be *voluntary,* or it is not holiness." Because God commanded obedience, it fell to people to adapt to his injunctions, and such adaptation presumed "the powers of moral agency, which every human being possesses."[22] That agency simply *had to be* possessed and employed, in Finney's view, because to deny it was actually to insult God—to suggest that he was so stingy with his grace as to reserve it only for a select few, and then only in recognition of a faith that they had acquired also from his arbitrary hand, thereby to reduce humanity to a race of sentient automatons and the universe itself to an exercise in futility. Finney imagined the extension and reception of justification by grace through faith as an agreement reached rather than a fate imposed. For him the voluntary submission of the will and subsequent alteration of the heart were matters of simple common sense, lending credence to the saving pact without yet implying a heretical covenant of works. Finney explained at seemingly extraneous length that to change one's own heart did not require the alteration of the soul's "constitution" or the addition of anything "fleshy" to the body. It meant, rather, "changing the controlling preference of the mind in regard to the *end* of pursuit," first and foremost by subordinating "selfish" to godly interests.[23] This was a choice that his auditors possessed the ability to make, and under his piercing gaze they were compelled always to make it *now*.

The very currency of revivalism, conversions were thus minted like coins in the melting heat of manufactured anxiety, and throughout his career Finney specialized in stoking those fires. He was a master of the artistic proofs, leveraging his personal renown

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[20] See E. Brooks Hollifield, *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003); Mark Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Nathan Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991).

[21] The influence of "self-culture" among up-and-comers in the early republic is difficult to overstate. For a compelling explanation of this discourse, as well as the lens of "faculty psychology" through which Finney and many of his contemporaries understood human nature, see Daniel Walker Howe, *Making the American Self: Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

[22] Finney, *Sermons*, 7.

[23] Finney, *Sermons*, 9.

to secure a curious if somewhat nervous audience attentive to his message and self-consciously prone to the withering barrage of *logos* and *pathos* that he would deliver each time. But plain and pragmatic as he was, Finney seems not to have thought of his work in those terms, or at least not to have framed it that way in speech or writing. Instead, he explained the process in reference to his legal training, charging in a derisive tone that preachers could learn a thing or two from lawyers, and would be more effective if they did. His frustration stemmed in particular from those dreamy and contemplative divines who spoke of God's majesty in the abstract without ever bothering to craft an argument or force the issue. To Finney, their doctrinal errors bore the poisoned fruit of bad preaching, culminating in nothing at all beyond bored congregants and unchanged lives. In the courtroom, by contrast, he had learned to speak with a purpose, as though he really believed that the result really mattered. During an earlier exchange with Gale, Finney recalled declaring that "if advocates at the bar should pursue the same course in pleading the cause of their clients that ministers do in pleading the cause of Christ with sinners, they would not gain a single case."[24] Having fashioned his own distinctive theology somewhere just within bounds of the binding creeds, Finney *argued* on its behalf, deploying careful premises in relatable language via an extemporaneous delivery that was versatile enough to refine points or inflame "affections" as the situation might demand.[25] And ever beholden to plain reason, he would not take a position that he did not himself entirely believe.

On the controversial matter of whether sinners are bound to change their own hearts, Finney dissected his position with care. Unwilling to consign such an important responsibility either to man or God alone, he set and examined the scene like an antecedent Kenneth Burke.[26] Insisting that the "actual turning, or change, is the sinner's own act," Finney went on to grant a share of that act to a plurality of agents. "The agent who induces him," Finney said, "is the Spirit of God. A secondary agent, is the preacher, or individual who presents the truth. The truth is the instrument, or motive, which the Spirit uses to induce the sinner to turn."[27] And if any of this was less than clear, he illustrated the idea through a relatable example—that of a daydreaming man walking perilously close to the Niagara Falls. From some safe vantage, you-the-viewer gaze across the torrent and observe this man as he walks unaware toward his foamy doom, and without other recourse, but with all of your might, you cry out *stop*, piercing both the air and his reverie, snapping him back, whirling him around, and so warranting his effusive praise for having just saved his life. "He ascribes the work to you," Finney explained, "and certainly there is a sense in which you had saved him." But upon further review, the man realizes that it was, more precisely, *stop*, "the *word* that aroused him, and caused him to turn." More precisely still, he thinks, "had I not turned at that instant, I should have been a dead man," conceiving the act, "truly, as his own," before finally attributing

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[24] Finney, *Memoirs*, 126.

[25] Appeals to the "affections" had drawn attention from preachers long before Finney, of course. See, for example, Solomon Stoddard, *A Guide to Christ* (Boston: Green for Henchman, 1742); Jonathan Edwards, "A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections in Three Parts," in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 1 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2000), 234–343.

[26] Finney's terminology here seems a forerunner to that of Kenneth Burke's "dramatism," the frame that launched a thousand doctoral dissertations. It is expounded at length in his *A Grammar of Motives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969).

[27] Finney, *Sermons*, 20.

all to God in his boundless mercy, as everyone should. And yet, Finney argued, as in the case of conversion, God's providence accounts for only part of the tale. As the sinner walks whistling into hell, God employs the voice of the preacher, the cry to *stop,* and the truth of the gospel so to impress the judgment of the sinner that he whirls of his own volition to see salvation, thus completing the transition in accordance with the scriptures while remaining true to the dictates of reason and of justice.[28] Through this brief illustration, Finney was able to split some important theological hairs for an audience that had until then been unable, at least in his mind, to parse them correctly. The story, like the sermon in which it featured, provides a helpful window into the method of the era's preeminent revival preacher, demonstrating the sort of blended intellectual-emotional technique that he found persuasive in that time and place, and the lengths to which he would go to ensure beyond doubt that his meaning was clear. Though it marked a climax of sorts for the sermon, Finney was unwilling to let the parable stand unbuttressed. He stated his intent to conclude following "several inferences and remarks," only then to elaborate on *seventeen* of these in meticulous detail, perhaps satisfying a few quiet objections but no doubt taxing the patience of many among the young and the restless in the room.[29]

In "Sinners Bound," we may thus observe the Finneyan method in microcosm, demonstrating the practical interests and elements that would inform his theoretical lectures in the decade to come. A preacher addressing a jury, Finney *made the case* for Christ, confronting his auditors with the cruel fact of their sin in terms so clear and compelling that even the wiliest among them could not wriggle free of conviction. His appeal to their Christian duty, in the light of their human ability, instilled in his congregants a sense of empowerment even as it bound them to solemn obligations. And ever mindful of the theological puzzle attendant to the competing wills of God and Man, Finney split the difference by dividing the roles, imagining redemption as a collaborative process and recognizing the various parts played by the various actors and acts. If his listeners could accede to that model where the conversion of the individual was concerned, then they were already primed to accept its importance to the persuasion of the mass, an effort confounded in some ways and simplified in others by the nature of revival itself: an inexorable matrix of beings, emotions, and arguments, ever fighting and fainting and weeping its way toward a momentous consensus.

Lectures on Revivals as Deliberative Rhetorical Theory

Delivered on consecutive Friday nights between December 1834 and May 1835 at the Chatham Street Chapel in New York City, Finney's "Lectures on Revivals of Religion" were published serially upon delivery and as a volume immediately upon completion. As always, he delivered the twenty-two speeches extemporaneously, leaving transcription to the exhausted hand of *New York Evangelist* reporter Joshua Leavitt.[30] (Finney would later complain that Leavitt's reports were "meager," with each capturing less than half of what

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[28] Finney, *Sermons*, 20–21.

[29] Finney, *Sermons*, 23.

[30] Hambrick-Stowe, *Charles G. Finney*, 155. Because a speech is delivered at a particular moment in time, I have made a habit of referring to and quoting from speeches in the past tense, as opposed to the present tense that one typically employs when discussing written texts. In this essay, since Finney's lectures were delivered, transcribed, and published, and because I refer in each case to the volume rather than to each individual address, I have reverted to the present tense.

the speaker had actually said. But given that the full collection runs to nearly 500 published pages, readers may thank Leavitt for his restraint.) Because they were not drafted in advance, Finney wrote that he never knew "what the next lecture should be" until he had read the report of the previous, which then allowed him to discern "the next question that would naturally need discussion."[31] In this way he sought to catalog the diversity of concerns raised by revivalism as he conducted it. The result is a fascinating text that invites analysis from a variety of angles, any one of which can be selected only to the detriment of all the others.[32] But with that disclaimer, I will propose that Finney's understanding of conversion as a process informed by several collaborative agents suggests a theory of revival as deliberation. This analysis becomes only more compelling when we recognize that revivalism refers not to the conversion of an individual or individuals, but to an instance of communal persuasion whereby the members of a group undergo a change together, helped along by mutual support and encouragement. Once Finney had established the capability of human beings to change their own hearts, he effectively sanctioned them in the work of changing each other's as well, and so to build an apparatus for evangelism comparable in form to the new institutions of democracy then in bloom across the young republic. As agents—indeed, as *citizen-Christians*—Finney's eager auditors were primed to revive their communities, succeeding or failing as a body, and ever intent on reaching consensus in good faith. To explore this phenomenon, I will borrow some formatting from the *Lectures* themselves, discussing:

I. What revival is;
II. Whom revival concerns; and
III. How revival works deliberatively to achieve its ends.

What Revival Is

Curiously enough, Finney never provides a precise definition for *revival*, skirting the opportunity even in an opening lecture titled "What a Revival of Religion Is." Curiouser still, McLoughlin also resists definition, both in his classic investigation of *Modern Revivalism* and in his long introductory essay to the Harvard edition of the *Lectures*.[33] If neither author felt it necessary to define his key term at the outset of a definitive work, the omission in each case may be less attributable to carelessness than to the implicit assumption that everyone already knows what revivals are. Certainly there is an intuitive quality to the term. Finney observes that revival necessarily "presupposes a declension," stemming in every case from an all-too-human failure of will. Again he assigns moral responsibility to people as moral agents, casting his claims in sharp little sentences that anticipate and preclude reply. "*Religion is the work of man*," he writes. "It is something for man to do. It consists in obeying God. It is man's duty."[34] Nevertheless, because God's firm and unchanging commands are invariably received by his famously deficient

[31] Finney, *Memoirs*, 277.
[32] For example, a more *religiously* focused essay might examine the reception of Finney's ideas among the prominent theologians of his day; a more *psychologically* focused essay might interrogate Finney's take on how emotional appeals affect listeners' minds; and a more *politically* focused piece might trace his ideas more carefully against those of the rising Jacksonian democracy.
[33] William G. McLoughlin, introduction to *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*, by Charles G. Finney, ed. William G. McLoughlin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard/Belknap, 1960), vii–lii.
[34] Finney, *Lectures*, 9. Emphasis his.

subjects, even the best of their intentions too often land as masonry in the well-paved road to hell. When people fail to honor God's will, as they usually do, their faith and practice go into corporate decline, leaving individuals, families, churches, and communities vulnerable to moral and civic atrophy. A revival occurs when corporate faith and practice are suddenly restored, breathing new fervor, commitment, and membership into the body. It may therefore suffice to define a "revival" as *the sudden infusion of religious zeal into a lapsed group of believers*, and "revivalism" as *the concerted effort to prompt such an infusion through preaching, prayer, and related means*. Because Finney spoke from the height of his own immense popularity as a revival*ist*, and because McLoughlin wrote from across the colorful legacies of Finney, Moody, Sunday, and Graham, their terms may indeed have gone without introduction.[35]

And yet, to describe revival activity as an infusion of "zeal" is perhaps to understate the case. Critics had been assailing the wild "passions" and "enthusiasms" of the revival circuit since the first Great Awakening, and their complaints about unbridled "affections" had been refined, updated, and substantiated countless times from Cane Ridge on.[36] (Albert Dod, one of Finney's more prominent critics, charged him with "fanaticism.")[37] Foundational to all such critiques was a Puritan preference for august self-control, an inclination at once confronted and reinforced by several generations of uneducated and often unhinged madcap preachers.[38] Still, without apology, Finney endorses the promotion of certain "excitements" in revival preaching, citing emotional appeal as a resource for overcoming the innate "sluggishness" of fallen humanity. "There is so little *principle* in the church," he writes, "so little firmness and stability of purpose, that unless they are greatly excited, they will not obey God." Indeed, Christians "have so little knowledge, and their principles are so weak, that unless they are excited, they will go back from the path of duty, and do nothing to promote the glory of God." This being the sorry state of affairs, Finney argues, religion "must mainly be promoted by these excitements."[39] Thus, the tactical deployment of *pathos* is, to his mind, an essential countermeasure to neutralize the injurious influence of the modern world, which always dazzles and distracts the Christian with sinful enticements, daily weakening her resolve and numbing her heart against the higher order of love to which she is otherwise entitled. Were she—were *they*—more committed and conscientious, such methods would be unnecessary. But that is not the world we live in.

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[35] In the event that additional background *is* desired, see Timothy L. Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform: American Protestantism on the Eve of the Civil War* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2004); Richard Carwardine, *Transatlantic Revivalism: Popular Evangelicalism in Britain and America, 1790–1865* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1978); William G. McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform: An Essay on Religion and Social Change in America, 1607–1977* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978).

[36] See Robert W. Caldwell, *Theologies of the American Revivalists: From Whitefield to Finney* (Wheaton, IL: IVP Academic, 2017); James A. Morone, *Hellfire Nation: The Politics of Sin in American History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 123–43; Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Holy Fairs: Scotland and the Making of American Revivalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001); Paul K. Conkin, *Cane Ridge: America's Pentecost* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990).

[37] Albert Dod, "Finney's Sermons," *Biblical Repository and Theological Review* 7 (July, 1835): 482-527; "Finney's Lectures," *Biblical Repository and Theological Review* 7 (October, 1835): 626–74.

[38] The writer J. D. Dickey has profiled a variety of these personalities, citing them as the forerunners of a distinctly American tradition of demagoguery. See *American Demagogue: The Great Awakening and the Rise and Fall of Populism* (New York: Pegasus, 2019).

[39] Finney, *Lectures*, 10. Emphasis his.

Finney's pragmatism on emotional appeal prefigures his mechanical take on revivalism writ large. Whatever "excitability" arises in the revival meeting is attributable to human nature, not to the *super*nature of invisible, otherworldly forces. Indeed, Finney here specifies that a revival is "not a miracle," at least when the miraculous is defined in either of two common ways: first, as "a Divine interference, setting aside or suspending the laws of nature," or second, as "*something above the powers of nature*." Instead, he famously writes, revival is "a purely philosophical result of the right use of constituted means—as much so as any other effect produced by the application of means."[40] These are cause-and-effect relationships, and nothing more. If emotional appeals produce revivals, it is only because God so intends, just as God intends the planting and cultivation of a field to produce grain in season. The crop depends upon the farmer's diligence, and both upon God's blessing, of course, but even that beautiful result is not *miraculous* so much as a logical product of the correct manipulation of natural forces.[41] Impatient with abstraction and ever irritated by the criticism of his Old School foes, Finney theorized revival by getting down to earth and back to basics.

Humans being who they are, and human nature working as it does, the gathering of human auditors and the provocation of their emotions would dependably produce the conditions in which a revival may occur. Orchestrated correctly by a pious minister, the event would honor the benevolence of God's providence, and invite the outpouring of his Spirit.[42] Sinners would feel the weight of conviction, backsliders would repent of their transgressions, and dutiful Christians would renew their commitments. The changes might manifest physically, causing some to weep, others to shout, and many to faint or to buckle beneath the awesome power of spiritual feeling. The secular *status quo* would be shaken from its foundations, generating an electric fervor that could spread by media accounts and word of mouth, burning its way through the countryside and into the neighboring towns. From a safe distance and the height of prejudice, such a spectacle may shock and appall, raising defenses and prompting whispers that strange and unholy enthusiasms are taking hold. But the critics simply could not deny the results. Throughout his ministry, Finney touted revivals for their high and consistent yield in human souls, boasting that, unlike their enemies, revivals work. They *are* because they *do*.

Whom Revival Concerns

Finney's confidence in the ability of a revival to restore some souls and to save others presumes that every preacher will address at least two audiences—"the church" and "the ungodly."[43] Though clustered together in a single, indistinct mass of humanity, these two factions will necessarily process the revival message in different ways, and each group can be subdivided even further into an intricate taxonomy of co-cultures. (Because he always outlined his orations for extemporaneous delivery, Finney became a skillful composer of points and subpoints, with each claim filed and categorized appropriately. To read the *Lectures* is thus to see his thoughts cleanly sorted according to genus and species, and eventually to perceive in silhouette the cosmic order as he imagined it.) If

[40] Finney, *Lectures*, 12–13. The emphasis is always his, and often it's not clear why.
[41] Finney, *Lectures*, 13. Like his Niagara Falls analogy, Finney returned to his image of revival-as-grain frequently.
[42] Finney, *Lectures*, 17.
[43] Finney, *Lectures*, 38.

the minister is to be understood simply as the *sender* in this transactional model, the *receivers* are more difficult to isolate, especially since Finney understands one of his audiences to be the self-conscious facilitator of the other, allied with the preacher in the missionary work of salvation even as they accept his rebuke for their own wayward and backslidden lives. In this way, the minister works both against and with members of the church in an appeal both to themselves and the ungodly, even as many of the ungodly, by virtue of their attendance, must on some level identify with and hope for persuasion by the minister and the church. If any mischief-makers are there simply to contest or disrupt the proceedings, their motives and messages will be consumed by the discourse, likely affecting its character but not necessarily to its detriment.[44] Into this combustible mix comes a calculated flurry of confrontational *logoi* and innovative measures intent at once on breaking resistance, sowing repentance, and summoning renewal. In Finney's model there can be no other way. A revival is, in every case, the coalescence of these parties.

Of ministers and their methods, Finney has a great deal to say. His thoughts on the matter cover Lectures IX–XII, from "Means to Be Used with Sinners" to "How to Preach the Gospel."[45] As a preliminary, the revival preacher must be a humble and pious man, submissive to God, attentive to sin, and persistent in prayer.[46] In his revival practice, he must prove himself wise, with wisdom defined as "the selection of the most appropriate means for the accomplishment of an end."[47] He must be of sound theology but non-dogmatic, embracing ecumenism whenever possible so as to cast the widest net. He must be a compelling preacher, a pragmatic manager, and an effective promoter. He must have a feel for *kairos*, an ability to "select the proper *time* to try to make a serious impression on the mind."[48] He must be attuned to the psychology of his audiences and capable of tailoring his rhetoric, identifying "the state of mind of the individuals," so that "he can know what truth will be proper and useful to administer."[49] He must be singularly focused, in all he does, on the salvation of souls. And his success or failure will be determined by the numbers, with the greatest preachers posting the greatest returns—setting a precedent that subsequent revivalists would honor, often to exaggerated and absurd effect, for over a century.[50]

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[44] Throughout the text, Finney anticipates disruptions from certain segments of the ungodly as evidence of Satan's opposition, but he treats these as welcome challenges. Disruptions and failures from within the church always appear far more lamentable and destructive in his view.

[45] Lecture XII draws upon and expands on the argument Finney had made previously in "Sinners Bound," including his attribution of the conversion process to various agents and a restatement—in full—of the Niagara Falls illustration.

[46] Finney considered prayer to be the lifeblood of revival, devoting three full sessions (Lectures IV–VI) to dissecting how it should be practiced and to what ends. In his view, prayer is the means by which sins are confessed, forgiveness is sought, hearts are cultivated, and God is moved. For a careful examination of prayer as rhetoric, see William Fitzgerald, *Spiritual Modalities: Prayer as Rhetoric and Performance* (University Park, PA: Penn State Press, 2012).

[47] Finney, *Lectures*, 156. This definition insinuates that Finney's critics, by attacking his highly successful "means," may have shown themselves foolish.

[48] Finney, *Lectures*, 156.

[49] Finney, *Lectures*, 183.

[50] Though all subsequent revivalists would emphasize numbers, the business-minded Dwight L. Moody was perhaps most shameless in his estimates and embellishments. See McLoughlin, *Modern Revivalism*, 262–3.

And yet, in stressing these qualities, Finney admonishes churches to "keep clear of the idea, both in theory and practice, that *a minister is to promote revivals alone*."[51] In Lecture XIII, appropriately titled "How Churches Can Help Ministers," Finney turns his accusatory gaze to the members in the pews, those hybrid receiver-senders of the gospel message that he expects both to absorb and to reflect its censure. As revivalism's vital supporting cast, the church must never conceive of itself as merely passive or participatory. Rather, congregants must submit themselves to labor. "I had rather have no church in a place," Finney writes, "than attempt to promote a revival in a place where there is a church that will not work." A lazy posture is "worse than infidelity." The choice for each member is simple and dichotomous. "If a professor [of religion] will not lay himself out in the work, he opposes it."[52] Indeed, though the church should maintain a high standard for their minister and his achievement, they must also consecrate themselves to his active service, imagining their relationship to him as analogous to that of an army to its general.[53] The church must always be ready and willing to help the minister in the work of revival. They must not complain about "plain, pointed preaching," even and especially when "*its reproofs fasten upon [them]selves*."[54] They must not shrink from the truth told in boldness, or give the wicked any quarter in their resistance. They must reinforce revival preaching, both in the meeting and on the street, bearing witness through virtuous lives.[55] They must provide for their minister, pray for him, pay him fairly, and be honest with him always. They must never waste his time or distract him from his duty. They must make careful arrangements for each meeting, ensuring that "the house of God is kept cleanly," that "people can sit *comfortably*," that the temperature is "*just warm enough*, and not too warm," that the room is "*well ventilated*," and that "dogs" and "very young children" are left at home. (During his discussion of cleanliness, Finney rails at some length against men who spit tobacco juice on the floor.)[56] Later, when the meeting is over, church members must "aid the minister by *visiting from house to house*, and trying to save souls." They should "hold Bible classes," maintain regular "*Sabbath schools*," and "*watch over the members of the church*," paying particular attention to "*the effect of preaching*," ready to assist those struggling under the weight of conviction but also careful to "take [their own] portion," lest they "starve" and "become like spiritual skeletons." Members must support their minister in his evangelistic plans, attend prayer meetings punctually, and take an assertive posture toward church activities. They should "*study and inquire* what they *can do*, and then *do it*."[57] By theorizing the church at such length, Finney establishes the reciprocal relationship linking minister to congregation, as well as the vital role performed by congregants in the revival campaign. Though audiences can always be credited to some extent with shaping the messages that they consider, rarely do they factor so directly in both the delivery and receipt. Without the active presence of the church, Finney argues, the minister's persuasive task is over before it begins.

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[51] Finney, *Lectures*, 224.
[52] Finney, *Lectures*, 224.
[53] Finney, *Lectures*, 225. Later in his career, Finney would be criticized for allegedly dubbing himself a "brigadier general for Christ," a charge that he denied. Finney, *Memoirs*, 231.
[54] Finney, *Lectures*, 227.
[55] Finney, *Lectures*, 230.
[56] Finney, *Lectures*, 233–9.
[57] Finney, *Lectures*, 242–3.

But assuming that minister and church are both true to form and working together, a shared target audience emerges in "the ungodly," which is to say, the sinners. When theorizing the unchurched in Lecture X, "To Win Souls Requires Wisdom," Finney sorts sinners into three categories and proposes rhetorical tactics for "dealing with" each. These are "*careless*," "*awakened*," and "*convicted*" sinners, each set indicating a relation to the gospel and so measuring the distance separating an individual from repentance and salvation.[58] Careless sinners fall within the least pious category, indifferent toward religion and likely preoccupied with trivial, worldly matters. Because they have not yet taken any proactive steps toward belief or practice, they cannot be presumed to know or to feel anything in particular about the gospel message. This makes them at once the most challenging and important of audiences.[59] Awakened sinners, by contrast, are essentially careless sinners who have suddenly been made to care, perhaps by some "providential circumstance" that has shaken them from their indifference, such as "sickness, a thunderstorm, pestilence, death in the family, disappointment, or the like."[60] Their minds are found in a state of readiness, presenting the church with an opportune moment to make an appeal and, perhaps, to move them toward conviction. Convicted sinners, finally, are those who feel themselves "condemned by the law of God." They are familiar with the gospel message, and able to understand their situation within the appropriate theological framework. They feel the weight of their sin and hope for absolution. They are close to conversion, but not there yet, perhaps because of some secret sin or idolatry that they have struggled to renounce. They are in a vulnerable state, and so require careful handling. But there is reason to believe that, with the right application of the right means, convicted sinners can be persuaded to convert and join the church.

There is much more to say about each of these audiences, of course, and Finney says much more in fact. But for present purposes it may suffice to observe that Finney's theory of revival is intimately concerned not just with the relationship between speaker and audiences, but also with the relationship between audiences and each other, examining in detail the various roles and responsibilities assumed by each, and predicating success upon the committed, consensual, good faith effort of all, or at least of a majority strong enough to overcome the disruptive opposition certain to be stirred by Satan, the skeptics, the Unitarians, or whomever. Though Finney's *Lectures* bear resemblance to the sort of oratory routinely practiced in both the chapels and the Chautauqua assemblies of his day, their emphasis upon a carefully coordinated, group-oriented dynamic identifies revival rhetoric as eloquence of a different—but still familiar—kind.

How Revival Works Deliberatively

Revivalism is akin to deliberation because it solicits an assembly of citizens, from different subsets of the community and various levels of religiosity, to interrogate crucial questions of agency, morality, theology, and citizenship, with emphases on individual salvation, ethical conduct, corporate worship, and community membership. It is a public

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[58] Finney, *Lectures*, 156.

[59] Finney discusses tactics at length here, enumerating eight points on how to time the approach and another twelve points on how to frame and deliver the appeal. See Finney, *Lectures*, 156–62.

[60] Finney, *Lectures*, 162.

ritual, open to everyone but mandatory for none, appealing both to the intellect and to the emotions, and intent on using persuasion to unify all participants within a particular sort of Christian consensus. Though it privileges the minister's speech above that of other participants, the revival anticipates and even welcomes expressions of thought and feeling from everyone in attendance, including those who doubt or dissent. Because a successful revival must sound the depths of each recalcitrant soul, disclosing and discharging each embedded sin, neither the revivalist nor his supporting church can afford to evade the virulent iniquities that undermine the health of their community. On the contrary, the very point of revival is to dig out and expose these problems, together, in the purifying light of truth.[61]

The means to this formidable end rely directly upon the corporate nature of the enterprise, employing the thoughts and feelings of the majority to bring the holdouts around. In Lecture XIV, "Measures to Promote Revivals," Finney crafts a systematic vindication of his divisive "new measures," including the "anxious" and "protracted" meetings and the "anxious seat," each tailor-made to coax a diversity of sinners into uniform salvation.[62] Because these methods featured among the most controversial elements of Finney's program, he felt an obligation to defend them at some length, casting them as perfectly ordinary measures that had been criticized solely for being new. Anxious meetings were simply smaller versions of the standard gathering, targeted narrowly at awakened and convicted sinners and providing the minister and the church with greater opportunity to hold "personal conversation" that may guide them gently toward salvation.[63] Protracted meetings, too, were comparable to regular revival gatherings except that they were longer, held sometimes for days or weeks at a time "in order to make a more powerful impression of divine things upon the minds of the people."[64] Each type presumed the good faith participation of citizens in the hard work of self-examination and repentance, and protracted meetings had the potential to shut down the towns in which they arose for as long as their fervor could be maintained. Either meeting may employ the notorious "anxious seat," referring to "the appointment of some particular seat in the place of meeting, where the anxious may come and be addressed particularly, and be made subjects of prayer, and sometimes conversed with individually." Having earlier defended revival as a "purely philosophical" result of right means, Finney here defends the anxious seat as "undoubtedly philosophical, and

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[61] My argument here is clearly more dependent on a vision of "public deliberation" broadly conceived than on the narrower objectives associated with "deliberative democracy." On the former, see Michael X. Delli Carpini, Fay Lomax Cook, and Lawrence R. Jacobs, "Public Deliberation, Discursive Participation, and Citizen Engagement: A Review of the Empirical Literature," *Annual Review of Political Science* 7 (2004): 315–44; on the latter, Simone Chambers, "Deliberative Democratic Theory," *Annual Review of Political Science* 6 (2003): 307–26.

[62] If we accept the points made above about what revivals are and who they concern, we might discern an analogy to the present-day self-help seminar, with a Charles Finney serving as pious forerunner to a secular Tony Robbins, and the "new measures" a precursor to the walking on coals. Certainly there is a family tree connecting such exemplars of emotion and promotion, and something cooperative binding their essential qualities. I see a lot of promise in a genealogy of this tradition, and would enjoy reading your book on the matter. See Joe Berlinger, dir. *I Am Not Your Guru*. RadicalMedia, 2016. https://www.netflix.com/title/80102204

[63] Finney, *Lectures*, 262.

[64] Finney, *Lectures*, 262.

according to the laws of the mind."[65] Because even awakened or convicted sinners may ultimately stand firm against their feelings and choose to conceal themselves quietly within the anonymous crowd, Finney sought them out carefully and worked to place them physically before the audience, where conviction could do its work more efficiently because it was done more publicly. If the novel, energetic, emotional, and collective nature of these measures made critics nervous, it seemed to Finney simply an application of ministerial wisdom. The "measures" offered appropriate means to accomplish a desired end.[66]

The deliberative nature of the enterprise may be further supported by the risks that stood ready to undermine it. In Lecture XV, "Hindrances to Revivals," Finney documents an array of conditions under which revivals are sure to die, almost all of these focused squarely upon the faithful in the pews. A revival is sure to stop, Finney writes, "whenever the *church believe it is going to cease*." It will stop when they "*consent*" that it should, or when they "*become mechanical in their attempts to promote it*," or when they "get the idea that *the work will go on without their aid*." It is doomed when "the church prefer to attend to their own concerns rather than God's business," when "Christians get proud of their great revival," when "the church gets exhausted by their labor," or when "the church begins *to speculate about abstract doctrines*, which have nothing to do with practice." It will end when "*Christians begin to proselyte*," when they "*refuse to render to the Lord according to the benefits received*," when they "*grieve the Holy Spirit*," when they "*lose the spirit of brotherly love*," when they are not "*frequently re-converted*," when they "*will not practice self-denial*," when they are taken up in "*controversies over the new measures*," when they face the "*continued opposition of the Old School, combined with a bad spirit in the New School*," when they allow "*any diversion of the public mind*" from the work, when they entertain "*resistance to the Temperance Reformation*," when they "*take the wrong ground in regard to any question involving human rights*," especially slavery, when they find themselves "*neglecting the claims of missions*," when they reject "*the calls of God upon them for educating young men for the ministry*," when they permit the revival to be "*slandered*," when they experience "*ecclesiastical difficulties*," and, finally, when they are taken by a spirit of "*censoriousness*"— a concern that, frankly, feels a little rich when it comes from Charles Finney.[67] I would not recount this tedious list at such length except that it demonstrates again the extent to which Finney relegates the success or failure of a revival to the conduct of an *audience* rather than a speaker, charging them to take ownership of their own persuasion and that of others, and to perform their crucial labor in concert, aspiring to satisfy an almost impossible standard. In Lecture XVI, "The Necessity and Effect of Union," he produces a comparable list of points on which church members must "agree" in order to succeed at their shared task.[68] In Finney's model, the revival thus is a gift that the people give themselves, albeit with a minister's

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[65] Finney, *Lectures*, 267. Finney often uses the term "philosophical" when distinguishing an idea from the theological, to place something in a *natural*, as opposed to *supernatural*, context.

[66] Though it would be anachronistic to apply her work to the 1830s, Mari Boor Tonn's essay on the role of therapeutic language in certain 1990s-era deliberative settings may lend itself to a reading of Finney's amateur psychology. See "Taking Conversation, Dialogue, and Therapy Public," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 8 (2005): 405–30.

[67] Finney, *Lectures*, 278–93. Finney uses the term "proselyte" to refer to competition among local congregations to claim the new converts generated by the ecumenical revival.

[68] Finney, *Lectures*, 310–32.

aid. *They* must desire it, *they* must create it, *they* must sustain it, and *they* must accept their measure of credit and blame when it is born and when it dies.

Certainly, the claim that revival rhetoric may be understood as a mode of deliberation is not invulnerable to criticism. A revival meeting is not directly comparable to a school board or a Senate because it does not invite a host of diverse and representative voices to pursue a negotiable consensus or to solve problems in some ideal center between divergent views. Rather, the result of a successful revival is a single, specific, and foregone conclusion, like harmony to the various members of a choir. And yet, because the revival meeting is open and noncompulsory, relying on persuasion rather than coercion, and so likely to draw a diverse gathering of willing participants intent on a shared but elusive end, and because that end can be achieved only in concert, we must concede that revivalism is a group enterprise solely reliant on persuasion together, a basic fact that warrants its inclusion among deliberative rhetorical forms. The interaction between the minister, the church, and the unchurched appears in this light more akin to a collaborative conversation than to traditional, sermonic public address.

Conclusion

In this essay, I have focused very narrowly on Charles Grandison Finney in the hope of understanding the theory of persuasion that he employed in his famous revivals. To that end, I have considered him as both theorist and practitioner, drawing upon the innovations developed in his theology to shed light on those developed in his itinerant preaching. Throughout this process, I have been at times convinced, challenged, annoyed, and amused by the great lawyer-preacher, responsive to his reasoning, attentive to his psychology, and impressed with the pragmatic cast of his pulpit rhetoric. Despite his evangelical emphasis on the salvation of the individual soul, I have found in his work a model of revival-as-deliberation that works to multiply conversions at scale and to revitalize the religious and civic bodies to which the people provide the parts.

To make this case, I first examined Finney's thinking in his most notable sermon, "Sinners Bound to Save Their Own Hearts." This is a provocative address that points an accusatory finger directly in the face of New England Calvinism, and Finney delivered the sermon many times over in an effort to establish the biblical fidelity of human agency, arguing in pragmatic language that, far from heretical, self-reformation was a matter of simple common sense. A humble and sincere effort at self-cultivation, changing one's heart was requisite to right standing with God and necessary for Christian action in the world. Conceived as a collaborative process involving both human and divine agents and acts, the conversion and redemption of the individual provides a theoretical basis for the conversion and redemption of the mass, informing the interminable list of evangelistic "means" that Finney would enumerate and explain throughout his famous lectures.

For their part, the *Lectures on Revivals of Religion* examine the process of revival from nearly two dozen angles, demystifying a supposedly miraculous phenomenon even as they demonstrate its internal complexity. In my reading, the *Lectures* displace the minister even as they tout his importance, shifting the onus of revival from speaker to audience and insisting at length that group reformation can result only from committed and enthusiastic *group* discourse. The minister remains important because he sparks the fire, using biblical arguments and emotional appeals to "excite" the feelings of the assembly, but no minister can summon the pulsing fervor of revival unless the audience

itself desires to kindle and fan the flames. Revival rhetoric thus constitutes a discourse somewhat different from standard public address, demanding a level of audience participation and interaction more reminiscent of a group deliberation than a sermonic oration. That the proponents of revival believed in its ability to yield stronger and more cohesive communities, too, aligns the practice with that of more explicitly deliberative bodies.

In American history, perhaps no single evangelical figure has been more influential than Charles Grandison Finney. His theological innovations were as influential in his day as his methods have proven durable in our own. Readers who grew up in the evangelical community of the late twentieth century will feel right at home in the ideas and arguments that Finney promoted in the first half of the nineteenth. And certainly his linkage of Christian faith to social reform—especially as it concerned temperance and anti-slavery—has survived in the thinking of evangelical elites who promote Christian political action on a host of contemporary topics. As a member in good standing of America's "first generation" and a sharp-minded, largely self-trained apprentice of both law and gospel, Finney charged his listeners with making their own way in the new republic, changing their hearts and converting their neighbors and building a community of believers worthy of the divine mission bestowed on them by the hand of God himself.