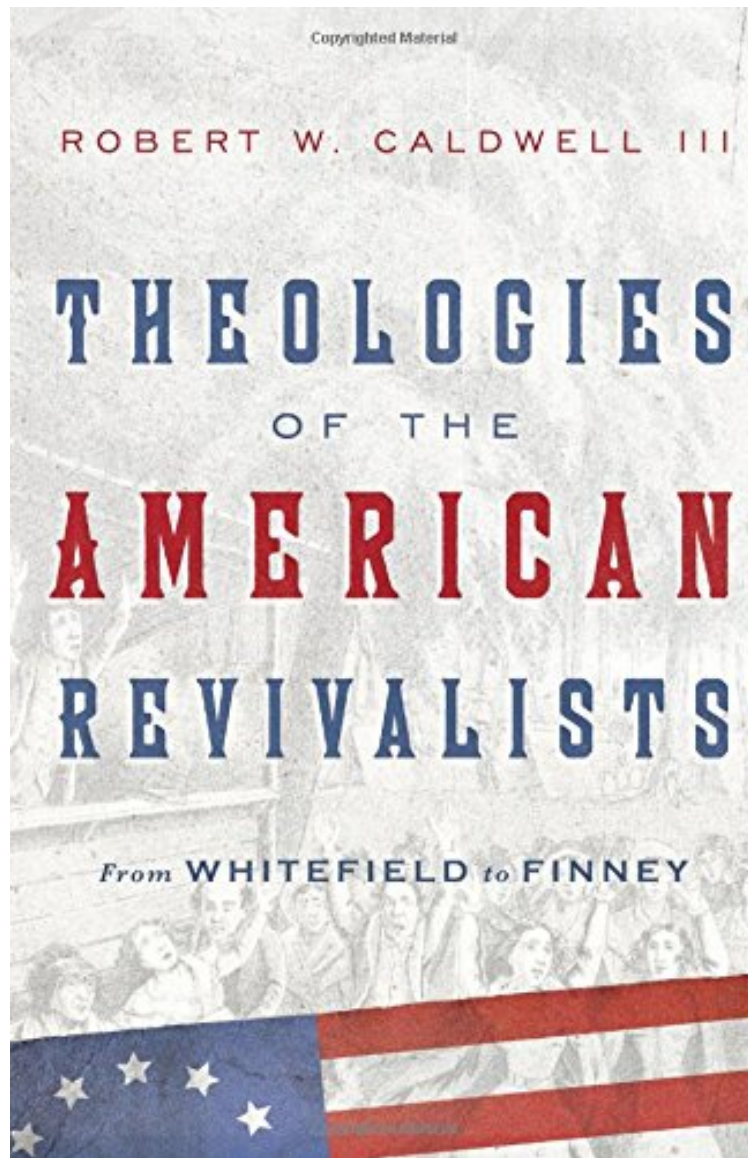


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Theologies of the American Revivalists: From Whitefield to Finney

Robert W. Caldwell III

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Robert W. Caldwell III : Theologies of the American Revivalists: From Whitefield to Finney before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Theologies of the American Revivalists: From Whitefield to Finney:

4 of 5 people found the following review helpful. Revival Theology American StyleBy James MatichukRevival has always played a significant role in American evangelicalism. The First and Second Great Awakenings (in the period roughly 1740-1840), transformed the religious landscape of our country and provided our communities with inspiring

conversion stories (and hope for similar acts of God). But what were the theologies that underpinned these revivals? What was it that the revivalists actually believed? Robert Caldwell III (Ph.D., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School) is associate professor of church history at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. In *Theologies of American Revivals*, he provides a comprehensive overview of the major theologians that shaped the First and Second Great Awakenings. Caldwell describes these revivalists in chronological order. His first three chapters discuss the first Great Awakening. In chapter 1, Caldwell describes the early revivalists (George Whitefield and others) and explores the theological features of the Moderate Calvinist theology (New Light) that inspired the first Awakening. There were three features of moderate evangelical revivalism: (i) Conviction of sin in the preparation of the heart to receive Christ (brought about by various means and a protracted conversion process) (ii) Conversion the Spirit's implanting illumination and regenerating the soul, and (iii) Consolation the experience of assurance of salvation through self-examination and sanctification. In chapter 2, Caldwell describes two 'Great Awakening alternatives' to this moderate evangelicalism. First, he describes the free grace revivalism of Andrew Croswell, which emphasized passivity, and criticized moderate evangelicals for confusing the message of grace by emphasizing 'spiritual works and religious experiences, and for their lengthy conversion process (46) Croswell posited instead that salvation was available immediately, 'in right and grant' to all who believe (48), and that assurance of God's love was what drew sinners to repentance (54). The other alternative was found in the theology of Jonathan Edwards, himself a moderate evangelical. While Edwards was similar to other New Lights, his theological innovation was 'a voluntarist accent to his theology' which impacted his understanding of original sin (all men are complicit in Adam's sin) (58-62) and free will (humans have a moral inability to choose Christ apart from the Spirit's work, but a natural, inherent ability to repent and believe) (63-68). He also promoted a 'disinterested spirituality' which redescribed conversion as coming to behold the objective, moral beauty of God (68-72). In chapter 3, Caldwell describes how the New Divinity School, (John Bellamy, Samuel Hopkins, John Edwards, Jr., etc), built on Edward's theological innovations and brought them to mature expression. Chapters four through six describe, generally, the theologies of the Second Great Awakening. Chapter four describes the Congregationalists (who promoted an Edwardsean style revival) and the 'New School Presbyterian Revivalism' of Nathaniel William Taylor, which was more optimistic than Edwards on the freedom of the will. Chapter five explores the Arminian revivalism of Methodists in the Second Great Awakening and chapter six explores the diversity of theology among early American Baptists. Chapter seven provides an analysis of the theology of Charles Finney. Caldwell shows that Finney was deeply influenced by the New Divinity School and had an Edwardsean superstructure under-girding his revival theology. Finney followed Edwards and the New Divinity school's emphasis on 'disinterested spirituality' and their atonement theology (174-75); nevertheless, his theological anthropology was indebted to Taylorism (sinner has moral ability to repent and believe), and he employed 'new measures' (e.g. prayers, protracted meetings, and 'the anxious bench') to effect revival. Chapter 8 describes two skeptical responses to revivalism. The first was the Old Light Calvinism of Princeton (Archibald Alexander and Charles Hodge), which critiqued, especially, the New School Revivalism of Taylor and Finney. The second critical response came from Restorationists like Alexander Campbell and Walter Scott, which offered a biblicist response to revivalism. Caldwell describes common threads running through both Awakenings and distinctives of important figures. I learned quite a bit from this book, especially from his articulation of Edwardsean theology and the theology of Charles Finney. Having not read deeply of either thinker (I've read more Edwards than Finney), I found that Caldwell helpfully articulated their theology. I was always taught to cast a critical eye to Finney for the ways he turned revival into a 'set of techniques' instead of a work of the Spirit. While it is true that Finney did employ 'new measures' and style of preaching to effect revival, Caldwell points out that he saw the Holy Spirit as the necessary agent: Finney is often characterized as a mechanizer of revival, one who has so thoroughly overthought the human side of the revival process that there seems to be no place for the Holy Spirit in a genuine revival of religion. This caricature is inaccurate, however. When we peer into his writings we find him repeatedly noting the necessity of the Holy Spirit's efficacy in the conversion process and the vast importance of remaining utterly dependent on him for grace (184). Caldwell offers a more balanced, evenhanded treatment of Finney, even if he remains critical of aspects of his theology. Because this book focuses solely on the 'theology of revivalists,' and 'the theology of revival,' it treats the practices of the Great Awakenings in less detail and doesn't describe every feature of the revivals. For example, The Great Awakenings both had impacts on African American communities (Albert Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, OUP, 1978, pp 128-31). Caldwell doesn't make any mention of race, or the abolitionist movement, though he does mention temperance (123). The emphasis throughout is on sin, redemption, the means and meaning of conversion. He focuses on the theological systems of major tenets of revival. Caldwell notes in his conclusion, " After the Second Great Awakening there were no major developments in the History of American revival similar to the changes that took place between 1740 and 1840" (227). This seems like a major assertion, especially when you consider the impact of Pentecostalism and the Charismatic movement in the 20th Century; however, Caldwell again is limiting his discussion of revival to issues surrounding the nature and meaning of conversion. Pentecostalism builds on the Holiness theology of Methodism, which is discussed in this text. Evangelicals in America are still impacted by the religious thought of these revivalists. Caldwell has produced a substantive volume that explores conversion, conviction of sin, the bondage and freedom of

the will, sanctification. This book will be of interest to anyone interested in theology or church history and will be a helpful aid in thinking through these issues. I give this four stars. Notice of material connection: I received a copy of this book from IVP Academic in exchange for my honest review. 2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Captures the Essence of the First and Second Great Awakenings By bmayer504 This is a phenomenal book. Caldwell has read extensively in primary sources, and unpacks the theological frameworks used by the various Christian movements in the first and second great awakenings. Caldwell surveys how conversion and salvation were understood within traditional Calvinism, Wesleyan-Methodism, New Divinity, various Baptist movements, and Restorationism. His chapter on Charles Finney is brilliant and captures how his theological understanding was derived from modifications of New Divinity theology and framed into what became a uniquely Oberlin theology. 4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Brilliantly clear. By Jason G. Duesing This is brilliantly clear, and insightfully crafted. A prime example of how historical theology should be done. Jason G. Duesing Provost and Associate Professor of Historical Theology Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

For centuries, revivals and the conversions they inspire have played a significant role in American evangelicalism. Often unnoticed or unconsidered, however, are the particular theologies underlying these revivals and conversions to faith. With that in mind, church historian Robert Caldwell traces the fascinating story of American revival theologies from the First Great Awakening through the Second Great Awakening, from roughly 1740 to 1840. As he uncovers this aspect of American religious history, Caldwell offers a reconsideration of the theologies of figures such as George Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards, John Wesley, Joseph Bellamy, Samuel Hopkins, and Charles Finney. His scope also includes movements, such as New Divinity theology, Taylorism, Baptist revival theology, Princeton theology, and the Restorationist movement. With this study, we gain fresh insight into what it meant to become a Christian during the age of America's great awakenings.

"Revival or even more, the longing for revival has been central throughout American Christian history. But what is meant by revival? Robert Caldwell's well-researched and exceedingly evenhanded book explains clearly what leaders of the American First and Second Great Awakenings taught concerning conversion, free will, the Holy Spirit, and how to interpret Scripture. He also explores with rare sensitivity what they assumed in their revival theologies. The result is a book rich in historical insight but also practical in guiding believers today in thinking about this vitally important matter." (Mark Noll, author of *The Rise of Evangelicalism*) "Theologies of the American Revivalists should be a valuable resource for scholars, evangelists, and laypeople. It provides clear accounts of the various understandings of evangelical conversion from the days when proponents of revival thought carefully about and debated such matters." (George M. Marsden, author of *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* and *C. S. Lewis's Mere Christianity*) "How can we explain the transformation of American revivalism between Edwards and Finney? Why did Americans move from eighteenth-century convictions about the bondage of the will to nineteenth-century confidence in the will's freedom? What drove the transformation of American theology from systematic constructs to common-sense approaches? Caldwell's study provides new answers to these important questions. It is an immensely helpful work of historical theology that is well researched and clearly written. Recommended for all students of American religion and theology." (Gerald McDermott, Beeson Divinity School, author of *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards*) "Conversion experiences and narratives have long been central to evangelical identity, but the doctrines undergirding them are seldom understood with much clarity by their subjects, let alone most others. In this evenhanded history of theologies of revival from the time of George Whitefield to that of Charles Grandison Finney, Robert Caldwell helps us out. He supplies what we need to understand our own experiences, those of converts in churches with different doctrinal perspectives, and the engine of the evangelical movement itself. Everyone interested in American church history, evangelicalism, or the history of revival and evangelistic methods will want to read this reliable, comprehensive, and fair-minded book." (Douglas A. Sweeney, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School) "Since it entered the English language in 1820, the term revivalist has come to be used generically. Like a one-size-fits-all shoe, the designation has been deemed equally applicable to every evangelistic preacher from Whitefield to Moody, from Edwards to Graham. But these awakeners were not just so many duplicates. The strength of Robert Caldwell's *Theologies of the American Revivalists* is that it helps us see that there were distinguishable ideas of Christian revival in circulation prior to the Great Awakening, that the Great Awakening immediately spawned competing theologies of revival, and that the early nineteenth century's Second Awakening spawned still more. This is now the go-to volume for those wanting to trace these developments and to understand their bearing on our time." (Kenneth Stewart, professor of theological studies, Covenant College, Lookout Mountain, GA, author of *Ten Myths About Calvinism*) "Robert W. Caldwell's *Theologies of the American Revivalists* offers an illuminating and authoritative review of how leading American revivalists, from Jonathan Edwards to Charles Finney, grappled with issues such as the nature of gospel preaching, conversion, and sanctification. I recommend it highly." (Thomas S. Kidd, distinguished professor of history, Baylor University) "In this one volume, Robert Caldwell has carefully traced the fascinating story of revival through an event-filled century of change. Dependent on primary sources and freshly locating figures from Fuller to Finney, this is important theology

presented by an even-handed guide." (Mark Dever, pastor of Capitol Hill Baptist Church, president of 9Marks.org)"Robert Caldwell offers a sophisticated and thought-provoking analysis of revivalist theology, rooted in the peculiarities of Jonathan Edwards's Reformed and evangelical theology, but developing and bearing fruit in ways that at times were flatly contradictory to Reformed doctrine. Linking Finney to post-Edwardsean theologians like Hopkins, Caldwell's monograph will stimulate scholarly discussion on a topic important both for the history of theology and the practice of the modern church." (Joel R. Beeke, president, Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, Michigan)About the AuthorRobert W. Caldwell III (PhD, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School) is associate professor of church history at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. He is the author of *Communion in the Spirit: The Holy Spirit as the Bond of Union in the Theology of Jonathan Edwards* and the co-author of *The Trinitarian Theology of Jonathan Edwards: Text, Context and Application*.