

# Charles Grandison Finney: The Social Implications of His Ministry

ROGER JOSEPH GREEN

## INTRODUCTION

Charles Grandison Finney (1792-1875) was by all accounts one of the most remarkable persons in nineteenth-century American religious history. Even the most cursory reading of his life and influence would cause one to agree with Perry Miller's assessment of the impact of Finney's *Lectures on Revivals of Religion* that "No religious leader in America since Edwards had commanded such attention; no one was to do it again until Dwight Moody."<sup>1</sup> But it is possible to go further and to see Finney's impact upon American social history of the nineteenth century as well. Sydney E. Ahlstrom noted this broadened influence of Finney: "Finney is an immensely important man in American history by any standard of measure. His revivals were a powerful force in the rising antislavery impulse and in the rise of urban evangelism. He was an influential revisionist in the Reformed theological tradition, an enormously successful practitioner, almost the inventor, of modern high-pressure revivalism which, as it spread, would have important consequences for the religious ethos of the nation as a whole."<sup>2</sup>

A complete picture of Finney must include an understanding of him as both preacher and as social reformer, as both minister of the Word of God, and Christian citizen involved in varying degrees in many of the problems and possibilities of the nation's religious and social life. To see him only as preacher on the one hand, or only as social reformer on the other, is to fail to understand Finney. Likewise, there was a tension in Finney's own thinking between his allegiance to preaching salvation from sin and getting involved in social concerns. One also fails to understand Finney if this tension is not taken into account.<sup>3</sup>

---

*Roger Joseph Green is professor and chair of the biblical and theological studies department at Gordon College in Wenham, Massachusetts.*

---

There are connections to be made between the ministry of Charles Grandison Finney and the social implications of that ministry, if by Finney's ministry we include his theology. It must also be noted that at times the social consequences of his ministry move beyond implications to concerted active engagement by Finney and those around him, brought about by obedient faithfulness to the gospel. I intend, therefore, to demonstrate in this paper the relationship between the ministry and theology of Charles Grandison Finney and his engagement in social ministry. I plan to demonstrate this, after a brief introduction to Finney and his times, by first reviewing Finney's thought on depravity on the one hand and perfectionism on the other hand. His doctrine of Christian perfection provided the theological basis for his vision of a new social order.

I will then show the connection between his theology and the social implications of that theology. There were many social reform movements in which Finney either directly or indirectly took part, ranging from the women's movement to the temperance movement to abolitionism. Because the latter was the predominant social crusade in Finney's time, and took the weight of Finney's attention, Finney's relationship to the abolitionist cause will be the principle focus of that section of this paper.

Finally, I will demonstrate that both Finney's theology and ministry, as well as his involvement in social change, were driven by an eschatological vision of a new age. Charles Finney was a postmillennialist, and that aspect of his theology was both a driving force for much of his ministry and desire for social reconstruction, and a drawing force, providing final legitimacy for the complete work of the gospel, as well as final fulfillment of such work.

I will conclude with some observations and criticisms. However, it is necessary, first, to lay the groundwork with some reflections about Charles Grandison Finney, his life and times, and it is with that introductory task that this paper begins.

#### CHARLES GRANDISON FINNEY (1792-1875)

America had experienced a surge of awakenings in the eighteenth century, and would continue to do so in the nineteenth. What is generally referred to as the Great Awakening of the 1740s was led by such outstanding preachers and personalities as Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield, and was sustained in later years by the tireless, extensive ministry of Francis Asbury. The religious fervor of that awakening declined, however, as deism and Enlightenment thinking gained ascendancy in America, and as people's interests turned to political matters toward the end of the eighteenth century.

However, a second surge in religious life in America would be seen at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The Second Great Awakening would not experience the leadership of personalities to match Edwards or Whitefield. It would be led in the East by Timothy Dwight, the grandson of Jonathan Edwards and president of Yale College, and in the West by Barton W. Stone, the Presbyterian pastor of Cane Ridge Church in Bourbon County, Kentucky. Settled convictions came to many people in the East as they heard the gospel of salvation preached and as they accepted Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord. The Awakening in the East reflected the culture—it

was basically calm, orderly and rational.

The Awakening in the West was another matter altogether, and as a social phenomenon was quite impressive. The West was socially untamed, and the Awakening would have to take on a different form if it were to meet the spiritual, social and emotional needs of the people. Keith J. Hardman, in his excellent biography of Finney entitled *Charles Grandison Finney: Revivalist and Reformer*, has aptly described the West this way:

But it was the West—that surging chaotic frontier that was moving sinuously onward—that disturbed the settled East most deeply. The Eastern seaboard might have its depressed periods religiously, but it still retained its churches, and they could be revitalized at any time. The West, however, was fundamentally different; it had never been won to Christian ideas, and it had no churches. There, lawlessness seemed to be the order of the day. Morals were low, the Christian faith was mocked and shunned, deism and atheism were rife, and the vast spaces and extremely low density of population stretched the resources of circuit riders and missionaries to the breaking point. The early settlers of Kentucky named some of their towns after prominent French infidels, as LaRue, Bourbon, Rousseau, Altamont, and other names indicate. It seemed beyond contradiction that several hundred thousand people on the frontier were “hair-hung and breeze shaken over the pit of hell.”<sup>4</sup>

Into this world came the “camp meeting,” and to such remote places as Red River or Gasper River or Cane Ridge, Kentucky, would go thousands of people to live in tents for many days and to hear the gospel preached. And so, for people living in sparsely settled areas of the West and with little social contact, life with thousands of other people was a refreshing experience. However, the manifestations of religious conviction at these revivals were often so extreme as to mitigate in the minds of many the genuine religious vitality experienced by those attending the camp meetings. Ahlstrom reminds his readers that Cane Ridge was “not only a landmark in the history of revivalism, but a cause of controversy and schism.”<sup>5</sup>

It is difficult to remember from a modern perspective that upstate New York was, in that time and world, part of the West. And although Charles Grandison Finney was born in Warren, Connecticut, when he was two years old his family migrated to Oneida County, New York. After being reared in this area, and after teaching in public schools in Warren and in New Jersey, Finney returned to Adams, New York, where successively he would train for the legal profession, give himself over to God and enter the ministry.

It would be this man who would become the chief agent in continuing the Second Great Awakening, beginning in upstate New York and, throughout his life, preaching in such distant and diverse places as Oberlin, Ohio, and London, England. Indeed, Finney was “eventually recognized as the head of the latter phase of the Second Great Awakening, and the real inheritor of the mantle of Jonathan Edwards and Timothy Dwight.”<sup>6</sup>

Upstate New York was referred to as the “burned-over district.” Hardman wrote that “An entire gamut of experiments promoting the perfection of humanity and the bringing of millennial bliss, unorthodox religious beliefs, new cults, and new political

parties caused the area even then to be called a 'burnt' or 'burned-over district.'" It is possible that Lyman Beecher "in his published letters may have been particularly responsible for the expression gaining currency."<sup>7</sup> Finney himself, later in his *Memoirs*, referred to this area as "a burnt district."<sup>9</sup> One author labelled this area rather ungraciously as a "psychic highway."<sup>10</sup>

Finney was ready for the task of converting the sinner, however, even in, and perhaps especially in, such a place as upstate New York. Finney enjoyed almost immediate popular success, and revival followed him wherever he went. By the time of the conclusion of the "Oneida County Revivals" in April of 1827, "a new star was blazing brightly in its orbit in the religious firmament of America."<sup>11</sup> It is the task of this paper now to understand this "new star" and to do so especially by establishing the relationship of Finney the revivalist and Finney the reformer. However, the basis for both his revivalism and his vision for a new social order can be found only by first examining his theology.

#### FINNEY'S THEOLOGY: THE BASIS FOR A NEW ORDER

As has been mentioned, Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield were two of the guiding lights of the First Great Awakening in America, and both were committed to Calvinism, a term which, although originally a term used derisively by German Lutherans of the sixteenth century, by the eighteenth century was one of honor.<sup>12</sup> It is not within the scope of this paper to discuss the several critical tenets of Calvinism, but it is sufficient to reflect on two issues which were greatly debated in Finney's day: sin and free will.

The Calvinist believed in original sin. People participate in the fall of Adam, which is a fall from original righteousness, and the result is that human reasoning is seriously contaminated and human will is in bondage to sin, always choosing evil, always deliberately rejecting any obedience to God. The image of God is mutilated in fallen humanity, and even people's apparently good actions are motivated by selfish intentions. People are both incapable and unwilling to save themselves, and so God saves his elect solely by his unfathomable grace in accordance with his inscrutable will. The awakening, the revival, by which God's intentions for people are made known, is solely the work of God through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Such revivals cannot be planned, but arise, as it were, spontaneously, by God's grace and his grace alone.

Vying for theological attention in the eighteenth century, however, was Arminianism, with varying emphases and beliefs about human depravity and freedom of the will. An important distinction should be made between "evangelical Arminianism," after the thinking of John Wesley, and "rationalistic Arminianism," held by someone like the influential Charles Chauncy of the First Church of Boston.<sup>13</sup> Wesley's emphasis was certainly upon God's grace in salvation, but Wesley did not believe that original sin so bound the will of people that they were unable to respond to God's universal prevenient grace in their lives. Wesley believed that the image of God was marred in humanity at the fall, but that free will was retained by which to accept or reject God's grace.

However, rationalistic Arminianism also was influential, giving rise to a growing

democratic spirit in America after 1740, and likewise being nurtured by that social context. This form of Arminianism

took an optimistic view of human nature, and its departure from the basic spirit of Calvinism was apparent. Its adherents in New England believed that humans are born with the capacity both for sin and for righteousness, and they can respond to one as well as to the other; that life is a discipline by which, with God's aid, the bondage to sin may be gradually broken.<sup>14</sup>

Finney was theologically all on the side of evangelical Arminianism, but culturally was influenced by rationalistic Arminianism. He did not believe in original sin as taught by the Calvinists (or by the Wesleyans), and he accentuated freedom of the will, both in his theology and in his ministry. The groundwork for his theology had been laid, ironically, by the followers of Jonathan Edwards, variously referred to as Edwardseans, Edwardeans or New Divinity men. Two examples will suffice here.

Joseph Bellamy (1719-1790), although a graduate of Yale and a former student of Jonathan Edwards, departed from Edwards in essentially denying responsibility for Adam's sin and affirming not a sinful disposition but sinful acts alone. People become sinners in their sinning and not because they are born in sin. Sin is, however, inevitable, and in that sense alone is original. Here Bellamy consciously steered clear of Pelagianism. He also, quite naturally, affirmed the freedom of the will to choose good or evil.

Samuel Hopkins (1721-1803), on the other hand, actually denied original sin outright, and concentrated in his theology only on actual sins. For Hopkins, free will reigns in humanity in choices between good and evil, and people are held responsible for such choices. "Conversion' was then made to rest wholly upon the active exercise of the human will, which leads to growth in positive holiness."<sup>15</sup> Such "Hopkinsianism" well set the stage not only for some of Finney's theology, but for his practical understanding of how conversions took place in revivals, although there were some aspects of Hopkinsianism with which Finney disagreed. "In preaching I sometimes...took occasion to denounce Hopkinsianism,"<sup>16</sup> Finney wrote in his *Memoirs*.

Finney reacted both to Calvinistic theology and to the Calvinistic disposition to see revivals as brought about solely by God's grace. Finney followed in the line of the dominant New Haven Theology, and affirmed that the essence of sin lies not in people's disposition to sin because they are one with Adam in his sin and hence have original sin. Sin, for Finney, was voluntary choice, but was universal in that each human being chooses to sin. The voluntary nature of sin did not make it any less destructive for Finney, did not make people any less enemies of the cross, and did not vitiate the need for forgiveness.

Freedom of the will was accentuated in both Finney's theology and his ministry, and thus he reflected that New Haven Theology mentioned above. Also, however, rationalistic Arminianism was dominant in the broader culture, a strict Calvinistic view of life having become a minority position in spite of the efforts of Charles Hodge at Princeton. Jacksonian democracy emphasized free choice, as did Finney's earlier legal training which taught him that people freely choose to disobey the laws of the land, incur guilt, and therefore deserve punishment. Finney's own experience of conversion underscored

his later-developed theology. He expressed his own conversion as freely giving his heart to God. In that now-famous passage in Finney's *Memoirs* where he wrote about his conversion experience in the woods in Adams, New York, Finney expressed himself this way: "As I turned to go up into the woods, I recollect to have said, 'I will give my heart to God, or I will never come down from there.' I recollect repeating this as I went up—'I will give my heart to God before I ever come down again.'" <sup>17</sup>

Two consequences came from Finney's teaching of liberty of choice. First, he was accused of Pelagianism. Perhaps the most forthright accusation was written by Albert Baldwin Dod (1805-1850), a Princeton graduate and an ardent Calvinist. His accusation took the form of a ninety-seven-page article entitled "Review of *Lectures on Revivals of Religion and Sermons on Various Subjects*," published in volume seven of *The Biblical Repertory and Theological Review* in July and October of 1835, of which Charles Hodge was the editor. Second, Finney's theology logically led him to deny the eternal security of the believer. Just as human beings are free to choose God in conversion, so Christians are free to reject God after conversion. For this Finney was condemned even by many of his friends, let alone his Princeton enemies. Finney had gone too far. "One may say that to deny the security of the believer is the inevitable tendency of the doctrine of natural ability run rampant, but it is also to say that here Finney had abandoned a crucial article of faith for most New Englanders and New Yorkers." <sup>18</sup>

Finney's emphasis upon freedom of the will would affect not only his view of conversion, but his understanding of revivals, which were designed to bring about such conversions and were likewise the result of these conversions. The revival, in Finney's view, was not only the work of God's grace, but also the work of people, involving careful preparation and deliberate measures. Here, as is popularly known, Finney changed the course of revivals for the nineteenth and twentieth centuries by declaring forthrightly in his *Lectures on Revivals of Religion* that a revival "is not a miracle, nor dependent on a miracle, in any sense. It is a purely philosophical result of the right use of the constituted means—as much so as any other effect produced by the application of means." <sup>19</sup>

Conversion could come at such revivals simply as it had come to Finney—at a brief encounter with God at a point of time at one place. "All of this dramatically changed the old Puritan idea of a prolonged period of conviction to one in which conversion could come within a relatively brief period." <sup>20</sup> On the one hand, a revival set the stage for the working of the Holy Spirit in individuals to bring about conviction, and the sinner then and there freely repented and believed the gospel of Christ. But on the other hand, a revival was the result of both divine and human effort.

There are two areas where Finney's theology of sin and his theology of free will would most influence his developed thinking. The first was in his theology of perfectionism and the second was in his theology of social reformation. Because the two are so integrally related, this paper will deal here with Finney's view of perfectionism, and will devote the next entire section to the social implications of Finney's theology and ministry.

For Finney, perfectionism was the ultimate realization of freedom of the will. By this perfectionism the cycle of sinning and repenting was finally broken in the life of the Christian. Finney's brand of perfectionism was also the basis for a new social

order in two ways: it was a sign in the individual believer of the ultimate perfection of a new society; and it was necessary towards establishing such a society because only a holy people could do a holy work.

The issue of perfection had been raised in the eighteenth century by John and Charles Wesley and their teaching of perfect love. While not denying the centrality of the doctrine of justification by faith in the Scriptures, they also asserted that the Bible promises that it is possible for all believers to be sanctified by faith whereby the intention of the believer is motivated by perfect love—loving the things which God loves and hating the things which God hates. Wesley wrote:

This it is to be a perfect man, to be “sanctified throughout”; even “to have a heart so all-flaming with the love of God” (to use Archbishop Ussher’s words), “as continually to offer up every thought, word, and work, as spiritual sacrifice, acceptable to God through Christ.” In every thought of our hearts, in every word of our tongues, in every work of our hands, to “show forth His praise, who hath called us out of darkness into His marvellous light.” O that both we, and all who seek the Lord Jesus in sincerity, may thus “be made perfect in one!”<sup>21</sup>

This was not, for the Wesleys, a form of either human perfection or sinless perfection. The believer, after receiving perfect love, is still beset by fears, doubts, temptations, infirmities, ignorance and even the possibility of sinning. The Wesleys’ theology was rooted in eighteenth-century Anglican notions of sin as willful transgressions of the known law of God, of an understanding of the freedom of the will of all rational human beings to choose either good or evil, and of a belief that the tradition of the Church as well as our own reason and experience confirms and brings to life the teachings of the Bible.<sup>22</sup>

This Wesleyan theology came to America via lay missionaries, the most important of whom was Francis Asbury (1745-1816) who was ordained at the famous Christmas Conference in Baltimore, Maryland, on December 24, 1784. It was propagated through the teaching and preaching of Methodist circuit riders, especially throughout the frontier, but also in the cities in the East. By 1844, at the heart of a very active and public ministry by Charles Grandison Finney, “the Methodists had become the most numerous religious body in America, with 1,068,525 members, 3,988 itinerant preachers, 7,730 local preachers, and an incalculable number of regular hearers. Even in New England, where its progress was slowest, it had become the second largest denomination.”<sup>23</sup>

While the preaching of entire sanctification by the Methodists brought genuine piety and renewal to believers, and thereby to the body of Christ, there were other disingenuous strands of perfectionism, often connected with various communitarian movements. John Humphrey Noyes (1811-1886) taught that a reconstructed society provided the ideal climate for perfectionism on the one hand, and a worthy goal on the other hand. He founded the Oneida Community in New York in 1848. There he taught a strange mixture of sinless perfection (having claimed his own sinlessness in 1834), the impossibility of believers falling again into sin, and a form of primitive Christian communism which included a sharing of marriage partners. And so perfectionism was, as it were, “in the air” in America during the time of Finney’s active life and ministry—ranging from

the teachings of John Wesley to that of John Noyes, with everything in between.

Charles Grandison Finney believed in perfectionism, taking his clue largely, but not entirely, from the teachings of John Wesley.<sup>24</sup> Finney's was a gradually developed view of sanctification, but it definitely had ramifications for his theology of social and moral reform. Finney's understanding of perfection was grounded in his beliefs on sin and free will. Sin consists of actions, of transgressions; and free will demands that we can choose for or against God. Likewise, for Finney, it is possible to choose not to sin, although he did not believe in a sinless perfection whereby the believer, after sanctification, cannot sin. Finney held that one's free will is still active after holiness, and that even in that state one may reject the continuing influence of the Holy Spirit, thereby falling from grace and needing to come once again to repentance and obedience.

In response to decidedly unbiblical views of perfectionism expounded by people like Noyes, in response to a popular misunderstanding of the word "perfectionism" which was used widely at Oberlin College and by Oberlinites, and in response to a perception of an anemic Christianity of the kind which Wesley encountered in England a century earlier, Finney had to give some definition—some shape and form—to perfectionism. He preferred the term sanctification, and defined it this way in his work entitled *Lectures on Systematic Theology*: "Entire and continued obedience to the law of God....It is self-evident, that entire obedience to God's law is possible on the grounds of natural ability."<sup>25</sup>

Finney held that this experience was normative for every Christian. He likewise believed that there are only two basic moral choices to be made in this life, and that such choice has consequences for all succeeding choices in life. Either one chooses entire sanctification and thereby does not continue in sin; or one chooses sin and falls under the judgment of God. Nevertheless, the decision for or against entire sanctification became the critical one for Finney. In this way his theology of sanctification fell back again to his presuppositions of the nature of sin and the nature of the freedom of the will. In that regard he was in company with Wesley. However, a case could be made that he parted with Wesley by lodging sanctification within human natural ability and a kind of legalistic obedience to the law rather than in the grace of God redeeming human depraved natures, and also by defining his theology of sanctification within a legal context rather than within a framework of love. Such observations would not escape the notice of even Finney's Calvinistic opponents such as Benjamin Warfield.<sup>26</sup>

Finney's theology of sanctification, along with that of Asa Mahan, the first president of Oberlin, dominated Oberlin theology and became known as Oberlin perfectionism.<sup>27</sup> Such a position found critics not only among the old Princeton Calvinists, but among various moderate Calvinists found in Presbyterianism and Congregationalism. Nevertheless Finney persevered, finally experiencing the second blessing himself and bearing witness to this as "my new and enlarged experience."<sup>28</sup> He wrote, "What I had been praying for for myself, I had received in a way that I least expected. Holiness to the Lord seemed to be inscribed on all the exercises of my mind."<sup>29</sup> And so Wesley's contention that experience, as well as tradition and reason, should confirm the teachings of Scripture and bring to life and vitality those teachings

became true in Finney's own life with respect to the doctrine of entire sanctification. What he believed intellectually and what he had been preaching consistently since 1837 he now experienced personally.

Asa Mahan experienced a second blessing in his life in 1836 and bore witness of this to Finney. Mahan claimed to know that Finney finally enjoyed a similar experience:

"When my associate, then Professor Finney," he says, "became aware of the great truth that by being 'baptized with the Holy Spirit' we can 'be filled with all the fullness of God,' he of course sought that baptism with all his heart and with all his soul, and very soon attained what he sought." According to Mahan, it was at this time that Finney received 'the second blessing,' and the effects on the two of them were dramatic, giving a greater urgency and power to their preaching.<sup>30</sup>

The question now needs to be asked: "Perfectionism for what?" Finney's understanding of perfectionism was not of the Roman Catholic monastic variety, which saw perfectionism as the holy life in a closed society apart from a sinful world. Likewise, Finney's perfectionism steered clear of Noyes's communitarian notion which held that a reconstructed society was needed to create a proper climate for freedom from sin, which climate might in turn have some kind of influence in establishing a perfect world.

Finney's belief was that sanctification, while experienced by the individual, had social ramifications. Only a holy people, whose moral character manifested itself in holy actions, could do a holy work. And that work demanded a reconstructed millennial society. In order to achieve such an end, however, there was work to be done in the social fabric of American life, and Finney, in varying degrees, was active in that work. This leads to the central focus of this paper—the social implications of Finney's theology and ministry.

#### THE SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF FINNEY'S THEOLOGY AND MINISTRY

Finney began his active ministry strictly as an evangelist and preacher, with the single mission in mind of converting the sinner and raising up the saint. He was in the company of other rising stars in nineteenth-century evangelicalism, and especially of Asahel Nettleton. This preacher was well-known as an evangelist by the time Finney came on the scene, and his Calvinistic theology caused him eventually to be an outspoken opponent of Finney. Some personal jealousy of Finney may have played a part in Nettleton's contention with Finney, and there is no doubt that Finney's popularity eventually far outshone that of Nettleton in the American evangelical experience.

The other important evangelist, a nemesis of Finney and a person whose relationship with Finney was up and down, was Lyman Beecher. It is impossible within the scope of this paper to do justice to Lyman Beecher, but he does set the stage for the journey of piety and social action in nineteenth-century America and therefore, in large measure, for both the general atmosphere in which Finney preached as well as the emphasis of Finney's ministry.

Beecher was one of America's most prominent pastors, first at the First Church in Litchfield, Connecticut, and then at the Hanover Street Congregational Church in Boston, and was the heir apparent for leadership in the Second Great Awakening after

the death of his mentor, President Timothy Dwight of Yale. He became the first president of Lane Theological Seminary in Cincinnati, Ohio, and throughout his ministry was a tireless organizer, popular public speaker and indomitable leader.

Beecher saw no discrepancy between preaching the gospel to the individual and leading causes for the improvement of the social order. Indeed, for Beecher, one led to the other. "A founder of the American Education Society and the American Bible and Tract Societies, he endlessly promoted home and foreign missions, almost single-handedly began the temperance movement in New England, and was a major figure in the crusades against Sabbath-breaking, deism, dueling, theater-going, profanity, and other causes of the day."<sup>31</sup> Sydney Ahlstrom noted this about Beecher: "Pursuing his career as a revivalist during these years at Litchfield, Beecher brought to fullness a conception that most distinguishes the evangelical resurgence of the next half-century: the ultimate association of evangelism in its broadest sense with moral reform and social benevolence."<sup>32</sup>

When Finney commenced this revivalistic preaching he began to see that there was a connection between conversion and moral and social regeneration. Not only did the sinner turn to God, but expressed that conversion in his or her conduct, which often meant a reformation of one's actions and habits. With the example of the ministry of Lyman Beecher before him, Finney expected such reformation to be the natural consequence of conversion. Early in his preaching ministry such results were often seen in individualistic ways, but would evolve into corporate and social reforms as Finney's ministry broadened and as his theology developed to embrace a concept of the Kingdom of God as the creation of a new order and not merely as the conversion of one person at a time.

Finney conducted a successful evangelistic campaign in Rome, New York, early in 1826, and the moral reformation of the converts was apparent to all. "The sabbath was now strictly observed. Drunkenness and profanity seemed to be things of the past. Quarreling and fighting stopped, and the church was blessed with peace and harmony, opposers apparently being nonexistent. The new converts were eager and earnest, and a delight to all."<sup>33</sup> Here we see personal responses to the gospel, but there is hardly yet an institutional reformation going on, even with the issue of observing the sabbath. In 1826 Rome, New York, had a population of about four thousand, many of whom were either Christians or recent converts to Christianity.

However, social reformation would begin as Finney's ministry expanded. One area of social reform which would have institutional consequences was that of women publicly praying and speaking. Indeed, from 1826 on, one of the "new measures" which Finney did not invent but would use effectively, much to the consternation of opponents such as Asahel Nettleton and Lyman Beecher, would be that of women praying in public with men present. For this he found useful the example of the Methodists, as well as the encouragement of Theodore Weld, the best known convert of Finney's and an inveterate crusader for a variety of causes, including the practice of women praying in public. Such was no small matter, for women would eventually enter into public life in other areas affecting society, such as the abolitionist movement. The New York Female Moral Reform Society was organized in 1834 in Finney's first church in New York City, the Chatham Street Chapel. And when Oberlin College was founded in 1835 it became "the first coeducational college in the

world and one of the few places encouraging women to get a college education."<sup>34</sup>

Finney found support for this from his first wife, Lydia, who became an example for such activity as she conducted visitation campaigns and female prayer meetings. In these activities she received the full encouragement of Finney, and people perceived the ministry of the Finneys as a shared ministry. It has been noted that "by the 1820s changes began to affect the minister's wife, and it was Charles and Lydia Finney who expanded the possibilities for her role. These allowed her public leadership and personal growth while encouraging the perception that she was not merely his support but a real adjunct to his ministry, operating even in areas of the church's work where he rarely intruded."<sup>35</sup>

The Finneys gave rise to a feeling of ministerial and theological equality of women with men, a viewpoint which would be even more clearly articulated later by Phoebe Palmer, the Methodist, and Catherine Booth, co-founder of The Salvation Army. Charles Finney lost his partner in ministry late in 1847 with the death of Lydia. However, his second wife, Elizabeth Ford Atkinson Finney, also took an active part in ministry, speaking to a mixed congregation on behalf of poor and unchurched women in London during Finney's first visit to England in 1850. Her speaking was very well received by men as well as women. Her ministry expanded, and she had an even larger hearing during Finney's second visit to England in 1859. "Elizabeth and Charles Finney were truly engaged in a team ministry which was extremely effective."<sup>36</sup> There was a conservative side of Finney on this issue, however. At his New York churches, the Chatham Street Chapel and the Broadway Tabernacle, women were admitted as members but they could not hold office or vote. It would take a Catherine Booth later in the century to see the full social implications of women in ministry as the Christian Mission and The Salvation Army opened up all ministerial offices and appointments to women as well as men. In any case, the social consequences of Finney's ministry and theology were becoming evident.

Early in his ministry, Finney saw that there was a connection between Christianity and social reconstruction in other areas as well, and perhaps the clearest example of this direct connection was seen in Finney's great revival in Rochester, New York, in 1830, where Finney gave leadership to a growing temperance movement in that city. Finney called on Theodore Weld to help lead the crusade against the liquor traffic, and even suspended his evangelistic meetings for a brief time to devote his speaking and energies to the cause of temperance. Converts, as a sign of their new faith, were asked to demonstrate that faith by moral uprightness, including a pledge of total abstinence. Finney asked for an economic boycott of stores selling liquor, and grocery owners voluntarily gave up selling alcohol.

Finney and Weld were elated at the success of their first determined attempt at reform. Praises crowded upon them from near and far. Because both of them possessed innately the reforming instinct, one success would lead to greater determination, and the wedding of individual conversion to societal renewal and reform was thus established as an ongoing principle of the new measures.<sup>37</sup>

But there were two events in Finney's life which would galvanize his interest not

only in the growing temperance movement, but in other reform movements as well. First, he would become intimately associated with the "Benevolent Empire," a loosely amalgamated group of societies which were formed specifically for the alleviation of social ills and which engaged in such activities as temperance and abolitionist movements. An "Association of Gentlemen" was formed of wealthy merchants and bankers to support the activities of the "Benevolent Empire."<sup>38</sup> Two leaders in these groups were the extremely successful and wealthy Connecticut silk merchants, Arthur Tappan (1786-1865) and Lewis Tappan (1788-1873). Indeed, it was largely through the invitation as well as the financial backing of the Tappans that Charles Finney went to New York City where he ministered first in the Chatham Street Chapel, a renovated theater holding twenty-four hundred people, and then at the Broadway Tabernacle, built especially for Finney. The Tappans continued their support in their provision of funds to found and build Oberlin College. The social reform impulses of the Tappans and their friends found an able spokesman in the person of Charles Grandison Finney.

Secondly, Finney's eyes were opened to the many social diseases of nineteenth-century industrialization and urbanization when he became the pastor of the Chatham Street Chapel. The chapel was established on the free church movement pattern which eliminated pew taxes and the sale of pews, and which effectively changed the face of church membership, now including the poor as well as the wealthy, and blacks as well as whites. Finney saw firsthand the devastation not only of an unbridled liquor traffic, but of the plight of women and children working in factories over long hours in unsafe conditions—lacking food, clothing and shelter. He witnessed the effects of unemployment, the consequences of prostitution and the treatment of blacks in pre-Civil War America.

He had the support of wealthy reform-minded Christians, and now, at the Chatham Street Chapel, a platform from which to speak. The stage was set, and Finney's converts, under the influence of his powerful and persuasive preaching, were ready for action. "When this impetus toward social reform began to take hold in the new and impressionable converts of Finney's revivals, under his careful tutelage, it began a thing of immense power. Gilbert Barnes, in *The Antislavery Impulse*, found that revivalism, and especially Finney's own preaching, provided the roots for the abolition movement."<sup>39</sup> A word of caution, however, is in order: "Evangelism and the conversion of the individual remained the first priority with Finney, and without that nothing further could be done."<sup>40</sup>

The great social burden of nineteenth-century America was the issue of slavery. This divided not only a nation, but denominations as well, and it became the dominant problem for Charles Grandison Finney and for the institutions with which he was identified—his churches in New York, the Benevolent Empire and Oberlin College. All other concerns were overshadowed by the significance of this one, and abolitionism became the great test of the social implications of Finney's ministry and theology.

Many Christians from the perspective of the modern world might be surprised to find what Finney's attitude toward blacks was, and it is important to understand this before considering Finney's abolitionist stand. Finney clearly believed in the separation of blacks from whites. He was all for the liberation of the blacks. About that there was no question. However, he respected the contention of many white people that the races should not in

any way intermingle. His friends, such as the Tappan brothers and Theodore Weld, strongly disagreed with Finney on this matter. They wanted not only the freedom of the blacks, but the full integration of the blacks into the predominately white society.

The Tappan brothers, the chief financial supporters of Finney's churches in New York, insisted that blacks be free to attend those churches. To this Finney wholeheartedly agreed, "but throughout his ministry at the chapel and the Broadway Tabernacle, blacks were segregated at a place reserved for them to the side of the sanctuary,"<sup>41</sup> and in the balcony. Finney admitted blacks into church membership, but, like the women who were admitted, they could not hold office or vote. Even the powerful Tappans could not convince Finney to open all seating to blacks, or place a black man on the board of trustees of the Chatham Street Chapel. Hardman has noted that "Finney had strong support in his view among a large majority in his congregation, who felt that social mixing of the races had no particular purpose."<sup>42</sup>

However, Finney's condemnation of slavery in principle was strong, and as Finney grew older he attacked slavery not just because of personal preference, but from a firm ideological base—the moral law of God, to which nations as well as individuals are subject, forbid the enslaving of human beings. He practiced what he preached, and he would not allow slaveholders to take communion at his New York churches. Of this Finney was sure: slaveholding was sin. "He refused to give communion to slaveholders, and he proclaimed slavery to be a sin and immediate abolition of all forms of slavery to be the duty of the slaveholders, the church, and the government."<sup>43</sup> When the New York City Anti-Slavery Society was formed in October, 1833, the organizational meeting was held at the Chatham Street Chapel. Finney's "views were definite and well known, so that no one could accuse him of evasion or cowardice."<sup>44</sup> He later reflected in his *Memoirs*, "When I first went to New York I had made up my mind on the subject of the slavery question, and was exceedingly anxious to arouse public attention to the subject. I did not, however, turn aside to make it a hobby, or divert the attention of the people from the work of converting souls. Nevertheless in my prayers and preaching I so often alluded to slavery and denounced it, that a considerable excitement came to exist among the people."<sup>45</sup>

However, it is beyond question that Finney many times felt a clash between his revivalistic interests and his social ones. Perhaps he felt a conflict of interests, and this caused him in the long run to be moderate not only in the antislavery issue, but in other social issues as well, and he generally advised such moderation to his friends. "Slavery, like all other social problems, was but a symptom of the inner malignity of sin, and the priority was to attack the sinful heart with the cure of conversion; once that was done, the symptoms would begin to take care of themselves."<sup>46</sup>

Here he parted company with some of the people closest to him. He especially felt that the Tappan brothers and his disciple, Theodore Weld, were giving too much attention to social causes, and thereby diminishing the evangelistic enterprise of the church. The Tappans, Weld and others tended to see evangelism and social ministry as a balanced ministry, each having its equal place, and indeed believed that some social ills were so threatening as to demand immediate attention. Finney, on the other hand, was the voice of moderation. He saw the conversion of the sinner as the priority, from which

would naturally flow social concerns.<sup>47</sup> But this was a singular ministry in Finney's mind, and he believed that nationwide revivals were the ultimate answer to social problems. "Evangelism was the mainspring from which all else must be energized!"<sup>48</sup>

However, Finney was also sure that, while revival automatically brings about reform, an improper view and attitude toward reform can hinder revivalism simply because reform, like revival, is part of God's agenda for the world. Donald Dayton has written that "This conjunction of reform and revival was also reversible. Finney not only argued that revivals should produce reforms, but also that resistance to reform was one of the great 'hindrances to revival.'"<sup>49</sup> Indeed, Finney wrote in his *Lectures on Revivals of Religion* that "Revivals are hindered when ministers and churches take wrong ground in regard to any question involving human rights."<sup>50</sup>

Oberlin College was founded as an abolitionist institution. Finney had no problem with that, but insisted, as one of the first professors and the shining light at Oberlin, that the college take a moderate, and what he considered to be, biblical abolitionist position. Furthermore, Finney argued that Oberlin was founded primarily to promote evangelism throughout the land, and his first priority was to train people for the ministry of preaching the gospel. He feared that anything which detracted from that was problematic. It is possible that Finney's carefully studied moderate position proved to be the salvation of the institution itself, and that "the school was prevented from veering into several extremes by Finney's moderate position on slavery."<sup>51</sup>

The point is, nevertheless, that this moderate position was difficult to maintain. Finney often expressed his condemnation of slavery, and lashed out against the slaverholders' guilt for the perpetuation of such an evil. But the cure was ultimately to be found in preaching and in converting the sinner. The convert, with the regenerated and cleansed heart, would repent from his or her evil ways, even if that meant freeing slaves, and would enter into social reform as a sign of salvation and inner transformation. Keith Hardman has best summarized Finney's position (and pointed out Finney's dilemma) in this way:

For Finney the most pressing insight (and also the most elusive) was to comprehend that all evils that afflict human society—wrongs done to women, slavery, drunkenness, war, and all the rest—were but natural consequences of sin, and that if faithful pastors attacked this central evil by the cure of conversion, in time all subordinate evils would begin to diminish. To him, mounting campaigns against various problems was a noble thing, but if it was done at the expense of the central Christian mission, evangelism, then it was like spanking the giant dragon but not slaying it. And he simply could not understand why of all the intelligent Christians he knew, including Weld and the Tappans, so few could grasp this insight.<sup>52</sup>

Oberlin's founding brought into focus several reform movements, including anti-slavery. "The Oberlin College and community was from the day of its founding in 1835 the seedbed of American Christian radicalism, not only on the question of slavery, but of radical brotherhood, women's rights, peace, prohibition, and a whole range of concerns for the creation of a righteous social order, in the nation and in the

world."<sup>53</sup> Oberlin's first president, Asa Mahan, had been on the board of trustees at Lane Theological Seminary, the only board member to defend the students' abolitionist cause and their forming of an antislavery society.<sup>54</sup>

Oberlin became a place where all reform issues could be discussed openly and without fear of recrimination. Blacks were admitted to the student body, although the Tappans undoubtedly wished that the percentage of black students was higher than the actual number. In any case, Oberlin College was begun and maintained as a place of distinction for its many reform movements, of which antislavery was one.<sup>55</sup>

However, the college gained an international reputation primarily for its abolitionist position. In fact, some of the early financial supporters of Oberlin were English Quakers who recognized the leadership of Oberlin College in the abolitionist cause. The Oberlin Anti-Slavery Society was founded in 1835, of which Finney was a charter member, followed by the Young Ladies' Anti-Slavery Society, the Female Anti-Slavery Society and the Young Mens' Anti-Slavery Society. Likewise, the presence of the likes of Theodore Weld with "his gripping series of lectures on abolition"<sup>56</sup> gave continual visibility to abolitionism at Oberlin.

However, when all is said about the beginning of Oberlin College and the first few decades of its existence, the great attraction to Oberlin was Charles Grandison Finney. His growing reputation in America caused people to associate him with Oberlin College, and as one of the first professors and as successor to Asa Mahan as president, Finney was a critical influence on the life and thought of that institution in its formative years. His theology, especially his developing theology of perfectionism, shaped the thinking of many Oberlinites for years to come, and provided the foundation for Finney's considered opinions about social reform.

Nevertheless, Finney was convinced that there was a grand eschatological vision which both shaped his notion of perfectionism and drew him into social reform. Likewise, his views of perfectionism and social reformation made straight the way of the Lord for a great millennial kingdom, and it is to Finney's vision of the millennium that this paper now turns.

#### POSTMILLENNIALISM: THE VISION OF A NEW ORDER

Charles Grandison Finney was a postmillennialist. He believed, along with others in pre-Civil War America, that it was the work of the Church to usher in the millennial kingdom, at the end of which Christ would return. This optimistic vision was radically different from other forms of millennialism which waited passively for the Second Advent of Christ. Finney's millennialism was a natural conclusion to the other elements of his theology: his doctrine of sanctification which envisioned the perfection of every Christian, the sign of which was perfect obedience to Christ in good works; and his doctrine of social redemption, which would come about through the efforts of perfected saints as they went to war against the evil principalities and powers of this world. Such activity would eventually bring about the millennium.

On the other hand, Finney's millennial vision provided the goal which drew the saints into such rigorous efforts at social reformation as temperance crusades and the abolitionist movement, and also provided the theological motivation for such efforts.

God needed their help in converting the world, and America would have a special part to play in that grand scheme. "All the causes that he advanced, and all the words that he ever wrote, assumed this postmillennial scenario."<sup>57</sup>

Finney wrote in *Lectures on Revival of Religion*: "Only let them feel as the heart of one man, and be agreed as to what ought to be done for the salvation of the world, and the millennium will come at once."<sup>58</sup> At the time of the writing of the *Lectures*, Finney was a rising prophetic voice in America. He was becoming a well-known revivalist and evangelist with a growing reputation in both the West and in the eastern cities. He had already entered into reforming activities particularly through his preaching in his New York churches and the leadership he provided to the extensive activities of the powerfully influential Benevolent Empire. Eventually his writings were widely read, and through his writings he became an internationally known Christian leader. Upon his association with Oberlin College, his views of perfectionism became clarified, and, as Finney discovered, nicely complemented his developed theological thinking.

Needless to say, as conditions seemed to be improving in American society, largely through the efforts of the Benevolent Empire and the Association of Gentlemen, Finney was not only encouraged in his millennial theology, but such theology gained more and more focus as the social agenda moved forward. And so Finney gave impetus to Jonathan Edwards's eighteenth-century idea of "universal benevolence" by advising all believers to seek and to do the will of God for their lives in this world in service to their neighbors toward the goal of establishing the millennial kingdom. Naturally, any borrowing of Edwards's ideas rankled Finney's Calvinist opponents, who saw Edwards as at the opposite end of the theological spectrum from their chief American mentor. The continuing generosity of the Tappans and the Association of Gentlemen provided the financial resources needed to maintain Finney's vision.

Finney assumed that progress was inevitable, as did many Americans of that day. Ironically he did meet William Miller, the premillennial Adventist, in Boston, who challenged the prevailing millennial assumptions of Finney and others by claiming that the world was decaying rather than progressing, and that the Lord's Second Advent, which was imminent, would be the only event that could reverse that process. Only Christ could establish the millennial Kingdom. All attempts by Christians to do so were fruitless.

Finney, after hearing Miller speak, confronted Miller with the errors of his ways. "I attended Mr. Miller's Bible class once or twice," Finney later wrote in his *Memoirs*, "after which I invited him to my room, and tried to convince him that he was in error."<sup>59</sup> In speculating on this scene, Hardman wrote:

That would have been a confrontation to witness as the fiery-eyed Finney, confident that progress was inevitable and that the reforms he and his friends had undertaken were surely bringing in the millennium, crossed verbal swords with the chief exponent of the view that the efforts of Christians were insufficient, and only the Lord's impending return could vanquish the forces of evil and decay!<sup>60</sup>

Finney was undaunted by the likes of William Miller and the Millerites. He contin-

ued to rouse the sleeping Church to action. He envisioned the Church as a voluntary society of Christians committed to the notion of cooperation with God in conquering evil and converting the world. His understanding of the Church partly reflected an age of increasing voluntary agencies striving in varying degrees toward a better world, and an age of Jacksonian democracy. Finney both influenced, and was in turn influenced by, a culture which moved away from a doctrine of election to a doctrine of free will, and away from a sense of control from above (by the elect) to control by the consenting will of the people, whether this manifested itself in civil government or in church polity. It comes as no surprise, parenthetically, that, although Finney was ordained into the Presbyterian ministry, he found Presbyterian polity to be too controlling and restrictive, and in 1836 he transferred his ordination to the Congregationalists, a fitting move for Finney.

Finney helped to change the thinking of the Church in insisting that every Christian—laity and clergy—had to participate in ushering in the great millennium. Here he was following the lead of the Second Great Awakening. The First Awakening in America, notable as it was, is remembered for the clergy who led that awakening: Edwards, Whitefield, Frelinghuysen, Tennent and others. However, the Second Awakening was less clergy-oriented and led by clergy and laity, especially in the southern camp meeting expression of that Awakening.

Many preachers who had no formal training—but simply a passion for preaching and saving the lost—were, for all intents and purposes, laity. The burgeoning democratic spirit in America found expression also in the democratic life and ministry of the Church. And, although Finney was a leader in continuing the Second Great Awakening, he gave voice to the ministry of the Church being a cooperative one between clergy and laity. And in turn his spirit of optimism was fuelled by the participatory nature of the ministry.

It is possible to say that some of Finney's millennial optimism diminished during and after the Civil War. "It was apparent, however, as he looked back, that the progress of forty years had done nothing to bring the Millennium any closer."<sup>61</sup> It was clear to many, as a result of the devastation of that national conflict, that the world was not getting better and better. Indeed, the opposite could be concluded—that there was an increase of evil. Postmillennialism would be replaced predominately by premillennialism, and the attendant beliefs that the world was getting worse and that only the Second Advent of Jesus Christ could save such a miserably fallen world.

Along with the evidence of a sinful world was the concomitant evidence that mankind, given choices between good and evil, often choose evil. Finney always maintained a high view of sin, and continued to view sin in the light of evil choices which people make. But he also believed in institutional evil which was more than the sum of sinful individual choices. Just as there was the possibility of universal social benevolence, so there was the possibility of institutional evil, represented most glaringly for Finney by the institution of slavery. Finney eventually hoped that slavery could be combatted not only by the Church, but by the civil government as well, and his opposition to both the election and the reelection of Abraham Lincoln was because he wanted someone more dedicated to radical abolitionism in the highest

office in the land.

And so Finney, ever the practical man, “was always mindful that sin blighted every attempt to make a better world.”<sup>62</sup> But Finney continued undaunted after the Civil War. He was still the evangelist, the revivalist, the educator, the writer. While his postmillennial vision may have dimmed a bit, basically his theological and ministerial concerns remained the same, and the social reform impetus to which he had given leadership and direction continued, not only in America, but in England as well.

## CONCLUSION

There is, gratefully, a revival of interest in Charles Grandison Finney and his religious and social impact upon America in the nineteenth century. Witness, for example, the publication of the recent excellent biography of Finney by Keith Hardman entitled *Charles Grandison Finney: Revivalist and Reformer*, or the recently published critical edition of *The Memoirs of Charles Grandison Finney: The Complete Restored Text*. Along with this, there is a renewed interest in the history of Evangelicalism and its religious and social impact. Scholarship is indebted to such works as Timothy Smith’s classic *Revivalism and Social Reform: American Protestantism on the Eve of the Civil War*, and Donald Dayton’s *Discovering An Evangelical Heritage*. Other scholars such as George Marsden and Mark Noll have developed a high level of serious scholarship and reflection upon the history and continuing development of Evangelicalism.

I have attempted to demonstrate in this paper what the social implications are to the ministry and theology of Charles Grandison Finney. I have tried to see that relationship by first spelling out Finney’s understanding of the human condition with his doctrine of sin, and of human potential with his understanding of perfectionism. People have freedom of the will to make two ultimate choices in this life: they either choose for themselves and for sin, or they choose for God and righteousness. Their actions and affections follow from these choices, and saying “yes” to God means deciding for God’s agenda for his creation—bearing witness by purity of heart and purity of will to reform and redeem a fallen world in concert with a benevolent God.

This leads, naturally, to Finney’s notion of social reform. In an age of reforming impulses, Finney became a leader and spokesman, not of general humanitarian reform, but of Christian reform done as a natural consequence of one’s right relationship with God. While Finney was engaged in many reform activities, the abolitionist cause was uppermost in his mind, as it was on the forefront of the national agenda during Finney’s life and ministry. However, as demonstrated, Finney was careful to see evangelism and revivalism as the dominant task of the Church, and believed that complete reformation of society would be the natural result of revivalism. His primary allegiance throughout his long life and ministry was to revivalism.

It has also been demonstrated that part of what drove Finney in both his revivalistic and reforming ministries was his ultimate vision of a new world, which was part of his postmillennial theology. His efforts in converting the sinner, raising up the saint, and putting all to work would lead, he believed, to the dawning of a new millennial day. Likewise that final goal provided impetus and drive for both his preaching and for the causes which his preaching inspired. It is understandable that some of his

postmillennial emphasis would diminish given the catastrophic events of a Civil War, but Finney's basic theology remained whole, and he could still wish for a new heaven and a new earth, with perhaps more emphasis on God's part than on ours. Nevertheless, his preaching and teaching ministry continued undaunted until he died shortly before his eighty-third birthday on August 16, 1875.

Charles Grandison Finney was a remarkable man by all accounts, not the least of which was that he was faithful to what he perceived to be God's direction in his life. In spite of criticism, some of which was well justified, of his "new measures" and social reform, he nevertheless tried to maintain the delicate relationship of revivalism and social reform.

#### NOTES

1. Perry Miller, *The Life of the Mind In America from the Revolution to the Civil War* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers, 1965), p.9.
2. Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), p. 461.
3. The titles of many works about Finney demonstrate the concern to understand him fully. There is an excellent recent biography of Charles Grandison Finney by Keith J. Hardman entitled *Charles Grandison Finney 1792-1875: Revivalist and Reformer* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1990). See also David L. Weddle, *The Law as Gospel: Revival and Reform in the Theology of Charles G. Finney* (Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, 1985); James E. Johnson, "Charles G. Finney and a Theology of Revivalism," *Church History* 38 (1969): 338-358; Garth M. Rosell, "Charles G. Finney: His Place in the Stream," in Leonard I. Sweet, ed. *The Evangelical Tradition in America* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1984). See also the many references to Finney in William G. McLoughlin, *Modern Revivalism: Charles Grandison Finney to Billy Graham* (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1959); William G. McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform: An Essay on Religion and Social Change in America, 1607-1977* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978); and Timothy L. Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform: American Protestantism on the Eve of the Civil War* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980).
4. Hardman, *Revivalist and Reformer*, p. 6.
5. Ahstrom, *Religious History*, p. 434.
6. Hardman, *Revivalist and Reformer*, p. 146.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 25.
8. Garth M. Rosell and Richard A. G. Dupuis, eds. *The Memoirs of Charles G. Finney: The Complete Restored Text* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1989), p. 78, n. 24. It is important to note that Finney's *Memoirs* were not written while many of the events of his life were taking place. He was persuaded to do so by the board of trustees of Oberlin College and by many of his friends in order that his biography could be written. Finney also believed that a correct picture of the revivals in which he took part be drawn, especially since distortions of those revivals had been put into print by Nettleton and Beecher. And so he began his *Memoirs* "sometime in the summer or autumn of 1866" (p. xxviii). After a series of revisions and corrections, the *Memoirs* were first published on January 27, 1876, under the title *Memoirs of Charles G. Finney*. Written by himself.

The *Memoirs* were edited by James H. Fairchild, Finney's successor to the presidency of Oberlin College. However, Fairchild's editing decidedly toned down some of Finney's colorful language and omitted important passages. The task of restoring the original text was undertaken by Rosell and Dupuis, and *The Memoirs of Charles G. Finney: The Complete Restored Text* provides the reader with the original text, copious footnotes, invaluable information about the

original manuscript, and various changes and corrections which were made before publication.

Because the *Memoirs* were written toward the end of Finney's life, his selective memory of events and people is evident, and so the *Memoirs* must be used cautiously. In any case, the *Memoirs* became "Finney's third great contribution to literature" (p. xxviii) after his *Lectures on Revivals of Religion* and *Lectures on Systematic Theology*.

For the sake of uniformity in this paper, this work will be consistently referred to as Finney, *The Memoirs of Charles G. Finney*, whether the reference is to the text itself or a note by Rosell and Dupuis.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 78.

10. Carl Cramer, *Listen for a Lonesome Drum: A York State Chronicle* (New York: McKay, 1950), p. 115, quoted in Hardman, *Revivalist and Reformer*, p. 25.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 71.

12. Alister E. McGrath, *A Life of John Calvin* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1991), pp. 202-203.

13. See Hardman, *Revivalist and Reformer*, p. 14.

14. *Ibid.*

15. Ahlstrom, *Religious History*, p. 409. See also Finney, *The Memoirs of Charles G. Finney*, p. 251, n34.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 251.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 19.

18. Hardman, *Revivalist and Reformer*, p. 345.

19. Charles Grandison Finney, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion* (Oberlin, OH: E. J. Goodrich, 1868), p. 12. There are many editions of these lectures, and this paper will use the 1868 edition. "The twenty-two lectures which make up the volume, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*, were delivered on successive Friday evenings at the Chatham Street Chapel and recorded by Joshua Leavitt, editor of the *New York Evangelist*. After they were edited by Finney himself, they were published as a series in the *New York Evangelist* to boost a sagging circulation brought on by Leavitt's strongly abolitionist editorial policy. Later, in 1835, they were published as a book. The volume was revised and reissued in 1868" (Garth M. Rosell, "Charles Grandison Finney and the Rise of the Benevolence Empire" [Ph.D. dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1971], p. 181, n2). See also John Stanley Mattson, "Charles Grandison Finney and the Emerging Tradition of 'New Measure' Revivalism," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1970).

20. Hardman, *Revivalist and Reformer*, p. 20.

21. John Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 1966), p. 37.

22. The conjoining of Scripture, tradition, reason and experience was something which John Wesley did often in his sermons and writings. The Wesleyan scholar, Albert Outler, labelled this the Wesleyan quadrilateral. For two excellent treatments of the quadrilateral, see Albert C. Outler, "The Wesleyan Quadrilateral in John Wesley," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 20:1 (1985): 7-18; and Donald Thorsen, *The Wesleyan Quadrilateral* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1990).

23. Ahlstrom, *Religious History*, p. 437.

24. See Hardman, *Revivalist and Reformer*, p. 332. Hardman is not entirely correct in his assessment of Wesley's "evangelical perfection." For Finney's remarks, see *Memoirs*, pp. 391-393, which includes the Wesleyans' disagreement with Finney and Finney's disagreement with the Wesleyans. See also Charles Grandison Finney, *Lectures on Systematic Theology* (Oberlin, OH: E. J. Goodrich, 1887), lectures 37-42; and Timothy L. Smith, ed., *The Promise of the Spirit* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1980), which is a compilation of writings by Finney on the subject of sanctification first published in the *Oberlin Evangelist* in 1839 and 1840. I

agree with David Rightmire's assessment, which states that "Finney's reaction to Methodist emphases was negative, as he misconceived Wesley's concept of 'perfect love,' and misconstrued it to mean a stress on the emotions" (R. David Rightmire, *Sacraments and The Salvation Army: Pneumatological Foundations* [Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1990], p. 136).

For further reading on this subject see James H. Fairchild, "The Doctrine of Sanctification at Oberlin," *The Congregational Quarterly* 18:1 (April 1876):237-259; John L. Gresham, Jr., *Charles G. Finney's Doctrine of the Baptism of the Holy Spirit* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1987); and B. B. Warfield's thorough response and criticism in his work entitled *Studies in Perfectionism*, 2 vols. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1931), especially vol. 2, chap. 1.

Note, also, Timothy Smith's remarks in *Revivalism and Social Reform*, p. 112: "The keynote of Finney's later crusades was the plea that Christians should consecrate themselves fully to the Lord. Everywhere he found them living in partial consecration and half-hearted love. A brave evangelist indeed would have been required to announce in the Park Street Church in 1857 that such persons had never really been converted before. The only practical alternative was to urge them to seek a higher work of grace."

25. Finney, *Lectures on Systematic Theology*, pp. 406-407.

26. See, for example, Warfield, *Studies in Perfectionism*, 2:59-60.

27. When Oberlin was built in 1835, a large white canvas tent was erected prominently on the Oberlin campus for use by the college and for evangelistic crusades, with a seating capacity of three thousand. The inauguration of the first president, Asa Mahan, was held in this tent. The center pole, protruding far above the peak of the tent, bore a long, blue banner on which were inscribed the words "Holiness to the Lord." Perfectionism was indeed preached at Oberlin, and as early as 1836 Oberlin students bore witness that they had put sin out of their lives and were seeking lives of holiness.

28. Finney, *The Memoirs of Charles G. Finney*, p. 459.

29. Ibid. For an excellent treatment of this, see, Timothy L. Smith, "The Cross Demands, the Spirit Enables," *Christianity Today* (16 February 1979): 22-26.

30. Hardman, *Revivalist and Reformer*, p. 329. Timothy Smith reminds his readers that "The man chiefly responsible for the adoption by American Wesleyans of the terms 'filling' or 'baptism of the Spirit' to describe the experience of sanctification was Charles G. Finney" ("The Cross Demands, the Spirit Enables," p. 23). For an account of Asa Mahan's own experience of holiness, see Edward H. Madden and James E. Hamilton, *Freedom and Grace: The Life of Asa Mahan* (Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, 1982), pp. 59-67.

31. Hardman, *Revivalist and Reformer*, pp. 122-123.

32. Ahlstrom, *Religious History*, p. 422. See also J. Earl Thompson, "Lyman Beecher's Long Road to Conservative Abolitionism," *Church History* 42 (March 1973): 89-109.

33. Hardman, *Revivalist and Reformer*, p. 74.

34. Donald Dayton, *Discovering an Evangelical Heritage* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1976), p. 88.

35. Hardman, *Revivalist and Reformer*, p. 101. For a more complete treatment of this, see Leonard I. Sweet, *The Minister's Wife: Her Role in Nineteenth Century American Evangelicalism* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1983), chap. 4. See also Nancy A. Hardesty, *Your Daughters Shall Prophesy: Revivalism and Feminism in the Age of Finney* (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishers, 1991); and Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform*, p. 82.

36. Hardman, *Revivalist and Reformer*, p. 438.

37. Ibid., p. 205. See also Gilbert Hobbs Barnes, *The Antislavery Impulse 1830-1844* (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1973), p. 11: "Among Finney's converts this gospel released a mighty impulse toward social reform."

38. For a complete treatment of this, see Rosell, "Charles Grandison Finney and the Rise of the Benevolence Empire."
39. Hardman, *Revivalist and Reformer*, p. 185.
40. Ibid. Note the comments of Timothy L. Smith in his *Revivalism and Social Reform*, pp. 149 and 180: "Charles G. Finney...inspired many an abolitionist. But he never thought of himself primarily as reformer." "Charles G. Finney probably won as many converts to the cause of William Lloyd Garrison, even though he shunned the role of political agitator for that of a winner of souls."
41. Hardman, *Revivalist and Reformer*, p. 262.
42. Ibid., p. 274.
43. Finney, *The Memoirs of Charles G. Finney*, p. 362 n29.
44. Hardman, *Revivalist and Reformer*, p. 263.
45. Finney, *The Memoirs of Charles G. Finney*, p. 362.
46. Hardman, *Revivalist and Reformer*, p. 263.
47. Ibid., p. 321.
48. Ibid., p. 273. This was one of the reasons why Finney gave himself increasingly in his ministry to the training of ministers and evangelists. In "Charles Grandison Finney and the Rise of the Benevolence Empire," Garth Rosell noted that "Finney's growing preoccupation with education, which ultimately led him to Oberlin College, grew out of this basic shift in strategy. Prior to the voyage (taken to recuperate from physical illness), Finney's primary concern had been upon his own evangelistic efforts. Upon his return, however, he began to talk increasingly of training younger men to take up the cause" (p. 181). See also Finney, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*, pp. 177-184.
49. Dayton, *Discovering an Evangelical Heritage*, p. 18.
50. Finney, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*, p. 272.
51. Hardman, *Revivalist and Reformer*, p. 365.
52. Ibid., p. 316.
53. Smith, "The Cross Demands, the Spirit Enables," p. 24.
54. See Madden and Hamilton, *Freedom and Grace*, pp. 35-44.
55. See Hardman, *Revivalist and Reformer*, p. 361, where he mentions that even health issues were important at Oberlin.
56. Ibid., p. 363.
57. Ibid., p. 152.
58. Finney, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*, p. 312. See also Finney's remarks in *The Memoirs of Charles G. Finney*, pp. 164, 544 and 312, n. 65.
59. Ibid., p. 453.
60. Hardman, *Revivalist and Reformer*, p. 374.
61. Finney, *The Memoirs of Charles G. Finney*, p. xx.
62. Hardman, *Revivalist and Reformer*, p. 370.