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IAIN H. MURRAY,
REVIVAL AND REVIVALISM:
A REVIEW ARTICLE

Tom J. Nettles

When Jonathan Edwards wrote his classic work *Religious Affections*, he intended that individuals use the principles discussed there as a guide for personal investigation. In Edwards's opinion, nothing was more important than the question, "What are the distinguishing qualifications of those that are in favor with God, and entitled to his eternal rewards?" Or what comes to the same thing, "What is the nature of true religion?" In writing this Edwards summarized more profoundly than any before him the Reformed and Puritan view of the effects of true conversion, or the fruits of saving faith. While he said that if one "has no affections, it proves that he has no true religion," he taught his readers (and listeners) "to distinguish between affections, approving some, and rejecting others; separating between the wheat and the chaff, the gold and the dross, the precious and the vile."¹

While Edwards desired to give a tool for private examination, he also produced the most potent textbook on the anatomy and physiology of God-sent revival, and, in so doing, created a philosophy of history which molded the thinking of the new nation. Revivals subsequent to Edwards, even well into the nineteenth century, and intermittently throughout the century were both promoted and examined on the basis of the Edwardsean model. In fact, Murray's thesis is that "in the period of our study, American history was shaped by the Spirit of God in revivals of the same kind as launched the early church into a pagan world" [xx]. Those revivals were Edwardsean in their content and dimensions. The first six chapters of *Revival and Revivalism* unpack the stories of men used constructively in seasons of revival in America. Denominational boundaries were transcended in these revival movements and Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Baptists, Anglicans, and Methodists all enjoyed the beauty and refreshment of the surprising work of God. Samuel Davies of Virginia, the initial leaders of Princeton (including John Witherspoon), Devereaux Jarrett, Archibald Alexander, James McGready, John Leland, Francis Asbury and others are discussed biographically and from the standpoint of their views on and participation in revival.

Interspersed in the narrative of these times of refreshment are hints of the change that would occur in the mid-nineteenth century. Though a Calvinist

¹ Jonathan Edwards, *A Treatise concerning Religious Affections*, ed. John E. Smith (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), 84

himself and a relentless preacher of the distinctive doctrines of Reformed Christianity, Devereaux Jarrett found much to be admired in a Methodist preacher named Robert Williams. In addition to a central core of common doctrine, Jarrett appreciated the “affectionate and animated manner in which his discourses were delivered” [68]. These factors, combined with the Methodists’ professed loyalty to Anglicanism, led Jarrett to encourage the itineracy of Methodist preachers in Virginia to counteract the success of the Baptists. He could not have realized at the time that at the end of the day the Baptists agreed more congenially to his cause than his fellow Anglicans.

Chapter four, “When theology Took Fire,” describes the spiritual and theological resurgence of Presbyterianism in Virginia and the South in the last quarter of the eighteenth century. The prominent influence of Archibald Alexander, John Blair Smith, and William Graham brought Presbyterians in the South to see that “orthodoxy and correct preaching, indispensable though they are, are not enough.” They must be set on fire with a generous infusion of “authority, tenderness, compassion, [and] pity” from heaven (109).

Chapter five introduces the age of the Second Great Awakening. After describing the post-revolutionary spiritual condition of America, Murray describes the extensive nature of the Awakening from a denominational, geographical, and chronological standpoint. He surmises that this revival exceeded in both power and extent the Awakening of the 1730’s and 1740’s, spanning a vastly larger geographical area and maintaining demonstrable power from 1798-1834. He concludes with four “particular observations” concerning the Second Great Awakening. One of these is peculiarly vital to the emphasis of this book: “Thus what characterizes a revival is not the employment of unusual or special means but rather the extraordinary degree of blessing attending the normal means of grace” (129).

Chapters six and seven highlight both the power and the wildfire that marked the revival in Kentucky in the first years of the nineteenth century. Much good was done that could be described as a “revival of the benign, the heaven-born religion of Jesus Christ” (159). The other side, better known than the first, was characterized by excessive emotionalism. Its existence would not have constituted a problem had the ministers in charge checked it, kept it in perspective, and not allowed it to define the nature of revival. Some ministers who sought to warn against canonizing these extraordinary manifestations were viewed with suspicion and eventually marginalized as anti-revival men. The hesitancy to give a clear demarcation between unspiritual passions and biblically informed affections destroyed the Edwardsean balance and promoted a climate for “revivalism.” Beyond that, the frontier movement spawned a populist confidence which diminished the importance of an educated clergy, created a false dichotomy between biblicism and subscription to historic confessions, and created denominations antagonistic to the Calvinism which till this time was dominant in American evangelical-

ism. The aggressiveness of this antagonism is described on pages 177-190.

After a refreshing description of the faithful ministries of five "old school" type leaders in the northeast, Murray centers chapters nine and ten on the meteoric rise to prominence of Charles Finney and the subsequent changes and controversies he brought with him. Both are masterful chapters, employing an appropriate blend of primary and secondary sources. Distressful prospects and poignant contemplation marked the times for some, while others inhaled the atmosphere with triumphalistic confidence. Murray traces both the content and the origins of the peculiarities of Charles Finney's "revivalism." These did not "burst upon Finney's mind directly from Scripture and from heaven" but resulted from a "confluence of ideas arising from several quarters" (258, 262).

The conflict which became focused at the New Lebanon conference between Charles Finney and Asahel Nettleton is described with historical and theological sensitivity by Murray. Subsequent to the conference, Lyman Beecher dropped his resistance to Finney and cooled in his support of Nettleton. Perhaps Murray is not wholly without warrant in attributing this to Beecher's "readiness to allow his beliefs to be swayed by factors other than adherence to the Word of God." Though it is true that "ambition and expediency are natural companions" (268) and many have stumbled at that temptation, a historian must be reticent in such judgments. Murray, however, does not go beyond the judgments of Beecher's contemporaries in describing this tendency of his personality.

Both New England theology and New Measures proved to be divisive in Presbyterianism and Congregationalism. Finney's complaint against the turmoil wrought by those who opposed his message and his techniques was "rather like that of an arsonist complaining of the disturbances caused by fire brigades" (273).

Chapter eleven has particular importance as Murray traces how the new theology and the new measures gradually became evangelical orthodoxy. Chapter twelve concentrates on the transition in Baptist life from historic Calvinism to revivalistic Finneyism. Typical of the transition are these words from John Leland: "In the course of life I have been announcing Christianity for more than fifty-five years, having more reverence for that preaching which shows how the Lord draws sinners, than I have for that which shows sinners how to drive the Lord" (320). Murray demonstrates how the American Baptists in the early nineteenth century, as well as the Southern Baptists in the latter nineteenth century, who sometimes have been maligned as hyper-Calvinist, were in reality the warm friends of evangelism, missions, and revival.

Chapter thirteen describes the development of J. W. Alexander's thoughts on revival including his initially moderating views on the New Measures of Finney. His experience of the "religious degeneration" in New York confirmed a growing negative appraisal of the "Finneyitish" revivalism.

Nettleton's prediction of its damaging tendency which Alexander earlier had thought was absurd he saw fulfilled (338). Murray's treatment of Alexander's connection with the 1857-58 prayer revival adds a dimension to that discussion which is virtually ignored in other histories.

Chapter fourteen, "Old and New, Past and Future," contains Murray's theological analysis of the historical dynamic from revival to revivalism. Among other things, he distills from the theological literature of the age five objections to the altar call system. His application of theological principles to the issues raised by the historical narrative should provoke sober discussion from all who care about the purity of the bride of Christ in this fallen world. Murray ends with a note of hope that a new generation may again be molded by the old gospel. Two appendices concerning revivalism in Britain and revival in the southern United States close the narrative portion of the book.

In addition to the helpful historical information and analysis provided by Murray, another issue emerges in this book which in the long run may be more significant than his personal evaluation of the decline from revival to revivalism in American evangelicalism. That issue has to do with the current state of historiography among evangelicals in America.

In criticizing various facets of Murray's book, Mark Noll reveals the dispositions of a growing number of cautious evangelical historians who discipline their writing by the conviction that their final product must be profane, not in the sense of aggressive blasphemy, but in the sense of being defined by non-religious purposes.² One could add a chapter to William Clebsch's *From Sacred to Profane* by discussing the development of writing history as an informative discipline in American academic life.³ The contrast between Murray and Noll embodies a vivid example of the change.

Historiography may, like ancient Gaul, be divided into three parts: methodological, stylistic, and principial. Methodological historiography concerns the discovery, evaluation, and investigation of sources, both primary and secondary. From an awareness of the sources and the state of

² Mark Noll, "How We Remember Revivals," in *Christianity Today* (April 24, 1995), p. 33, 34.

³ William A. Clebsch, *From Sacred to Profane America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 14-38. In these pages, Clebsch outlines six areas that he expands in the rest of the book: education, pluralism, welfare and morality, participation, novelty, and nationality. "Americans did their planning within the temple of religion," Clebsch maintains, "but did their building on profane ground." He could add writing of history to that list beginning with Cotton Mather's strong providentialism within a stated purpose not to be a "party" historian to contemporary evangelicals who think no differently than their secular counterparts on the issue of providence in their efforts not to write "tribal" history.

research on a subject, a would-be writer must frame a question that is operational, open-ended, flexible, clear, precise, analytical, and can yield an answer in light of the sources to be investigated.⁴

Stylistic historiography involves the organization of one's evidence and conclusions. One seeks the right ordering of chapters or sections, the right flow of paragraphs and sentences, and ransacks a number of sources to find the words and images to produce the right atmosphere for the environment created by the final product. The right certitude, the necessary ambivalence, the appropriate nuances, and the overall literary value all contribute to the integrity and credibility of the historical presentation.

Principial historiography unfolds from the world-view of the historian. Within what kind of world have such and such events taken place? What value, therefore, is the historian to give to the particular phenomena? It will do no good to seek to be "world-viewless."

First, no such neutrality is possible. To suppress one's own world-view under the guise of (some would prefer I had said "in the interest of") objectivity simply causes one to capitulate to the world-view of another. A theist who tries to write history as if there were no God, performs as, and presents the world as, an atheist.

In a strange context, this warning is given by Richard A. Muller and James E. Bradley in their recent book *Church History*.⁵ They rightly argue that a Christian must use a credible methodology and possess "sufficient analytical gifts and literary abilities" to write marketplace history. Muller and Bradley warn young historians to be mindful of the pitfalls of the facile providentialism of an earlier age of historiography and encourage them to be "loath to return to that long and tortured process." A historian should expect few if any differences "between a Christian and a non-Christian approach to scholarship." The Christian historian must avoid assigning supernatural causes to events "that will never by their very nature, submit themselves to the methods of the historian." In short, a religious perspective has powerful potential to be "an undesirable handicap, rather than a potentially desirable asset."

In the middle of all these warnings, however, the historians insert, "On the other hand, if the religious element is entirely excluded from church history, the historian's conclusions might become so many arguments for atheism." This statement unfolds as a sort of safety net to provide rescue should they fall in walking so dangerously close to the precipice of their own warn-

⁴ For issues concerning question framing for historical writing see David Hackett Fischer, *Historians' Fallacies: Toward a Logic of Historical Thought* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1970), 3-39.

⁵ James E. Bradley and Richard A. Muller, *Church History: An Introduction to Research, Reference Works, and Methods* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 54, 55.

ing. The insertion of a single warning, however, is not the same as providing a way of escape. One wishes that the authors had given some specific attention to the ways a conscientious Christian historian can work without ignoring, and tacitly denying, Christ's incarnation and the reality of his historical work of atonement. A Christian who seeks to suppress his awareness of places in which, from principles of divine revelation, he knows God manifestly acts in gracious ways, does not thereby become more objective; he writes as a secularist. While many of the warnings against a naive supernaturalism given by Bradley and Muller have merit and will contribute positively to factual honesty and empirical rigor, they give no rationale why one should not capitulate entirely to the profane.

Second, world-view gives direction and vigor to the historian's craft and should not be hidden. Will Durant's rationalism and Adolph von Harnack's liberalism energize both their style and their content. Sometimes their views determine their selectivity, but most often it affects their analysis and evaluation. Greek culture looks very different to Durant than to Tertullian; and Arianism, though its content is described in virtually the same way, doesn't fall under anathema to Harnack but it certainly does under Athanasius. A clearly stated world-view gives the reader an opportunity to evaluate the presentation as the result of a particular way of seeing things.

Methodological and stylistic matters, to the degree that they may be uniform for all historians, may be critiqued, and thus approved or corrected, on the basis of guidelines open to historians of all persuasions. Sometimes, however, a principal matter may suffer compromise in the light of style or in light of one's audience. In his helpful book, *Patterns In History*, Bebbington makes the issue of providence a matter of style and academic context.⁶ He argues that a Christian historian can do his research and analysis and form his understanding from the standpoint of Christian assumptions and then write "a distinctively Christian product" in which the Christian content will be "implicit rather than explicit." He then makes the rather puzzling statement, "If the same piece of history is needed for a Christian audience or to vindicate a Christian position, reference to providence can readily be restored." A Christian historian is not obliged to "tell the whole truth" in every piece of historical writing, but may refer to providence or not "according to his judgment of the composition of his audience."

Bebbington certainly has no intention to minimize the impact of the Christian faith on the task of the Christian historian. He affirms that throughout his book and clearly asserts, "the source documents about Jesus Christ, the Bible, provide the continuing norm for any Christian perspective on history."⁷ If the factor of providence, however, may be as easily omitted as

⁶ David Bebbington, *Patterns in History* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1990), 187.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 183.

included with no loss of coherence in argument, does this not qualify as an argument for atheism?⁸

Principal matters, however, involve a more complex process of development and defense, but must operate within their sphere just as clearly as methodological matters operate in theirs. The Christian historian who operates within the sphere of a Christian world-view will have justified his use of Scripture as a source of his principal approach to history. He also has the right to expect other historians to be ready to give a reason for their use of the world-view they assume to be true. Methodology must not be mistaken for principle, nor must it be allowed to dominate principle.

Murray's highly principled historiography has opened his book to accolades from some but to just as certain criticism from others. Mark Noll has employed Grant Wacker's term of "tribalism" to describe the type of historiography used by Murray. According to that criticism, Murray has employed interpretative principles that are factional and non-public. Murray may be accurate in his display of all the facts he chooses to use, but, consistent with his "tribalistic" method, they are "linked by explanatory frameworks that only insiders find credible."⁹ Noll believes that the value of Murray's work is greatly reduced because he ignores the work of evangelicals who are "open to spiritual interpretations of history" but nevertheless "concentrate on features of the past that can be studied empirically and whose interpretation does not require pre-existing commitments to a specific theological viewpoint." Noll feels exasperated by the book because he shares "Murray's Calvinism." Noll also thinks (unlike Murray?) that Calvinism "justifies an approach to historical study focusing on evidence and interpretations open, in principle, to all observers." Murray's approach, on the other hand, is "muddled in its assumption that historical evidence by itself can carry the burden Murray asks it to bear."

Noll's review is stimulating and provocative. It provides a needed caution to all historians concerning certain aspects of methodological historiography. He criticizes Murray for ignoring evidence that does not fit his theological scheme. Noll believes that actions of both Witherspoon and Hodge in criticizing and/or discouraging certain manifestations of revival/revivalism damage Murray's thesis. These are heroes who criticize his other heroes.

His point concerning selectivity is important. A historian's selection of data may well determine his outcome. Critical omissions may strain the

⁸ Bebbington does not argue as a positivist or naturalist but consistently warns against falling into those errors as a historian. His treatment of providence as stylistically optional at this point may come from his view that the presence of providence in history is analogous to the relationship between God's sovereignty and human responsibility. One and the same event may be explained in terms of human activity or in terms of divine activity.

⁹ "How We Remember Revivals," 34.

credibility of one's work. One may only speculate as to how Murray would respond to the specific examples Noll provides, but to this writer they appear to do little to discredit the basic thesis of Murray. Instead, these examples could serve to confirm his observation that the pre-Finney supporters of revival encouraged its reality but were careful in their investigation of phenomena. They may even have disagreed concerning the evidence for the true spirituality of an apparent revival; they did not disagree, however, that revivals indeed occurred and that revealed criteria existed by which individual phenomena could be evaluated. They also agreed that God uses means in granting the blessings of his Spirit, but, conversely, that a formulary approach to such efforts could establish predictability of revival they unanimously rejected.

In fact, Murray employs examples of the very thing Noll accuses him of omitting. "Father" Rice, a careful, but serious and positive supporter of revival, criticized and warned against encouraging "bodily exercises." He, and others, also "prayed against enthusiasm and . . . gave marks of true illumination and true faith." For their discernment and care they were dubbed "anti-revival" men (Murray, 165). Witherspoon and Hodge were to be the same kind of "anti-revival" men. Noll's claim to have disclosed evidence that doesn't "fit" Murray's thesis seems to miss the point.¹⁰

Another criticism aims at Murray's research methodology. Noll compares Timothy Smith's use of sources in *Revivalism and Social Reform In Mid-Nineteenth-Century America* with Murray's book. Smith, Noll rightly contends, "added extensive digging into weekly and monthly religious newspapers to the exhaustive study of published books that is the backbone of Murray's research." It is certain that a historian may enhance the possibility of sketching an accurate profile of an era when he increases the number and types of sources he investigates. One could argue, however, that in this case the published literature takes on the character of primary source and that the number and variety of Murray's sources makes the multiplying of diaries and letters superfluous. They might add illustrative interest at certain points but would only increase the number of a certain type that Murray already had investigated and evaluated. The methodological superiority of Smith is, therefore, at least debatable and probably only superficial.

Noll's point, however, that Murray has missed an opportunity "to engage

¹⁰ Murray does in fact point out that Hodge's negative evaluation of the excesses which often accompany revival were so severe that "it was liable to undermine all belief in revival." He describes James Alexander's disagreement with Hodge and reports that he did all he could to diminish the negative impression Hodge might have left. In characterizing Alexander's attitude, Murray summarizes: "To lose faith in the special and extraordinary work of the Spirit of God because of the excesses of mere excitement was a capital mistake" (339). This tends to make Noll's criticism a moot point.

Smith's evidence and his arguments" is justified. That interchange would have been helpful and, had it been done, probably vigorous. Murray mentions Smith at least three times (332, 351, 362), and corrects Smith's mis-handling of evidence at least once (332). Since he is clearly familiar with Smith's interpretation and with the data of the period under discussion, one can only regret that Murray failed to be persistent and specific in challenging Smith.

Murray and Smith are not far apart in their general analysis of what in fact happened in the nineteenth century. Sometimes different slants on the data and their consultation of different sources give interesting diversity to their judgments. Smith claims that "by 1840 both Calvinism and humanism [radical Unitarianism] had been weighed in the balances and found wanting," and that "it was not the logic of liberal seminary professors, but the roaring revivals of the 1850's which broke the grip of Calvinism on nineteenth-century Protestantism."¹¹ He also celebrates the perfectionist spirit engendered by the revivals and points out the unifying effect perfectionism had on Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Baptists, Methodists, and Unitarians as they all sought "an experience that would 'make Christianity work'."¹²

Murray, on the other hand, entitles a chapter on that period as "The Illusions of a New Era" (277-298). He points out that the former revival theology, Edwardsean Calvinism, still held sway with many notable and useful preachers and was the foundation for several observable movements of the Spirit of God. It is clear, however, that Smith's argument is consistent with the impressions made in the media and the purpose of many preachers to be "loose from the chains of predestination" so that they might convert "the world at once." Murray's interpretation of the eventual dominance of the "New Measures" differs immensely from Smith's.

In conclusion, the reasons why the new measures came to be accepted may be summarized as follows. First, the claim that they were justified by massive success appeared so feasible that biblical warrant for their use seemed to be unnecessary. Scripture was not the decisive criterion. Second, all Christians rightly want to *see* success, and the new measures seemed to offer that possibility in a way not known before. Third, the introduction of the new measures in a time of real revival gave weight to the claim that their "successes" were due to divine blessing. And, finally, the illusion was ultimately accepted because the alleged successes received far more publicity

¹¹ *Revivalism and Social Reform In Mid-Nineteenth-Century America* (New York/Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1957), 102.

¹² *Ibid.*, 135-147; the quote is on 145. Smith fails to link the fervor for perfectionism with Finney's eventual rejection of the doctrine of perseverance of the saints and his own observation that many of his 'converts' did not seem to have sticking power. See Keith J. Hardman, *Charles Grandison Finney* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1990), 324-349; also Murray, 277-298.

than did the evidence of harm done to the life of the churches [298].

One could argue that Smith has contributed to perpetuating that same kind of publicity. As it is, we are left without an extended direct discussion. Our historical understanding may be poorer for it. The reader may make comparisons on his own and even surmise as to how the historians might respond to each other; but a straightforward interaction in which historical data and historiography provided the content of discussion would be informative and helpful in giving more definite outline to the as yet inchoate discipline of evangelical historiography.

Noll's final two paragraphs are curious. He believes that Smith has made a compelling case, "on the basis of the [historical] evidence he presents," that "fresh dynamic and expansive" Arminianism produced the most "successful, biblically balanced, and powerful version of the faith" [!] — not just revivals — America has ever seen. He considers Murray's approach, however, "muddled in its assumption that historical evidence by itself can carry the burden Murray asks it to bear." Can it be both ways? Can Smith's theological presuppositions gain increased credibility through greater detail of historical evidence, while Murray asks historical evidence to bear too much? Noll's comparative evaluation is confusing and seems contradictory.

The source of this confusion is the failure to maintain delineation between the methodological and the principial in the evaluation of Murray's work. Aggravating this confusion is a major clash of world-views, a historic but disciplined providentialism maintained by Murray contrasted with an implicit positivism upheld by Noll. While Noll aimed his criticisms at Murray's methods, i. e. his selection of persons and examples, and appears to unearth examples of methodological flaws, his illustrations in reality were challenges to Murray's principial approach. He closed by commending Smith's multiplying of data in the service of a world-view and criticized Murray for expecting too much from the data in service of his world-view.

This kind of criticism is understandable if we must be driven by "evidence and interpretations open, in principle, to all observers" so that we may escape the "tribal history . . . that only insiders find credible." Murray falls outside the measure of those historians Noll commends who have "abandoned the providentialism that characterized most earlier histories of evangelicals." Nor does he seem to find more "religious satisfaction" in "historical study than in . . . biblical or traditionally theological pursuits." Again, Noll leaves out Murray when he writes, "However much evangelicalism has always been a religion of experience, its story as told by the recent generation of professional historians has conformed as much to modern standards of the professional academy as to the practice of an experiential faith."¹³ The

¹³ See "Afterword: The Generations of Scholarship" in *Evangelicalism: Comparative Studies of Popular Protestantism in North America, the British Isles, and Beyond*, ed. Mark A. Noll, David W. Bebbington, George A. Rawlyk (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 411–413.

reality of experiential faith as an observable element has given way to a methodology dominated by positivistic and naturalistic assumptions.

Noll's criticisms, and the general tenor of much evangelical historiography, should suggest two areas of serious discussion for Christian historians. The first is, "Does Christian faith involve a kind of connectedness with history that expands the possible explanatory framework of empirical data?" The second is, "Does Christian experience involve an expansion of awareness which operates both subjectively and objectively in the historiographical process?"

As to the first, the answer has to be some degree of "Yes." Christian faith includes cognitive commitments which cannot omit the historical veracity of certain propositions. One must give historical credit to the testimony, "The word was made flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory." In addition, "He himself bore our sins in his own body on the tree" is the kind of historical affirmation which is inextricably connected with the theological conclusion, "so that we, being dead to sin might live to righteousness." The Christian believes that Christ came from heaven to earth, that he died for sinners, that he rose again, and that his resurrection occurred with such evidence that Jesus could place the credibility of his entire ministry on it (John 2:18-22) and his apostles could preach about his resurrection with no fear that contemporaries would find any evidence to disprove it (Acts 2:32-38). Can a Christian historian look at all the facts surrounding the accounts of the resurrection and not affirm that it happened? If he could not bring himself actually to affirm it *as a historian*, would it be because of a lack of evidence or because he would not want to affirm something that "only insiders find credible." Faith is not an existential decision one makes in seeking to create a framework of meaning for life, but is a moral submission to the conditions of the gospel message in light of the certainty that in these last days God has spoken to us by a Son who has "made purification for sin" (Heb 1:3). The Christian's openness to what may actually happen in history is substantially defined by his knowledge that God "showed up" one day in the person of Jesus Christ.

These very points are affirmed as essential to Christian historiography, as well as Christian faith, by a Jewish atheistic historian, Eugene Genovese. His analysis of what he finds in liberal Christianity may blushinglly be applied to much that one finds in the evangelical academy today.

To begin with, the overpowering evidence of religious faith aroused in me a skepticism about the reigning tendency in Academia to, as it were, socialize the faith out of religion — to deny the reality of spirituality. That debilitating tendency may be observed even among scholars who profess Christianity but espouse an extreme theological liberalism that leads toward a denial of any claim Christianity may have to being not one reli-

gion among many but the Way and the Truth. I would not presume to tell Christians how to be Christians, but I must confess that I cannot understand how Christians, without ceasing to be Christians, can retreat one inch from a belief that Jesus is the second person of a triune God, the Christ, the redeemer. If other religions offer equally valid ways to salvation and if Christianity itself may be understood solely as a code of morals and ethics, then we may as well all become Buddhists, or better, atheists. I intend no offense, but it takes one to know one. And when I read much Protestant theology and religious history today, I have the warm feeling that I am in the company of fellow nonbelievers.¹⁴

Another important aspect of Christian faith that should inform the Christian historian is that truth may be distinguished from falsehood. Paul expected the Galatians to be able to discern a false gospel from the gospel that he preached (Gal 1:8, 9). He expected the Corinthians to distinguish between the true Jesus preached by Paul and the false one preached by false apostles (2 Cor. 11:3, 4). Sometimes, therefore, when the distinctions are clear a group or a thought must be identified as non-Christian, which may claim to be Christian, or heretical, which may desire the cloak of orthodoxy. And in some settings, one type of preaching may be judged in itself more conducive to spiritual awakening than another type. This kind of analysis does not lie beyond the bounds of historical judgment.

A Christian historian will reverently avoid absolutism in his portrayal of these factors, for he will realize that many common features exist in the broad spectrum of evangelical preaching. These common features may be central to the gospel and thus produce like results in both Calvinist and Arminian preaching. It may be just as true, however, that added elements may greatly compromise the spirituality of responses to preaching.

The second question concerns the value of Christian experience as both a subjective and objective factor in writing history. Employing Edwards's understanding of "Affections" as a distinctive aspect of evangelical Christianity certainly would create an explanatory framework "that only insiders find credible" at certain strategic points. Edwards claims, and demonstrates from Scripture, that there is in the gospel and the saving influences of the Spirit of God a "new inward perception or sensation" of mind that is "entirely different in its nature and kind from anything that ever their minds were the subjects of before they were sanctified."¹⁵

For Edwards, therefore, Christian experience necessarily functions at points as a guiding principle in the lives of some people. This principle may

¹⁴ Eugene Genovese, *The Southern Front: History and Politics in the Culture War* (University of Missouri Press, 1995), 10.

¹⁵ *Religious Affections*, ed. Smith, 205.

operate both in the historian as he evaluates his material and as a factor to be discerned in the objects of his study. If there really is such a thing as a "spiritual and holy beauty, which is seen only by the regenerate" as well as a "natural good, which all men love as they love themselves," then perhaps a Christian historian may see some things differently than a non-Christian. This is not because the Christian receives revelation of information that is not available to the non-Christian or has an enhanced intelligence or has any new faculties added to those which any conscientious reader of the sources has. Rather, "this new spiritual sense is not a new faculty of understanding, but it is a new foundation laid in the nature of the soul, for a new kind of exercises of the same faculty of understanding."¹⁶ A Christian historian cannot eliminate that faculty from his soul nor disregard it as he examines the documents of history.

In light of this, when a Christian historian reads the diary of a successful minister, in this case George Whitefield, who says, "Lord, not unto me, but unto Thy free grace be all the glory!"¹⁷ he should have enough documentation to nullify a judgment that the minister's popularity was due to "shameless self-promotion through the press and word-of-mouth."¹⁸ Christian experience should give a historian empathy with such expressed spirituality and should forestall the conclusion that the words are a cloak for self-promotion unless irrefutable evidence to the contrary can be produced. Such confidence in this experience should be entirely credible to "insiders" who have the Spirit of God, while it may not be credible to outsiders. The Apostle Paul told us that the natural man will not receive spiritual things because they are foolishness to him and he can not understand them because they are spiritually discerned. The evangelical should be wary of lying down in the historical procrustean bed perfumed and feathered by the naturalist.

One need not agree with all of Murray's specific interpretations to speak with confidence, in harmony with Murray, both in private and in the market place that there is such a thing as "an outpouring of the Spirit of God" (88). It would not be a bad thing to work hard as an honest historian and at the same time be like those "freshly-anointed preachers" envisioned by Murray who are "hard students of Scripture," who "prize a great spiritual heritage," who see "the danger of 'unsanctified learning'," whose cheerfulness has "a higher source than their work," and whose knowledge of God Himself is "their supreme concern and joy" (387).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 206.

¹⁷ George Whitefield, *George Whitefield's Journals* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1978), 468.

¹⁸ Harry S. Stout, "George Whitefield in Three Countries," in Noll, *et al.* eds., *Evangelicalism*, 58.