

A Timeline of American Revivalism

- **1734**

A religious fervor begins to sweep the town of Northampton, Massachusetts. Sinners are converted by the hundreds under the ministry of Rev. Jonathan Edwards. He details the occurrences in *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Works of God* (1737), one of the seminal works of the Great Awakening.

- **1743**

In response to Edwards and his disciples, the annual convention of Massachusetts Congregational ministers issues a condemnation of practices which lead to "disorderly tumults."

- **1750**

Edwards, attempting to instate open confession (one of the hallmarks of the Great Awakening), is fired from his church in Northampton. He turns to theological writing.

- **1780-1800**

These years see the publication of several central works of American deism, a humanistic philosophy espousing faith based on reason: Ethan Allen's *Reason the Only Oracle of Man*, Thomas Paine's *The Rights of Man*. Deism is condemned by the clergy, embraced by the intelligentsia, including Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson.

- **1782**

A survey at Princeton University, a bastion of the Presbyterian ministry, finds only two professed Christians in the student body.

- **1798**

The Presbyterian minister James MacGready of North Carolina moves to Kentucky to begin a frontier mission. Over the next two years at his Red River church, the Great (or Western) Revival begins.

- **1801**

On August 6th, the first camp meeting (precursor of the tent meeting) takes place, at Cane Ridge, Ky. It lasts three days; 20,000 are said to attend. Some witnesses record that liquor was in abundant use and many virgins were undone.

- **1809**

The Presbyterian Church disciplines MacGready and distances itself from revivalism.

- **1785-1840**

Through its embrace of revivalism, and the labors of its "circuit riders" (traveling frontier preachers), the Methodist Church grows from 15,000 to 850,000 souls. The Methodist ministers stress dramatic, personal conversion. Rev. Peter Cartwright tells of being struck down by a flash of divine light; when "convicted", Rev. James B. Finley spends a week in a hollow log, weeping and reading the Bible.

- **1856-1861**

Boston shoe salesman Dwight L. Moody moves to Chicago to make his fortune. He spends his free time as a YMCA organizer, until his fame as a preacher allows him to give up business. He unites with singer/composer Ira Sankey (who coined the term "gospel music"). They are the first great urban revivalists. They use publicity, advertising and organizational planning to conduct successful revivals throughout the U.S. and England (where in one tour they are heard by 1.5 million people).

- **1889**

Mariah Woodworth-Etter, first of the famous woman revivalists, arrives to preach in Oakland, CA. At the height of her popularity, she speaks to racially mixed crowds of 2,500. Her husband cranks an ice-cream freezer at the refreshment stand, 50 feet from the pulpit.

- **1890**

Etter holds weekly street parades to trumpet her prediction of an earthquake and tidal wave to strike the city on April 14. The date passes uneventfully. Etter flees Oakland the next day. Her chief civic supporters are sent to an insane asylum.

- **1891**

Chicago outfielder Billy Sunday gives up baseball to begin spreading the word of God. Twenty years later "the baseball preacher," famous for "sliding in" to the altar, will be preaching in New York in a tabernacle of 16,000 seats, with the Astors and Rockefellers in attendance.

Compiled by Herschel Garfein. Sources: Bernard A. Weisberger, *They Gathered at the River* (Chicago, 1966); Patsy Sims, *Can Somebody Shout Amen?* (NY, 1988); The New York Times; MSNBC; The Pew Resource Center.

- **1901, 1906**

During revivals in Topeka, Kansas, and Los Angeles, California, congregants speak in tongues. The modern Pentecostal movement begins.

- **1926**

Evangelist Aimee Semple MacPherson "disappears," the purported victim of kidnappers. When she reappears in Los Angeles, 100,000 people line the streets to greet her rose-draped car.

- **1927**

SINCLAIR LEWIS PUBLISHES *ELMER GANTRY*.

- **1947**

After years of declining popularity in the 30's and 40' s, revivalism is launched again by Pentecostal preachers Oral Roberts, A.A. Allen and Jack Coe.

- **1950-1960**

A. A. Allen holds interracial revivals in Little Rock and Atlanta, hotbeds of segregationism. He publicly pledges to uphold integration in his services.

- **1956**

Evangelist Jack Coe is arrested for practicing medicine without a license. During a service, he had urged a woman to remove the leg braces from her polio-stricken son, thus causing the boy irreparable physical damage. Coe is acquitted, but dies ten months later.

- **1968**

Oral Roberts stuns evangelicals by accepting the stewardship of an Oklahoma Methodist church. He begins massive campaigns to build a university and medical center in Tulsa. Over the next twenty years he will repeatedly claim that God is going to "call him back" if he doesn't meet fundraising goals.

- **1975**

In the aftermath of two deaths at a Holiness church in Newport, Tennessee, the ACLU represents the church in an unsuccessful challenge to the state's law prohibiting snake-handling.

- **1984**

In a private prayer meeting, Evangelist Arthur Blessitt, famous for having carried a 12-foot cross around the world, helps future President George W. Bush to accept Jesus. Blessitt's diary entry for April 4 says, "Led Vice President Bush's son to Jesus today. This is great! Glory to God."

- **1988**

Evangelist Jimmy Swaggart, rumored to be visiting prostitutes, tearfully confesses to unspecified sins on national TV. The Assemblies of God order him not to preach for one year.

- **1988**

In the Iowa Presidential caucus, Televangelist Pat Robertson finishes second.

- **1989**

Jim Bakker, head of PTL (Praise the Lord) Ministries, is convicted of defrauding his followers of \$158 million - the largest case of mail fraud in U.S. history. He is sentenced to 45 years in prison.

- **1991**

Jimmy Swaggart is stopped for traffic violations in California. A prostitute is with him in the car. He later announces he will step down from the directorship of his worldwide ministries.

- **2001**

On Pat Robertson's "700 Club" telecast two days after the September 11 attacks, Rev. Jerry Falwell says God may have allowed the attacks because of the country's moral decay. Addressing the ACLU, abortionists, feminists and gays, he says, "You helped this happen." He apologizes a few days later.

- **2004**

A film, "George W. Bush: Faith in the White House", which recounts the Blessitt conversion experience, is released on DVD and shown at off-the-floor events at the Republican National Convention. Eventually, Bush carries 78% of the white evangelical vote (up from 68% in 2000).

- **2006**

Ted Haggard ('Pastor Ted'), leader of the National Association of Evangelicals, is alleged by male prostitute Mike Jones to have paid him for sex and bought methamphetamine over the course of a 3-year relationship. Haggard receives three weeks of pastoral counseling and emerges 'completely heterosexual.' However, the public uproar continues and Haggard resigns.