



## REVIVAL I

### CULTURAL RESOURCES

**Sunday, August 17, 2008**

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#### **I. Introduction**

(A) Today's lection text long ago spawned an African American song from the Island Methodists off the coast of Charleston, South Carolina:

Ezekiel in the valley----- Oh----

Ezekiel in the valley----- Oh----

Ezekiel in the valley----- Oh----

Oh--- Lord, time is drawing nigh

Oh--- Look-a what a wonder-----Oh---...

Oh---Calling of the judgment-----Oh---

Ain't you heard about Hezekiah----- Oh—...

Ezekiel what's the matter?-----Oh---...<sup>1</sup>

Luke A. Powery's commentary points us to the contemporary valley of dry bones and suggests that our churches sit in communities where there is death and despair, but all need not be lost; that is if the living church recognizes that work outside the church walls is as important as service to members-in-good-standing within the congregation. Some congregations, new and old, have repositioned their notion of revival and mission and grounded their mission toward those most in need of sanctuary and revival. Some churches have figured this out and are examples that can be followed.

**(B) Donna Laurence Jones, Pastor of Cookman United Methodist Church**

Donna Laurence Jones has been pastor of Cookman United Methodist Church in Philadelphia for the past 15 years, where she has led her congregation in areas of restorative justice impacting women, children, and families. Her work includes: beginning an alternative high school for youth 14-20 years of age, a welfare to work ministry, a youth and young-adult led entrepreneurial and leadership development ministry, a unique program of family group decision-making aimed at enabling families and their young people avoid court and other punitive sanctions, transitional housing for young women who have aged out of foster care, and a 13 square-block walk-in center that serves older teens and young adults.

Reverend Jones believes in a holistic ministry where material and spiritual needs are naturally connected.<sup>2</sup> “Jesus met the physical and material needs of people, as well, and the spiritual needs. It's very important for churches to engage in ministry to persons in welfare or in transition, and we work with both. If the church does not get involved, we will see more homelessness, more hunger, more crime, more violence, more drug activity, more hopelessness, more shootings, more of all that's wrong in our society today. The church can, at least, begin a dialogue with government about how we can have some kind of partnership, to ensure that the whole person is dealt with in our society in a way that brings life. Doing holistic ministry is hard – it's hard in general, to work closely with individuals who are going through pain, and what makes it more difficult is to have to do that with limited resources, limited staff. When you're talking about people restoration, without the hope that comes from faith, I don't see that it's possible.”<sup>3</sup>

Reverend Jones' reference to, “hope that comes from faith,” comes from her deep sense that people who come into the church's programs for training also need spiritually based support to take their newly acquired skills and apply them in the world for an extended period. For Jones, there is a difference between getting a job and keeping one, and building on a new work experience. A faith community is a crucial part of expanding that capacity and creating true revival in the lives of persons.<sup>4</sup>

**(C) Liberation Community Presbyterian Church, Memphis, TN**

*Our participation in the Kingdom of God is directly connected to our participation in works of justice. Yet justice issues are difficult to find on the agendas of many church institutions.*<sup>5</sup>

Reverend J. Herbert Nelson, and Reverend Gail Porter Nelson are the pastors of Liberation Community Church, the first African American Presbyterian Church in Memphis in 46 years. It began as New Life Community Presbyterian Church, and in 1995, after re-working the mission of the church, Liberation Community Church was born. The regional Presbytery refused to charter this church; Liberation Community Church was instead chartered by the national church body. “We are in the heart of the community, and are not a church running from problems in the community, but are running to the problems.”<sup>6</sup> The church is located in the Whitehaven community of Memphis, Tennessee, and operates as a ministry to the poor and oppressed. Over half of the membership is under 17. The Basic Learning Center of the church has adopted the Whitehaven Elementary School, and provides after school and summer day camp. There is a weeknight worship service focused on the concerns of young people. The Gayraud S. Wilmore Community Learning House is a church house and computer learning center, which offers activities for building the community. Rev Herbert states, “I still believe that children want to be taught, loved, nurtured, and disciplined. We cannot educate children in a vacuum, while assuming that parents understand how to raise their children or what constitutes proper behavior. The rules of community living, and respect among neighbors, have changed and gone unchecked. **This revival effort aims to rekindle a spark of hope for all children of the city.** There is a call for religious groups, community organizations, schools, business leaders, former teachers, graduates, and children to join in improving communal living and raising the bar of expectations for our children.”<sup>7</sup>

## **II. The Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Civil Rights Movement as Revivals**

“What a fellowship, what a joy divine

Leaning on the everlasting arms

What a blessedness, what a peace is mine

Leaning on the everlasting arms.”

This hymn, “Leaning on the Everlasting Arms”<sup>8</sup> by Elisha Hoffman, was one of the powerful hymns used in mass meetings during the Montgomery Bus Boycott. After the successful beginning of the Montgomery Bus Boycott, a Grand Jury was convened and it found that the boycott was illegal and named citizens who should be brought in for indictment. On Wednesday, February 22, 1956, mass arrests ordered by the Montgomery Grand Jury began. Eighty-nine leaders, mostly ministers, were picked up first and fingerprinted, photographed, given case numbers, and released. I believe that the Civil Rights Movement was in many ways a revival for the churches that participated and for people from all walks of life who joined this historic struggle against systemic racism within the United States of America.<sup>9</sup>

This movement was led *en masse* by those who bore the brunt of a brutal, crippling, racist system. As we stepped out, there were others who walked with us, not just to free black people, but to, in fact, find another centering for what was important and central in their lives. The Civil Rights Movement was in large part hosted by the black church, the church being an institution owned by its membership and built to hold congregations. It is important to note that not all churches opened their doors, but quite a few that did paid a cost in losing their buildings to bombs. But a church is more than a building, and the bombs, jailings, and killings did not stop the organizing; and churches continued to step forward--opening their doors for mass meetings, sanctuary, planning meetings, becoming the place from whence the marches began, extending its work and mission outside of its walls, taking over the streets, going to jail, sitting in—challenging racism in the heart of its stronghold in the American South. **This massive call to justice was civil, social, political and, at its core, a spirit-led revival work.** It was a call for a kind of revival for a nation to be morally righteous and rid itself of systemic legal protection of the practice of unjust and evil racial segregation and oppression.<sup>10</sup>

### **III. Historical Revivals: The First Great Awakening, The Second Great Awakening, and The Azusa Street Revival**

#### **(A) The First Great Awakening**

When I first read about the First and Second Great Awakenings and the conversions, I recognized what was being described, because I had grown up and joined the church within a community where revivals and sign-indicating conversions were expected of all of us who stood and stepped forward to join the church.

The First Great Awakening was not really an ongoing revival, but multiple revivals in different locations between 1730-1745. This spiritual movement brought into the church people who were left out of the Puritan and Anglican establishment churches of Massachusetts and Virginia.<sup>11</sup> Participants in these services would express themselves with extreme emotion: barking, shouting, and running as an expression of their conversion. A leading figure of the First Great Awakening was George Whitefield, known as the “Great Itinerant.” An associate of John Wesley, Whitefield had a powerful voice, and it was said that he could be heard three miles from where he was preaching.<sup>12</sup> Whitefield preached that Christianity was accessible and all were welcome; he was the first revivalist to preach to Blacks. In a sermon in Philadelphia he constructed a conversation with heaven that demonstrated that he did not think much of the increasing tendencies for Christians to organize themselves in different denominations. Looking up, he asked:

"Father Abraham, whom have you in heaven? Any Episcopalians?"

“No!”

“Any Presbyterians?”

“No!”

“Any Independents or Methodists?”

“No! No! No!”

“Whom have you there?”

“We don't know those names here. All who are here are Christians...”

“Oh, is this the case? Then God help us to forget your party names and to become Christians in deed and truth.”<sup>13</sup>

African Americans seeking a way to build a sustainable survival within a slave-based economic, cultural, and social society, responded to this message, the accessibility of God to each heart and soul. Methodists and Baptists were more inviting to personal witness and experience as evidence of conversion.

The text of the spiritual, “I Got Shoes,” is brilliant in its statement that we are all equal in the sight of God, and that the message of Jesus Christ and the messenger may or may not be compatible. The line, “Everybody talking about heaven ain't going there,” is a parable admonishing us to always distinguish between the message and the messenger. Each person with a mind, heart, and observation could sort out for herself or himself what was good, and what was evil, in the world in which they worked out their daily lives.

I got shoes, you got shoes

All of God's children got shoes

When I get to heaven gonna put on my shoes

Gonna walk all over God's heaven, heaven, heaven

Everybody talking bout heaven `ain't going there

heaven...

### **(B) Charles Grandison Finney and The Second Great Awakening**

The Second Great Awakening focused on personal transformation over intellectual study and teaching. Social activism was also a central focus, especially in the East. Culturally, it was in the South, the Appalachian regions of Tennessee and Kentucky, where the evangelistic fiery camp meetings among Presbyterians, Methodists, and Baptists took hold and spread like a spiritual wild fire.<sup>14</sup>

During the autumn of 1821, at age twenty-nine, a student of the law in Adams, New York, Charles Finney, was saved. One Wednesday morning, Charles Finney woke up a questioning and sometimes scornful observer of the religious life around him. The following day, when asked by a client if he were ready to try the case scheduled for that

day, Finney was able to reply, "I have a retainer from the Lord Jesus Christ to plead his cause, I cannot plead yours."<sup>15</sup>

The ministry which began that day would change the face of American evangelism. Before and after his conversion, Finney rejected the Calvinist doctrine of passive salvation available only to the elect. He believed that God offered Himself to everyone and, most importantly, that one could be saved only through an active acceptance of God's invitation to grace. The sinner chooses to sin just as the penitent chooses to repent. Finney defines a revival not as a miracle in the sense of a physical change brought on solely by God, but a change of mind which, through influences by the Holy Spirit, is ultimately a matter of the individual's free will.<sup>16</sup> Ordained a Presbyterian minister in 1824, Finney believed in social activism abolition, temperance and suffrage groups, prison reform, and care for the handicapped and mentally ill. In addition to being an innovative evangelist whose techniques others would imitate, he held that the Gospel saved people, but that it also was a means to reform society. True to his word, Finney was a fervent abolitionist and encouraged other Christians to get involved.

Perhaps more than any other revival, the Second Great Awakening exerted a lasting impact on American society. While its fervor abated, it left a legacy of many established churches, democratization, and social reform.<sup>17</sup>

Some Congregationalists, led by Lyman Beecher, feared that Finney was opening the door to fanaticism by allowing too much expression of human emotion. Unitarians opposed Finney for using scare tactics to gain converts. Across the board, many thought that his habitual use of the words "you" and "hell" "let down the dignity of the pulpit." There is a stock or floating African American Christian song verse that speaks to the outpouring changed expressiveness of these services. The words are:

Some people call me noisy

I belong to the noisy crew

I shout when I get happy

That's the way God's Christians do.

Finney was also controversial because of what became known as "New Measures." He allowed women to pray in mixed public meetings. He adopted the Methodists' "anxious bench" -- he put a pew at the front of the church where those who felt a special urgency about their salvation could sit. He prayed in colloquial, common, language. Most of these New Measures were actually many decades old, but Finney popularized them and was attacked for doing so.

Between September 10, 1830 and March 6, 1831, Finney preached 98 sermons. He was in continual revival as a pastor of two churches in New York, before moving to Oberlin Ohio

in 1934 to pastor and teach. In 1851, he was appointed President of Oberlin College and used that forum to fight for the social reforms in which he believed.<sup>18</sup>

### **(C) The Azusa Street Revival 1906-1909**

The Azusa Street Revival in Los Angeles was led by an African American preacher, William Joseph Seymour, who was joined by his mentor, a White Holiness preacher named Charles Parham. The initiating revival lasted for three years with services three times a day for seven days a week. Thousands received what was called the “Tongues Baptism.” From this gathering, Pentecostalism was born and spread around the world. There also were two other large revivals that grew out of the Azusa Street tradition which were the Brownsville Revival, also called Pensacola Outpouring, and the Toronto Blessing Revival.



Rev. William J.J. Seymour

Charles Fox Parham, a teacher at the Bethel Bible School in Topeka, Kansas, believed that speaking in tongues, “glossolalia,” was evidence of Holy Ghost baptism. He believed that this, along with sanctification and salvation, were the three works of grace available to Christians. Seymour studied with Parham after he relocated to Houston, Texas. William Joseph Seymour was born May 2, 1820 in Centerville, Louisiana. His spiritual journey took him to Indianapolis and the Holiness church. He arrived in Houston in 1905 and worked with Lucy Farrow, who introduced him to Parham. Parham training sessions were for whites only, and Seymour had to sit in the hallway.

Seymour moved to Los Angeles in 1906, but was not well received in the Holiness church there. He continued to conduct services in homes and received his personal Holy Ghost Baptism on April 12, 1906.<sup>19</sup> Those that witnessed his Holy Ghost Baptism shouted and danced for three days and three nights praising God. The followers of Seymour then located a space at 312 Azusa Street. It had originally been used as an African Methodist Episcopal Church and, having fallen into disrepair, had been used as a stable to house hay and livestock. The building was secured and cleaned up within days, and the Azusa Street Mission was born. Thousands came together in worship and prayer: men, women, children,

the aged, blacks, whites, Hispanics, Asians, the rich and the poor, the educated and the uneducated.<sup>20</sup> The merging and the participation from all of the ethnic minorities of Los Angeles was a phenomenon that was almost unheard of in America in 1906. It has been described as the color line being washed away in the Blood.<sup>21</sup>

Parham broke with Seymour on the issue of racial mixing within congregations. Seymour continued to serve as the pastor of the Apostolic Faith Mission on Azusa Street along with his wife Jennie Evans Moore, whom he married in May 13, 1908. They lived over the mission and organized schools, rescue missions, and other congregations, all the time preaching the Holy Ghost Baptism and preaching against racism. This Spirit-filled movement spread from Los Angeles; a new Christianity called Pentecostal and Charismatic was born. Several new churches came out of the Azusa Street Revival, among the most well known are the Assemblies of God Church and the Church of God In Christ.

- Ivey Campbell, a White Christian from Akron Ohio, received the Holy Ghost Baptism at the Azusa Street Revival in 1906 and returned to Akron, Ohio and held a sharing in the summer of 1907, where many of the ministers and laity of the Christian and Missionary Alliance came into the outpouring experience of the Holy Spirit. Some of these members spread to the Assemblies of God Church.
- G. B. Cashwell was a minister of the Holiness Association of North Carolina and received the Holy Ghost Baptism at the Azusa Street Revival in 1906 and returned to start the Fire Baptized Holiness Church.
- C. H. Mason was an African American Holiness minister in Memphis, Tennessee and received the Holy Ghost Baptism at the Azusa Street Revival in 1906 and became the founder of the Church of God in Christ (Pentecostal).<sup>22</sup>

The powerful congregational spirited worship tradition intensified African American worship culture across congregational lines. The role of instruments in worship, and the evolution of gospel music as a congregational shout tradition within Holiness and Pentecostal congregations, influenced Baptist worship styles. As we move deeper into the 21<sup>st</sup> century with most African American youth outside of the church and not doing well in school or on the streets, churches are being called upon to again step outside their walls for a revival that could also be the salvation of the organized black church and the black community.

### Notes

1. Ezekiel in the Valley. Traditional Gullah song from the Johns Island Singers, Johns Island, S.C.; Location: Moving Star Hall Singers, and Alan Lomax. Sea Island Folk Festival. Custom compact disc series. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Folkways, 2001. Audio clip can be heard of the Lomax recording from the album. You must scroll toward the bottom of the page. Made available by The Center for Southern African-American Music (CSAM) at the USC School of Music:  
[http://www.sc.edu/csam/csamaudioarchive\\_various.htm](http://www.sc.edu/csam/csamaudioarchive_various.htm)



2. Cookman United Methodist Church: "Surviving Fears, Change, and Conflict." Evangelicals for Social Action: Word & Deed Network: accessed 17 Jan. 2008.  
<http://www.urbanministry.org/esa/cookman-united-methodist-church-surviving-fears-ch>
  
3. Transcribed from the video, "What is Holistic Ministry," available at 1-800-650-6600. Evangelicals for Social Action: Word & Deed Network, accessed 17 Jan. 2008.  
<http://www.urbanministry.org/revdonna-lawrence-jones-cookman-united-methodist-church>
  
4. Ibid.
  
5. J. Herbert II. "Bible Explorations." Presbyterians Today. April 2005.
  
6. Jones, Yolanda. "Liberation Enters Fold of Memphis Presbytery." The Commercial Appeal, 12 April 1999.
  
7. Nelson, J. Herbert II. "A Conspiracy for Achievement." The Commercial Appeal, Thursday, 12 June 2003, B5.
  
8. Performance by: "JMBC Rev Sutton Sings Leaning on the Everlasting Arm"  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RskdnnzuveI&feature=related>
  
9. Maundy, Alfred. "Around the USA," The Nation, 3 March 1956. Songs of the Civil Rights Movement 1955-1965, unpublished dissertation of Bernice Johnson Reagon, 1975.
  
10. Robinson, Jo Ann Gibson, and David J. Garrow. The Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Women Who Started It: The Memoir of Jo Ann Gibson Robinson. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1987.
  
11. Matthews, Terry. "Lecture 4: The Great Awakening." Wake Forest University Religion in the South Course. 1995, accessed 17 Jan. 2008  
<http://www.wfu.edu/~matthetl/perspectives/four.html>
  
12. Ibid.
  
13. Ibid.
  
14. [www.u-s-history.com/pages/h1090](http://www.u-s-history.com/pages/h1090)
  
15. Finney, Charles Grandison, Garth Rosell, and Richard A. G. Dupuis. The Memoirs of Charles G. Finney: The Complete Restored Text. Grand Rapids, MI: Academie Books, 1989. p. 24
  
16. Finney, Charles Grandison. Lectures on Revivals of Religion. The John Harvard Library. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1960.

17. "Religion: The Second Great Awakening." Travel & History: at Online Highways  
<http://www.u-s-history.com/pages/h1091.html>, accessed 17 Jan. 2008
18. See the following books for additional information on Revivals and Revivalists:  
Rosell, Garth M. and Richard A.G. Dupuis, eds. The Memoirs of Charles Finney: The Complete Restored text. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1989, first published 1875;  
Finne, Charles. Lectures on Revival. William G. McLoughlin, ed. Cambridge: Flemming H. Revell Pub., 1960; Duewel, Wesley L. Revival Fire. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub. House, 1995; Bartleman, Frank. Azusa Street. New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 2000; Ravenhill, Leonard. Why Revival Tarries. Minneapolis, MN: Bethany Press, 1984; Orr, J. Edwin, and Richard Owen Roberts. Campus Aflame: A History of Evangelical Awakenings in Collegiate Communities. Wheaton, Il: International Awakening Press, 1994; Orr, J. Edwin, and Richard Owen Roberts. The Event of the Century: The 1857-1858 Awakening. Wheaton, Illinois: International Awakening Press, 1989.
19. "Evangelists and Apologists: Charles Finney Father of American revivalism." Christian History & Biography, accessed 17 Jan. 2008  
<http://www.christianitytoday.com/history/special/131christians/finney.html>
20. Holstein, Joanna B. "Azusa (Asusa) Street Revival: Birth of the Pentecostal Movement." Becker Bible Studies. accessed 17 Jan. 2008  
[http://www.guidedbiblestudies.com/library/asusa\\_street\\_revival.htm](http://www.guidedbiblestudies.com/library/asusa_street_revival.htm)
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid.