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“Your Sons and Your Daughters Shall Prophesy...Your Young Men Shall See Visions”:

The Role of Youth in the Second Great Awakening,

1800-1850

Trevor J. Wright

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Rachel Cope, Chair
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Religious Education

Brigham Young University

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ABSTRACT

“Your Sons and Your Daughters Shall Prophecy...Your Young Men Shall See Visions”:
The Role of Youth in the Second Great Awakening,
1800-1850

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This thesis contends that youth from age twelve to twenty-five played a pivotal role in the revivals of the Second Great Awakening in New York and New England. Rather than merely being passive onlookers in these religious renewals, the youth were active participants, influencing the frequency, spread, and intensity of the Christian revivals. Relying heavily upon personal accounts written by youth and revival records from various denominations, this work examines adolescent religious experiences during the first half of the nineteenth century.

Chapter 1 explores the impact parents had on youth religiosity, showing how the teaching and examples they saw in their homes built the religious foundation for young people. The next chapter discusses how the youth continued to build upon what they were taught in their homes by seeking for personal conversion experiences. This chapter contends that conversion experiences were the crucial spiritual turning point in the lives of young people, and explores how they were prepared for and reacted to these experiences. Chapter 3 outlines personal worship among the youth and describes the specific tactics that churches implemented in helping convert and strengthen the young. As churches used revival meetings and clergy-youth relationships to fortify these converts, young people implemented the same practices in helping their peers. Finally, chapter 4 utilizes revival records and Methodist church data to provide quantitative evidence of the widespread and crucial role that young people had in influencing revivals.

Understanding the widespread impact of these youth on nineteenth-century revivals provides new insight into the ways in which young people impacted the greater social, religious, and culture changes sweeping across America at the time.

Keywords: Second Great Awakening, revivals, revivalism, youth, spirituality, conversion narrative, devotional life, evangelical churches

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Introduction and Historiography

“Children of the Godly”: Understanding Youth and the Second Great Awakening

Early nineteenth-century America was characterized by periods of widespread religious activity and frequent revivals. The spirit of freedom permeated the people of the United States, which was emerging from a successful revolution just a few decades before, and pervaded the social, economic, and spiritual lives of the people—especially those of New York and New England.¹ This new period of religious fervor, termed the Second Great Awakening, was characterized by prevalent conversion—personal religious experiences which caused individuals to devote themselves to Christ—and subsequent joining of various churches, dramatic manifestations, and frequent religious gatherings.

Authors have discussed extensively the reasons for the emergence of such revivals and the impact they had on communities and society as a whole, examining them primarily through a macro-lens. However, the religious experience and impact of a significant segment of the population, the youth, has largely been unwritten. During the first half of the nineteenth century, many youth engaged themselves in religious gatherings through frequent attendance at various church and spiritual meetings, sharing of religious conversion experiences, proselytizing work among peers, and general excitement for religious topics. Yet, despite this involvement, scholars have largely overlooked the role that youth played in the spread of, the involvement in, and the continuation of revivals during the first half of the nineteenth century—thus a wide

¹ Nathan O Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

scholastic gap remains to be filled specifically focusing on youth involvement in religion.² Even with the abundance of nineteenth-century records that expound upon youth conversion experiences, basic religiosity, and revival and church data, few scholars have told the story of the lived religion of youth.³

While this approach of exploring “practiced religion” has been applied to other historical groups throughout time, this method has never been specifically implemented in a significant way in relation to nineteenth-century youth and the Second Great Awakening.⁴ This method of exploring and examining everyday experience “opens doors to an astonishing range of historical queries” about the practices of youth.⁵ What was the driving force behind the youths’ desire for religious activity? What role did social interaction between peers, parents, pastors and others play in the participation of youth in

² Joseph F. Kett, *Rites of Passage: Adolescence in America, 1790 to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, 1977); Joseph F. Kett, “Adolescence and Youth in Nineteenth-Century America,” *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 2, no. 2 (October 1, 1971): 283–298; Nancy F. Cott, “Young Women in the Second Great Awakening in New England,” *Feminist Studies* 3, no. 1/2 (October 1, 1975): 15–29; Mary P. Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: the Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865* (Cambridge, Eng.; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Susan Juster, “‘In A Different Voice’: Male And Female Narratives Of Religious Conversion In Post-Revolutionary America,” *American Quarterly* 41, no. 1 (March 1989): 34–62; Stephen R. Grossbart, “Seeking the Divine Favor: Conversion and Church Admission in Eastern Connecticut,” *William & Mary Quarterly* 46, no. 4 (October 1989): 696–740; Rodney Hessinger, *Seduced, Abandoned, and Reborn: Visions of Youth in Middle-Class America, 1780-1850* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005); Todd M. Brenneman, “A Child Shall Lead Them: Children and New Religious Groups in the Early Republic,” in *Children and Youth in a New Nation*, ed. James Alan Marten (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 108–125; Rachel Cope, “‘In Some Places A Few Drops And Other Places A Plentiful Shower’: The Religious Impact Of Revivalism On Early Nineteenth-Century New York Women” (PhD diss., Syracuse University, 2009). Hillel Schwartz, “Adolescence and Revivals in Ante-Bellum Boston,” *Journal of Religious History* 8, no. 2 (December 1974): 144–158.

³ By “lived religion.” I specifically refer to the personal religious experiences that young people had as understood from their perspectives.

⁴ Perhaps the champion of examining lived religion is Robert Orsi. For one example of his work, see Robert A. Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem, 1880-1950*, 2nd ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002).

Others have described the lived-religion approach as taking “a mediating stance between social analysis and theological appropriation of practice.” Laurie F. Maffly-Kipp, Leigh Eric Schmidt, and Mark R. Valeri, eds., *Practicing Protestants: Histories of Christian Life in America, 1630-1965* (Baltimore, Md: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 6.

⁵ Maffly-Kipp, Schmidt, and Valeri, *Practicing Protestants*, 3.

religious exercises? Were religious experiences as deeply impactful in the hearts of these youth as they were widespread?

This chapter will provide a foundational understanding of what has been written about the Second Great Awakening and revivalism in New York and New England, discuss the strengths and weaknesses of various works, and ultimately show the gap within scholarship that this thesis will fill in relation to the religious involvement of youth during this time. As other scholars who have implemented this approach have done, I hope to “offer fuller descriptive accounts than have previously been written.”⁶

The Emergence of Revivals

Scholars and writers have often used the terms “awakening” and “revivals” synonymously, but they differ in their scope. William McLoughlin described the difference: “Revivals alter the lives of individuals; awakenings alter the world view of a whole people or culture.”⁷ Or as Rachel Cope noted, “the story of revivalism is not identical to the story of the Great Awakenings, nor should periods of personal awakening be subsumed by the cultural changes described by the same term.”⁸ In short, revivals directly influence individuals, which then go on to impact societies through the creation of new churches, the spread of religious and political ideals, and the strengthening of societal institutions whose priorities are based on the moral and religious principles espoused by revivals.

⁶ Ibid., 6.

⁷ William McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform: An Essay on Religion and Social Change in America, 1607-1977* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), xii.

⁸ Cope, “In Some Places A Few Drops.” For a better look at Great Awakening sources see Cope, 19-25.

The revivals of the Second Great Awakening often began as traveling preachers moved from town to town sparking religious excitement by “stir[ring] the memories of the hardened or indifferent.”⁹ The fire of conversion sparked in an individual or small group and quickly engulfed hundreds of souls; in some cases, whole towns united themselves with a church and received the grace of God.

Northwestern Connecticut in the late 1790s was the birthplace for such revivals and they spread quickly throughout the rest of New England and into New York.¹⁰ Areas as far west as Ohio and as far south as Georgia experienced revivals, and over time the

⁹ Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism*. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 51.

¹⁰ The historical underpinnings for the Great Awakening in the early 1800s stem from the First Great Awakening that occurred a century earlier. While some scholars have argued that no such awakening existed, Thomas Kidd makes the case for this foundational beginning.¹⁰ He argues “there was, indeed, a powerful, unprecedented series of revivals...that touched many of the colonies” during this time, eventually leading up to “a new round of growth” later called the Second Great Awakening. Kidd goes as far as to say that truly, there was no Second Great Awakening, arguing that it was just an extension of the First Great awakening, “a long-term turn toward Baptist and Methodist piety.”¹⁰ His work is important in understanding that these awakenings did, in fact, occur and shaped the spiritual and social lives of those involved in them. Thomas S. Kidd, *The Great Awakening: the Roots of Evangelical Christianity in Colonial America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007). xvii, 321.

Jon Butler was the first to call the Great Awakening “interpretative fiction” and other scholars have agreed with him. See Jon Butler, “Enthusiasm Described and Decried: The Great Awakening as Interpretative Fiction,” *The Journal of American History* 69, no. 2 (September 1982): 305–325.

For other works on the First Great Awakening see Edwin S. Gaustad, *The Great Awakening in New England* (New York: Harper, 1957); Harry S Stout, *The Divine Dramatist: George Whitefield and the Rise of Modern Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 1991); Frank Lambert, “Pedlar in Divinity”: *George Whitefield and the Transatlantic Revivals, 1737-1770* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994).

Other pre-eighteenth century volumes give insight into the culture and evolution of the First Great Awakening. Charles E Hambrick-Stowe, *The Practice of Piety: Puritan Devotional Disciplines in Seventeenth-Century New England* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982) describes the religious culture of personal religious experience that led the First Great Awakening; Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Holy Fairs: Scottish Communion and American Revivals in The Early Modern Period* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989) shows the predecessor to American revivals in Scottish 17th century revivals and describes how Scottish immigrants had some influence on American revivals.

work caught fire in all parts of United States.¹¹ The movement had its greatest impact upon those of Western New York, an area termed the “Burned-over District.”¹²

The literature concerning the revivals of the early nineteenth century is vast and varied, but perhaps the most foundational work on the revivals during this time is *The Burned-over District* by Whitney Cross.¹³ After years of academic silence in the field of religious history, Cross emerged as the catalyst in bringing this region to the forefront of scholarship again. His work spans the entire Second Great Awakening period and specifically discusses social and economic consequences of revivals. Cross argues that the widespread religious awakenings, specifically in Western New York, were directly influenced by socio-economic conditions rather than political or spiritual influences. He describes how the economically developed counties of Western New York produced the perfect environment for social and religious reform. The strength of Cross’ study is in his

¹¹ One of the most notable revivals occurred at Cane Ridge, Kentucky in 1801 where Methodists, Presbyterians, and Baptists gathered and experienced an outpouring of spiritual manifestations and conversions. Paul K. Conkin, *Cane Ridge: America’s Pentecost* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1990).

One scholar noted, “Viewed against the general backdrop of American society, the revivals in northwestern Connecticut represent the emergence within the New England Congregational community of the rights of American’s to determine their own destiny.” David William Kling, *A Field of Divine Wonders: The New Divinity and Village Revivals in Northwestern Connecticut, 1792-1822* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993), 11.

¹² Whitney R Cross, *The Burned-Over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800-1850*, 2nd ed. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982).

The social makeup of this region provided an important opportunity for the fires of revivalism to spread. In contrast to Massachusetts and Connecticut, which established Congregational churches by law, New York was “a religious *tabula rasa* on which the local devout could write.” The citizens of this region did not merely reproduce their former churches in a new land, but rather sought to understand and create churches that were built “in accordance with democracy and common sense.” The people began to develop their own answers to questions about the function of churches, membership requirements, steps for salvation and religious proselyting. They created a system which embraced religion for and by the common man, shaking off some of the shackles of rigidity that existed in the New England Churches. In short, this nurtured the perfect setting in which “religious innovation” could flourish. Curtis D Johnson, *Islands of Holiness: Rural Religion in Upstate New York, 1790-1860* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 7–8.

¹³ Cross, *The Burned-Over District*.

unique approach. This is the first work that links “economics and reform to a region where revivals flourished.”¹⁴

Cross also discusses both the influence and impact of established churches and the emergence of new religious groups. He shows how ultraism—extreme religious and social reform—expanded in the region, leading to such groups as the Millerites and the Mormons. Because of the depth and importance of Cross’ research, any significant study done about the Second Great Awakening since then has been influenced by his thinking. While Cross’ research and approach is fundamental, this has had some negative consequences as well. Cross’ way of thinking about religious reform—in terms of social, economic, and political factors—has provided the framework in which many scholars have approached revivalism, largely ignoring the religious or personal perspective.¹⁵

According to various studies, scholars have contended that the Second Great Awakening furthered individual freedoms by allowing people to take charge of their own

¹⁴ Cope, “In Some Places A Few Drops,” 26.

¹⁵ Some examples of other scholars and works that built off of Cross include Richard Birdsall, who describes how a “crisis of faith and social order” in New England in the 1790s ultimately was resolved by the Second Great Awakening, increasing the total energy and stability of the region. Richard D. Birdsall, “The Second Great Awakening and the New England Social Order,” *Church History* 39, no. 3 (September 1970): 345–64. Donald G. Mathews argues that the awakening was not really about religion, but rather was “an organizing process that helped to give meaning and direction to people suffering in various degrees from the social strains of a nation on the move into new political, economic and geographical areas.” Donald G. Mathews, “The Second Great Awakening as an Organizing Process, 1780-1830: An Hypothesis,” *American Quarterly* 21, no. 1 (Spring 1969): 23–43. Using the Connecticut River Valley of Vermont as his case study, Randolph Anthony Roth attests that the awakening occurred because of the “changing nature of community and class relationships.” Randolph Anthony Roth, “Whence This Strange Fire? Religious and Reform Movements in the Connecticut River Valley of Vermont, 1791-1843” (PhD diss., Yale University, 1981).

Other writing about this time period include Neil Meyer who takes a more psychological approach and argues that the extreme display of emotions, most specifically shame, is the most significant feature of the early revivals. Neil Meyer, “Falling for the Lord: Shame, Revivalism, and the Origins of the Second Great Awakening,” *Early American Studies* 9, no. 1 (Winter 2011): 169–93. Michael Barkun asserts that there was widespread focus on millennialism during the first half of the nineteenth century which was a direct result of natural disasters and man-made catastrophes. Michael Barkun, *Crucible of the Millennium: the Burned-Over District of New York in the 1840s* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1986).

religious destinies¹⁶; instigated and influenced sweeping social movements like feminism, prohibition and abolitionism¹⁷; fueled the growth and creation of many denominations like the Methodists, Baptists, Mormons, and the Millerites¹⁸; and provided a foundation for the American family¹⁹. These studies are necessary and insightful in understanding the broader implications and influences of revivalism in general, but lack the specific, personal viewpoints which provide an opening into the lives of those who participated in the revivals, namely the youth.²⁰

¹⁶ Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*; Paul E. Johnson, "Democracy, Patriarchy, and American Revivals, 1780-1830," *Journal of Social History* 24, no. 4 (July 1, 1991): 843–850; Paul E. Johnson, *A Shopkeeper's Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815-1837* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978).

¹⁷ Donald Mathews notes that "The Second Great Awakening as a general phenomenon not limited by institutional or denominational lines was a vast mobilization of people," Mathews, "The Second Great Awakening as an Organizing Process, 1780-1830: An Hypothesis." Nancy Hardesty, *Women Called to Witness: Evangelical Feminism in the 19th Century* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984); Nancy Hardesty, *Your Daughters Shall Prophesy: Revivalism and Feminism in the Age of Finney* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Carlson Pub., 1991).

¹⁸ John H. Wigger, *Taking Heaven By Storm: Methodism and the Rise of Popular Christianity in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); Richard Carwardine, "The Second Great Awakening in the Urban Centers: An Examination of Methodism and the 'New Measures'," *The Journal of American History* 59, no. 2 (September 1972): 327–40; Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (Knopf, 2005); Bushman, *Beginnings*.

¹⁹ Anna M. Lawrence, *One Family Under God: Love, Belonging, and Authority in Early Transatlantic Methodism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011); Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class*.

²⁰ Paul E. Johnson's work fits into this category. He sides with Cross and argues that economics were key in the formation and spread of religious revivals. In *A Shopkeeper's Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815-1837*, Johnson contends that there were two stages to revivalism: stage one primarily affected the middle and upper class, while stage two led to the conversion of the working class. Thus, religious experiences seem to trickle down from the elite. His work also argues that the rising middle and upper classes used revivals as a way to discipline the "unruly middle class."

Despite his conclusions, Johnson's scope is limited. He ignores the personal perspective of the experiences of the workers themselves and makes his conclusions based on statistical data. Furthermore, he only had access to the records of two Presbyterian churches and two Episcopal churches, so his history is not a history of Rochester, but of those two churches alone. Johnson, *A Shopkeeper's Millennium*; Johnson, *Islands of Holiness*, 77–78, fn 2.

Other scholars also conclude that revivals and reform movements were linked to and promoted a more stable society. Rachel cope writes, "Glen C. Altscher and Jan M. Saltzgeber explore the excommunication trial of Rhoda Bement, a resident of Seneca Falls, New York, who challenged the veracity of her own minister. The reform issues that brought her to trial were abolition, temperance, and

One work that takes this big-picture approach, *The Democratization of American Christianity* by Nathan Hatch, provides an important understanding that largely affects personal spiritual experience. In his foundational work Hatch contends that the Second Great Awakening came about as a byproduct of the spirit of freedom and independence created by the American Revolution.²¹ Hatch notes that during this time Americans “yoked strenuous demand for revivals...with calls for popular sovereignty.” The ability for the people to “experiment with new forms of organization and belief” allowed for the emerging of new ideas and groups.²² Thus the revivals became a type of revolution in and of themselves. Hatch focuses on the leaders of the Methodists, Baptists, Mormons, the Christian Connection, and African-American congregations, and shows how these men were able to reject the traditional religious authority and create their own movement rooted in the tenets of the newly-formed democratic nation, but in doing so, he misses the experiences of the people involved in these movements.

women’s rights. By looking at this case, the authors explore the roots of revivalism and reform in Seneca Falls. Nancy Hewitt also looks at the public roles of women, as they sought social change in nineteenth-century Rochester, New York. Glen C. Altscher and Jan M. Saltzgaber, *Revivalism, Social Conscience, and Community in the Burned-Over District: The Trial of Rhoda Bement* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1983); Nancy Hewitt, *Women's Activism and Social Change: Rochester, New York, 1822-1872* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1984); see also, Michael Barkun, *Crucible of the Millennium: The Burned Over District of New York in the 1840s* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1986); and Timothy L. Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform: American Protestantism on the Eve of the Civil War* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1980),” Cope, “In Some Places A Few Drops,” 37.

Paul Johnson and Mary Ryan argue that “evangelical Protestantism provided a bulwark for northern society against the chaos created by commercialization and industrialization,” see Curtis Johnson, *Island of Holiness*, 1-2.

²¹ William G. McLoughlin also describes this spirit of independence emerging during this time. He notes that as nineteenth century America was moving away from a community-oriented worldview and toward one of independence and self-reliance, the old Calvinist ideas needed to be replaced by the Arminian doctrine that harmonized with emphasis on the individual, creating greater desire and need for religious revivals. McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform*, 1-23, 98-140; Johnson, *Islands of Holiness*.

²² Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*; Johnson, “Democracy, Patriarchy, and American Revivals, 1780-1830.”

Understanding Hatch's argument is important in considering why youth took such a commanding role in this awakening. Hatch shows that with the spirit of the American Revolution in full force, the people sought to hear the voice of the common man. Thus uneducated ministers were able to speak to the layman in common terms, rather than from a position of social authority. This emergence of new leaders changed the method and mode in which Americans viewed, thought about, and practiced religion.²³ While Hatch doesn't specifically refer to youth, this new system he describes allowed young men and young women to speak to their fellow citizens on a colloquial level and provided the necessary environment for revivalism to spread by word of mouth. The emergence of the common-preacher, rather than the educated ministers of the past, opened the gates for thousands of young people to join the cause of Christ and become preachers in their youth.

Curtis Johnson examines both broad effects of revivals and specific issues of religiosity. His work, *Islands of Holiness: Rural Religion in Upstate New York, 1790-1860*, uses Cortland County, New York as a case study to describe the emergence of frontier churches, their subsequent growth and development during the period of revivals, and their ultimate conflicts and divisions that arose from the beginning to the end of the Second Great Awakening.²⁴

Johnson explains how early Americans held differing viewpoints on the function of churches. The non-evangelicals, or Universalists, saw the church as an institution meant to maintain social order and encourage morality. In contrast, the evangelicals, or

²³ David Kling also links the emergence of revivals with the American revolution, Kling, *A Field of Divine Wonders*.

²⁴ Johnson, *A Shopkeeper's Millennium*.

Baptists and Methodists, felt that the chief function of the church was salvific in nature—leading souls to Jesus Christ. A third group, the perfectionists, felt the church should purify and redeem society. Johnson traces these churches throughout the first half of the nineteenth century and shows how these three viewpoints interacted and clashed with each other and changing societal pressures, and ultimately led to the breakup and reformation of many of these churches.²⁵

In discussing the changes within churches, Johnson turns briefly to the personal motivation for individual support of churches during this era. Unlike Cross, Hatch, Paul Johnson, and others, Curtis Johnson is convinced that rural revivalism in this region was ultimately influenced by religious ideology rather than “broad-based economic and demographic factors.” Change happened because people believed that “personal salvation was vitally important and became convinced that they had a role in promoting the salvation of themselves and others.”²⁶ He agrees with Catherine Brekus who stated, “I do not believe that eighteenth or nineteenth-century revivals were simply the byproduct of larger social or economic forces, or that religious *belief* had no independent force of its own . . . religion is an irreducible part of human experience that shapes as well as reflects culture.”²⁷

Johnson does not downplay the various social factors that created this hunger for salvation, like the positive influence of religious activity on domestic concerns or the need for churches to attract new members to gain or maintain stability, but he is clear that

²⁵ Johnson, *Islands of Holiness*, 133.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 167.

²⁷ Catherine A. Brekus, *Strangers & Pilgrims: Female Preaching in America, 1740-1845*, Gender and American culture (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 16–17.

the catalyst for the awakening was “the overriding evangelical assumption that a personal salvation experience was necessary for anyone seeking the blessing of eternal life.”²⁸ This important approach, acknowledging both societal impacts and personal motives, expands the field of scholarship in an important way. Curtis helps emphasize the point that societal movements, interactions, and changes are ultimately a result of individuals’ desires, motives, and actions.

This perspective becomes extremely important when examining youth. While Johnson only briefly mentions young people and their involvement in the revivals of Cortland County, contemporary youth accounts are filled with descriptions of their motivation in seeking salvation. The most common question that the youth would ask when first pricked by the Holy Spirit was “*what shall [I] do to be saved?*”²⁹ While each child’s definition of sin varied, from bad thoughts to pride to ingratitude,³⁰ countless primary accounts show how the sins of these youth weighed heavily upon their minds. And even after receiving justification from their sins, these youth desired to spread the message so others could feel what they had felt.³¹

Yet, Johnson’s work is still institution-focused, rather than person-focused. His purpose is to tell the tale of churches, rather than the stories about the members of those churches. So while his work opens the way for a discussion of personal religiosity as a

²⁸ Johnson, *Islands of Holiness*, 167.

²⁹ Joshua Bradley, *Accounts of Religious Revivals in Many Parts of the United States from 1815 to 1818* (Albany, New York: G.J. Loomis & Co, 1819), 173. Emphasis in original.

³⁰ E. Brooks Holifield, “Let the Children Come: The Religion of the Protestant Child in Early America,” *Church History* 76, no. 4 (December 2007): 769; *Christian Magazine* Vol. 1 (Utica, New York: Merrell & Camp, 1814), 30.

³¹ For example, sixteen-year old Mary desires other young people to read the Bible after her study of the book led her to experience a forgiveness of sin, *The Guardian or Youth’s Religious Instructor*, Vol 1, 1819, No 6:193-94.

motive for the formation of and spread of revivals, it ultimately leaves the door open for others to have that discussion—one in which this thesis seeks to engage.

Differing Perspectives

While many scholars have tried to explain the reasons for the emergence and spread of the revivals, others have focused on examining their impact on specific groups. Some works are specifically denominational studies, tracing how various denominations fared during this period of religious excitement. For example, David W. Kling concentrates solely on the Congregational churches of northwestern Connecticut. In his refreshingly poignant book *A Field of Divine Wonders: The New Divinity and Village Revivals in Northwestern Connecticut 1792-1822*, Kling explains how many “New Divinity” preachers, inspired by the efforts and teachings of Jonathan Edwards of the first awakening, emerged to “revive the backslidden or save the lost.”³² Their teachings were founded in the “right doctrine” of Calvinist election and they sought to guide many to accept true theology so they could experience a proper rebirth. Kling’s work is the foundational source on the New Divinity preachers and the beginnings of the Second Great Awakening. Using data from two counties in Connecticut, Kling puts Congregationalism in its proper context, describing its rise, climax, and fall. He makes the case that the revivals of the Second Great Awakening start in these counties with the New Divinity men and spread both geographically and denominationally as they mark the beginning of a “national and transatlantic explosion of spiritual energies probably not witnessed since the Protestant Reformation.”³³

³² Kling, *A Field of Divine Wonders*, 4.

³³ *Ibid.*, 13.

John Wigger is another denominationally-focused scholar. Wigger's work on Methodism, *Taking Heaven by Storm*, sides with Hatch about the impact of the revolution on religion, but further contends that the "social revolution of the early republic" combined with American Methodism aided in the popularization of American religion. In fact, he contends that Methodism was "one of the most important cultural or social developments of the early republic."³⁴ He notes that the spread, influence, and organization of Methodism showed how "popular religious movements ... could influence the basic character of American society."³⁵

Kling describes how the rise of the Arminian doctrine overtook the Congregationalist churches because the Methodist belief of "the free decision of humans" to choose their salvation harmonized better with the emerging republic than the old Calvinist thought about the "sovereign plans of God."³⁶ Citizens who were seeing a growing ability to choose political, social, and economical facets of their lives felt the power should extend to all aspects of their lives, including religious realms. Young people were growing up in this environment and were learning to think in terms of how they could personally choose their own religious path in life. With the Arminian doctrine of free will being spread chiefly by the Methodists, this sect became a magnet for the young. Wigger discusses this briefly and explains how "predominantly young, single-minded, and remarkably dedicated, Methodist itinerants forever changed the appearance

³⁴ John H. Wigger, *Taking Heaven by Storm: Methodism and the Rise of Popular Christianity in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

³⁵ Ibid., 195.

³⁶ Kling, *A Field of Divine Wonders*, 235.

and tone of American religion.”³⁷ Yet, the role and impact of these young itinerant preachers on Methodism and American religion as a whole has yet to be examined.³⁸ This contribution is important because these young preachers were the driving force behind the spread of Methodism during the early nineteenth century.

Youth and Religious Experiences

As instrumental as the revivals of this period were in shaping American life, the youth of the time were just as instrumental in shaping the revivals. To start, young people made up a large segment of the population of New York and New England. One scholar notes that about two-thirds of the people living in Vermont were twenty-five or under, while those moving to Western New York were even younger during the first part of the nineteenth century.³⁹ In addition to making up a sizeable segment of the population,

³⁷ Wigger, *Taking Heaven by Storm*, 48

³⁸ Richard Carwardine also specifically writes about Methodism. Like Wigger, he believes that Methodism was the driving force behind popularizing religion at this time. His assessment of Methodism is that it was “wholeheartedly a revival movement: it had been born out of a revival; its churches grew through revivals; its ministers preached revival; and its success was talked of in terms of revival.” This emphasis on revivals, combined with their anti-Calvinist doctrine gave the Methodist an advantage in winning souls. While they were often persecuted for their emotional outburst and unusual displays, Carwardine argues that many churches, even Calvinist churches like the Presbyterians and Congregationalists, of the East “were adopting Methodists practices.” Primarily, Charles Grandison Finney was key in helping the “new measures” of revivals become “palatable to a somewhat more respectable class of people than most of those reached by the Methodists.” Carwardine, “The Second Great Awakening in the Urban Centers: An Examination of Methodism and the ‘New Measures’.” 330, 337, 339. For another study on Holiness in Methodism, see Melvin E. Dieter, *The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth Century* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1980).

In addition to denominational studies, much has been written about the role of women during this time. Nancy Hardesty is most famous for her writings about nineteenth century feminism. In one volume *Women Called to Witness: Evangelical Feminism in the 19th Century*, Hardesty argues that American feminism is deeply rooted in the revival movements of the Second Great Awakening. Her later work *Your Daughters Shall Prophecy* specifically shows how Charles Finney was instrumental in developing and promoting the place of women in society, thus giving strength to the feminist movement.

³⁹ Cross, *The Burned-Over District*, 6. Using John Wigger’s argument that “Methodism’s numerical growth alone makes it credible,” the impressive proportion of youth to the rest of the population makes them a group that cannot be ignored. See chapter 4 of this thesis. Wigger, *Taking Heaven by Storm*, 190.

sources indicate that these young people made up a sizeable portion of those involved in religious activity as well. Joshua Bradley, a minister, recorded about his experience in Bristol, New York that “the greatest number, who have been the subjects of this work, is found among the youths.”⁴⁰ He also noted a similar observation in Troy, New York: “Among children and youths, the work of grace spread with the greatest rapidity.”⁴¹ Scores of other references to the dominant nature of youth during revivals are recorded in diaries, letters, newspapers, magazines, minister’s reports, and church records.⁴²

These records show how young people not only attended to revivals, but also helped instigate revivals, spread the revival spirit, experienced personal conversion, joined various churches, and in many cases even became church ministers and missionaries. To help these young people come to and stay in the church, numerous publications were devoted entirely to the conversion, retention, and piety of youth and children.⁴³ Yet, despite this extensive involvement in the revivals, there are few secondary materials which focus exclusively on youth during this time period.⁴⁴ Some

⁴⁰ Bradley, *Accounts of Revivals*, 225.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 173.

⁴² Some examples of their involvement are found in the following sources, though the remainder of the thesis will present many more and detailed explanations: Peter Lovejoy Diary, 1867-1875, Manuscripts and Special Collections, Carl A. Kroch Library, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York; John Perkins to Elias Bowen, 12 January 1827, Elias Bowen papers, 1820-1852, Manuscripts and Special Collections, Carl A. Kroch Library, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York; Abner Chase, “Revival of the Work of God in a School,” *Methodist Magazine* Vol. 1 (1816), 70-73, 117-19; Bradley, 189, 225, 228-31.

⁴³ Just a few examples include *The Guardian or Youth’s Religious Instructor* (1819-1824) and *The Youth’s Instructor and Guardian* (1823-1824).

⁴⁴ There have been many influential journal articles and book chapters that address this topic, but no lengthy, in-depth discussion on the subject has been written. Recently a PhD dissertation was written on the role of youth in both the First and Second Great Awakenings, but the focus is more evangelic than scholastic and the scholarship is all but non-existent, adding nothing to the academic field. See Micah Davidson, “The Role of Youth in the Great Awakenings of North America from 1720 through the Civil War” (PhD diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2003).

sources share part of the story of the lived-religion of youth, and this thesis uses those as a springboard to provide a more in-depth look. Examining what has been written about the revivals of this period can help us understand what gaps need to be filled.

Up until about forty years ago the experiences of adolescents during the revivals of this time were largely ignored. As more interest in youth experience and youth studies began to emerge in the 1970s and 1980s, a number of scholarly works came forth which briefly mentioned youth and their involvement in revivals, usually to place them in a greater social or political context.

One of the first attempts to explain this phenomenon appears in Joseph Kett's book *Rites of Passage: Adolescence in America, 1790 to the Present*. In his volume, Kett devotes one chapter to "Youth and Religious Conversion." Beginning with youth pietism of the Great Awakening, Kett traces the impact of youth throughout American history. He argues that human religious experience changed during the late eighteenth to early nineteenth centuries as society "deemphasized a gradual spiritual growth in favor of immediate regeneration." He notes that "partly for this reason, conversions during periods of religious enthusiasm... occurred at relatively earlier ages."⁴⁵ Kett points to theological and social pressures on children as the source for their early piety, but he fails to provide adequate information about the active involvement of youth both before and

For studies on childhood and adolescence in America see Steven Mintz, *Huck's Raft: A History of American Childhood* (Cambridge, Mass; London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004); Karen-Marie Yust et al., eds., *Nurturing Child and Adolescent Spirituality: Perspectives from the World's Religious Traditions* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005); Marcia J. Bunge, ed., *The Child in Christian Thought* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001); Philip Greven, *The Protestant Temperament: Patterns of Child-Rearing, Religious Experience, and the Self in Early America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977). Jacqueline S. Reinier, *From Virtue to Character: American Childhood, 1775-1850* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1996).

⁴⁵ Kett, *Rites of passage*.

after conversion.⁴⁶ Kett's work is important because he attempts to grapple with the youth story, but in the end it is more broad than deep. Furthermore, the information he does add is four decades old and needs updating. While Kett's work is highly respected, it focuses more on the society that influenced youth conversion, rather than the experience of youth themselves.

Nancy Cott also wrote about youth during the 1970s. She focuses specifically on young women in her article "Young Women in the Second Great Awakening in New England."⁴⁷ Pointing to the accounts of numerous ministers, Cott asserts that "young women, then, made up the largest single age and sex grouping in these revivals." Cott points to economic reasons for the disruption of the American family and thereby the changing role of young women in society. She notes that "disruption of traditional domestic usefulness, uncertainty about means of financial support, separation from family, substitution of peer-group for family ties, unforeseen geographical relocation, ambiguous prospects for and attitudes toward marriage, and hence an insecure future" all were factors in propelling young women toward the church. Simply stated: "Conversion could resolve young women's uncertainties about the future."⁴⁸

Cott's work provides an important starting point in understanding some of the reasons for young women's involvement in revivals, but it is just that—a starting point. While her scholarship helps fill a gap of exploring the female experience, it fails to delve into the lives of these young women. Cott doesn't utilize excerpts from journals and

⁴⁶ Ibid, 68.

⁴⁷ Cott, "Young Women in the Second Great Awakening in New England."

⁴⁸ Ibid., 16, 19, 22.

diaries of the young women themselves, and as a result she fails to capture individual reasons that young women involved themselves in revivals. She ignores the personal desires of these young women for salvation and describes their motives for religion in strictly economical terms.

Another scholar, Mary Ryan, shares Cott's belief about why youth got involved in revivals in such large numbers, noting that the young men and young women of Western New York "were struggling to find a comfortable place for themselves within a changing social and economic structure."⁴⁹ Her book *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865* explains how changing society pushed many parents, especially mothers to seek conversion experiences for their children before they left the safety of the home. She describes how many female family members had important roles in bringing their relatives to revivals and ultimately church membership, especially noting the impact of parents on their children. Her work is foundational in understanding family impact and social structure and the role of women and mothers on their children. Ryan affirms that "the role of women in the inauguration of the revival cycle was actually more extensive than...many historians have acknowledged."⁵⁰

Ryan never set out to write a book on youth during this time, but she provides a crucial context in which youth conversion can be understood. Her study is primarily concerned with the changing nature of the family unit during this time. Her thesis affirms the declining role of patriarchal authority and the rise of domestic leadership as "the bond between mother and child assumed central place in the constellation of family

⁴⁹ Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class*, 13.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 83.

affection.”⁵¹ As with other volumes of the time, Ryan starts to dip her toe into the waters of youth religious life but never fully commits, leaving us with a solid, but shallow look at adolescence and awakenings.⁵²

As we move through time, more authors write briefly about adolescence and religion in nineteenth century New York and New England. David Kling dedicates a small section of one chapter to the role of youth in these revivals, ultimately concluding that the clergy “portrayed the influence of youth in the village revivals far in excess of the actual numbers converted.” He claims that “some scholarly observers have taken the clergy at their word and so portrayed the Awakening as an adolescent phenomenon, but statistical data for the formative phase of the revival indicate otherwise.”⁵³ The statistical data he refers to are the church records of the Congregational church in just two counties in Connecticut during a five year period. His data lacks the breadth necessary to make such a sweeping conclusion, leaving a statistical gap that must be filled.

While Kling dismisses the idea that the revivals were an “adolescent phenomenon,” he argues that the clergy exaggerated the accounts of youth conversion because the youth began revivals in many towns, they experienced the most tangible response of any age group, and ultimately because the clergy looked to this group as the

⁵¹ Ibid., 232.

⁵² For other dated studies that make reference to youth see Juster, “‘In A Different Voice’: Male And Female Narratives Of Religious Conversion In Post-Revolutionary America”; Grossbart, “Seeking the Divine Favor: Conversion and Church Admission in Eastern Connecticut.” Roth mentions that youth had “intense but short-lived outbursts of moral fervor and religious conviction that occurred at intervals” in Calvinist churches, “Whence This Strange Fire?,” 47.

⁵³ Kling, *A Field of Divine Wonders*, 208.

future of the church.⁵⁴ In the end, Kling has produced a masterful work on Congregationalism, but it lacks the scope necessary to be a significant or accurate study on youth involvement. This thesis attempts to fill that statistical gap, by utilizing records from numerous denominations and locations throughout New York and New England that span the first half of the nineteenth century.⁵⁵

More recent studies have been written within the past decade, which have added new viewpoints on this topic. Rodney Hessinger explores the various approaches that Calvinist church leaders took in bringing youth to their congregations.⁵⁶ He introduces a different perspective by using Philadelphia as his case study, rather than areas of the Burned-Over District or New England.

In his masterful style, Hessinger compares youth to goods in a marketplace-type system that churches must compete to obtain. He shows that in response to the Methodist revival focused approach “that empowered youth,” the Presbyterians organized the Sunday School system that focused on teaching children true doctrine. While it sometimes brought with it opposition from the Old School minds, “youth were given a central place in Sunday schools—not so much as students but as teachers of younger children.” They recognized that it was necessary to make “important concessions to a developing religious marketplace that was increasingly oriented to youth.” In the

⁵⁴ Ibid., 208–09. Cott disagrees with Kling about the motive of clergy to exaggerate youth involvement, contending that “it is unlikely that ministers exaggerated the role of youths, because such claims were also subject to the accusation that young people were volatile and susceptible to enthusiasms, and their professions of faith often specious.” Cott, “Young Women in the Second Great Awakening in New England,” 25.

⁵⁵ For more information on the quantitative aspect of youth and revivals, see chapter 4 of this thesis.

⁵⁶ Rodney Hessinger, *Seduced, Abandoned, and Reborn: Visions of Youth in Bourgeois America, 1780-1850* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005).

Presbyterian mind, Sunday School was not seen as an “evangelizing outpost to stir revival seasons,” but more of a place of “religious nurturing” that kept “children of the godly within the church fold.”⁵⁷

Hessinger’s fresh approach and detailed use of nineteenth-century sources creates a solid work that is imperative to understanding a non-evangelical outlook on youth and religion. It successfully shows how youth fit within the context of an organizational structure, and their impact on that structure.⁵⁸ Thus, it is Hessinger’s approach which adds more to the picture of youth and revivals than his specific content.

With all of these works, no one had specifically written the story of youth religiosity from the youth perspective, until E. Brooks Holifield. His article “Let the Children Come: The Religion of the Protestant Child in Early America” examines the diaries and letters of forty-four children between the ages of nine and sixteen who lived between 1770 and 1861.⁵⁹ His purpose is to understand the children’s religious experiences during this era from their viewpoints. Holifield’s research reveals the strong influence of adults on these youth, as well as the sensitivity of their emotions and their concern for their personal salvation. His unique work seeks to discover what and how the youth felt about religion, conversion, church leadership and revivals in general. His study serves as a springboard for this thesis.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 96, 118.

⁵⁸ Todd M. Brenneman also takes a different approach to writing children. He focuses on how new religious groups of the early United States, the Disciples of Christ, the Mormons, and the Shakers, viewed and treated children. He demonstrates how the children provided a framework for “the developing ideologies of religious Americans.” His work is primarily concerned with children, not youth. Brenneman, “A Child Shall Lead Them: Children and New Religious Groups in the Early Republic.”

⁵⁹ Holifield, “Let the Children Come.”

The most recent work which discusses youth and religion comes from Rachel Cope who builds upon the style of Holifield. Her dissertation “‘In Some Places A Few Drops And Other Places A Plentiful Shower’: The Religious Impact Of Revivalism On Early Nineteenth-Century New York Women,” describes the lasting impact that involvement in nineteenth century revivalism had on the young women who experienced it.⁶⁰ She makes the case that the conversion experiences that these young women went through were not temporary collisions with the social religious pressures of the day, but rather “lifelong processes that began with personal religious awareness and continued with the quest for holiness”⁶¹

Assembling entries from the diaries of numerous young women, Cope opens a window into the lives, emotions, and desires of these young women and helps us understand the personal impact the revivals had upon them. She deems these women “spiritual pilgrims” whose early conversion provided them with the ability to “create satisfying lives for themselves.”⁶² While many historians have focused on the bigger picture issues like the economic impact, social influence, or political atmosphere of the revival period, Cope provides a refreshing personal viewpoint into the motives of those involved in revivals themselves. Her work offers a glimpse into what religion meant for the women of the day and how their conversion experiences and church membership impacted them throughout their lives. So, while Cope provides a greater understanding of

⁶⁰ Cope, “In Some Places A Few Drops.”

⁶¹ Ibid., 285.

⁶² Ibid., 290–91.

the life-long impact of women themselves, her work doesn't specifically examine the impact of these women on revivals, nor does it share the male perspective.

Purpose

As demonstrated, there is a serious gap in scholarship in regards to youth and the revivals of the early nineteenth century. With at least half of the United States population under the age of seventeen during this time, it is crucial to understand their experience and influence.⁶³ Thus, the purpose of this thesis is to explore the religious experience and impact of youth in the religious revivals of the Second Great Awakening in New York and New England from 1800-1850. More specifically, this thesis will delve into the conversions and personal religious experiences of youth, the influence of others (i.e. clergy, parents, peers) on their spiritual development and the various means by which they engaged with these religious experiences. In short, the thesis will examine lived religion of young people during the early nineteenth century, an important new perspective in the historiography of youth. By understanding their personal experiences, this work will also show the impact that youth religiosity had on the formation, growth, and spread of revivals during this time.

The first chapter of this thesis will examine the foundational religious influence that young people received in their homes. It will focus on the types of instruction and guidance youth received from their parents in the home and how their upbringing influenced their involvement in religion. Specifically, it will discuss the teachings of both mothers and fathers toward their children, parental examples of prayer, and the impact of

⁶³ James Alan Marten writes that "The median age in 1820 was 16.7: fully half of all citizens were under seventeen years of age. In 1860, the median age was still only 19.4." James Alan Marten, *Children and Youth in a New Nation* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), x.

private and home-bound worship services upon the young. This section will examine such questions as: To what extent were youth exposed to religious households during this time? Did their upbringing lead them to join these religious movements? Or was this participation part of a new youth culture?

Building upon the parental foundation in the home, chapter 2 will define conversion, showing what the term meant to the young people at this time and examine how the youth were prepared for personal conversion experiences of during the revivals of this era. Drawing upon fifty conversion accounts from religious periodicals, diaries, newspapers, letters and other personal correspondence, this chapter will explore the types of conversion experiences these young people had, including but not limited to visions, personal spiritual manifestations, group conversion experiences, and feelings.

Denominational affiliation, age, type of spiritual experience, and location were all taken into account in selecting the fifty conversion accounts. These selections are meant to be representative of the experiences of young converts at the time.

Chapter 3 will focus on the basic worship of youth who lived from 1800-1850. The various efforts of the churches through revival meetings and specific clergy-youth relationships will be examined, as well as the manifestations of these practices in the youths' personal lives. Once converted, how did the youth express their devotions? What role and function did the churches have upon the young people and how did these specific practices affect youth worship? How did their actions change from pre- to post-conversion?

While anecdotal accounts of youth conversion and religious activity provide insights into the personal lives of these individuals, quantitative data of youth

participation will solidify the validity of the claims of widespread youth involvement in the region. Chapter 4 will focus on the quantitative information gathered from published revival accounts and church records to get a sense of the extent to which youth were involved in these revivals. While churches of the day generally did not record the ages of new members, the accounts of pastors often mention the conversion of youth. Examining numerous sources from across New England, this chapter will present and analyze the specific accounts of youth participation in revivals to get a sense for what was happening in the region as a whole.

In addition to revival accounts, this section will present data from the Journals of the New York Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church from 1801-1848. As part of the annual conference, the qualifications of aspiring preachers were discussed and voted to be accepted on trial for two years. After those two years were finished, if found qualified, the preacher was “admitted into full connexion, (sic.) and ordained a deacon.”⁶⁴ This chapter analyzes the numbers and ages of those accepted on trial to be Methodist ministers in New York from 1801-1848, showing how the majority of those involved in organizing camp meetings, traveling circuits, and conducting revivals were youth themselves.

Sources and Methodology

This thesis consults a variety of different types of primary sources. For broad revival information and data I have consulted numerous nineteenth century periodicals. Specifically, I examined fifty accounts from *Methodist Magazine* between 1816-1840 and

⁶⁴ Lorenzo Dow, *Extracts from Original Letters to the Methodist Bishops* (Liverpool: H. Forshaw, 1806).

fifty accounts from *The Christian Advocate*, a weekly Methodist newspaper between 1826-1845. Both of these sources served as key publishing outlets for the Methodist Episcopal Church during the first half of the 19th century. I also drew upon every volume from *The Youth Instructor and Guardian* (1823-1829) and *The Guardian, or Youth's Religious Instructor* (1819-1824), two separate monthly religious publications aimed specifically at youth.

To gain perspective from non-Methodist sources, I used the *Universalist Magazine* (Universalist, 1819-1828), *Massachusetts Missionary Magazine* (Baptist, 1803-1807), *The Adviser* (Congregational, 1809-1815), and *Utica Christian Magazine* (Congregational and Presbyterian, 1813-1816). These published magazines provided important congregational information, conversion accounts, missionary reports, church business, sermons, and other pertinent religious information for the time. Other magazines, newspapers, and published accounts of revivals were consulted as well.⁶⁵ Information relating to personal conversion experiences have largely been taken from published memoirs and autobiographies, with youth diaries and personal correspondence to supplement.

The Use of Reflective Accounts

A large portion of the available historical records during this time are found in published memoirs and autobiographies. I fully recognize that relying on these specific sources for youth accounts presents some difficulties. Since “personal memories are the primary archival source” for such records, and memories are reinterpreted and re-understood over the course of one’s life, these records present a form of the truth that

⁶⁵ See bibliography for information on these sources.

differs from what was understood at the time of the experience.⁶⁶ As one scholar summarized it, “Life narrators may present inconsistent or shifting views of themselves.”⁶⁷ As an author shares specific experiences from youth, many other factors affect the way they see their youthful experiences: how they view religion as an adult, societal expectations, their specific purpose in writing a memoir or autobiography, and how they want people to view them, among others.

For example, many of these memoirs are written by clergy members. In writing about their specific experiences as young people, clergy may have ulterior motives than just telling their life story. In many cases, these writings are idealized or didactic, hoping that the readers will glean some lesson or point of emulation from their experiences.

However, these motives or influences do not make the accounts any less true. In reading and understanding autobiography “we need, then, to adjust our expectations of the truth told in self-referential narrative.”⁶⁸ There are many important truths that can be gained through reflective accounts that cannot come from contemporary accounts. While these accounts are written from the adult perspective, they provide a unique opportunity to understand how society viewed youth and conversion experiences by seeing how adults viewed their conversion experiences as youth in context of an entire life of religiosity. The authors’ descriptions and specific emphasis about their youthful experiences helps us understand how nineteenth century society viewed young people

⁶⁶ Sidonie Smith, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 6.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁶⁸ Smith asks a series of questions to those seeking to understand these truths: “What is it that we expect life narrators to tell the truth about? Are we expecting fidelity to the facts of their biographies, to experience, to themselves, to the historical moment, to social community, to prevailing beliefs about diverse identities, to the norms of autobiography as a literary genre itself? And truth for whom and for what? Other readers, the life narrator, or ourselves?” *Ibid.*, 12–13.

and conversion. Not all of the memoirs may be written the way that the youth would have written them while young, but they provide personal commentary on these experiences that we wouldn't get otherwise. I have attempted to utilize contemporary journal accounts, letters, and published articles written by youth while they were still young as a means of supplementing or providing a "current" perspective. While some differences exist in style and commentary on conversion experiences, there are not significant differences between contemporary and reflective accounts, nor do they alter the conclusions reached.

So, I fully acknowledge the weakness and difficulties of societal influence and exaggerated descriptions that accompany reflective accounts, but recognize that there are important benefits of understanding how faithful individuals viewed their religious experiences over time. My purpose in this thesis is to better understand the role and influence that youth had on the American religious experience during the first half of the nineteenth century and memoirs are an important tool in understanding how the people who lived through it viewed their own youthful influence and that of others.

Defining "Youth"

To define the term "youth" I consulted many other historians' views on the subject. As one noted, "Early American society was less age-graded than our own, so fixing definitive ages for categories of youth is tricky."⁶⁹ As a result, many historians have varied ideas of how to define youth in antebellum America.⁷⁰ After examining many

⁶⁹ Hessinger, *Seduced, abandoned, and reborn*.

⁷⁰ Rodney Hessinger and Ross W. Beales, Jr. both explain that for Colonial New England, the concept of youth began in the teens and extended well into the twenties. Anne Boylan agrees that youth begins around fourteen, but citing nineteenth century views, Boylan states that youth ends around eighteen

scholarly views, I have chosen to define youth as those between the ages of 12-25 for this study. I sought to define the term as closely as those involved in the revivals of the early nineteenth century would have viewed it.⁷¹

While it is customary in scholarly publications to refer to individuals by their last names, I felt that doing so with the accounts of young people added unnecessary formality to their accounts. These youth were, well, youth, and addressing them in such a formal manner seemed inconsistent with the spirit in which they write about their experiences.⁷² Spending years immersed in their personal religious writings, sharing their hopes and excitements and difficulties, I feel like one of their peers and as such, will address them in this manner. Following Richard Bushman's practice of addressing Joseph Smith as Joseph throughout his biography of the Mormon prophet *Rough Stone Rolling*, I

or twenty. While Jacqueline S. Reinier doesn't specifically define the age of youth, her studies on children examine those up to fifteen years old. John Gillis notes that in pre-industrial Europe, youth began around age 10 and ended in the mid-twenties.⁷⁰ Still others, like Steven Mintz, take the modern view of childhood being from birth until age 18. Ross W. Beales, Jr., "In Search of the Historical Child: Miniature Adulthood and Youth in Colonial New England," in *Growing Up in America: Children in Historical Perspective*, ed. Joseph M. Hawes and N. Ray Hiner (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985), 7-24; Anne M. Boylan, "Growing Up Female in America, 1800-1860," in *American Childhood: A Research Guide and Historical Handbook*, ed. Joseph M. Hawes and N. Ray Hiner (Westport, Conn. [u.a.]: Greenwood Pr., 1985), 153-184; Reinier, *From Virtue to Character*; John R. Gillis, *Youth and History: Tradition and Change in European Age Relations, 1770-present* (New York: Academic Press, 1974). Mintz, *Huck's Raft*.

⁷¹ Beales argues that Colonial New Englanders made distinctions of "the ages of man" for both legal and religious thought and practice. He notes that Gilbert Tennent preached in Boston in 1741 and divided the human race into four ages or groups that best define the New Englanders' views of the "ages of man": "old" or "aged Persons"; "middle-ag'd People, of thirty Years old and upwards"; "my younger Brethren, of fourteen Years and upwards"; and "little Children, of six Years old and upwards." Beales cites numerous eighteenth and nineteenth century figures who refer to these same four age distinctions including Anne Bradstreet, Ellis Gray, Samuel Moody, Thomas Shepard, and Jonathan Edwards. For a more in-depth discussion of age distinction in early America, see Beales, "In Search of the Historical Child," 10-15.

Nancy Cott uses primary sources to argue that youth were generally defined as those between twelve and twenty-five in the nineteenth century. Cott, "Young Women in the Second Great Awakening in New England," 16.

A nineteenth century teacher defined "the eventful and critical period of youth (say from fourteen to eighteen or twenty)." Frederick Adolphus Packard, *The Teacher Taught: An Humble Attempt to Make the Path of the Sunday-School Teacher Straight and Plain*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: American Sunday-School Union, 1861), 112. See also Boylen, "Growing Up Female in America," 164.

⁷² Furthermore, when speaking of young women, their maiden names change as well later in life, so referring to them by their first names avoids his confusion.

too refer to these young people by their first names.⁷³ All scholars and others are referred to using the traditional style of using their last names.

Conclusion

While there have been numerous significant scholarly works published about the Second Great Awakening, this thesis attempts to fill an important academic hole. This work seeks to paint the picture of the religious lives of youth during this time, attempting to answer such questions as: What was it like to be a youth during this time of great religious activity? What influenced their decisions for church involvement? What personal motives prompted these young people to get involved? Who did they turn to for spiritual advice and strength? What organizations were in place to educate them? How did the experience of so many adolescents impact the overall revival pattern in America? While this thesis will not be comprehensive, it will seek to provide greater context and begin new conversations about one of the most important and impactful groups of the early-nineteenth century—the young people.

⁷³ Bushman, *Joseph Smith*, xxii.

Chapter One

“I Was Born...of Goodly Parents”: Home and Family as the Foundation of Faith

*“Oft does memory send [my] thought
Back to scenes of early years
When I was blest and knew it not
With social friends and parents dear”¹*

In spring of 1833, a group of Congregational Church brethren gathered together in the small town of Springfield, Vermont. Feeling “an unusual solicitude for a revival of religion,” they committed to each other that they would “prepare the way of the Lord” by attending a weekly Sabbath prayer meeting to plead for the emergence of a revival in Springfield. After discussing numerous purposes they could pray for to help instigate this revival, the brethren ultimately decided to pray for two groups—first the youth, and then the unconverted husbands whose wives were church members.²

The brethren’s decision to pray for the youth first, then secondly, heads of families, provides crucial insight into nineteenth-century evangelical priorities. It is clear that these church leaders recognized the potential that the young people of Springfield had for instigating, perpetuating, and expanding revivals, for their very purpose of meeting was to decide the best means of bringing a revival to their town. Perhaps past

¹ Adaline Cleveland Hosner Journal, 10 June 1838, Adeline Cleveland Hosner papers, #6005. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library. Emphasis removed.

² Daniel O. Morton, *A Narrative of a Revival of Religion in Springfield, Vermont* (Springfield, Vermont, 1834), 4.

experience with revivals, news about the role of youth in such meetings in nearby towns, or the quality of their young people inspired them to focus their prayers here.³

After pleading for the youth, these church brethren prayed specifically for the approximately fifty men whose wives attended church without them.⁴ Seeing the important role that believing mothers were already playing in their children's religious lives, the church brethren recognized that if fathers could join their wives, they too would have tremendous power in influencing their children's religiosity. While they don't specifically mention it, their decision of who to pray for suggests that as leaders of the church in Springfield, their first concern was for the rising generation of the church; their second was for the strength of the family. The prayers and efforts of these men proved fruitful; within the year, a revival broke out and "all the people of God in town were cheered with visitations of his love."⁵

The specific focus on the spiritual welfare of youth and family was a common practice in the nineteenth century. Both church leaders and parents felt great concern for their young ones and continually brought their case before the Lord that God would "bless his children and make them objects of his mercy."⁶ As a general rule, the young people that involved themselves in revivals first learned their religious desires from the

³ Accounts of revivals in Vermont prior to 1833 are filled with descriptions of the catalytic role of the young people in spreading revivals. In numerous instances one young man or young woman was converted, and then became an instrument in bringing hundreds of other converts into the fold. These young people were not second-class church members, but were "as faithful as any Christians." Examples of such accounts occur in Fair-Haven, Poultney, Salisbury, Middlebury, and Greensborough, Vermont. See Bradley, *Accounts of Revivals*, 95–99, 115, 129–53.

⁴ Morton, *Revival of Religion in Springfield, VT*, 4.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁶ Enoch Pond, *The Young Pastor's Guide: or Lectures on Pastoral Duties* (Bangor, Maine: E. F. Duren, 1844), 218.

examples and teachings of pious parents in the home. This created a spiritual foundation for the youth, preparing them for future personal conversion experiences in three distinct ways: by creating a desire within the youth to seek for religion because of the example and instruction of their parents, by helping the youth see the importance and power of prayer, and by demonstrating the necessity of public and private worship.⁷

Foundation of the Home

The nineteenth-century home in New York and New England was considered the center of society. Among other things, it fulfilled the role of home, school, town-hall, venue for public entertainment, and place of religious instruction.⁸ Especially when it came to spiritual matters, the home was supreme. Mary Ryan explains how in one New York town, the first “religious congregations looked to households as their chief allies in creating a Christian community.” Or as another scholar explained it, “home and church were nearly synonymous institutions, with much of the life of the latter centered in the former.”⁹ The home “served as a sanctuary for the faithful.”¹⁰ While this was important for the function of the church in early Christian communities, it was more important in the lives of the young, as the home acted as their primary venue for religious instruction.

⁷ Otis Skinner counseled parents at this time to focus on these three specific areas when instructing their children. Otis A. Skinner, *Family Worship: Containing Reflections and Prayers for Domestic Devotion* (Bpston: A. Tompkins & B. B. Mussey, 1843), 56–57.

⁸ Ryan gives specific examples of each of these in her book. She summed up the role of the home by explaining that “everyday socializing, like worship, welfare, and most every aspect of social reproduction, was conducted largely within the household unit.” Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class*, 24; Lawrence, *One Family Under God*, 161.

⁹ Wigger, *Taking Heaven by Storm*, 159.

¹⁰ Scott Stephan, *Redeeming the Southern Family: Evangelical Women and Domestic Devotion in the Antebellum South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008), 24.

As part of this focus on the home, parents were bombarded with religious literature that stressed their most solemn and important responsibility to “train up a child in the way he should go,” (Proverbs 22:6) with stern warnings about the consequences of failing at this duty. One 1843 guidebook written specifically for parents explained, “Let no parents suppose it is enough to teach by precept; they must teach by example also, or they will be the worst enemies of their children.”¹¹ Another admonition affirms that it is completely dependent on the parents to “say whether their children shall lead idle, sinful, wretched lives, or whether they shall be honored, useful and happy.”¹² This strong language emphasizing the importance of the parental duty is found in religious, social, and cultural literature published across various denominations and groups.¹³

These types of directives teach us many things about the religious centrality of the nineteenth-century home. Society held that the religious actions of parents truly had a formative impact on the young or they wouldn’t have placed such weight on the fulfillment of their duties in the literature. The people believed, both theologically and socially, that “the hopes and expectations of the age to come, depended entirely on the present” efforts of parents educating their youth.¹⁴ Theologically, these instructions to parents were all scripturally based, with the base of their message coming from the Psalms, Proverbs, and the writings of Paul on parenthood. Socially, the people

¹¹ Skinner, *Family Worship*, 107.

¹² *Ibid.*, 106.

¹³ See note 26.

¹⁴ “Duty of Parents,” *Christian Advocate*, September 9, 1826, sec. Parents’ Department, 4.

understood that it was ultimately the education that children received in the home that led them to “become blessings and ornaments to society.”¹⁵

The records of the young reflect this emphasis as well. The description of wanting to follow the example of one’s parents is the most common theme among the memoirs, diaries, letters, and conversion narratives of the young.¹⁶ Despite the variation in these accounts of the date, location, denomination, or age of the young person, descriptions of parental example are the constant. As such, it seems that the piety of parents was the most important factor in leading young people to seek religion.

The Influence of Mothers

Mothers were the bonding agents that sustained family spirituality in the early nineteenth century and established within their children’s lives a desire for religion.¹⁷ This is understandable since it was the home, not the church, which bore the primary responsibility for religious instruction, and mothers spent much of their time with the children there.¹⁸

¹⁵ “Duty of Parents.”

¹⁶ Among the fifty conversion accounts consulted, around 80% of the conversion accounts mentioned something of the influence of religious parents.

¹⁷ Mary Ryan indicates that economic reasons influenced the men’s ability to attend revival meetings and participate in religion as much as their wives. She also indicates that a large proportion of those women involved in female missionary societies were of the wealthier class who had escaped the “patriarchal home economy.” She writes, “Contemporary observers of the revivals all concurred in the estimation that women and youth, and not household heads, constituted the majority of converts.” For greater insight into the impact of mothers on their children’s religious lives, see Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class*, 83–104.

¹⁸ For more on gender roles in the nineteenth-century family see Nancy Grey Osterud, *Bonds of Community: the Lives of Farm Women in Nineteenth-Century New York* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 142–86; John Mack Faragher, *Women and Men on the Overland Trail* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 40–65.

An account by a New York clergyman exemplifies the role of mothers in spiritually strengthening their children (and in many cases, their husbands). He writes: “I became acquainted with a family...the father, mother, and five sons... [in which] the only individual who professed religion was the female head.”¹⁹ Shortly after her conversion, she “felt it to be her duty and a most precious privilege to dedicate her children to God in baptism.” To facilitate this conversion, she would often pray as “her melting heart went up to God in supplication for his blessings on herself and her offspring.” The primary focus of her prayers was three specific desires: “help me to instruct [my children], to pray for them, and to set a pious example before them.”²⁰

It isn’t coincidental that her first desire was to be given strength to instruct her children, for it was this role of religious educator that describes well the nineteenth-century mother. One pastor observed that “very few fathers pay much attention to the religious education of their children.”²¹ And numerous clergymen wrote about how impressed they were with the “many accounts of pious parents, especially of mothers, instructing their children.”²²

¹⁹ “Prevalence of a Mother’s Prayers,” *Christian Advocate* (New York, July 11, 1828), 177.

This was a very common family situation for the time. While many scholars have debated on the reason for this maternal-centered instruction, the records of both the young and publications of the church indicate it was the case. Curtis Johnson points to female missionary societies as a reason for strong mothers and describes how these organizations focused on evangelizing the young. He argues that as the youth began to leave the home to go look for work, their mothers felt the need to make sure they had experienced conversion before they left. Johnson, *Islands of Holiness*, 64–66.

Mary Ryan contends that these mothers were products of earlier revivals and so they focused on the need to help their children through the types of conversion experiences they personally went through. Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class*, 93–99.

²⁰ “Prevalence of a Mother’s Prayers,” 177.

²¹ “Parental Instruction,” *Christian Advocate* (New York, September 23, 1836), sec. Parents’ Department.

²² *Christian Advocate* (New York, March 3, 1827), sec. Parents’ Department, 104.

After praying for help, this New York mother went to work teaching her children and husband by word and precept. Within several weeks, two of her sons were “convinced of sin, and anxious to know the way of salvation.” Just a short time later, two of her other sons were convicted in separate occasions. Within a five month time period, her four oldest sons, “between fourteen and twenty years old,” as well as her husband, had all united themselves with the church of which their mother was a member.²³

This type of motherly influence was not uncommon and demonstrates an important component in understanding youth religiosity. The depth of conversion of early nineteenth-century mothers speaks volumes to the motivation of their children in developing meaningful religious lives. These early days spent engaged in prayer, Bible study, learning church doctrine and other devotional activities from their mothers created deep, lasting feelings that would spiritually carry these youth throughout their lives.²⁴ The most constant and committed young converts came from the homes where religion played an important role. Daniel Brayton, a Methodist circuit rider, observed that he most admired the faithfulness of those young converts who had “early been taught the doctrines of the Gospel” and he “hope[d] in their steadfastness.”²⁵

The churches recognized this motherly influence and spent considerable efforts trying to encourage and strengthen their teaching. Weekly publications, like the Methodist newspaper the *Christian Advocate*, often devoted specific sections to helping parents. In the fifty-one issues consulted for this study, ranging from 1826 to 1845, there

²³ “Prevalence of a Mother’s Prayers,” 177.

²⁴ For more on domestic devotional activities see Stephan, *Redeeming the Southern Family*, 133–82.

²⁵ Daniel Brayton, “Account of a Revival of Religion on Amena Circuit,” *Methodist Magazine* V (1822): 197.

were nineteen issues that contained a section entitled “Parents’ Department.” Of those nineteen, sixteen of them specifically mentioned the importance of parents properly educating their children in religious principles, almost all of which specifically referenced mothers.²⁶ It was these women “who most often forged the feeble generational links in the church corporation.”²⁷

The Impact of Pious Fathers

While many scholars have argued that mothers held the primary role in influencing their children in religious matters, there is much to be said of the patriarchal influence as well. Clearly, the men did not match the women in terms of numbers involved in religious activity, but in many cases the youth refer back to the examples of their fathers, more than their mothers in influencing their own religious beliefs.

Perhaps because there was more fluency in the roles of fathers and mothers during this time, this allowed fathers to spend more time with their children in the home and, in rural cases, the fields. Youth often refer to their father’s examples of goodness, rather

²⁶ The articles had titles such as “The Pious Mother,” “Hints on Early Education,” “Duty of Parents,” “Instruction of Children,” “Religious Education,” “On Chastising Children,” “Mother’s Instructing Children,” “Begin to Educate Your Children Early,” and “The Parent’s Friend” among others. See *Christian Advocate* (New York) September 9, 1826; September 16, 1826; September 23, 1826; March 3, 1827; July 27, 1827; Oct 5, 1827; July 4, 1828; July 11, 1828; Aug 21, 1829; March 5, 1830; March 12, 1830; March 19, 1830; Apr 8, 1831; May 25, 1832; April 14, 1837; May 25, 1838; Friday, Nov 9, 1838; July 10, 1840.

The Methodists were not alone on this, but other denominations printed similar things as well. Some titles in *Universalist Magazine* include “To Parents and Children,” “A Hint to Mothers,” “A Caution for Children,” and “Parental Duty.” See *Universalist Magazine* I (1819): 24, 43, 127, 139, 143, 147.

This emphasis on education was not lost on the women of the church. They knew this was their primary responsibility and they wrote often in their journals about such anxiety.

In writing about Lucy Mack Smith, the mother of the Mormon Prophet Joseph Smith, Rachel Cope writes, “Reflecting upon her maternal responsibilities, she declared, ‘am I indeed the mother of the prophet of the God of Heaven?’ Lucy certainly considered her role as ‘Mother in Israel’ one of her greatest achievements—she believed she had raised a son who had accepted a divinely appointed calling to restore New Testament Christianity. Cope, “In Some Places A Few Drops,” 89–90.

²⁷ Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class*, 77.

than their specific teachings.²⁸ These frequent interactions with their fathers provided ample opportunities for children to see their fathers live their professed religion.

Elizabeth Prentiss looked upon her father as a saint. A Congregational minister himself, Elizabeth remembers the kindness which he exhibited to her and her sisters. On one occasion, Elizabeth took her sister's Bible and drew all over one page. Upon seeing this defacement of the word of God, her father kindly took the Bible, replaced it with sheets of paper and counseled Elizabeth to draw to her heart's content. She later described that "this little kindness on her father's part did her more good than a month's lecture could have done, and made her resolve never to do anything that could possibly grieve him again." Instead of drawing on the sheets of paper, she wrote about the love and kindness she felt toward her dad.²⁹ These types of experiences with fatherly examples were the most lasting lesson that many of these youth received and many still remembered them fondly decades later.

One woman, Adaline Cleveland Hosner, when reminiscing of her youthful joyous religious experiences, specifically mentioned "the many Sabbaths I have spent at home at my Fathers." Adaline grew up in a home with faithful parents and she recognized that her deep faith later in life was a direct product of being "surrounded by all the means of grace which was so well calculated to [her] growth" which her father's home provided.³⁰ This remembrance of the piety of her father affected her desire to raise her children with the same example of a positive fatherly influence. Though her husband was not religious for

²⁸ Youth commonly refer to their mother's teaching or their parents' teaching, but rarely do they single out their fathers in relation to religious instruction.

²⁹ George Prentiss, *The Life and Letters of Elizabeth Prentiss* (New York: Garland, 1987), 19.

³⁰ Adaline Cleveland Hosner Journal, 10 June 1838, Adeline Cleveland Hosner papers, #6005. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

many years, her deep desire and yearning for this blessing for her family is a crucial theme throughout her personal journal. She knew that as a mother she held a solemn responsibility to teach her children truth, but she longed for the strength that came from a pious husband and a faithful father for her children. She remembers learning by her father's example and she desired that greatly for her children. She wrote: "The thoughts of my children being brought up without a pious father to guide them in virtue seems more terrible than death itself."³¹ For Adaline, her father's influence was not only fundamental as she developed her personal religiosity as a youth, but throughout the remainder of her life as well. She used her memory of his example as a pattern for her own child-rearing.

In other cases, George Peck described his father as "the kindest hearted and most companionable man that ever breathed;" and Joseph Smith, who experienced a series of visitations by angels, was told specifically to tell his father about his visions, rather than his mother.³² In each of these instances, the young people referred to the actions of their fathers as a strong source of motivation for developing their own religiosity.

These many experiences shared by the young about their mothers and fathers were done in a spirit of reverence, gratitude, and respect. It should not be assumed that parents were perfect beacons of goodness that children obediently followed. Many personal journal accounts show parents who were struggling to know how to best lead their children toward goodness.³³ Parents were not always perfect examples to their

³¹ Adaline Cleveland Hosner Journal, 10 April 1839, Adeline Cleveland Hosner papers, #6005. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

³² George Peck, *The Life and Times of Rev. George Peck, D.D.* (New York: Nelson & Phillips, 1874), 36.; Lucy Mack Smith, *The Revised and Enhanced History of Joseph Smith by His Mother* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Bookcraft, 1996), 108–109.

children and in some cases, the children were the ones who had a positive impact on their parents. Nevertheless, children did remember the good teachings and works of their parents in the home.

Parental Teaching

Without the availability of formal curricula or lesson plans it is difficult to gauge all of the doctrines which were taught in the home. In their writings, most youth don't directly list the specific things they were taught by their parents, but they indirectly mention doctrines that they felt were important, providing insight into what their parents shared with them.

One foundational truth that is commonly referred to by many of the youth is the importance of studying the Bible, as well as certain doctrines found therein. William James, a young man born to Congregational parents in Pompey, New York, described his upbringing: "I was favored with pious parents, who gave me up to God in baptism, in my infancy, upon the plan of his everlasting covenant. I was early taught to read the bible,

³³ Adaline Cleveland Hosner, who herself was a recipient of parental nurturing which resulted in her conversion at age 15, expresses the desire of these nineteenth-century mothers well. She often wrote in her personal journal about her desires for the religious well-being of her children. On June 24, 1838 she writes "Of late I have felt a great responsibility resting upon me to bring up my children in the fear of the Lord. Now whilst they are sleeping in the cradle before me I can scarce refrain from tears to think of dangers they will be exposed to from the world they should live."³³ Less than two months later she records, "This morning when taking into consideration how ill prepared I was to bring up my children in the fear of the Lord by giving way to a hasty spirit, I felt to weep bitterly before god."

For many years of their lives, her husband was not a member of any church and altogether avoided religious things, so she felt the responsibility to teach her children twofold. Her most ardent desire was that her children "might be trained in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." At one point, when she was sick and dying, she pleaded with the Lord that he would spare her life, at least until her children are grown. While she doesn't say it outright, this experiences shows the depth of her commitment to her duty as a religious educator to her children. Adaline Cleveland Hosner Journal, 24 June 1838, 12 August 1838, 21 April 1839, 1845. Adaline Cleveland Hosner papers, #6005. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

and to consider it to be the word of God.”³⁴ It is significant to note that the first thing that William, as well as other youth writers, mentions learning in connection with his parents is the importance of the Bible.

Young Joseph Smith shared this sentiment and started on his path to the justification of his sins because of these instructions from his parents about the importance of the Bible. When writing about his childhood, he begins his record much the same as William, asserting that he was born “of goodly parents who spared no pains to instruct me in the christian religion.”³⁵ This instruction was fundamental for Joseph as he encountered numerous denominations who sought his membership. Ultimately, he fell back on his parents’ teachings and at age twelve he began “searching the Scriptures believing *as I was taught*, that they contained the word of God.”³⁶

Parents didn’t just teach *about* the importance of the Bible, rather they taught specific doctrines *from* Bible. For William James, it was the importance of preparing himself for death. He explained how his parents “were often conversing on the doctrines of the bible” and in one instance he heard them discussing the “certainty of death, and of the necessity of preparing for it.” This doctrine led William to “think that religion was of some importance.”³⁷ As he set out on the pathway to find religion, William went back to his parents often with questions about the doctrine, especially the doctrine of being born

³⁴ He also describes how this was common with other children, “I recollect that I used to sand between my father's knees to say the catechism with the other small children.” William James, “Trials and Experience of William James,” *Utica Christian Magazine* III, no. 3 (September 1815): 62.

³⁵ Karen Lynn Davidson, David J. Whitaker, Mark Ashurts-McGee, and Richard L. Jensen, eds., *Histories, Volume 1: 1832-1844*, vol. 1 of the Histories series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, edited by Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, and Richard Lyman Bushman (Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2012), 11.

³⁶ *Ibid.* Emphasis added.

³⁷ James, “Trials and Experience of William James,” 62.

again. William's interest was first piqued by the parental instruction he received about the Bible, but his heart was pierced by the specific doctrines contained therein. This frequent talk of spiritual things, in his home, was the fundamental catalyst in his preparation for conversion.

For Joseph Smith, his mother's teachings, directly from the Bible, about the importance of seeking God was ultimately the motivator for his visionary experience. As a young mother, Lucy Mack Smith fell very ill. She was so sick that even the doctors gave up hope that she would recover. Lying in her bed, she "looked to the Lord and begged and pled that he would spare [her] life that [she] might bring up [her] children" in the principles of Christianity. In the midst of her pleading, she heard a voice that quoted directly from the Bible, "Seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you" (Matthew 7:7) and then she quickly recovered from her disease. When later asked by her mother what had occurred, Lucy simply responded, "The Lord will let me live. If I am faithful to my promise which I have made to him, he will suffer me to remain to comfort the hearts of...my children."³⁸

Lucy followed through on her promise and taught her children of the importance of both studying the Bible and seeking the Lord. This instruction was vital for young Joseph as questions began to arise in his heart about the truthfulness of the various denominations in his town. Trusting in his mothers' counsel, he went to the Bible for guidance and found the same message his mother had taught him about seeking the Lord. The words of James directed him to "ask of God...and it shall be given him" (James 1:5), ultimately leading him to pray in the woods near his home and experience a marvelous

³⁸ Smith, *History of Joseph*, 48.

theophany. Thus, because of Lucy Mack Smith's teachings to her son about the reliability and strength of the word of God, Joseph turned to that source in his time of spiritual crisis.

Even after many of these young people left the home, they relied on parental figures for guidance. For early Methodists, religious family relationships extended beyond blood relatives, as they looked at other church members as their own families.³⁹ Many Methodist circuit riders, most of whom were young themselves, relied heavily on the "emotional encouragement, lively conversation, and, on occasion, extra financial aid" of older women who housed them during their travels. They saw these women as "mothers in Israel."⁴⁰

Whether referring specifically to the natural maternal-child relationship that many of the youth experienced, the specific examples that their fathers displayed, or the influence of motherly figures later in their lives, it is clear that parents played a significant teaching role for the young. In each of these, and many other cases, young people consistently turned back to the teachings of their devout parents as the root of their religious beliefs and actions.

"May These Children Live...Prayerful Lives"⁴¹

In addition to maternal teaching, youth were influenced by their parents' engagement with prayer. Nineteenth-century Christians considered prayer the most basic

³⁹ Lawrence, *One Family Under God*, 3–8.

⁴⁰ Wigger explains "It is difficult to imagine how the early itinerant system could have successfully operated without these sorts of relationships." Wigger, *Taking Heaven by Storm*, 162–163. For more on the age of Methodist circuit riders, see chapter 4 of this thesis.

⁴¹This excerpt is taken from a specific prayer of a family prayer book as an example of how families should pray. Skinner, *Family Worship*, 61.

form of worship that would bring one closer to God. It required no outside help or guidance nor any particular venue for prayers to be effective. One early book of prayers taught: “He that prays not, has no more claim to the name of a Christian, than he who speaks not the truth. Both disregard God.”⁴² The young people learned the importance of this practice from their praying parents. Parents were instructed to teach their children how to pray from a very early age and as such, they were promised, “You will find that they can, much sooner than you imagine, make little prayers of their own.”⁴³

Reflecting back on her childhood, Fanny Newell remembered vividly the prayerful example of her father. The experience came shortly after her parents received a forgiveness of sins and became members of the Methodist church in Sidney, Maine. In one of his first acts as a religious leader of his home, Fanny’s father gathered the children around, took out a Bible, and shared with his children what God had done for him and his newly found determination to serve The Lord. He apologized for his life of sin, committed to living a new life, read the Bible with his children, and then invited his children to kneel with him in prayer.

This humble example sunk deep into Fanny’s heart and she wrote, “O what heart rendings I then had; I could have freely cried out loud...As soon as he had closed his affecting prayer, I immediately retired to my chamber...greatly affected.”⁴⁴ As her father continued this example, Fanny explained that his “faithfulness...affected my poor heart

⁴² Many churches and groups published books of family worship that included set prayers that fathers and mothers could use in leading their children. These books also provided practical advice on the duties of prayer, family prayer, setting good examples by praying, duties of parents, and many other home-based religious topics. See *Ibid.*, 13.

⁴³ *Christian Advocate* (New York) September 16, 1826, 8.

⁴⁴ Fanny Newell, *Memoir of Fanny Newell* (Springfield, Mass.: O. Scott and E.F. Newell, 1833), 9.

very much.”⁴⁵ Fanny’s experience shows the extent to which youth were affected both by praying with their families and hearing their parents pray for them. This became an important source of motivation, and even guilt for Fanny throughout her childhood. She was motivated by her desire to follow the example of her parents and for some time during her childhood she was “constant in secret prayer.”⁴⁶ Yet, when she was not consistent in her prayers, and at times was even blatantly rebellious against praying, she felt the strong guilt of her rebellion and would reach the point that her “bed could hold [her] no longer” until she joined her family in prayer.⁴⁷ This example of her praying parents was so influential that even as a grown woman, Fanny recalled the inner impact this example had.

Parents prayed for their children for a variety of reasons. Perhaps the most important and most often recorded reason was for the conversion and subsequent righteousness of their unbelieving children, because they understood that prayer was “one of the most efficient means of grace which could be employed.”⁴⁸ Many accounts from nineteenth-century publications describe parents as humble seekers, knowing that if their children were going to receive religion it would require their faithful prayers, both in public and in private for the “anxious desires for the salvation of their children.”⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Ibid., 11.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 12.

⁴⁸ Skinner, *Family Worship*, 60.

⁴⁹ Lewis Pease, “Revival of religion in Alford, Mass.,” *Methodist Magazine* III (1820): 32. See also *A Letter from a Solicitous Mother to Her Only Son* (Andover, Mass.: New England Tract Society, 1815); Rev. Isaac Parsons, *Memoir of Amelia S. Chapman* (New York: American Tract Society, 1840), 3; “Prevalence of a Mother’s Prayers,” 177.

A letter from one young man to his sister describing his conversion shows how much he relied on and was affected by his parents' prayers. After leaving for an extended period of time to discover his own spirituality, he writes that it was the remembrance of the "prayers of his aged father, and the admonition of his godly mother" that first created a desire for salvation within himself. He tried to brush these feeling aside but they sank, "deeper and deeper into his heart, and drove sleep from his pillow, and peace from his soul." To seek peace and justification for his sins, this young man did what he saw his parents do—he prayed. He attended a prayer meeting and "after a two or three hour struggle in prayer, the peace of God visited his heart." Then, as a token of gratitude, he again "raised his voice in praises to his God and Savior."⁵⁰ This young man turned to prayer in every step along his pathway to conversion, likely because of the example his parents set before him.

As these examples show, this act of approaching the Lord with their families created a strong desire in these youth to develop habits of personal prayer; it provided a longing for youth to ponder on their personal state before the Lord; it "cause[d] children to venerate their parents, and willingly bow to their authority;"⁵¹ and ultimately it led to personal, secret prayer which facilitated a conversion experience.⁵²

⁵⁰ T.Z.N., "Copy of a Letter From a Young Gentleman," *Methodist Magazine* III (1820): 358.

⁵¹ Skinner, *Family Worship*, 60.

⁵² For specifics on the role of prayer in conversion see Chapter 2. For other examples of parents praying for their children see Ann Eliza Bigelow Turner Safford, *A Memoir of Daniel Safford* (Boston: American Tract Society, 1861), 115; Timothy Merritt, "Memoir of Mary S. Wardwell," *Youth's Instructor and Guardian* II, no. 12 (December 1824): 418; Pease, "Revival of religion in Alford, Mass.," 32.

“Divine Power...in Private Houses”⁵³

In addition to gospel instruction and prayer, a third religious practice through which parents impacted their children was the decision to conduct religious meetings and gatherings in the home. With the lack of official church meetinghouses in many regions, especially the frontier of Western New York, the home became the perfect gathering place for informal religious services. This “family worship” was common and was not limited to any particular denomination, but was found recorded “in the sermons and didactic writings of Baptists, Presbyterians, and Methodists alike.”⁵⁴

Minister Beriah Green emphasized the value of parents opening their homes up for religious meetings so their children could experience religion, rather than just hear it. He writes, “It is a most important thing to make children *see and feel* that family worship is a duty and a privilege.”⁵⁵ In fact, the intimate nature of these settings often provided more powerful experiences than larger gatherings of the same sort. Some preachers preferred these small venues, as one Methodist preacher suggested “that the greatest displays of divine power and the most numerous conversions were in private houses.”⁵⁶

The benefits of such meetings were twofold for parents. First, they provided a venue where their family and other community members could hear the preaching of the word of God. Secondly, they brought these experiences to their unconverted children, with often no excuse for escape. It was common for the young people to make excuses

⁵³ Henry Boehm as quoted in Wigger, *Taking Heaven by Storm*, 117.

⁵⁴ Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class*, 23.

⁵⁵ Beriah Green, *The Miscellaneous Writings of Beriah Green* (Whitesboro, New York: The Oneida Institute, 1841), 18. Emphasis mine.

⁵⁶ Henry Boehm as quoted in Wigger, *Taking Heaven by Storm*, 117.

for not wanting to attend a religious service, or initially avoid interaction with clergy for fear that they too would be required to join in religious services.⁵⁷

As with adolescents from any time period, many of the youth feared ridicule from peers or siblings so they often didn't publically profess religion immediately. Some spent years secretly praying or reading the word of God, without confiding in anyone. Fanny Newell explained how she "strove hard to hide [her] feelings, for fear of being discovered by her brothers and sisters."⁵⁸ A young man in Western New York spent two or three years in constant, "secret prayer twice a day."⁵⁹ Another young man often "wept in secret" for his sins.⁶⁰ Some would try to avoid religious meetings, so the parents' decision to hold them in their homes provided a way for mandatory attendance for their children. In each of the aforementioned cases, religious meetings in their homes softened their hearts and they gained the courage to publically confess their faith.

George Peck recalls frequent meetings occurring in his home as a young man, which provided some of his most vivid youthful memories in connection with religion. He specifically credits his father with the decision to make his home a "home of the preachers, and a true house of God. Under its lowly roof preaching, prayer-meetings, and class-meetings were of frequent occurrence." Young George recalls that the presence of these meetings "filled the whole house with holy influence."⁶¹ It was in his home that

⁵⁷ In one example, Elizabeth Prentiss dramatically describes the Lord's table as "a place of torture" instead of its true function as a place of worship. Prentiss, *The Life and Letters of Elizabeth Prentiss*, 34.

⁵⁸ Newell, *Memoir of Fanny Newell*, 9.

⁵⁹ James, "Trials and Experience of William James," 63.

⁶⁰ Peck, *Life and Times*, 39.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 27.

George first felt the influence of the Holy Spirit; it was in his home where George heard his first sermons; and it was in his home that George saw the structure and unifying nature of class meetings. Because of his parents' willingness to make their home a place of worship, George's heart was ultimately turned toward God.

As young people like George saw their parents inviting, encouraging, and embracing religion, they learned how they too should accept His word. They were not only hearing of the importance of religious lives, but they were seeing and experiencing it in their own homes. This exposure to social religious interaction opened these youth up to religious meetings outside the home and ultimately prepared them for church membership.

From Home to Revival

After witnessing such important influences and receiving instruction in the home, nineteenth-century youth began to spread their religious wings into more public spheres. The doctrines of the Bible, as taught to them by their mothers, the example and influence of parental prayers, and the participation in homebound religious meetings properly prepared the youth to engage in revivals. As fires of revivalism spread throughout New York and New England during this time, the youth were like spiritual kindling, prepared to ignite with the revival spirit. And this was largely due to their devout parents.

Revival accounts from across the region show not only describe vast amounts of youth participation, but they also specifically reference the impact of parents on this trend. For example, in a Methodist revival in New Haven, Connecticut, Heman Bangs writes of the work, that "at first it was confined principally to the youth, from ten years of age to twenty-five...most of them the children of pious parents, the children of many

prayers and tears.”⁶² About 100 miles northwest in Rhinebeck, New York, a similar trend occurred. In an 1821 revival, a minister recorded, “This glorious work commenced principally among the sons and daughters of pious people, and I am happy to state that all the adult children of methodist parents profess the religion of Jesus.”⁶³

The church recognized that the role of parents didn’t just end with the conversion of their children, and they put much hope into the continuing influence of family throughout the lives of the converted. In speaking of a newly converted group of young people, Clergyman John Smith explained it this way, “it is to be hoped, from this circumstance, that parental example and instruction, united with divine grace, will tend much to fortify their minds against any disposition to...renounce their religion.”⁶⁴

So, as the Congregational Church brethren first gathered together in Springfield, Vermont in 1818 desiring the blessings of a revival in their town, they chose to pray for the most crucial parties.⁶⁵ Their prayers for the youth, as well as their fathers, proved wildly fruitful and resulted in an extended revival and the conversion of over 150 souls.⁶⁶ Near the end of the revival those church brethren gratefully exclaimed: “We bless God, that a large proportion of our young people are now rejoicing in the hope of eternal

⁶² Heman Bangs, “Progress of Religion in New-Haven,” *Methodist Magazine* IX (1826): 276.

⁶³ C., “Revival of the work of God in Rhinebeck, NY,” *Methodist Magazine* IV (1821): 349–50. See also “Account of Camp Meeting Held on Long-Island, New York,” *Methodist Magazine* IV (1821): 387–91.

⁶⁴ John M. Smith, “Revival of Religion in Southhold, Long Island,” *Methodist Magazine* I (1818): 474–77.

⁶⁵ While it could be that the church leaders were praying for the youth because they felt like they were the most corrupt group, their descriptions of the young people are overwhelmingly positive. They never mention the young in a negative light. This lack of negative talk, coupled with the other revival accounts of youth in Vermont leading the way in revivals, point toward the idea that the church leaders knew where that the most potential rested with the youth.

⁶⁶ Morton, *Revival of Religion in Springfield, VT*, 6.

life...It is not improbable, that this revival will eventually give to the church some faithful heralds of the cross.”⁶⁷ With this foundation of family piety, it would not be improbable to believe that the youth converted at this revival, as they became parents and church leaders themselves, would one day gather together and pray for a revival to commence among their own children providing a new generation of “faithful heralds of the cross.”⁶⁸

⁶⁷ These new youth converts of this revival were not just turned over to the church or the world immediately after their conversion, but they were requested to meet with the church brethren each morning “for further conversation respecting their spiritual state” and provide strength for their future success in the church. Ibid., 12–13.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

Chapter Two

“What Shall I Do to Be Saved?”: Conversion Experiences Among Youth

*“Show pity, Lord, O Lord, forgive;
Let a repenting rebel live.”¹*

George Peck wanted to be saved. He was born in 1797 in the heart of the burned-over district, Ostego County, New York, and as such, he “could scarcely evade a religious experience.”² After the conversion of his parents to Methodism shortly after his birth, George grew up praying, reading the Bible, speaking of religious matters, and witnessing “outbursts of holy emotion” in his home.³ Wanting their children to follow their examples, his devout parents transformed their home into a “home of the preachers, and a true house of God.”⁴

Like other many other youth in similar situations across the region, George pondered often of spiritual things and felt a deep sorrow for his sins. Following the examples of his parents, George pursued a personal conversion experience through prayer, Bible study, and attendance at revival meetings. At the age of fifteen, after years of seeking, he experienced this spiritual rebirth. Immediately after attending a revival meeting and feeling a desire to “seek the Lord...at that time,” George secluded himself

¹ Hymn by Isaac Watts as quoted by Peck, *Life and Times*, 42.

² Cross, *The Burned-Over District*, 7–8.

³ Peck, *Life and Times*, 27.

⁴ *Ibid.* George’s family came from a long line of uniquely American ancestors with “decided religious character.” A group of his ancestors sought religious freedom with the pilgrims in 1630s and later others fought for those freedoms in the 1770s. This love of freedom and religious ideals was passed down through the generations until eventually it was impressed upon George in the early 1800s by his parents. *Ibid.*, 14.

from others. He wrote, “Being alone, I began to sing one of our old familiar penitential hymns: ‘Show pity, Lord, O Lord, forgive/Let a repenting rebel live.’”⁵ As he sang, he was filled with a spirit of joy.

He later recorded, “My heart was melted; I felt strangely buoyant, and almost ready to exclaim aloud, ‘Glory to God!’ I said to myself, ‘What change is this? Is this what I have been seeking? It may be that God has pardoned my sins.’”⁶ These two questions that George asked himself highlight the ultimate desire that many nineteenth-century youth had: they sought personal changes in their lives that would bring about forgiveness of their sins. George, along with thousands of other youth, flocked to churches, revival meetings, homes, and other places during the first half of the nineteenth century seeking that forgiveness.

Later that night George did just that. Attending a revival meeting with a close acquaintance, he shared with others some of the things that he had felt. While his experience was not the overwhelmingly powerful manifestation he had supposed it might be, he felt an inner peace as he shared his story with others. After having a lifetime to reflect again and again upon his experience that morning, he later wrote, “from that memorable day I have tried to serve the Lord. I believe that God forgave my sins in the morning, while I was alone, singing.” George Peck was baptized the next day into the Methodist Episcopal Church, along with six other members of his family, and noted that “from that day I felt myself one with God's people.”⁷ Just four years later, George left

⁵ Ibid., 42.

⁶ Ibid., 43.

⁷ Ibid., 44.

home and joined the Methodist circuit riders to spread the news of salvation—a career he would engage in for 57 years.

George's account highlights the role of conversion experiences among youth during the nineteenth century. These formative events brought feelings of peace and forgiveness of sins that the youth so desperately sought, and created within them a desire to continue on the path of personal religion. Conversion experiences, defined in this context as the moment of spiritual rebirth or religious turning point in one's life, were the most important religious events that a young person could undergo. They became the goal for which young people sought before their conversions and the spiritual guide to which young people referred throughout the remainder of their lives.

These experiences, which litter journals, newspapers, magazines, letters and tracts of the early nineteenth century, grew out of a culture that emphasized the dangers of sin and the need for rebirth. The teachings and examples of parents and clergy about the need for personal change and the inherent sinfulness of the youth drove young people to seek after conversion experiences early in their lives. These conversion accounts serve as one of the defining features of Second Great Awakening revivals, painting a scene where frequent, powerful experiences with the divine were commonly experienced, recorded, and shared.⁸

In short, personal conversion was the crux of the youth religious experience. If parental teachings and examples were the foundation for the religious lives of youth, then conversion experiences were the building itself. Early American society placed such emphasis on these events that without a specific conversion experience, no one could join

⁸ These types of experiences varied from simple feelings of peace and forgiveness to profound visions of God. Despite the vehicle by which they came, all of these experiences brought a sense of forgiveness from sin and the beginning of a new spiritual life.

themselves to a church and thereby fully participate in the religious experience. To best understand this, we will examine the definition of conversion, the deep feelings of both fear and love that prepared youth for conversion, and the various manifestations of this spiritual rebirth. By considering the journey toward conversion, we can better understand the various family, societal, and religious influences on nineteenth century youth, as well as the personal responses, motives and desires of the young people.

George Peck's conversion experience at age fifteen was both an end and a beginning in his young life. It marked the climax of his journey to find justification from sin, while simultaneously starting him on a new journey of life-long devotion to God. Many youth who experienced conversion, despite their denominational affiliation, went through a similar process to reach the point of spiritual rebirth as George had done.⁹ This study will not examine the conversion process itself as others have, but rather seek to understand the specific feelings, motives, and experiences of the young people as they went through this process, regardless of their denominational ties.¹⁰

⁹ Even Calvinists, like the Congregationalists, who believed that God had already chosen those who would be saved, stressed the importance of conversion experiences. Tyler Smith a nineteenth century Congregational minister outlines the general conversion process for Congregationalists, "When first awakened, persons were generally moved by a sense of danger. They generally set out with a resolution, and the expectation of doing something to make themselves better...the more they attended to the duties of religion...the more sensible they became of their exceeding depravity and guilt...They were soon brought to see that their hearts were full of sin and opposition to God. There were feeling convinced that they never could enjoy any real peace or happiness...unless their hearts were renewed by the divine Spirit...This view of their character and condition...rendered them sensible of their need of the Lord Jesus as their Savior to deliver them both from the power and punishment of sin, and so prepared them to trust in him alone for salvation...Some experienced them for a longer, some for a shorter term. But when they were very powerful, the subjects of them commonly found relief sooner." Bennet Tyler, *New England Revivals, As They Existed at the Close of the Eighteenth, and the Beginning of the Nineteenth Centuries* (Richard Owen Roberts, 1980), 197–200.

¹⁰ The conversion experiences among the youth are as varied as the youth themselves, and examining their commonalities helps paint a picture of what the typical journal looked like for these nineteenth-century youth. Over fifty different accounts taken from youth journals, memoirs, letters, newspapers, magazines reminiscences, and revival records provide the sources to explore the commonalities in the conversion process among various youth.

Defining Conversion: “Ye Must Be Born Again”

For centuries, Christians have identified with the doctrine of conversion because of its prominence throughout the Christian Bible. This theme is introduced in the Old Testament, with the most notable reference coming as Jehovah sought to help the children of Israel enter into his presence. To do so, Jehovah promised his people, “I will put a new spirit within you” (Ezekiel 11:19) and pledged that he would “give them an heart to know me” (Jeremiah 32:39). In order to understand and see God, the people of Israel needed to undergo a conversion experience that would allow them to be spiritually prepared to truly become God’s people. With this “new heart and a new spirit” (Ezekiel 18:31), the people would be prepared to come into his presence.

The basic understanding of conversion continues in the New Testament in the teachings of Jesus Christ himself. During Jesus’ ministry, he commanded his followers to “be born again” (John 3:3), or in other words receive a complete forgiveness of sins through being born again by both water, or baptism, and by the spirit, or the Holy Ghost. Through this process an individual would experience a change of heart and devote their lives to God—in a word, conversion. Following this command of Jesus in the New Testament and seeking for the promised of Jehovah in the Old Testament, Christians of all ages have sought to be born again and walk in “newness of life.” (Romans 6:4).

This concept of conversion continued after the death of Jesus as early church fathers wrote about this idea, tying it closely with baptism. One of the strong proponents

In examining conversion narratives from the beginning of the nineteenth century, Virginia Brereton noticed a similar pattern in the conversion process. She separated the evangelical conversion process into five parts: (1) life before the desire for conversion began, (2) the recognition of an individual’s sinfulness, (3) the specific conversion experience where forgiveness was felt, (4) a change in behavior and attitudes, and (5) periods of backsliding and rededication. Virginia Lieson Brereton, *From Sin to Salvation: Stories of Women’s Conversions, 1800 to the Present* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 6.

of the necessity of conversion in the early church was Aurelius Augustinus, or Augustine the Bishop of Hippo.¹¹ Augustine taught that “a man may be baptized with water, and not born of the Spirit.”¹² He explained that someone who is born of the spirit is one who is “changed with a true conversion.”¹³ Comparing our physical nourishment to our spiritual, he described that the process of a child being delivered from its mother is only the beginning of its life. The infant must then take nourishment from its mother, from whom he received the gift of life. Likewise, we too are born spiritually of the Savior through baptism of water, but that is only the beginning. One must then turn to the source of life, even Jesus Christ, to receive the necessary nourishment and growth. As this happens, God grants us the “first blessing of God’s goodness in the Holy Ghost [which] is the remission of sins.”¹⁴

As church fathers passed these teachings down throughout the years, the focus moved away from baptism and primarily became focused on personal experiences—a shift away from sacramental to experiential. These teachings became embedded deep within the Puritan culture. Early New England Puritanism was based upon reason, but “at its heart...[it] was a devotional movement, rooted in religious experience.”¹⁵ The counsel

¹¹ Bruce L. Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language*, 3rd ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2008), 125.

¹² Augustine, “On Baptism, Against the Donatists,” Book 6, Chapter 12, Verse 18 in Philip Schaff, editor, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers – First Series*, fourteen volumes (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004), 4:485.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Augustine, “Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament,” Sermon 21, Verse 19, in Philip Schaff, editor, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers – First Series*, fourteen volumes (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004), 6:324.

¹⁵ Hambrick-Stowe, *The Practice of Piety*, vii.

to seek personal religious experiences was not reserved for the elite alone, but was something in which “the entire populace participated.”¹⁶

As the Puritan churches began to languish in the 1670s, Samuel Torrey, a pastor at Weymouth, Massachusetts was the first that saw a need for a reemphasis on conversion for individual members, rather than a change in the church. He expressed the need for every member of the church to undergo a “heart-reformation, or making of a new heart,” for he argued that the churches would not revive through their efforts alone but “only when God would pour ‘out [an] abundance of converting grace, and so revive and renew the work of Conversion.’”¹⁷ Through a series of church policy changes, the Puritans began to seek for revivals of God’s spirit among the people.¹⁸ These efforts eventually led to the revivals of the First Great Awakening in which ministers such as George Whitfield and Jonathan Edwards preached vigorously for the conversion of the masses.

The descendants of these Puritan ancestors and those converted in the First Great Awakening were the rising generation during the outbreak of the Second Great Awakening. While some young people were pioneers in religious conversion, most were the children of devoted parents, as discussed in the previous chapter, who came from long lines of ancestral piety.

Thus, throughout the years, two basic definitions of the term “conversion” emerge. The first is an idea that conversion is a lifelong process for which all Christians

¹⁶ Ibid., 287.

¹⁷ Kidd, *The Great Awakening*, 2.

¹⁸ For an in-depth look at the halfway covenants and the covenant renewal of the late seventeenth century, see Ibid., 3–12.

should strive as they turn their lives and devotions over to God.¹⁹ The second definition refers specifically to an actual conversion experience, where one is spiritually reborn or receives a forgiveness of sins, causing this individual to forsake their old life of sin and strive to follow after the Savior.²⁰ Evangelicalism moved conversion and experiencing conversion to the forefront.

This thesis, while recognizing that ultimate spiritual conversion was a lifelong process, implements the more common usage of the word “conversion” in nineteenth-century vernacular, meaning the initial experience of being born again or converted.²¹

¹⁹ Most scholars view conversion as the process in which an individual gains a forgiveness of sins, termed justification, and turns their life and devotions over to God. Rachel Cope described that “justification is a legal term that is used to describe one’s release from the guilt of sin at the moment of spiritual birth... For Christians this is considered the beginning of a person experiencing grace through the atonement of Christ and is thus the first step to final sanctification, holiness and perfection.” Thus for some it is the beginning of a life of piety, not the destination—“a process rather than an event.” Rachel Cope, “In Some Places A Few Drops And Other Places A Plentiful Shower’: The Religious Impact Of Revivalism On Early Nineteenth-Century New York Women” (PhD diss., Syracuse University, 2009), 3, fn7, 1–12; Catherine A. Brekus, *Strangers & Pilgrims: Female Preaching in America, 1740-1845*, Gender and American culture (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 42–43, 177; Cross, *The Burned-Over District*, 41.; D. Bruce Hindmarsh, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative: Spiritual Autobiography in Early Modern England* (Oxford University Press, USA, 2005), 25. For a commentary on modern conversion experiences in the religious world see Lewis R. Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

Charles Hambrick-Stowe simply stated that the conversion of one’s heart was a change from “sinfulness to godliness,” and that this process has been “a powerful force” and the “defining element in the broad evangelical stream of religious life in this country from colonial days to the present.” Charles E. Hambrick-Stowe, *Charles G. Finney and the Spirit of American Evangelicalism*, Library of religious biography (Grand Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 1996), 15, 18.

²⁰ For example, Cope distinguishes between the “initial conversion, or spiritual birth” which often occurred during youth and the “final conversion, or holiness” which required a lifetime of striving to obtain. She also describes the difference between justification and sanctification, noting that “justification is a legal term that is used to describe one’s release from the guilt of sin at the moment of spiritual birth... Sanctification continues as a process through which believers seek to become more like Jesus Christ through the power of his divine grace.” Cope, “In Some Places A Few Drops,” 3. See also Hindmarsh, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative*, 3, 25.

Cope’s dissertation surrounds the idea that the initial conversion experiences of women were just the beginning of their spiritual journeys of seeking for ultimate sanctification in Jesus Christ, an endeavor that lasted a lifetime. Cope, “In Some Places A Few Drops,” 3.

²¹ To best understand how the people of the Second Great Awakening viewed conversion, it is imperative to explore the writings of nineteenth-century preachers and church members. The Tract Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church published a pamphlet in the 1850s called “On the Nature of Conversion and the Way to Obtain It,” which outlines in detail what conversion is and what it is not. The work

Powerful conversion experiences became the goal for which all God-seeking people strove. As one preacher of young children put it, “No intelligence is more welcome, than that which relates to the conversion of sinners.”²² These conversion experiences represented a transcendence of individual desires and a complete union with the mind and will of God.²³ Examining conversion as a specific experience helps us better understand how the youth prepared for, experienced, and reacted to this foundational event in their spiritual lives.

This culture of seeking for conversion experiences became a significant influence on the youth as the quest to be born again acted as the driving force in young people’s

specifically mentions that conversion is not: “confessing to be a Christian,” “baptism,” “a good education,” “strict performance of all the outward duties of religion,” “turning from former sins,” “deep convictions of sins...and pangs of conscience,” or “strong movings of affection under powerful preaching.” Rather, conversion is “a universal change upon your heart, and also in your life.”

According to the tract, elements of conversion that attend an individual who experiences this change of heart include: his “understanding is enlightened,” his “will is renewed, and brought into subjection to the will of God,” “the stream and current of the affections are changed,” he “takes holiness for his path,” and the conversion experience “has an effect upon a man’s whole life and practice.” *On the Nature of Conversion and the Way to Obtain It* (New York: Tract Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, n.d.), 2–8.

An article in the *Christian Advocate and Journal* from Jan. 24, 1834 entitled “Sermon on Self Conversionism” further defines conversion as “a free, moral, spiritual turning of the soul to God...It is nothing but beginning to know, believe, love, and serve God, and includes the beginning of sorrow for sin, hatred of it, determination to forsake it, confession of it, and consent of the will to follow Christ. He who begins to believe and love Christ is the subject of self conversionism.” (The term “conversionism” as used in this article is found in no other sources I have read. It is clear the author meant “conversion”). *Christian Advocate and Journal* 8:22, January 24, 1834.

In 1807, Rev. James Kemp used scriptural passages to teach that to be converted means “to be turned.” He explains the three defining features of conversion for of any age: “a change in their faith...a change in their hearts and lives...and an initiation into the Church of Christ.” Thus the importance of conversion for nineteenth-century religious followers cannot be overstated. It became the powerful hinge around which their spiritual lives revolved. Rev. James Kemp, *A Tract Upon Conversion* (Baltimore, Md: Robinson for Cole & Bonsal, 1807). See also Aaron Bancroft, *A Discourse on Conversion* (Worcester, Mass.: William Manning, 1818). A young woman in Connecticut recognized conversion as a significant experience as she wrote that “conversion must be a great and important change.”²¹ Bennet Tyler, *New England Revivals: As They Existed at the Close of the Eighteenth and the Beginning of the Nineteenth Centuries* (Wheaton, Ill.: Richard Owen Roberts, 1980).

²² C. M. T., “Revival of the Work of God in a School” *Methodist Magazine*, vol. 1 (New York: J. Soule and T. Mason, 1818), 70.

²³ Brekus explained that “the goal of conversion was not self-realization, but self abnegation: the eclipse of the self in blinding unity with God.” Brekus, *Strangers & Pilgrims*, 42–43.

religious lives. If parents and church leaders could inspire the young people to be born again, they would spiritually strengthen both the home and the church. The feelings recorded by George Peck long before his conversion at fifteen, demonstrate the multitude of experiences that shaped most youths' longings for personal salvation. While George wrote these feelings specifically about his own childhood, his experience is quite common and could have come from the pen of any number of youth. He wrote:

My mind began to be the subject of religious impressions as soon as I became capable of religious ideas. I recollect being in a prayer-meeting when I was about four years old, and feeling that I was a sinner, and I wept at the thought that I did not possess that which rendered those about me so happy. The sermons which I heard often impressed, and my father's prayers in the family greatly moved me. My mother's admonitions and tears were always more than I could endure. My sister Elizabeth sought Christ at a camp-meeting ... and I was powerfully awakened to a sense of my need. Many a time, during the years which, I presume, seemed to others to be spent in careless, boyish mirth and indifference, I was greatly troubled in spirit, wept in secret and formed resolutions which, if permanent, would have led me to a different life.²⁴

As George described, the entire evangelical American culture revolved around seeking personal conversion experiences. Parents desired it for their children;²⁵ Children longed to save nonreligious parents;²⁶ Friends exhorted other friends to piety;²⁷ Clergy

²⁴ Peck, *Life and Times*, 40.

²⁵ Mary Ryan discusses this extensively as she contends that mothers sought to help their children receive conversion experiences before they left the home. Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class*, 77.

²⁶ An example of a young girl, Mary Ann Hopkins, of Buffalo New York describes how she worried immensely about her father's salvation. Even on her deathbed, she was more concerned about her father reading the Bible and praying than she was about her own health. Mrs. Thomas, *Mary Ann Hopkins: The Sunday School Girl Who Was the Instrument of Her Father's Conversion* (New York: Carlton & Phillips, 1856).

²⁷ An account in Franklin, New York describes how "God made use of a young man as a great instrument in awakening many...His soul was so filled with love to God and compassion for sinners, that he went from house to house exhorting his young companions to *flee from the wrath to come*...and numbers who were dead in sins have been made alive unto God." Bradley, *Accounts of Revivals*, 189. Emphasis in original.

wanted this for their congregations above all else;²⁸ And the very purpose of revival meetings themselves was to help facilitate conversion.²⁹

²⁸ “The conversion of a sinner produces joy in Heaven.” - Youth’s Instructor and Guardian – Vol 2, No 4 (April), 127; C. M. T., “Revival of the Work of God in a School,” 70.

²⁹ While modern terms often equate conversion with church membership, this was not the case in the early 1800s. Revival records separate conversion from entrance into church membership, often recording the number of converts on any given day, followed by the number of individuals who joined the church. They recognized that conversion was first and foremost an act of coming unto Jesus Christ, and secondly an experience that led one to join themselves to a church. Some examples of this include the description of Mrs. Harriot Larmonth’s conversion: “About two years after her conversion she joined the Methodist Episcopal Church,” Biographical Department, *Christian Advocate and Journal* 11:34, April 14, 1837; Another record indicates that one man “Immediately after his conversion...joined the Methodist Episcopal Church Sept. 16, *Christian Advocate and Journal* 12:8, October 13, 1837; An account in New York mentions specifically that 100 souls were converted, but only 30 joined church, *Christian Advocate and Journal* 12:40, May 25, 1838; and another account of a Sister Peterson who converted at age ten, then joined the Methodist Episcopal Church a year later, *Christian Advocate and Journal* 19:13, November 6, 1844.

Though conversion experiences and church membership were not equated with each other in general, they had an important relationship. Many churches considered conversion such an important step in one’s spiritual journey that they required it for church membership. Cross, *The Burned-Over District*, 41. Discussing this relationship, Stephen Grossbart explains that “conversion was a typical requirement for church membership that brought with it not only eternal salvation, but also full privileges in the church and significant social prestige.” He explains that “conversion and church admission...are not identical...[but since] there is no way to systematically determine the timing of conversion(s) for any given individual...[numerous studies] use church admission as proxy for conversion.” Grossbart, “Seeking the Divine Favor: Conversion and Church Admission in Eastern Connecticut.” Curtis Johnson also writes, “To join a Congregational, Presbyterian, Baptist or Methodist church one had to profess having experienced the New Birth.” Johnson, *Islands of Holiness*, 22.

This policy brought with it some complications that affected many youth. One young man explained to his father that while he desired to join himself to the Baptists, “they will require of me to relate an experience, and to tell of some time and place where I had already experienced that which I am only seeking for, and have not found. This, of course, I cannot do; and, therefore, they will not receive me unto baptism. How, then, can I observe the ordinances of God and keep his commandments?” Parley Parker Pratt, *The Autobiography of Parley Parker Pratt* (Chicago: Law, King & Law, 1888), 23.

Fear and Love: Being Prepared for Conversion

The youth of the early 1800s wanted to be close to God; and judging from their writings it seemed that they believed God wanted them to cultivate a relationship with him.³⁰ They often describe a pull toward spiritual matters or a desire to learn the things of God beginning at a very young age. Records are strewn with experiences of small children, even as young as four years old, who had encounters with the Divine.³¹ Through these formative spiritual experiences, the youth developed a spiritual repertoire that prepared them for conversion as they grew into adolescence. Repeated exposure to spiritual matters produced greater desires to be prepared to meet God, often manifesting itself through feelings of fear of death or guilt for sinful actions. These feelings often lasted for long periods of time, slowly leading these young souls to seek conversion.

Fanny Newell's early childhood experiences demonstrate this process. Fanny, who grew up in Sidney, Maine, was first drawn to God as a very young girl: "When quite young I can well remember my being awakened times without number; and at so very early a period of my life, that I, like young Samuel of old, did not know that it was the Lord."³²

As a five year old, Fanny began to fear death exceedingly, having attended the funeral of one of her young companions. One day, while thinking upon the subject, the very distinct message came to her mind, "You must pray or be *damned*." Having little idea of how to pray or what to do, Fanny arose from her play, went to a nearby window,

³⁰ As noted in the introduction, I have defined youth as those between the ages of 12-25.

³¹ Four years old is the youngest age mentioned in the records, but it was more common to have children around 7 or 8 who began having these experiences.

³² Newell, *Memoir of Fanny Newell*, 5.

and kneeled down to pray. “How or for what” she had no idea, but she recorded that after that first, simple prayer she felt “calm, serene, easy and quiet in [her] mind.”³³ The contrast she felt between the brink of damnation and the peace of heaven from this simple experience provided her first impressions of God and led her to continue to seek Him.

These feelings of fear manifest themselves again just a few short years later as Fanny attended the funeral of an aunt, who was dear to her. At that occasion she again felt terrified of death. Beginning to sob and shake uncontrollably, for fear that she was not prepared to die and receive judgment, she retired to a secret place. Once there, she reflected over her life and made resolutions to be more obedient to her parents, kinder to her siblings, and more devoted to God. While Fanny was not always true to these convictions, she was aware that “the good Spirit of the Lord did not leave [her], but strove with [her] from time to time.”³⁴

As Fanny’s experience demonstrates, these feelings of fear were often a strong motivator for children to follow the things they had been taught. As they did so, they were filled with a sense of strength, peace, and joy which led them to love God for these blessings and fear him less. Thus ironically, both fear of God and love for him motivated children to follow after religious things. These spiritual experiences caused children and youth to engage in self-reflection and cultivate a desire for self-improvement. It took many of these types of experiences, often over the course of many years, coupled with the examples and teachings of others for young people to devote themselves entirely to

³³ Ibid., 6. Emphasis in original.

³⁴ Ibid., 5–7.

religion. As Fanny grew and was drawn toward religion, she continued to seek spiritual experiences until she finally attained conversion at age fifteen.

Fanny's process shows that youth were being prepared to experience conversion as teenagers through the spiritual feelings and experiences they encountered as children. They came to recognize and be drawn to the feelings of love and peace they felt when following God, and similarly they learned what fear and guilt felt like when they turned against him.

In addition to gaining a familiarity with spiritual feelings, childhood experiences helped youth develop spiritual practices which later became crucial in their conversions. For Parley Pratt of Burlington, New York, his early childhood experiences taught him how to seek the Lord through the scriptures. Seven-year-old Parley remembers fondly how his mother began to teach him the stories from the scriptures. Each story instilled within his young heart, a love for the word of God and a hatred for the evils of the world. Joseph in Egypt with "his dreams, his servitude, his temptation and exaltation; his kindness and affection for his father and brethren...inspired [him] with love, and with the noblest sentiments ever planted in the bosom of man." The Old Testament stories of battle like David and Goliath, Saul and Samuel, and Samson and the Philistines created within Parley a hatred for evil men and their practices and a deep love for good men and their deeds. After hearing the words of Jesus and his Apostles in the gospels, Parley explained, "O, how I loved them! How I longed to fall at the feet of Jesus; to worship him, or to offer my life for his."³⁵

³⁵ Parley wrote how his mother's teachings about the Bible helped instill within him the love for reading. He explained "But I always loved a book. If I worked hard, a book was in my hand in the morning while others were sitting down to breakfast; the same at noon; if I had a few moments, a *book!* a *BOOK!* A

Parley's description here shows the great contrast that was taught to and grew in the hearts and minds of the young. They were taught to feel abhorrence for evil and love for God. These two opposite, but reinforcing, feelings led the youth to seek God more fervently in their lives.

Because of his childhood experiences with the Bible, Parley began to study the Bible on his own and at age twelve, he had a powerful encounter with the word of God. After reading of the resurrection in the book of Revelation, Parley felt a deep desire to receive such a glorious resurrection. Both feelings of love and fear are clearly present in Parley's account and his words paint a picture of a young population who were being driven to love God through fear. Like Fanny Newell, a sense of impending death filled Parley's heart and he wrote:

I felt a longing desire and an inexpressible anxiety to secure to myself a part in a resurrection so glorious. I felt a weight of worlds,—of eternal worlds resting upon me; for fear I might still remain in uncertainty, and at last fall short and still sleep on in the cold embrace of death; while the great, the good, the blessed and the holy of this world would awake from the gloom of the grave and be renovated, filled with life and joy, and enter upon life with all its joys: while for a thousand years their busy, happy tribes should trample on my sleeping dust, and still my spirit wait in dread suspense, impatient of its doom.³⁶

Parley's description of his "longing desire" to be "filled with life and joy" combined with his "inexpressible anxiety" to avoid the "cold embrace of death...and doom" show both sources, fear and love, that had taken hold upon the hearts of the

book at evening, while others slept or sported; a book on Sundays; a book at every leisure moment of my life" (Emphasis his). Pratt, *The Autobiography of Parley Parker Pratt*, 18.

³⁶ Ibid., 18–19. This fear of death was a common feeling among the records of children in the nineteenth century. After examining the religious diaries of 44 children, E. Brooks Holifield perceived that "The encounter with death—either the anticipation of their own deaths or the experience of the deaths of others—led them to wonder and reflect about heaven and hell" and became one of the most common themes of these writings. E. Brooks Holifield, "Let the Children Come: The Religion of the Protestant Child in Early America," *Church History* 76, no. 4 (December 2007): 753.

young. They existed simultaneously in young people's hearts and their religiosity manifest itself in a battle to overcome fear and experience peace in their young lives.

As Parley grew, he continued to study the doctrines in the Bible which led him to "believe in Jesus...serve him and keep his commandments", leading to his eventual conversion. His desire to be baptized by immersion guided him to join the Baptist church at age eighteen.³⁷

The spiritual experiences of children cultivated both a familiarity with spiritual matters and a better understanding of how to seek them. As children were exposed to the teachings of parents or pastors, various religious meetings, experiences with death of loved ones, and other types of religious socialization, their awareness of their own spiritual shortcomings came to the forefront. In short, the more children and youth encountered God, the more they became aware of their sins. This self-awareness provided the perfect ground in which spiritual conversion could sprout.

From Sin to Salvation

The historical records indicate that at first, the feelings of fear of God and the afterlife caused the young people to examine their own sins and misdeeds in an extremely

³⁷Parley continued to search the Bible for the doctrines of Jesus Christ and was ultimately unsatisfied with the Baptist's doctrine. He eventually was taught by a Mr. Sidney Rigdon, a former minister who had since joined the Mormon Church. Parley was impressed with the doctrine they taught and after hearing their message, wrote, "Here was the *ancient gospel* in due form." He still wanted to know more about the church and was especially curious as to their source of authority to teach and to baptize.

After receiving a copy of a "very strange book," *The Book of Mormon*, from a Baptist deacon, Parley wrote, "I read all day; eating was a burden, I had no desire for food; sleep was a burden when the night came, for I preferred reading to sleep. As I read the spirit of the Lord was upon me, and I knew and comprehended that the book was true, as plainly and manifestly as a man comprehends and knows he exists."

Parley sought to find the man responsible for this discovery and translation of this book, and after meeting Joseph Smith, the founder of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Parley joined himself to them, eventually becoming one of the members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of the Church. Ibid., 23–24, 31–41.

critical light. The most common feelings that this inner searching brought were feelings of guilt.³⁸ By their teenage years, most youth had been taught by their parents and encountered many church teachings about the importance of being free from sin, ensuring they were prepared for death. They were taught clearly about Paul's words to the Romans that "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). One nineteenth-century book targeted at the young counseled them to "pray that God may *change your heart*. The youngest child has a bad heart. You know bad hearts need changing. But who can change bad hearts? None but God. O, pray God to give you new hearts!" It then charged

\: "Pray that your sins may be *forgiven*. Your sins have offended a good God: entreat God to forgive them. It is sin which keeps bad children out of heaven. Pray God to forgive your sins, that they may not keep you out of heaven."³⁹

As a result of these teachings, the young people became "acutely aware of their sinfulness and of the possibility that they would be damned forever" and so they diligently sought conversion experiences that their sins, and their guilt, would be taken away.⁴⁰ Each child's definition of sin varied, from bad thoughts to pride to ingratitude,⁴¹ and countless primary accounts show how the sins of these youth weighed heavily upon their minds. When feeling this weight and being pricked by the Holy Spirit each of the

³⁸ Neil Meyer makes the argument that the emotion of shame was the most significant feature of the early revivals and examines how this created a culture where the revivals spirit could spread. Meyer, "Falling for the Lord: Shame, Revivalism, and the Origins of the Second Great Awakening."

³⁹ Committee of Publication, ed., *The Youth's Friend* (Philadelphia: American Sunday-School Union, 1825), 151.

⁴⁰ Brereton, *From Sin to Salvation*, 6.

⁴¹ Holifield, "Let the Children Come," 769.

youth would ask “*What shall [I] do to be saved?*”⁴² These feelings built up over a period of time, sometimes many years, providing a clear motive to seek forgiveness of sins—the only relief for these feelings.⁴³

Often personal experiences of youthful disobedience sparked the fire of guilt within the youth, as these experiences were glaring evidences of their imperfections. These reminders of their own sins were equally, if not more, effective in prompting these young people to seek conversion as were their spiritual experiences.

George Peck’s record indicates that an experience of this kind put him on the pathway to seek forgiveness at age thirteen, because he realized how seriously his sins affected him and it instilled a strong desire within him to seek for a new life. One Sabbath morning, George and his brother Andrew were put in charge of watching the little ones, while the older family members attended a church service. George writes that “a sudden temptation seized me to leave our charge for a ramble in the woods, and I prevailed upon Andrew to go.” After playing in the woods for some time, the boys felt uneasy about their moment of rebelliousness and began to head back home. As they did so “dense clouds suddenly darkened the heavens, and a furious tornado swept down” upon them. George recounts seeking shelter among trees, one of which was toppled by the storm and landed just a few feet away from him and his brother. When the storm ceased, George and Andrew “hurried home, drenched with rain, terrified by the fearful scenes through which

⁴²Bradley, *Accounts of Revivals*, 173. Emphasis in original.

⁴³ Records indicate that conversion was a powerful source of initial relief for the young people from feelings of guilt, but the feelings undoubtedly returned. This is where the definition of conversion as a lifelong process takes its place. Their initial conversion experiences showed them the way in which they could overcome negative feelings of fear and guilt and changed their hearts so that they would desire these things. They then spent the remainder of their lives seeking to keep those feelings at bay by following the teachings of God. Hindmarsh, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative*, 25; Cope, “In Some Places A Few Drops,” 3, 51.

[they] had passed, and [their] hearts burdened with guilt.” These feelings of guilt did not come from their parents, for the boys never told their parents about their disobedience. Rather, their understanding of God and his displeasure with sin were the source of their anxiety.

George’s parents, while converts to Methodism and the Armenian doctrine, grew up as Calvinistic Congregationalists. These Calvinistic tones of an angry God seem to be secured deep within George’s heart, for George was terribly affected by what he had done and the danger he exposed his brother to. He wrote with guilt, “The idea of being killed in the act of breaking the sabbath made my very bones shake.” Yet, George’s experience did not merely make him feel bad about what he had done, it motivated him to change. He wrote, “Many were the vows I made to lead a new life. Often did I fear to close my eyes at night until I had promised God that if he would spare me to see another day I would do better.”⁴⁴ Like George, most youth could not simply forget that they had sinned and move forward with their spiritual lives. They desired a deep sense of forgiveness that matched their deep sense of guilt. The only way to receive such was to seek to live lives of devotion and yearn for spiritual rebirth. Thus this fear proved to be one of the most important motivators for young people to seek God.

The most powerful feelings of guilt were often associated with those youth who were antagonistic towards spiritual practices and initially fought against religion. Having been taught religious principles at home and church, this rebelliousness would sometimes create such guilt in the youth that they describe seeking forgiveness more earnestly. One dramatic example from New York describes a young woman, “Miss S.”, who saw a peer

⁴⁴ Peck, *Life and Times*, 34–35.

reading the Bible at school instead of her lessons, and felt tempted to tease her for it.

Almost immediately, “Miss S” was struck with a feeling of deep guilt that lasted with her for a number of days. Ultimately, she “saw that her only hope of safety was submission to Christ.” On the fourth day, she didn’t retire to bed, but instead found a dark room to pray in, “literally trembling and quaking, under a sense of her sins, and the wrath of God.”

This condition lasted for a few weeks, and she was heard repeatedly to cry out, “What can I do with such a wicked heart? [...]Must I give up?”

Throughout the night she cried to Jesus for mercy until eventually “God filled her heart with joy unspeakable.” After falling unconscious for some time, the young girl arose and exclaimed, “*Jesus!—there he is,—I see him;—my Redeemer, crucified for me!* [...]Jesus took me by the hand, and said I was his. *Yes, Jesus take me I am thine.*” From this point on, her countenance had changed completely and it seemed as if “heaven itself was in her soul.”⁴⁵

Perhaps these conversion experiences were so memorable to the youth because of the traumatic feelings they experienced just prior to the conversion. The contrast between guilt and peace created such a paradox that it led to an unforgettable experience.

⁴⁵ S.J., “Remarkable Conversion of a Young Female,” *Youth’s Instructor and Guardian* II (1824): 305–310. Another similar instance occurred in Provincetown, Massachusetts where a young man came to a meeting and began to ridicule another young man. A Methodist minister, Rev. E. Kibby, recorded that in the very act of ridicule, the boy’s hand began to tremble, which spread to the rest of his body. Rev. Kibby took occasion to speak to the boy about what was happening and explained that “Spirit of God was now striving with him” and that this was part of the new birth. Rev. Kibby recounted, “He appeared the most distressed person I ever saw,” and he continued to tremble for two days until the Lord appeared for his deliverance. “He took his departure from us, praising God.” Rev. E. Kibby, “An Account of the Revival of Religion in Provincetown, Mass.,” *Methodist Magazine* III (1820): 279. See also T. Spicer, “A Short Sketch of the Revival of Religion in the City of Troy, A.D. 1816,” *Methodist Magazine* I (1818): 152–154.

The majority of these experiences in which an antagonist experienced a change of heart and repented of their sins are written by church leaders. Leaders often used these examples as teaching tools to help scare the young into religious submission. Therefore, it could be that these accounts are exaggerated in order to better demonstrate the danger of rebellion. Whether exaggerated or not, the youth still were often turned toward God because of their sins.

It is important to note that many of these accounts of the conversion of antagonistic youth were recorded by preachers. The sermons and writings of preachers at the time were meant to create immediate piety in children and so they often addressed the youth as if they were “unchristian children in a Christian land.”⁴⁶ Culturally, children were raised to feel that they were sinners in God’s eyes and the only way to overcome that stigma was to be perfectly obedient to him. It is likely the preachers were tweaking these specific accounts to show a more dramatic change from the rebellious sinner to the supplicant saint. In many cases, after sharing such accounts, the clergy would then draw morals for consideration and give stern warnings about rebelling against the teachings of God. It is likely that these types of accounts were less commonly had, but more commonly shared because of their teaching value.

Regardless, whether their source of guilt came from disobedience to parents, rebellion against God’s servants, or any other number of sins, these youth felt the pains of these sins deeply. The dramatic descriptions of the spiritual anguish these young people felt show young people who desperately wanted to be free from such torment and live lives of piety. One young woman in New York showed how her deep sorrow for sin led her to want to act, “O my heart, my hard and sinful heart! It is full of sin—full of every kind of pollution. Never was there so great a sinner... What shall I do? O, what shall I do?”⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Many of the recorded sermons to children focus on their sinfulness. Cordelia Smith records many of the topics of various sermons, a large portion of which, seemed to instill guilt. For example on July 12, 1835 she attended a sermon focused on Psalms 51:14, “Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation.” A week later on July 19, the sermons focused on Matthew 16:26, “For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” Cordelia H. Smith Diaries, #6067, Division of Rare and Manuscripts Collections, Cornell University Library.

See also Samuel Nott, Jr., *Sermons for Children: Designed to Promote Their Immediate Piety* (New York: J. Leavitt, 1828), 20.

This desire to act created a sense of urgency in the accounts of the youth. Many seemed to feel that their window for change was small and if they missed it, they could be forever doomed. When under conviction, Fanny Newell described how she saw herself: “I viewed myself a wretched undone sinner, hair hung and breeze shaken over the gulf of ruin, and feared greatly that mercy was clean gone — forever, and nothing remained for me but to drop into the ‘lake where the worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched.’”⁴⁸ This idea of losing their chance for salvation created a greater sense of urgency to seek conversion while young, for if they waited until adulthood, it could be too late.

The youth describe not only mental anguish, but very real physical anguish as well. In a letter to his sister, one young man described how his guilt sunk “deeper and deeper into his heart, and drove sleep from his pillow, and peace from his soul.” At a revival in Canaan, New York, a minister explained how “the pressure of unpardoned sin became so intolerable” for young Polly Chamberlain that “she sunk down into the arms of her aunt.”⁴⁹ Another young woman from Boston wrote in a letter to her minister how her anguish felt as if she were being “crushed under the mighty hand of God.”⁵⁰ These overwhelmingly difficult experiences caused the youth to look beyond their temporary desires for frivolity and fun and see the importance of preparing for the future.

Countless descriptions of sin-laden souls saturate the records throughout New

⁴⁷ *The Utica Christian Magazine* Vol. 1 (Utica, New York: Merrell & Camp, 1814), 30.

⁴⁸ Newell, *Memoir of Fanny Newell*, 19. Spelling has been modernized.

⁴⁹ Lewis Pease, “An Account of the Work of God in Canaan, N. Y.,” *Methodist Magazine* III (1820): 393.

⁵⁰ J. H., “Experimental Religion,” *Youth’s Instructor and Guardian* II, no. 4 (1824): 136.

York and New England, providing a clear picture of a young population who wanted nothing more than to be clean. These desires were a direct result of a culture steeped in the idea that in order to please God, one must forsake all sinfulness and turn to him at a very young age. This theology displayed itself in the teachings of parents and clergy who emphasized the youth's sinful state and urged them to seek conversion experiences. These teachings seemed to deeply affect the young, for while they were prone to "youthful lusts" (2 Timothy 2:22) and "convivial" amusements that distracted them from spiritual things,⁵¹ their personal writings indicate they were solemn, somber, God-fearing young people who wanted the joy of a conversion experience.

The Experience of Spiritual Rebirth

Though the motives and modes of conversion varied from youth to youth, the pathway to get there was the same. Intense feelings of guilt always led the youth to their knees as they prayed for divine relief. These prayers led to powerful conversion experiences accompanied by strong initial feelings of peace and freedom from the pains of sin. Even after their conversion experiences, keeping these feelings of peace required constant diligence from the youth and many struggled throughout their lives to overcome them.

In his landmark Sermon on the Mount, Jesus counseled his disciples, "when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to the Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly" (Matthew 6:6). Per Jesus' counsel and having learned how to pray at home, the youth wielded prayer as

⁵¹ C.M.T., "Revival of the Work of God in a School," *Methodist Magazine* I (1818): 71.

the primary weapon against the burden of sinfulness. Some supplicated heaven in private, others in public prayer meetings, but in all cases prayer preceded conversion.

Certain youth depended on group prayer meetings to gain support enough to experience spiritual birth. An instance in 1817 describes this dependence. After the death and funeral of a young woman named Mary Fairchild, her brother returned to his family's home having heard the word of God and wanting to "flee the wrath to come." His record describes that on a particular Sunday evening, "he became incessant in prayer" while a prayer meeting was being held at his father's home. When the meeting was concluded and the guests departed, "he fell on his knees and continued in praying, as in agony for the space of two or three hours; when the Lord answered prayer, and spoke peace to his soul." His purpose in attending the meeting was to receive justification and he gained strength from others who came with the same purpose. The record indicates that about six or eight others stayed after the meeting to mourn "on account of their sins" and seek conversion as well, along with family members and parents of those involved. After experiencing his moment of conversion, this young man turned to the others and began to "exhort the mourners around him, to look to Jesus by faith for pardon."⁵²

Lewis Pease, the preacher present at this occasion remarked, "This was truly an affecting scene—the midnight hour witnessed parents and children rejoicing in God."⁵³ Parents were most joyful as they saw their children experience conversion, because it was often their teachings which led the youth to do so. This peace came after a long struggle

⁵² Pease, "Revival of religion in Alford, Mass.," 34.

⁵³ Ibid.

with sinfulness, and the strength and prayers of others helped this experience come to pass.

In addition to the accounts of prayer-meeting conversions, many other instances were more personal and intimate. In his examination of Methodist conversion patterns, Chris Jones observed that most often, the “personal conversions of writers...often occurred in private.”⁵⁴ In 1816 in Troy, New York, after making some unkind comments to a young lady, a certain young man was convicted by his sins. “He stopped in the street, and said within himself, Why should I labour, as long as my soul is exposed to hell? He repaired immediately to a wood about a mile distant, resolved never to return until he found mercy.—Here he continued nearly all day, sometimes on his knees; sometimes walking, and sometimes prostrate before the Lord, until he found peace.”⁵⁵ This young man’s determination to stay in a secluded place until he had received forgiveness helps us understand how personal they considered these experiences. While the youth would often discuss spiritual birth with parents and church leaders, these youth understood that ultimately, conversion came from God. Private supplication was an effective means of bringing these blessings.⁵⁶ The youth mention choosing wooded areas as places where they could be alone, without the distractions of others to hinder their objectives.

⁵⁴ Christopher C. Jones, “The Power and Form of Godliness: Methodist Conversion Narratives and Joseph Smith’s First Vision,” *Journal of Mormon History* 37, no. 2 (Spring 2011): 104.

⁵⁵ Spicer, “Revival in Troy,” 152.

⁵⁶ This act of retiring to groves to seek forgiveness was quite common. Peter Lovejoy of Benton, New York wrote about this habit as a young boy of thirteen: “my heart was seriously inclined at times I would go round through the woods near by the shade of a big tree and pray to god to have mercy on me a sinner and save me from the damnation of hell.” He notes that because of his prayers he “would feel happy and love to god.” Peter Lovejoy diary, #6087, Division of Rare and Manuscripts Collections, Cornell University Library. Spelling modernized.

When the youth did finally experience conversion, the defining characteristic of their experiences was their feeling of being forgiven. Those youth who seemed lost and hopeless under the weight of their sins were overcome with a sense of peace and forgiveness that they described as transcending any guilt that they felt. Their own descriptions and those of onlookers at the moment of justification are telling. The aforementioned Polly Chamberlain who fell unconscious into the arms of her aunt, suddenly rose up and “quick as a flash of lightning her notes changed; she began to utter glory to God in the highest! Jesus has come! My soul is happy! O glory!”⁵⁷

The daughter of Philander Hulbert who had been pressed down by the terrible weight of her sins, cried out for mercy continually. Suddenly, “Jesus smiled upon her: the cloud broke—peace and joy flowed into her soul. The change was evident. The grace of God supported her, in the midst of her afflictions. She continued triumphant in soul.”⁵⁸

For each of the youth, the darkness and gravity of their former sins were surpassed by peace and glory of their clean consciences. These clean consciences gave these youth the spiritual energy and motivation to look toward the future. The language of these youth shows a group of people who were just as, if not more, committed to religious matters than were the adults. Long, intense fights with guilt and despair preceded periods of utter joy and enlightenment, neither of which was available to the casual or indifferent.

⁵⁷ Pease, “An Account of the Work of God in Canaan, N. Y.,” 393–94.

⁵⁸ Pease, “Revival of religion in Alford, Mass.,” 34. In contrast to the many young people who recorded that they could not sleep due to the weight of their intense guilt, others wrote how they couldn’t sleep because of the joy they felt afterwards. In particular, Rev. E. Kibby described the feelings of an 18-year-old girl: “During the night she was too happy to close her eyes in sleep, and in the morning she was too happy to stay at home and eat her morsel alone.” Kibby, “An Account of the Revival of Religion in Provincetown, Mass.,” 278.

Visions

One defining characteristic of youthful conversion during the Second Great Awakening was the frequent report of visions and dreams. These were the far less frequent than conversion experiences that were just feelings, but examining youthful visions accentuates the common struggle between damnation and salvation shared by all converted youth. The visions and reactions to those visions of some youth provide dramatic examples of the struggle to overcome sin and the results of their efforts to feel the love of God.

Perhaps the most famous example of visionary experiences during this time is the account of the Mormon prophet, Joseph Smith.⁵⁹ Like other youth, Joseph did not set out to have a vision, but he describes how his initial interest in religion was sparked by this inward need for justification of his sins: “I began to reflect upon the importance of being

⁵⁹ The many denominations of the time, Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Quakers, and others stressed the importance of conversion experiences. They all believed that salvation could only occur as an individual turned from sin and toward God. Most young people experienced conversion through specific feelings of relief, peace, or comfort, after wrestling with the bonds of sin. However, the Methodists were unique in their doctrine about the channel through which conversion could come. They were the visionary sect.

They never required it of their members, but the Methodists believed that “true religion...could—and in some instances, should—include visions, revelation, and other manifestations of the miraculous.” John Wigger explains how “family opposition, boisterous meetings, falling in a swoon, shouting, *and prophetic dreams*—were common parts of early Methodist conversions.” He even goes as far as to note that “few preachers...passed through this stage without similar experiences.” Jones, “Methodist Conversion Narratives,” 98. Wigger writes about some of the most prominent Methodists who experienced prophetic dreams and visions from all regions during both the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. John H. Wigger, *Taking Heaven by Storm: Methodism and the Rise of Popular Christianity in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 53, 104-110. Emphasis added.

While he didn’t join the Methodists, Joseph Smith admits that “in the process of time my mind became somewhat partial to the Methodist sect.” Though he never mentions it, it seems unlikely with his attendance at their meetings that he would have never heard of visionary experiences. Joseph Smith as quoted Lynn Davidson, David J. Whitaker, Mark Ashurts-McGee, and Richard L. Jensen, eds., *Histories, Volume 1: 1832-1844*, vol. 1 of the Histories series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, edited by Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, and Richard Lyman Bushman (Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2012), 210.

There were four main denominations in Palmyra at this time: Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptist, and Episcopalians. See Lucy Mack Smith, *The Revised and Enhanced History of Joseph Smith by His Mother* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Bookcraft, 1996), 105, n7; Bushman, *Joseph Smith*, 36.

prepared for a future state.”⁶⁰ Clearly the need for repentance sunk deep into Joseph’s heart, for in all four of Joseph’s firsthand accounts of his teenage conversion experience, Joseph mentions the concern he had about his standing before God. In his earliest account, Joseph recalls becoming obsessed with “the welfare of my immortal Soul... [because]...my mind became exceedingly distressed for I became convicted of my Sins.”⁶¹ He later adds that this fixation with his sins caused him “serious reflection and great uneasiness.”⁶² This description of guilt and sinfulness could have come from any young man or woman of the day.

In addition to seeking personal justification, fourteen-year-old Joseph sought to find the true church of God on the earth. He wrote, “I knew not who was right or who was wrong, but considered it of the first importance to me that I should be right, in matters of so much moment, matter involving eternal consequences.”⁶³ In his quest for the truth Joseph turned to the Bible and received guidance from the words of James that directed him to “ask of God...and it shall be given him” (James 1:5). With this charge, Joseph set out to a grove of trees in the early spring of 1820, “with a fixed determination”⁶⁴ to obtain an answer from God through personal prayer.

⁶⁰ *The Joseph Smith Papers, Histories, Volume 1*, 492.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 11. Spelling modernized.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 208, 210.

⁶³ Dean C. Jessee, Mark Ashurst-McGee, and Richard L. Jensen, eds., *Journals, Volume 1: 1832-1839*, vol. 1 of the Journals series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, edited by Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, and Richard Lyman Bushman (Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2008), 87.

⁶⁴ Milton Vaughn Backman, *Joseph Smith’s First Vision: Confirming Evidences and Contemporary Accounts*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City, Utah: Bookcraft, 1980), 158., 88.

As Joseph retired to the grove of trees, knelt in prayer and began to call upon heaven, a marvelous manifestation occurred, emphasizing in a dramatic way the contrast between the darkness of sin and the light of God that many youth felt. As Joseph began to pray, he describes the great struggle that ensued: “I was seized upon by some power which entirely overcame me and had such astonishing influence over me as to bind my tongue so that I could not speak. Thick darkness gathered around me and it seemed to me for a time as if I were doomed to sudden destruction.” It was as if, at that point, Joseph was feeling the entirety of the weight of his sins so powerful it almost prevented him from following through with his prayer. Yet, Joseph exerted all his “powers to call upon God to deliver” him and “at the very moment when [he] was ready to sink into despair... not to an imaginary ruin but to the power of some actual being from the unseen world who had such a marvelous power as [he] had never before felt in any being,” Joseph records seeing a pillar of light which dissipated the darkness immediately.⁶⁵

He records seeing “a pillar of fire,”⁶⁶ in which there were “two personages (whose brightness and glory defy all description),” namely God, the Father, and his son, Jesus Christ and many angels.⁶⁷ This contrast between the overwhelming despair and the unexplainable light that Joseph felt typifies the nineteenth-century youth experience.

Joseph records that Jesus Christ forgave him of his sins and told him that “all religious denominations were believing in incorrect doctrines, and that none of them was acknowledged of God as his church and kingdom.” Joseph claimed, “I was expressly commanded to ‘go not after them,’ at the same time receiving a promise that the fulness

⁶⁵ *The Joseph Smith Papers, Histories, Volume 1*, 212, 214. Spelling modernized.

⁶⁶ *The Joseph Smith Papers, Journals, Volume 1*, 87-88.

⁶⁷ *The Joseph Smith Papers, Histories, Volume 1*, 214.

of the gospel should at some future time be made known unto me.”⁶⁸ His visionary experience, while much more dramatic than others, displays the key characteristics of youth conversion: a desire to be free from sin, seeking the Lord through prayer, a forgiveness of sins, and a commitment to change one’s heart. As a result of his vision and justification, Joseph wrote: “For many days I could rejoice with great joy and the Lord was with me.”⁶⁹

Other youth describe having visions and dreams as well and in each case their vision was a personal encounter with Jesus Christ—symbolic of the godly encounters that

⁶⁸ Ibid.,494.

⁶⁹ *The Joseph Smith Papers, Histories, Volume 1*, 13.

Joseph shared his vision with a Methodist minister and despite their belief in the power of visions, his was utterly rejected. The fact that Joseph had a vision did not trouble the minister, for visions were common in revival experiences; rather, the content of Joseph’s vision that “all their Creeds were an abomination” and that “those professors were all corrupt” caused the minister great concern. His role was to strengthen the youth in the church, yet Joseph’s vision denied the church’s very validity. In the minister’s eyes, Joseph’s experience was backsliding in the worst degree. As Richard Bushman explains, “The only acceptable message was assurance of forgiveness and a promise of grace,” Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism*. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 59; *The Joseph Smith Papers, Histories, Volume 1*, 214..

Joseph’s visionary experiences did not end with his experience in the grove. Three years later, at age seventeen, while praying to know his standing before God, an angel of God appeared to him, named Moroni, and directed Joseph to an ancient record, which Joseph then translated by the power of God, named *The Book of Mormon*. That “fulness” that Jesus spoke of in Joseph’s vision came with the eventual formation of The Church of Christ, known today as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, on April 6, 1830. Throughout his life, Joseph experienced countless, visions, heavenly visitations, and revelations from God.

For more information on Joseph see Richard Lloyd Anderson, “Circumstantial Confirmation of the First Vision through Reminiscences,” *BYU Studies* 9, no. 3 (1969): 1-27; Milton Vaughn Backman, “Awakenings in the Burned-over District: New light on the historical setting of the First Vision.” *BYU Studies* 9, no. 3 (1969): 1-15; Ivan J. Barrett, *Joseph Smith and the Restoration*, (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1967); Richard E. Bennett, *School of the Prophet: Joseph Smith Learns the First Principles, 1820-1830* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2010); Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith, The Mormon Prophet* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979), 1-16; Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005); Richard Lloyd Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984); Whitney Cross, “Mormonism in the "Burned-Over District,"” *New York History* 25 (July.1944): 326-338; Donna Hill, *Joseph Smith: The First Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1999), 32-55; Dan Vogel, *Joseph Smith: The Making of a Prophet* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2004); Wesley P. Walters, “New Light on Mormon Origins from Palmyra (N. Y.) Revival,” *Bulletin of the Evangelical Theological Society*, Vol. 10 (Fall 1967); Adam Hock, ““Behold an Angel of the Lord Came and Stood Before Me:” A Cultural Examination of Joseph Smith’s 1823 Visions of Moroni” (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University, 2013).

other youth experienced through feelings of his spirit. Fanny Newell often had religious dreams leading up to her conversion.⁷⁰ In the midst of the torment for her sins, Fanny saw a series of visions of Jesus. Like Joseph, her first encounter was filled with allusions to the darkness and pains of sin. She writes:

Suddenly my chamber appeared as light as day, and I saw a man hanging on a cross, and it immediately came into my mind, that it was Jesus who died for me. His head was inclining to one shoulder and turned from me, as though he saw me not. — I waited — and longed that he would cast one pitying look on me, and speak peace to my troubled soul. But O! my grief there is none can tell.—He turned his head and fixed his eyes on me with a frown, as though he had cast me off for ever. I cried out, I am damned! I am damned! I am forever gone!⁷¹

She continued to sink into despair and darkness, never ceasing to cry upon God for mercy. At length, another vision came, this time filling her with the peace that she so desired. She describes seeing a “small ray of light” that gradually grew brighter and brighter until a man appeared, whom she later said was Jesus. Fanny describes that as he appeared, “the darkness which had surrounded me withdrew and stood in a body before me; which I thought to be my sins, and they appeared like mountains piled on mountains.” With the appearance of Christ, she cried upon him for mercy, exclaiming, “Lord, I freely give up every thing, and my heart, my wicked heart too.” After she did so, she writes that “In a few moments he smiled and said, ‘I have taken thy sins away and put them upon the head of the scape-goat, and separated them from thee, as far as the east is from the west.’ Immediately my burden was gone.”⁷²

⁷⁰ One night she awoke terrified after dreaming that Satan was rocking her to sleep in a cradle. She then realized that they were experiencing an earthquake and the ground was actually shaking. Newell, *Memoir of Fanny Newell*, 12.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 29–31. “Experimental Religion,” 136–139. Another young woman described to her minister that she saw the suffering of Jesus Christ and because of this experience, she felt “such a sweet stillness, such a peace, indeed like a river, or like the waves of the sea, wave after wave thrilled through my

Fanny's description of both her sins and her moment of justification are perfectly representative of youth who fought feelings of unworthiness for lengthy periods of time. They also seem to reflect the language that preachers were using in sermons to youth at the time. Many sermons to the young emphasize "the Redeemer who is stretching out his arms to receive the dying saint [and] is sending down the Holy Comforter to their bosoms."⁷³ They present the youth as sinful creatures full of "shame and everlasting contempt" and urge them to do good so as to "arise to everlasting life."⁷⁴ The accounts of youth experiences are clearly influenced by the language they are hearing at home and at church; and these visions are just a more dramatic manifestation of these moments of spiritual rebirth, with the ultimate goal being a forgiveness from sin.

Looking Forward

The youth during the Second Great Awakening were committed to seeking conversion experiences as the gate to their religious futures and as a relief from their sins. As children, they responded to the teachings of pastors and parents about their fallen natures, leading them to encounter spiritual experiences early on. With more time and experience, the desire to feel more of God's spirit, coupled with the need for a relief from guilt drove the youth to religious action. This action resulted in climactic spiritual rebirths, whether manifest through feelings, miracles, visions, or otherwise, and provided the foundational strength they needed to begin and continue lives of religious piety. These formative experiences "laid the foundation for a deep sense of personal piety,"

soul as no tongue can tell or pen describe...From this moment I had the witness that the work was done, and that God had full possession of and dwelt in my heart." See also "Remarkable Conversion of a Young Female."

⁷³ Nott, Jr., *Sermons for Children: Designed to Promote Their Immediate Piety*, 40.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 93.

which would serve them throughout their lives.⁷⁵ Or as one scholar noted, “Consequently, [youth] spent the remainder of their lives looking back to those important memories [of conversion] in an attempt to renegotiate their spiritual and temporal selves into a new identity.”⁷⁶ As they sought to overcome feelings of guilt throughout their lives, they were able to use their memories of forgiveness they received at their time of conversion to give them both the strength to carry on, and a reminder of what brought those feelings of peace in the first place.

After long periods of wrestling with their sins, and ultimately experiencing the sweet joy of conversion, each of the youth could sing, like 15-year-old George Peck did:

“O how happy are they,
Who the Saviour obey,
And have laid up their treasure above;
Tongue can never express
The sweet comfort and peace
Of a soul in its earliest love.”⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Wigger, *Taking Heaven by Storm*, 54.

⁷⁶ Cope, abstract “In Some Places A Few Drops,” 3.

⁷⁷ Peck, *Life and Times*, 42.

Chapter Three

“Carefully Attend Upon Divine Worship”: Church Influences on Youth Worship Practices

*“Now that my journey’s just begun,
My road so little trod,
I’ll come before I further run,
And give myself to God.”¹*

Though only thirteen, Amelia Chapman “gave her heart to God.”² Being raised by devout parents in East Haddam, Connecticut in the 1820s, Amelia grew up seeing powerful examples of devotion and learning the doctrines of the Congregational Church both at home and at Sunday School.³ Her childhood was “nothing uncommonly remarkable” and her devotion to religion was likewise. At thirteen however, being inspired by the encouragement of a dutiful teacher, Amelia became “deeply interested in the subject of personal religion.”⁴ Because of this instructor, Amelia’s “religious impressions were deepened, her mind rendered more solemn; she read her Bible, reflected on her past life, and saw that she had not obeyed her Savior, nor given her heart to him.”⁵ In an effort to overcome these feelings of guilt, Amelia sought justification and in the process underwent a life-altering conversion experience like many of her peers.

¹ Jane Taylor, “Early Will I Seek the Lord,” Hymn VI, *Hymns for Infant Minds* (New York: American Tract Society, 1849), 10.

² Parsons, *Memoir of Amelia S. Chapman*, 7.

³ Sunday School will not be examined in this work. For more information on the formation and role of Sunday School in the spiritual lives of youth, see Anne M. Boylan, *Sunday School: The Formation of an American Institution, 1790-1880* (Yale University Press, 1988).

⁴ Parsons, *Memoir of Amelia S. Chapman*, 6.

⁵ *Ibid.*

While often powerful, youthful conversions were not always a one-time, life-changing event. Even after having such experiences, many would fall back into their sinful ways or lose interest in religious matters. It was a constant struggle to stay on the path of God.⁶ Amelia, like all converts, “rejoiced to commit her soul and all her interests to [God] for time and eternity;” but unlike all other converts, Amelia remained faithful to this commitment.⁷ Five months later, Amelia joined herself to the church and entered in a solemn covenant with God that she would worship him with all her soul and prevent herself from turning back to her sinful ways. Feeling “in some degree the importance of sustaining a holy character in her manner of life” she devoted herself to the worship of God. As she did so daily, her change became more apparent and her conviction deep. She sought to strengthen and encourage her young companions by committing them to lives of piety.

As pastors often did at the time, Amelia’s pastor, Isaac Parsons, saw her as the model of a faithful church member and used her as an example of piety for others to follow. Of her he wrote: “*The Bible* was her daily companion...She was strict in her *observance of the Sabbath*, and attendance on public worship...She was early instructed in *sacred music*...She was an *attentive hearer* of the word when preached.... She delighted in...religious meetings.”⁸ Over time, “there was manifestly a growing

⁶ Mary Ryan claims that “Of the new church members, 30% requested official letters of dismissal within five years of their conversion. Countless others must have left the church more hastily and without this formality...They were largely young and, in the short term at least, a peripatetic lot with fragile roots in church and community.” Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class*, 80.

Curtis Johnson also cites high excommunication rates among churches. Johnson, *Islands of Holiness*, 107.

⁷ Parsons, *Memoir of Amelia S. Chapman*, 7. Emphasis in original.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 11–12.

conformity to the will of God in the heart and life of this young Christian. As she increased in years, her piety seemed to mature.” Rev. Parsons’ purpose in writing about Amelia was didactic in nature, as he used her life as a standard that should be emulated among the youth. In the last chapter of the memoir, Parsons shares specific lessons that should be learned from Amelia’s story.⁹

While the experience of Amelia Chapman may be skewed by Parsons’ telling of it, the principles demonstrate the personal religious conviction that preachers believed young people could have in their own lives and the influence they could exhibit on others as they continued in worship after their conversion experiences. They taught that conversion experiences were the foundational event upon which youth built their religious lives; the convicted believed it was necessary for them to consistently strengthen and improve their devotion through personal and church worship. Worship is broadly defined here as any practice or action taken by the youth to strengthen their spiritual lives. Young people involved themselves in worship as part of their pathway to conversion, but the ones who continued in worship after their conversion experiences developed into committed, faithful members of their churches. These youth are the ones who grew up to raise faithful families, lead churches, and consequently impact the American religious landscape.

In most cases, religious worship among the youth was developed, facilitated, and strengthened by organized church practices, then continued in their personal lives. The

⁹ In the same spirit that Isaac shared Amelia’s life as an example of what should be followed, I use it here to demonstrate the importance of the continued faithfulness among the youth. As will be described throughout this chapter, the majority of youth struggled to remain true to their conversion experiences, but when they did devote themselves to purposeful worship in public or private, their “piety seemed to mature” like Amelia Chapman. Ibid., 14.

church sought to strengthen worship practices of youth primarily through revival meetings and focused clergy-youth relationships, which inspired the young people to worship and strengthen their peers through organizing meetings and personal peer-to-peer relationships of their own.

Church Focus on the Young

The church leaders of the nineteenth century recognized both the danger of admitting vast numbers of youth converts into their churches and the potential of such an influx. In some cases, youthful inexperience and immaturity led to a lack of commitment which resulted in “intense but short-lived outbursts of moral fervor and religious conviction that occurred at intervals.”¹⁰ Shortly after their conversions, all youth came to face the reality of trying to live a religious life in a carnal world. Joseph Smith described these difficulties that young people faced as he explained his own challenges, “I was left to all kinds of temptations, and mingling with all kinds of society, I frequently fell into many foolish errors and displayed the weakness of youth and the corruption of human nature which I am sorry to say led me into divers temptations...offensive in the sight of God.”¹¹ This experience was so common that the Methodists created a name for these converts who returned to their sins: backsliders.¹²

¹⁰ Roth, “Whence This Strange Fire?,” 47.

There was much debate among pastors about whether young children and youth should be allowed to join the churches. Heman Humphrey counseled another minister, “It appears to me the cases are very rare, in which children should be received under *fourteen*.” While others have said “No more satisfactory cases of conversion have ever come under my observation than among children.” Henry Clay Fish cited the Savior as a reason to invite the young: “Shall we doubt whether they are old enough to know his voice? Shall we be suspicious of their coming? Shall we imitate those in Christ’s day who forbade them to come? Let it not be. It is safe to follow in Christ’s steps.” Henry C. Fish, *Handbook of Revivals: For the Use of Winners of Souls* (Boston: James H. Earle, 1874), 180, 186. Fish examines this debate and the arguments for and against it in his chapter “Child-Piety and Profession” of his handbook, 168–96.

¹¹ Karen Lynn Davidson, David J. Whitaker, Mark Ashurts-McGee, and Richard L. Jensen, eds., *Histories, Volume 1: 1832-1844*, vol. 1 of the Histories series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, edited by Dean

Yet, the energy and zeal that accompanied the youthful generation injected an excitement and enthusiasm into the work that older generations lacked. They had the ability to spark religious excitement into whole families, congregations, and even towns that “spread with a rapidity unequalled by anything ever before seen.”¹³ One minister saw the incredible potential of these young converts and described them in this way: “We have seen...lambs in the fields run toward the keeper at his call; perhaps the quickest to catch his voice and be at his side.”¹⁴ These young people truly were “the hope for the church and the world.”¹⁵ In short, their youthfulness proved to be both a blessing and a curse. Some youth blessed the church through their vigor and numbers, while others burdened the church by their lack of focus and immaturity.

As a result of both the danger and potential of youth, churches focused on strengthening the youth as a means of keeping them firm, so that they in turn, could strengthen the church. One scholar noted that the evangelical ministry was “the group with the most consistent institutional and intellectual concern with young people throughout the nineteenth century.”¹⁶ While many means were instituted to strengthen

C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, and Richard Lyman Bushman (Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2012), 220.

¹² Bushman, *Beginnings*, 59. This problem is described by one minister: “We received on probation, during the revival, upwards of fifty, principally young persons, many of whom appear to bid fair to make pillars in the church of God; although it may be justly feared that some turn back again to folly.” Tobias Spicer, “State of Religion in Albany,” *Methodist Magazine* VIII (1825): 286.

¹³ Bradley, *Accounts of Revivals*, 228–31. Revival accounts describe youth leading the way in revivals in following New York towns: Greenwich, Moreau, Fort Edward, Troy, Norwich, Broadalbin, and Long Island.

¹⁴ Fish, *Handbook of Revivals: For the Use of Winners of Souls*, 173.

¹⁵ Bradley, *Accounts of Revivals*, 185.

¹⁶ Kett, “Adolescence and Youth in Nineteenth-Century America,” 290.

and build worship practices among the youth, revival meetings and minister-youth relationships comprised the primary strategy of the church.

Revivals

The role of the revivals in facilitating youth conversion and retention cannot be overstated. Whereas youth gained their basic religious feelings in the home, the revival provided young people the opportunity to take their feelings public. Most revival meetings were aimed at inviting people of any age to come unto Christ, but there were others that specifically targeted youth. Both were effective. These bursts of religious fervor became the chief vehicle that drove the conversions of thousands of individuals during the first half of the nineteenth century and were the means of bringing many backsliders back to worship. A nineteenth-century Methodist minister and historian described the purpose of a revival in these terms:

Let us inquire what constitutes a revival of religion...“Let many sinners turn simultaneously to God. Let conversions to Christ, instead of being few and far between, become numerous, rapidly occurring, and decided in their character, and you have all that is usually meant when we speak of a revival. It is the conversion of a number of individuals from sin to holiness, and from Satan unto God.” Revivals of religion, then, are times of spiritual awakening, in which the church is quickened, wanderers reclaimed, and sinners saved.¹⁷

As this minister described, revivals were invaluable to churches because of their ability to invite new converts into the church, reclaim those who were lost, and strengthen those who were already faithful. A Baptist preacher, Henry C. Fish, agreed, explaining that a

¹⁷ L.D. Davis, *History of the Methodist Church*, 122-23, as quoted in Johnson, *Islands of Holiness*, 39.

revival has a two-fold purpose: “the renewal of spirituality and vigor among Christians, and the conversion of sinners in considerable numbers to God.”¹⁸

Revival meetings differed in mode and manner depending on the denomination, but all shared the above purpose.¹⁹ Whitney Cross describes these differences: “Methodists held camp meetings and permitted physical exercises upon which Congregationalists frowned. Free-will Baptists inclined to tolerate such activities, while Calvinist Baptists were more strict.”²⁰ The famous Calvinist pastor Asahel Nettleton conducted his meetings in a very solemn manner. His manner “was to go round and speak to each individual present, in a tone so low as not to be heard by others, to give a word of pointed exhortation, and close all by solemn prayer...All was solemn, still, and reflective, and if an improper person was found to have intruded himself, Mr. Nettleton knew how

¹⁸ The ministers of each church “had every incentive to preach for revivals” since these meetings often led to the conversion of hundreds of souls—many more than in times of normal religious activity. In the majority of accounts of religious revivals, the most commonly reported information is the number of new converts to the various denominations. Church membership had such a significant role in the conversion experience that many people had powerful spiritual experiences and gave “evidence of a change of heart,” but were not considered genuine until “they unite[d] in the covenant” to a specific church. Fish, *Handbook of Revivals: For the Use of Winners of Souls*, 12.

Curtis Johnson explains that “revivals were not universally appreciated, however. Many evangelicals would have preferred a slow, steady rate of growth...but evangelicals knew from experience that ...converts...usually came in droves or not at all.” Johnson, *Islands of Holiness*, 40. See also Honestus, *Revivals of Religion, Considered as a Means of Grace*. (Ithaca, New York: Mack & Andrus, 1827).

In describing his feelings about the revivals, Joseph Smith said that he “wanted to get religion too, wanted to feel and shout like the rest but could feel nothing.” He felt like each sect sought for the growth of their respective congregations, rather than the spiritual conversion of the individual. Joseph writes that the various churches were “endeavoring to establish their own tenets and disprove all others.” Alexander Neibaur Autobiography as quoted in Backman, *First Vision*, 176.; See also Bushman, *Beginnings*, 52; *The Utica Christian Magazine*, vol. 3 (Utica, New York: Printed for Cornelius Davis, 1815), 23.

¹⁹ Despite these differences, revivals were most often interdenominational and churches would band together to help create revivals and seek to gain converts. See Benjamin Sabin, *Short Narrative of the Revival of Religion in Ithaca* (Ithaca, New York: Mack & Andrus, 1827), 3. For example Adeline Cleveland Hosner was converted at a Methodist revival, but eventually joined herself to the Baptists. Adaline Cleveland Hosner Journal, Introduction, Adeline Cleveland Hosner papers, #6005. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

²⁰ Cross, *The Burned-Over District*, 8.

to dispose of him.”²¹ In most cases, prayer circles were held. Sermons were preached. Hymns were sung. Church business was conducted. And in the process of all of this, thousands of youth were strengthened.²² While it was in their homes that these youth learned the importance of prayer, studied the doctrines of the Bible, and were introduced to religious matters, it was at large revival meetings that these young people saw the power of prayer on a larger scale, came to feel the energy of the Biblical sermons being preached to crowds of believers, and began to experience the excitement of religion that was engulfing the entire region.

Meetings were as varied in their occurrence as they were in their style. A letter from a Dr. Lewis to his family regarding the 1815 revival in Lenox, New York explained that “besides the stated meetings on the Sabbath,” there were “frequent lectures on week days” and “conferences...almost every day in the week, and sometimes half a dozen in different parts of town, on the same evening.”²³ In addition to their frequency, these meetings occurred in a variety of venues. Firsthand accounts name schools, churches, homes, colleges, groves, and even unfinished buildings as gathering places to hear the word of God.²⁴

²¹ R. S. Smith, *Recollections of Nettleton and the Great Revival of 1820* (Albany, New York: E.H. Pease & Co, 1848), 33–34.

²² Heman Bangs, “Campmeeting at Comp, Connecticut,” *Methodist Magazine* VIII (1825): 436–40. Sabin, *Short Narrative of the Revival of Religion in Ithaca*; Kibby, “An Account of the Revival of Religion in Provincetown, Mass.”; Morton, *Revival of Religion in Springfield, VT*.

²³ *The Utica Christian Magazine*, 3:22.

²⁴ Rev. Smith describes these out-door venues as “forest-girdled” churches, “whose packed and half-finished walls seemed ready to burst from the pressure within.” Smith, *Recollections*, 58; Bradley notes that one occasion, a large crowd was “under the necessity of leaving the school-house and repairing to a fine grove.” Bradley, *Accounts of Revivals*, 159. For accounts of meetings in colleges, homes, and other venues see *Ibid.*, 149–51, 157–58.; Reverend George Peck describes the setting of one such outdoor meeting on “the Vienna road” during an annual meeting of ministers in 1819 called the Genesee

Methodists were famous for their huge camp meetings that were meant to accommodate thousands of individuals. The description of Methodist minister Heman Bangs of one camp meeting in Connecticut helps capture the magnitude of these events:

The encampment stretched about three quarters of a mile through the beautiful grove of oaks and cedars, along a high bluff, containing about one hundred and sixty tents, many of which would hold several hundred persons. The stand, or temporary pulpit, was placed in the north part of one of the finest natural amphitheatres I ever saw. Rising gradually on all sides, a congregation of ten thousand could be brought within reach of an ordinary voice, and in full view of the speaker. When this was filled...no spectacle could be more splendid.²⁵

Other churches conducted, smaller, more intimate meetings for their revivals. Regardless of the meeting size, “the whole district of Country seemed affected by [these meetings] and great multitudes united themselves to the different religious parties.”²⁶

These meetings attracted people from many different walks of life, but numerous preachers mention that young people comprised a significant portion of those in attendance. George Peck described the people who attended these outdoor meetings, “the congregation numbered three or four thousand...chiefly with women and children.”²⁷ Another minister wrote that “in these revivals, God has most conspicuously owned the administration of the ordinances, the prayers and exhortations of young converts. Many have been awakened seeing the candidates advancing to own their Lord.”²⁸ Other

Conference: “the church being far too small to contain the crowds which gathered from far and near, the services were held in a neighboring grove.” Peck, *Life and Times*, 93.

²⁵ Bangs, “Campmeeting at Comp, Connecticut,” 438.

²⁶ *The Joseph Smith Papers, Histories, Volume 1*, 208.

²⁷ Peck, *Life and Times*, 65.

²⁸ Bradley, *Accounts of Revivals*, 169–70.

ministers share similar experiences that a great number of those attending the camp meetings were the young.²⁹

With an audience of many young people, church leaders recognized the important opportunity of focusing their efforts specifically on the young; they often went to great lengths to create meetings and gatherings that invited, involved, and invigorated the youth. Numerous scholars describe the extent to which every church went to invest in young converts. Congregational churches in Connecticut specifically held “religious conferences [that] were often inspired, organized, or even conducted by pious youth.” As a result, “the young turned out in overwhelming numbers.”³⁰ Presbyterian Churches, famous for their Sunday school instruction, invited children of all churches to attend and would often call upon youth to act as teachers for the younger children, “spiritually empowering youth as teachers of the gospel.”³¹ Methodists became the example for youth-focused ministry. They “encouraged early conversions, [gave] freedom to speak at religious gatherings, and [offered] quick promotion into the ministry” thus empowering the young people of their church.³² One Baptist church even put on a series of plays given by the youth as a means of attracting others.³³

²⁹ Ibid., 168, 189, 225, 228, 173. Modern scholars observed the same trend. Mary Ryan writes that “contemporary observers of the revivals all concurred in the estimation that women and youth, and not household heads, constituted the majority of converts.” Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class*, 77.

³⁰ Kling, *A Field of Divine Wonders*, 69.

³¹ Hessinger, *Seduced, Abandoned, and Reborn*, 96.

³² Ibid., 112; See also Wigger, *Taking Heaven by Storm*, 48–53.

³³ Cross, *The Burned-Over District*, 42. Church leaders got very creative in trying to strengthen the youth. One account mentions that “Ebenezer Porter found no better way to stimulate piety in his congregation than to assign is young people the responsibility of preparing 'written compositions' on religious themes, and these were read aloud at church conferences.” Richard Rabinowitz, *The Spiritual Self*

This investment into the rising generation insured both the strength of the young and the strength of the church. Church leaders could rely upon the experiences of excited new converts to help spread the news of salvation and add numbers to the church, while engaging in this work deepened the excitement and conviction of the young. Thus the young people and the church developed a symbiotic relationship that was mutually strengthening for both parties.

The personal records of young people indicate that this church focus was effective and led them to further worship in their lives. Cordelia Smith recorded in her personal diary that “the Lord has begun a revival” in her town. She described how much she had looked forward to a revival and prayed “O that he would continue to pour out his spirit until there shall not be room [to] receive it.”³⁴ Many converted youth described this same desire for revivals and would often pray for these to occur to strengthen their faith.

Just as those unconverted souls attended revival meeting as a means of being strengthened and inspired by others, converted youth saw these gatherings as a way to solidify their convictions. After experiencing conversion as a result of a revival in Bristol, Rhode Island, thirteen-year-old Mary Wardwell was especially “fond of her class meetings.” She saw them as an opportunity to further strengthen her conversion and as a result she had a “more constant attendance on the means of grace in general than many around her.” The more she attended the meetings, the more she desired to continue. Her consistent exposure to the word of God at meetings translated into devoted personal

in Every Day Life: the Transformation of Personal Religious Experience in Nineteenth-Century New England. (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1989), 19.

³⁴ Cordelia H. Smith Diaries, #6067. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library, 28.

worship at home and caused her to be “strict in the observance of the private duties of religion.”³⁵ There was a strengthening power that came into her life and the lives of youth in general from gathering together in groups and sharing their convictions with each other. Hearing about the efforts and feelings of other committed young people caused countless youth to rededicate themselves to religion so they too could share with the same power. In this way, public revival meetings strengthened private worship practices.

Youth who were converted by revival meetings often became strong advocates for their efficacy throughout their lives. One of the most dramatic examples comes from Pastor Asahel Nettleton. Asahel experienced conversion as a result of the early revivals in Connecticut in 1800 at the age of seventeen. Soon thereafter, he spent his time studying the writings of church leaders and entered Yale College in 1805 as a focused, driven 22-year-old. Just two years later, a revival broke out at Yale and Asahel found himself as “the center of the spiritual storm” counseling those who were under conviction. These experiences led him to become a New Divinity pastor and eventually one of the greatest revivalists of all time.³⁶ Because of his own experience becoming converted at a revival meeting as a young man, Asahel took great pains to hold specific classes and meetings for the youth.³⁷ As a result of his efforts with many young people, historians estimate youth, numbering in the tens of thousands, avoided the evils of their day and “appeared to *grow in grace*.”³⁸

³⁵ Merritt, “Memoir of Mary S. Wardwell,” 417.

³⁶ Kling, *A Field of Divine Wonders*, 137–43.

³⁷ Smith, *Recollections*, 124.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 113. See also Kling, *A Field of Divine Wonders*, 138–40, 216–36.

Due to their experiences at these revival meetings, the youth “developed or discovered their own faith. Whether they chose to accept the denomination whose revivals they attended or whether they opted for a different religious path, they were impacted by the experiences they had attending revival meetings.” Any religious exposure at this point in their lives influenced how they felt about and viewed religious matters, so these early experiences were foundational for the young people. In reflecting back upon the impact of revivals across the years, one woman wrote “Many of the most eminent, devoted, and useful servants of Christ, whose names, during the last half century, have adorned the annals of American faith and zeal, owed their... noblest and strongest Christian impulses, to ‘revivals of religion.’”³⁹

Clergy-Youth Relationships

In addition to revival meetings, which helped strengthen the young in mass numbers, church leaders recognized the importance of giving individual attention to the young. Minister Enoch Pond demonstrated this in his words to his fellow clergy in 1844 that “the ministers of Christ are commissioned and directed to feed, not only his sheep, but his *lambs*. The children and youth of his flock will be, to every good minister, a most interesting and most important part of his charge; a part which he will not suffer, under any circumstances, to be neglected.”⁴⁰ They must not be neglected because they are, as

³⁹ Rachel Cope explains how revivals fit in to both the justification and the sanctification processes for the young: “Spiritual awareness and personal awakening served as the prelude to [young people’s] revival attendance; likewise, revival attendance and [their] eventual justification experience[s] became the prelude to [their] continuing quest for sanctification. Rachel Cope, “‘In Some Places A Few Drops And Other Places A Plentiful Shower’: The Religious Impact Of Revivalism On Early Nineteenth-Century New York Women” (PhD diss., Syracuse University, 2009), 53; Prentiss, *The Life and Letters of Elizabeth Prentiss*, 27.

⁴⁰ Enoch Pond, *The Young Pastor’s Guide, Or, Lectures on Pastoral Duties* (New York: E. Collier, 1844), 215. Emphasis in original. See also Holifield, 750.

Pond refers to them, “the hope of the church...from whom the future members and pillars of the church must come.”⁴¹

Many pastors understood this and as a result, gave specific attention to the youth. “This practice was somewhat varied of course, under different pastors; but it was constantly recommended and more or less aimed at by all.”⁴² Pond urged each fellow minister to “make himself *acquainted* with the children of his parish. He will enter into their feelings, and interest himself in their affairs; and thus engage their affections, and win their confidence.”⁴³ The pastors who followed this advice often won the confidence of the youth.

In his study of the diaries of forty-four children during these revival periods, E. Brooks Holifield found that “almost half the children wrote something about their ministers.”⁴⁴ The youth were excited when their ministers visited their homes, or paid special attention to them. One example comes from fifteen year-old Caroline Chester who wrote, “Mr. Beecher visited the school. I was very much pleased, his doctrine is plain and easy to understand.”⁴⁵ The young people longed for the blessings that these religious representatives brought to their homes and villages.⁴⁶

⁴¹ Pond, 217-18.

⁴² Bradley, 124-25.

⁴³ Pond, 221.

⁴⁴ Holifield, 760.

⁴⁵ Caroline Chester, “Extracts from her Commonplace Book,” in Emily N. Vanderpoel, *Chronicles of a Pioneer School from 1792 to 1833*, ed. Elizabeth C. B. Buel (Cambridge, Mass.: University Press, 1903), 151. See also Holifield, 760.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

This individual time spent with the youth placed the clergy in a position of trust and as a result, the youth often confided spiritual concerns, desires, experiences, or questions with them.⁴⁷ Personal encounters with clergy increased the desire for the youth to increase their devotion and worship to God. When she was troubled about the doctrine of perfection, one young woman approached her minister as a means of resolving her concern. After discussing the doctrine, and pouring her soul out to him, they prayed together. Kneeling with her minister in prayer was such an impactful moment for this girl that she wrote “when we arose from our knees I found I had lost my burden...I went home much relieved.”⁴⁸ This experience of receiving personal attention and spiritual strength calmed her fears and put her on the path to lifelong devotion. With the help of her minister, she was able to feel the relief and strength that prayer could provide, while also strengthening her faith in church leadership. These types of experiences bound the hearts of the young people to the clergy, creating an instant rapport and trust with these church leaders.

Mary Dustin’s first encounter with a Methodist preacher occurred when a minister came to her house by mistake. She had heard that preachers would often “talk to young people,” and so she was initially wary of his visit. Many youth mention how they were initially frightened by preachers because they feared getting involved in religion. However, these fears quickly subsided and in the end, they respected and admired these men.

⁴⁷ A common practice of the day was for new converts to share their spiritual experiences with clergymen as a means “to test the validity of their conversion.” Bushman, *Beginnings*, 58.

⁴⁸ “Experimental Religion,” 139.

Regardless of his mistake, this preacher began to ask Mary about her desires for religion and committed her to attend an upcoming meeting. It was held at one of her young companion's home and was a powerful meeting for the young people in attendance. Perhaps because of her fascination with this new spiritual world, Mary and the other youth stayed after and spoke with the preacher at great length. Mary describes how listening to his sermon and speaking with him afterwards created a great desire within her to worship God. "I felt determined to read and pray," she said, and after leaving the meeting went directly home and began to read the Bible. She continued this pattern until she experienced a powerful vision of the goodness of God. Without her initial encounter with the Methodist preacher, it is unlikely that Mary would have had the courage to seek out a religious experience. Yet, it was because of this man, that Mary not only converted and joined the church, but eventually married a preacher herself.⁴⁹

Ministers thus took on important leadership roles for the young and had the ability to affect entire groups with their examples. When Rev. Jonathan B. Condit was installed as the pastor of their church, Elizabeth Prentiss and her friends were excited about this new minister. Elizabeth's friend wrote to her in a letter and explained how "he at once became almost an object of worship with the enthusiastic young people." His teachings had such an impact that "the young ladies had a praying circle which met every Saturday afternoon, full of life and sunshine. Indeed the exclusive interest of the season was religious; our reading and conversation were religious; well-nigh the subject of thought was learning something new of our Savior and His blessed service."⁵⁰ If their goal was to

⁴⁹ Mary Dustin as quoted in Cales Dustin, *The Experiences of Mrs. Mary Dustin* (Concord: George Hough, 1807), 7-16.

⁵⁰ Prentiss, *The Life and Letters of Elizabeth Prentiss*, 25.

instill a desire for worship within the youth, these ministers were succeeding. Their examples and friendship to the young created strong followings which inspired widespread religiosity. The ministers, many of whom were young themselves, were able to build upon the excitement of the era and use this to strengthen the future of the church.

In addition to spending one-on-one time with them, preachers also affected the youth through specific sermons directed to their needs. Individual sermons and series of sermons, along with specific books targeting the youth were published, “all having in view a more doctrinal education of those who had thus happily come into the church in early life.”⁵¹ Some of the topics found in these sermons and publications include conversion accounts of other youth, scriptural themes about the necessity of repentance, counsel on finding good friends, scriptural stories, warning against sins of the flesh and various other subjects.⁵² Some youth specifically credit their conversion and subsequent worship practices to sermons such as these. After hearing a lecture from her Presbyterian pastor, Eliza McCarty of Aurora, New York recognized her sinful state. As a result of this realization, she began to “more carefully attend upon divine worship” and study the scriptures more fervently at home. Youth would often build upon what they were taught in these sermons and make a change in their personal worship practices. Eventually this

⁵¹ Bradley, 125.

Almost every denomination also relied heavily upon the written word. Magazines, newspapers, tracts, pamphlets, and entire books were published specifically to help young people strengthen their faith in and commitment to the cause of God. These examples of these sources include the periodicals: *Youth's Instructor and Guardian* (New York: N. Bangs and T. Mason); *The Youth's Friend* (Philadelphia: American Sunday-School Union); *The Guardian or Youth's Religious Instructor* (New Haven: Office of Religious Intelligence); and other pamphlets and books like *The Instruction of the Rising Generation in the Principles of Christian Religion* (Andover: Flagg and Gould, 1818); John Morrison, *Counsels to the Young*, (Norwich: Thomas Robinson, 1837); *Address to Youth*, (New York: American Tract Society, 1825); *Counsel for Young Disciples* No. 57 (Boston: American Tract Society); *I'm Too Young* No. 57 (Boston: American Tract Society).

⁵² The Methodist newspaper *Christian Advocate* devoted an entire section entitled “Youths Dept.” The topics listed above were all topics found herein.

led to Eliza's conversion experience and faithfulness in the church. After her conversion, she continued to turn to God in daily, worshipful prayer.⁵³

The powerful impact that a single sermon could have on the young is demonstrated by a special youth meeting held by Reverend Asahel Nettleton. Near the end of one revival of 1820, "a company of some one hundred dear young converts" gathered together to hear from Reverend Nettleton. The subject of his sermon came from 3 John 1:4, "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth." After Rev. Nettleton preached to these youth, urging them to stay strong and serve the Lord, a Rev. Smith recorded his version of their reactions:

A little sea of up-turned youthful faces was before him, and every mind seemed easy to be moulded as the plastic clay. We sympathized; we ran together at once, in our assent to truth, in views, in holy feelings, in love itself, chaste, elevated, and heavenly, and yet without any thing to destroy reverence... The scene cannot be described. They sung, they conversed, they congratulated, they strengthened each other, and *hearts* were then bound together, we have no doubt, by ties which have since sweetened earth's toils, beautified Zion, taken off death's bitterness, and are enduring still where toil and death are no more.⁵⁴

Whether all efforts to shepherd the youth were as successful as this experience or not, the experiences as those shared above show that the youth did indeed listen to their ministers.

Church efforts to strengthen the youth of the church, whether it was through revival meetings or clergy-youth relationships, were crucial in helping the young people solidify their spiritual feelings and continue to worship in public and in private. Above

⁵³ "Memoirs of Eliza McCarty," *The Guardian, or Youth's Religious Instructor* I, no. 9 (September 1819): 302-05.

⁵⁴ This utopian description of the youth's reaction, as recorded by Rev. Smith, may be skewed by his adoration for his senior pastor, Rev. Nettleton. The book is meant as a tribute to Rev. Nettleton and so Rev. Smith may be exaggerating to paint Nettleton in a more favorable light. However, based on revival records, it shows that Rev. Nettleton was responsible for the conversion of thousands of individuals, many of whom are the youth. R.S. Smith, 127-28.

all, churches saw the young people as an important spiritual investment and hoped to “bring out the treasures of this invaluable mine, and consecrate them to God; that we may open this inexhaustible fountain, and draw from it streams which shall refresh the barren land, and make glad the city of our God.”⁵⁵

With specific focus on the youth, these organizations could instill deep conviction in them to stay true to both Jesus and the church to which they belonged so that they could provide strength for the growing church in the present and leadership for the church in the future.

Proselytizing: The Ultimate Form of Worship

Inspired by churches’ efforts to hold revival meetings and instigate personal religious experiences, young people continued to worship God in their personal lives. These worship practices often included Bible study, personal prayer, church attendance, and music.⁵⁶ But the most committed and converted youth expressed their devotion through efforts to share their conviction with others and spread the revival spirit to all who would hear. Believing youth were clearly influenced by the efforts of the church as they followed the same patterns, using meetings and personal exhortation as a means of sharing the word with others.

Once converted, many of the young people felt a deep responsibility to share the word of God with their friends and family. As was said about another group of young people with the same desires, nineteenth-century youth were “desirous that salvation

⁵⁵ *Utica Christian Magazine* Vol. III, 36.

⁵⁶ While much could be said about each of these aspects of personal worship, I will primarily focus on the efforts of the youth to share their religious convictions with their peers. See chapter 1 which described parental influence on these worship practices.

should be declared to every creature for they could not bear that any human soul should perish ; yea, even the very thoughts that any soul should endure endless torment, did cause them to quake and tremble.”⁵⁷ Remembering the awful state in which these youth found themselves, they desired to see other sinners receive the same relief.

The most common desire in post-conversion narratives among the young is the longing to help others become converted as well. These feelings were so strong for many that they didn’t view them as a mere personal wish, but rather a God-given duty to help others. A young man from New York explained it to his sister in these terms: “I often feel a zealous fervency springing up in my soul in behalf of the unconverted, and have felt, and still feel that it is my indispensable duty to warn sinners of the wrath to come, and invite them to a bleeding Saviour. O! could I compass them all in my arms, I would bear them to Calvary.”⁵⁸ This young man’s passion and desire are apparent and he, like other youth, felt an inherent responsibility to share what they received with others.

In imitation of church practices to hold revival meetings, many young people organized meetings of their own as a means of converting unbelievers or strengthening those who believed. These gatherings were often specifically targeted toward other youth, but open to all, and the styles matched those run by the church.

Most of the time, these meetings were simple, created as a venue to share conversion experiences of those “who had a few weeks before been brought to a knowledge of the truth.”⁵⁹ Their purpose was for “young converts to tell their wondrous

⁵⁷ Joseph Smith, Jr., *The Book of Mormon* (Palmyra: E. B. Grandin, 1830), 215.

⁵⁸ “Copy of a Letter From a Young Gentleman,” 359.

⁵⁹ “Memoirs of Eliza McCarty,” 303.

story. They arose one after another, and honoured the hand that made them. They related what God had done for their souls in an admirable manner. Many burst into weeping and the voice of mourning was heard in all directions.”⁶⁰ Just as many of them had felt the powerful impact that sermons could have on their desires to change, they shared their own feelings, experiences, and desires to help incite the same reaction in each other. Their hope was that by relating their conversion experiences with each other, they could deepen their commitment to Christ and help those who had not yet converted to seek His forgiveness, thus acting as an extension of the efforts of their clergy.⁶¹

Rev. Simon Waterman recounted a common pattern where two young people would gather to have a religious conversation, with others eventually joining them. In one instance, Waterman witnessed almost 140 youth gathering as a result of this type of conversation. This meeting then became more regular and eventually even adults joined the youth.⁶²

In some places, youth driven meetings went beyond simple gatherings and became formal, detailed meetings of public worship. In Warren, Connecticut, the young people established weekly conferences, “where they prayed, sang psalms and hymns” and if no ordained pastor could attend their meeting to instruct them, they “read printed sermons in lieu of a personal appearance by the pastor.”⁶³

⁶⁰ Kibby, “An Account of the Revival of Religion in Provincetown, Mass.,” 222.

⁶¹ Mary Ryan describes how, in some instances, young men and women would meet separately. The young women met for “prayer and religious conversation” while the young men gathered for “religious conference and exercise and improvement.” Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class*, 88.

⁶² Kling, *A Field of Divine Wonders*, 70.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 69.

Meetings thus became the backbone on which the youth formed social and religious groups and worshipped God. Adalaline Hosner remarked in her journal that these types of meetings strengthened her faith the most. She said “my soul hankers...to be in a prayer meeting where the life and power of religion is felt.”⁶⁴

In addition to revival-style meetings, the youth understood the power of personal invitations and felt a duty to take the word to those they loved. While they were not trained in preaching or proselytizing, the young people often resorted to the simplest means of exhorting that they knew how—sharing their own conversion experiences. After experiencing conversion at a revival meeting in Provincetown, Massachusetts, a young woman was not content “to stay home,” but went directly to visit her “religious friends, to tell what the Lord had done for her soul.”⁶⁵ This act of sharing personal experiences, while simple, proved to be one of the most significant and impactful means of helping others come to the fold of God. Hearing the experiences of their friends had a powerful impact upon many youth. After the aforementioned young woman shared her conversion with her friends, a young man fell under conviction and ultimately experienced a conversion of his own.

In other cases, the effect was much greater. A unique account from a camp meeting in Niagara, New York describes over a hundred “Canadian Indians” who attended. One young man from their group stood up and spoke to the assembly, sharing that since his conversion at a camp meeting two years prior, he had taken the word of

⁶⁴ Adaline Cleveland Hosner Journal, 11 August 1838, Adeline Cleveland Hosner papers, #6005. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.

⁶⁵ Kibby, “An Account of the Revival of Religion in Provincetown, Mass.,” 278.

Christ to his own people and shared his conversion story with them. Because of his exhortations alone, over sixty of his people had converted.⁶⁶

In addition to sharing their experiences, young people often exhorted their peers to practice acts of personal worship, prayer, and scripture study. In many cases, they would pray and read *with* their friends to help them on the road of God. One group of youth would enter into their friends' houses and fall on their knees in prayer for their souls.⁶⁷ Another young man took his Bible to the house of a young companion and read to him promises made to penitent sinners.⁶⁸ The young people were not satisfied with receiving the grace of God alone, but desired it greatly for anyone who would listen.

These personal acts of sharing not only helped others experience religion, but they also strengthened the faith and conviction of the sharers. "The young converts were filled with the good wine of the kingdom, and the grace of God shone in their faces. Wherever they went, they seemed to carry conviction, and many trembled in their presence."⁶⁹ These practices created a population of young people that were not merely passive members of the church, but rather active seekers of the kingdom of God. These types of efforts by the young and old alike are what caused the revival spirit to spread so rapidly during the Second Great Awakening.

Some youth were not content to just help those in their own towns, but used letters as a means of spreading the word to those afar. Amelia Chapman, whose account

⁶⁶ Thomas Madden, "Good Effects of Campmeetings," *Methodist Magazine* VIII (August 1825): 321–22.

⁶⁷ Kibby, "An Account of the Revival of Religion in Provincetown, Mass.," 221.

⁶⁸ Billy Hibbard, "Revival of Religion in Hinsdale, Pittsfield Circuit," *Methodist Magazine* VII (1824): 75.

⁶⁹ Kibby, "An Account of the Revival of Religion in Provincetown, Mass.," 221.

is shared at the beginning of this chapter, was known for her commitment to writing letters to classmates who were leaving her school. Because she would no longer be privileged to have direct contact with them, she wrote to them as a means of continuing her spiritual relationships. While there were many youth who did so, Amelia's letters are representative of the style and message that most of these letters shared.

Amelia's letters reflected her theology. The most common theme she shared was that of being prepared for the afterlife and her belief in heaven. She wrote to one friend, "let us trust in the hope of meeting in a brighter, better world than this," while to another she counseled, "that you may ever live in a state of preparation to meet death, the king of terrors, is the sincere wish of your friend."⁷⁰ She also recounted her daily worship practices in hopes of encouraging and inspiring those to whom she wrote. It seems that her personal relationship with her minister must have impacted these exhortations, for Amelia's choice of words reflects those found in the sermons of the time. It is likely she even shared the specific things that she was being taught for the content of her letters. Through these types of letters, the words of a minister in one town could spread and inspire an individual in another, furthering the great expansion of the work of God.

In addition to their words, Amelia seemed to use the same types of techniques as the clergy. In some cases, she even took it upon herself to command a peer to repent. To one friend she wrote, "Will you excuse the boldness I use, and from a sincere friend who feels extremely anxious for your welfare in another world, receive in kindness a few lines?" She then continued, "First allow me to ask you a few questions. Have you an interest in the blessed Savior? Have you repented of your sins? Have you evidence that

⁷⁰ Parsons, *Memoir of Amelia S. Chapman*, 9–10.

your heart is changed? If not, where are you? Pause a moment and consider!”⁷¹ This bold style clearly mimics the style of preaching she received. Especially in her case as a Congregationalist, Amelia was used to hearing deeply Calvinistic sermons about the dangers of hellfire and eternal damnation. Preachers would ask the youth specific questions in relation to their standing before God, just as Amelia did in her letters. These preachers’ efforts to save the young were being magnified by the young who desired to save each other.

So, whether through formal or informal religious meetings, or personal exhortations, the youth of the Second Great Awakening played an integral role in helping spread the work of salvation in their towns and elsewhere. Following the examples of church leaders, the youth demonstrated the depth of their commitment and conversion by both their personal religious habits at home and their proselytizing efforts to those around them.

Faithful Members for a Strong Church

The various nineteenth-century churches were seeking converts that would stay faithful. As much as they focused on helping individuals experience conversion, they sought their permanent conversion. The churches were constantly asking themselves the question: “The older members of [our] church are passing off, and who are to fill their places?” Their answer was, in most cases, the youth.

Understanding the great challenge and opportunity that was theirs to both attract and keep young converts, churches went to great lengths to teach young people how to properly worship, or strengthen their commitment to God. Through revival meetings,

⁷¹ Ibid., 21–22.

churches sought to create an environment where the Holy Spirit was present and many new young converts could come into the fold of God, while many current members could be refreshed. In order to accomplish this, churches implemented specific programs and training where clergy were advised to focus on the youth and devote their efforts to ensure that their young flocks were “growing in knowledge and grace...becoming more intelligent, consistent, established, faithful, more instant in prayer, and more ready to every good word and work.”⁷²

As a result of these efforts, great numbers of young people established themselves as spiritual pillars in the church. While in some cases, young people were uncommitted and left the church as quickly as they joined, many others devoted themselves to a lifetime of church membership. These young people participated in personal worship through prayer and Bible study and sought, above all, to convert and strengthen those around them. These efforts of the youth more than filled the gaps left by the passing of older members, and ensured that the church body was “continually increased and strengthened.”⁷³

It was perhaps, the greatest joy for clergy “as the fathers and mothers in his Israel [were] removed, to see the children coming forward and taking their places, and the church, by their means, perpetuated and increased.”⁷⁴ These youth were not just replacing their parents, in the church but the clergy as well. At younger and younger ages, youth began to join the work of the ministry. Knowing this, most clergy spent considerable

⁷² Pond, *Young Pastor's Guide*, 370.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 371.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

efforts with this promising group of future church leadership and prayed, as did one pastor, “Lord, sharpen our sickles when we go to reap for thy harvest among the young.”⁷⁵ The Lord did and as a result, thousands of youth joined themselves to the church and took up sickles of their own. Their specific efforts to perpetuate revival meetings, invite sinners to repent, and generally incite religion among their peers and fellow townspeople led to thousands of powerful conversion experiences “such as may not be described, ‘such as Heaven looked down to see.’”⁷⁶

⁷⁵ The prayer of Dr. Bonar of Scotland as quoted in Fish, *Handbook of Revivals: For the Use of Winners of Souls*, 196.

⁷⁶ Smith, *Recollections*, 58.

Chapter Four

“A Great Instrument in Awakening Many”: A Quantitative Study of Youth Impact on Revivals

“...the conference was composed mostly of young men in the prime of life and none past the meridian and vigour of manhood...looking at them I said to myself[,] with such men we can take the world.”¹

In February of 1816, Reverend Len Eych, pastor of a church in the small town of Owasco, New York began preaching near the shores of Skaneateles Lake. As any pastor would, he hoped that his message might inspire some individuals to forsake their lives of sin and turn to God. As he preached, “the power of God came down, and about thirty mostly young persons were soon discovered to be under the most pungent conviction.” The spiritual awakenings of these young people spread to “every part of society,” until hundreds were joining the church. Through the proselytizing efforts of these young members, this excitement reached to the neighboring Sandbeach congregation, which previous to this time was in a “state of spiritual stupor,” and “the flame spread with a rapidity unequalled by anything ever before seen in that region.” Between those two churches there were three hundred and fifty one souls admitted in just one year, with “more than two hundred dear youths approaching the Table of the Lord.”²

While dramatic, this type of description about the influence of youth conversion experiences upon others is common throughout nineteenth-century revival records. In many cases, youth conversion not only sparked the flame of belief for a few, but also

¹ The feelings of Laban Clark as he gazed over the crowd of assembled preachers at his first annual conference in 1801. Quoted in Wigger, *Taking Heaven by Storm*, 78. See also Laban Clark, *Laban Clark: Circuit Rider for the Methodist Episcopal Church*, trans. E. Farley Sharp (Rutland, VT: Academy Books, 1987), 30.

² Joshua Bradley, *Accounts of Religious Revivals in Many Parts of the United States from 1815 to 1818* (Albany, N.Y.:G.J. Loomis & Co, 1819), 228-31. Other accounts describe youth leading the way in revivals in Greenwich, Moreau, Fort Edward, Troy, Norwich, Broadalbin, and Long Island, New York.

ignited an inferno of conversion among the citizens throughout the region. The literature of the early nineteenth century is drenched in revival accounts such as this one. Eager to spread the news of their excitement to other clergy, ministers would record the proceedings of their revival efforts and share them with fellow clergy. Many published them in magazines, newspapers, tracts, and other forms of literature.³ Other ministers gathered these accounts and published them in volumes of books with the purpose of filling the earth with “knowledge of his salvation and [convincing] all nations [to] bow before him and call him blessed.”⁴

The description of convicted sinners, conversion experiences, and reclaimed backsliders is commonplace, but the most oft repeated occurrence throughout these records is the mention of youth involvement in revivals. These records make it clear that youth played crucial roles in the instigation, the continuation, and the spread of revivals during the first half of the nineteenth century. In contrast to what some scholars have argued, church and revival data from nineteenth century records indicate that young people both greatly impacted *short-term* revivals and invested themselves in *long-term* commitments to the church.⁵ In the short-term, thousands of youth attended revival meetings in mass and were the instigating force in the commencement and continuation of such meetings. In the long-term, young people made up a significant portion of the clergy who continued these meetings throughout the first half of the nineteenth century.

³ Some of these publications include *The Christian Advocate Magazine*, *Evangelical Intelligencer*, *The Presbyterian Magazine*, *The Utica Magazine*, *The Utica Christian Magazine*, *Christian Examiner*, *The Massachusetts Missionary Magazine*, *The Missionary Herald*, *The Religious Intelligencer*, *The Youth's Religious Instructor*, *New England Revival*, and many others. For complete listing of bibliographical information and works, see attached bibliography.

⁴ Bradley, *Accounts of Revivals*, iv. Some other examples include “Revival of the Work of God in a School”; *Revivals of Religion, Considered as a Means of Grace.*; Smith, *Recollections*.

⁵ Roth, “Whence This Strange Fire?,” 47; Kling, *A Field of Divine Wonders*, 208–209.

Using data from thousands of revival accounts compiled by Baptist minister Joshua Bradley, one of the most thorough collections of nineteenth-century revival accounts that exists, as well as conference records from the New York Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, this chapter examines the quantitative contribution of young people as part of the revivals of the Second Great Awakening. The purpose of this chapter is not to provide an in-depth study of any one particular area, but rather to show the general patterns of widespread youth activity across all of New England and New York.⁶

Young People and Revivals

As described in the previous chapter, revival meetings were a crucial tool used by the church to instigate conversion experiences for new members and strengthen the faith of the old. From the eastern coast of Maine to the western edge of New York's burned-over district and beyond, young people were flocking to revival meetings and bringing multitudes with them. Their role in these meetings seemed to be catalytic, as in many cases, the conversion experiences of young people instigated the conversion of many others. As one minister reported, "the good news that this or that youth was under concern for his soul, or rejoicing in the love of God, daily awakened attention."⁷ Many

⁶ Many ministers published revival accounts throughout the nineteenth century as a means of reporting on the work that was taking place. Rev. Bradley gathered thousands of these accounts from various denominations as a means of sharing what was happening in New York and New England at the time to promote faith in those who read them. His accounts are not statistical representations of the region, but rather culturally representative. His choice to share information from various denominations and his large sample size provide uniformity.

The New York Conference records from the Methodist Episcopal Church cover the years from 1801-1848. This wide spread of years helps shows general patterns over time. All accounts and data suggest that what was happening in New York was similar to that which was happening in New England and the surrounding regions.

⁷ Bradley, *Accounts of Revivals*, 45.

town members were inspired that the young had such an interest in religious matters and would then involve themselves as well. Not every revival account identifies the instigators of each revival; however, when they do so, the majority of the time they cite the conversion of young people as the spark that led to the rapid spread of religious ideas and experiences.⁸

The experiences and exhortations of the adolescents were not limited to helping their peers. In many cases, older, educated citizens were deeply impressed with the youth and as a result, sought for conversion experiences. In Acworth, New Hampshire, the conversion of some school children greatly impressed two strong church members, which led to a spiritual revolution in the town, during which even “the stoutest heart seemed to dissolve like wax before an increasing fire.”⁹ Another minister observed that “the exhortations of young converts were often rendered powerful means of extending the work, and refreshing the souls of old professors.”¹⁰

While anecdotal accounts alone are important in understanding the specifics of youth experience, an examination of the numbers of youth involved in these revivals gives further credibility to these firsthand reports. The numbers show that youth conversion was a common occurrence and it was not limited to a small area, but rather widespread across New York and New England. Woven throughout revival accounts, quantitative data outlining the number of converts joining the various churches, along with the ages of these converts, describes a scene where vast numbers of youth were the

⁸ Ibid., 16–19, 21, 28, 30, 33, 37–38, 41–44, 60–61, 71, 76, 77, 81–83, 131, 139, 140, 156, 167, 168, 171, 172, 189, 225, 231, and 277. See also Merritt, “Memoir of Mary S. Wardwell,” 417.

⁹ Bradley, *Accounts of Revivals*, 19..

¹⁰ Ibid., 38.

key players in revival meetings. These accounts indicate that in some cases, the majority of those attending revival meetings were youth, showing that a large percentage of the religious activity that was happening at the time was among the youth.

One of the most thorough publications detailing revival information during this time was published in 1819 under the title *Accounts of Religious Revivals in Many Parts of the United States from 1815 to 1818* by Minister Joshua Bradley. As stated in the book's preface, the purpose of this work was to compile "numerous accounts of revivals since the commencement of 1815 to 1818...[from]...many excellent letters upon revivals from ministers of different denominations, and more than two thousand subscribers [detailing accounts from] Synods, Presbyteries, Conventions, Associations, and every publication, upon revivals that has come within [his] knowledge."¹¹ Bradley did so in hopes that those who did not have access to revival accounts published in periodical literature could read them in his book.

It is important to note that Bradley is writing from a perspective of faith. He believes in the importance of these events and publishes these accounts as a means of inciting faith in others. Naturally, with this purpose, he would choose the most dramatic or faith-promoting incidents. As a result of this bias, Bradley's accounts might not be representative of what is going on in all places. Yet, this does not invalidate the accounts that he does share. Similar patterns of widespread youth involvement show up in all of his accounts no matter the location, pointing to the fact that these things were happening on a larger scale.

¹¹ Ibid., iii, iv, vi.

Bradley made no attempt to present any of his conversion data for analytical purposes. Rather his purpose was to share human experiences to promote faith. Reading casually through these various accounts, one can see youth were often mentioned in relation to these revivals, but extracting the data from these accounts and isolating it by state, shows the great magnitude of youth involvement. Bradley's data presents a strong case that young people were the primary group participating in, inspiring, and spreading revivals. The bulk of Bradley's accounts cover the states of New England and New York, the most active revival states, but I have chosen to only use the data from the New England states for this section and use information from New York for the latter half of this chapter. The patterns shared by Bradley about New England are largely the same for those of New York. As noted in my introduction, using many of the accounts defining youth during the nineteenth century, I consider youth as those between the ages of twelve and twenty-five.¹²

Maine

While Maine is one of the least mentioned states in terms of the number of religious revival experiences, the accounts that are recorded are filled with reports of young people getting involved. In his work, Bradley shares accounts from seven different towns in Maine (see Map 1.1), and he gives specific conversion data for six of the seven towns (see Table 1.1).¹³ In the year 1816 alone, 994 individuals united themselves with a

¹² See p. 27, especially footnote 67.

¹³ While much of Bradley's data is quantitative, there are many instances where he describes the number of converts with words like, "some," "multitudes," "a considerable number," "many," "several," and "hundreds". Using Noah Webster's *An American Dictionary of the English Language* (New York: S. Converse, 1832), 182, 516, 745, 771, to look-up the early 19th century meaning of each of those words, I have developed estimated values as follows: "many hundreds" = 400, "hundreds" = 200, "many" and "multitudes" = 50, "a considerable number" and "a number" = 30, "several" = 5, "some" = 3, . Any number

church of God, with 110 of those individuals specifically mentioned as being young people. While Bradley does not give us the exact ages of the remaining 884 individuals, his account mentions youth or children converts over fifteen times, while only mentioning adults six times. He describes “multitudes...of youth...flocking to meetings everyday” and writes that “this work has been principally among the youths, and very few over thirty years appear to have had a share in it.”¹⁴ According to this description, one can assume that at least half, likely more, of the remaining 884 converts were young people. Combining this group with the 110 youth already specified, the total reveals that there were 552 youth converts in 1816 alone, which includes over 55% of the total converts in these seven towns.

with the (*) preceding it is my estimate based on the definitions listed above. There are some instances where the record indicates that “many” joined the church, along with a specified number of individuals. In those cases I added my estimations to the specific numbers that Bradley recorded to arrive at a sum total.

I have taken care to use very conservative estimates (for example for “hundreds” I chose the smallest amount possible, 200, while Bradley could have been referring to many more). I recognize that this data was not collected in a random sample, but rather self-reported and is, therefore, biased by those who reported. It is also biased by Bradley who chose which accounts to include in the book. My purpose is not meant to present exact numbers, but rather show a pattern of youth involvement. The fact that there are many references to youth in so many accounts across New England presents a strong case of their actual involvement to the described degree.

¹⁴ Bradley, *Accounts of Revivals*, 32, 44.

Map 1.1 - Select Towns in Maine

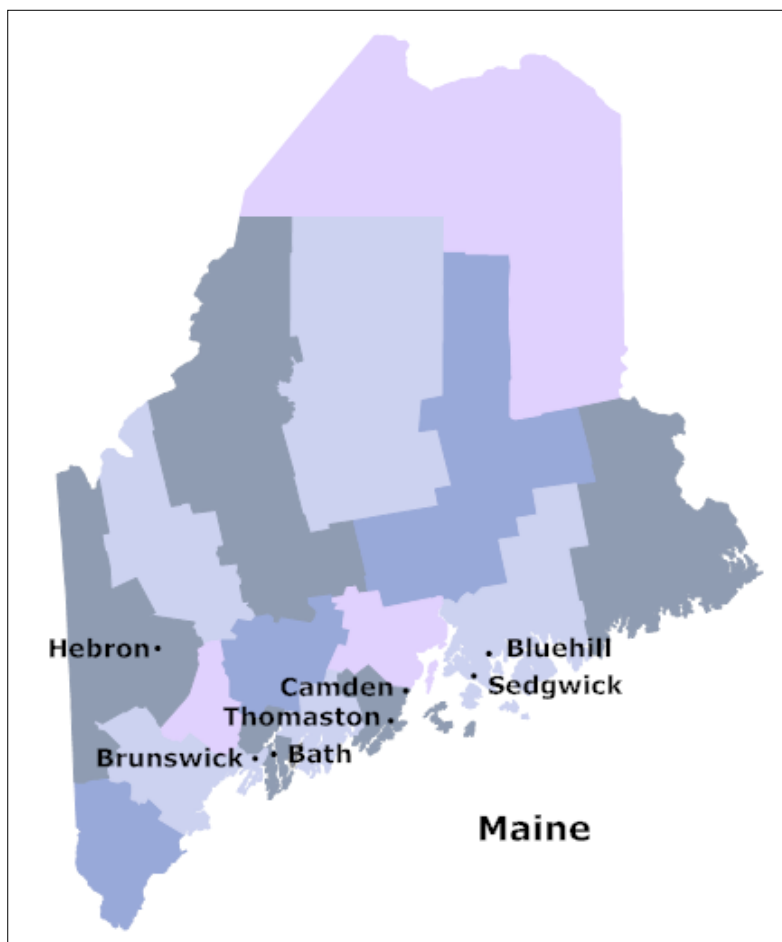


Table 1.1 - Number of Converts in Select Towns in Maine, 1816

<u>Location</u>	<u>Date of Revival</u>	<u>Denomination</u>	<u>Age of Converts</u>	<u>Number of Converts</u>
Sedgwick, ME	Spring 1816	Congregational	"children, youths, and the middle aged"	*30
Sedgwick, ME	April 1816	Baptist	"children, youths, and the middle aged"	150
Bluehill, ME	Spring 1816	Baptist	"children, youths, and the middle aged"	104
Bluehill, ME	Spring 1816	Congregational	"children, youths, and the middle aged"	30
Camden	1816	N/A	N/A	20
Brunswick, ME	1816	N/A	9-80 years old	300
Bath, ME	1816	Methodist, Baptist, &	"aged, middle-aged,	250

		Congregational	and youth"	
Thomaston, ME	1816	N/A	11-20 years old	60
Hebron, ME	1816	N/A	youths under 30	50
			TOTAL	994

New Hampshire

As with Maine, Bradley includes town conversion data from seven towns in New Hampshire (see Map 1.2 and Table 1.2). The data in New Hampshire highlights one of the most popular venues for successful revivals—schools. Schools were natural gathering places for young people and as such made significant locations for revivals. From primary schools to colleges, and everything in between, schools are mentioned frequently as a place where revivals had great success, among young teachers and their students alike. In some cases, school teachers often encouraged their pupils to seek after religion and acted as mentors in their spiritual journeys.¹⁵

In the case of Salisbury, New Hampshire, concern for the soul began with “several young women who were employed in school keeping.” After they were converted the “work spread with great rapidity” among both teachers and students. The conversion of one of those students, a twelve-year-old girl, added to the excitement and “many united with her... in professing Jesus before men.” This resulted in 114 converts in that town in only two months.¹⁶

¹⁵ See Parsons, *Memoir of Amelia S. Chapman*, 4–8; Safford, *A Memoir of Daniel Safford*, 136–37.

University campuses also became a common venue for revivals with college-aged young people leading the way. An entire work could be written about this specific aspect of revivalism and I have specifically not chosen to address it here because of its magnitude. See “Connecticut,” *The Adviser, or Vermont Evangelical Magazine* 1, no. 2 (February 1809): 46.

¹⁶ Bradley, *Accounts of Revivals*, 30–31.

Acworth, New Hampshire experienced a similar start to its January 1817 revival. The school master and fifteen young scholars came under the “weight of conviction” and “in a short time...the school was transformed into a religious conference.”¹⁷ Other schools in the area heard reports of this event and soon thereafter, they too felt the revival spirit, resulting in the conversion of many individuals in the schools and the surrounding town.

These experiences suggest that the youth were not always the first to feel the desire for conviction, but rather they were influenced by those with whom they shared a trusting relationship. Once influenced, the result of many young people coming unto God produced great excitement in the municipality. So while they may not have been the first converts in certain towns, their conversions appear to be quite influential to the other citizens. Perhaps as the youth returned home and shared with their families the things they had witnessed, it caused those family members to seek out spiritual witnesses as well.

In the case of New Hampshire, the data doesn't indicate that youth are the majority of those attending revival meetings, but for the reasons mentioned above they seem to have great influence on the rate at which they spread. Five of the seven New Hampshire towns record that the revival spread more rapidly after many youth were converted. In examining the 1,835 recorded converts from 1814-1817 in these select New Hampshire towns, only 176 of them are specifically mentioned as being young. While this accounts for only 10% of the converts, no specific age is mentioned for 1,155 or 63% of those who were joining churches; and the remaining 500 or 27% are described as

¹⁷ Ibid., 21.

“men, women, and children” from seven to eighty years of age.¹⁸ If the patterns are consistent with the surrounding states, it is likely that a large portion of the unidentified converts were young people as well.

Map 1.2 - Select Towns in New Hampshire

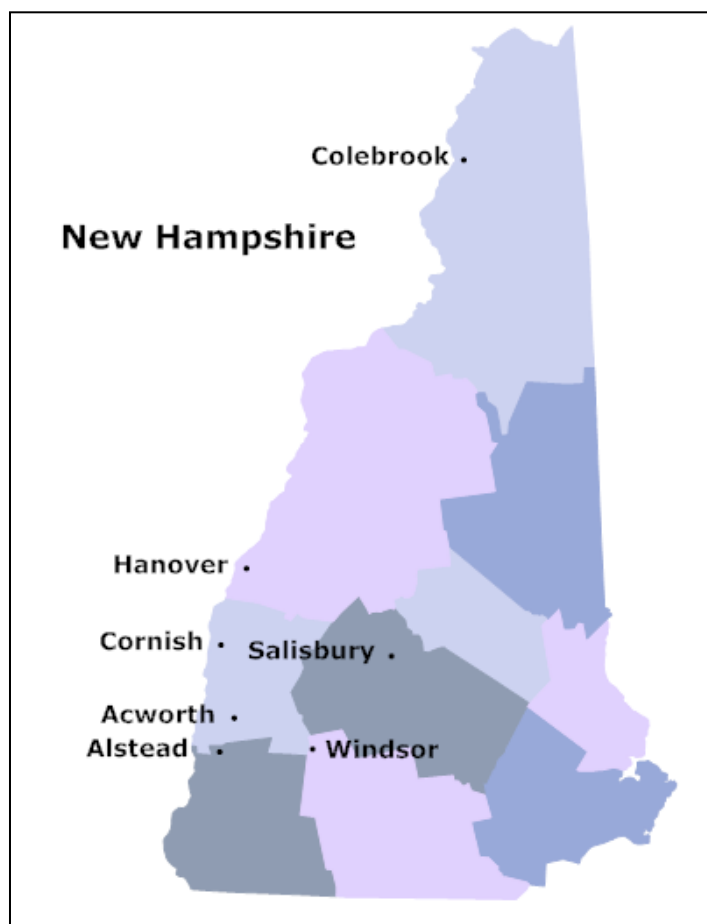


Table 1.2 - Number of Converts in Select Towns in New Hampshire, 1814-1817¹⁹

<u>Location</u>	<u>Date of Revival</u>	<u>Denomination</u>	<u>Age of Converts</u>	<u>Number of Converts</u>
Acworth, NH	1814	N/A	N/A	16

¹⁸ Ibid., 84, 156.

¹⁹ Ibid., 13-21, 30-31, 81-95, 156-157, 162.

Acworth, NH	Sept, 1816	N/A	N/A	60
Acworth, NH	Jan 14, 1817	N/A	"young people" ²⁰	26
Acworth, NH	Jan 1817	N/A	"Eldest scholars of a school" for children	15
Salisbury, NH	July, 1815	N/A	"young women"	*34
Salisbury, NH	July, 1815	Baptist	N/A	49
Salisbury, NH	July, 1815	Congregational	N/A	*30
Cornish, NH	N/A	N/A	"men ,women, children"	*200
Windsor, NH	1816	N/A	"young men"	*55
Hanover, NH	N/A	N/A	"pious young men"	*50
Colebrook, NH	May 1815	Baptist, Congregational	7-80 years old	300
Various NH towns²¹	1814-1817	N/A	N/A	1,000
TOTAL				1835

Connecticut

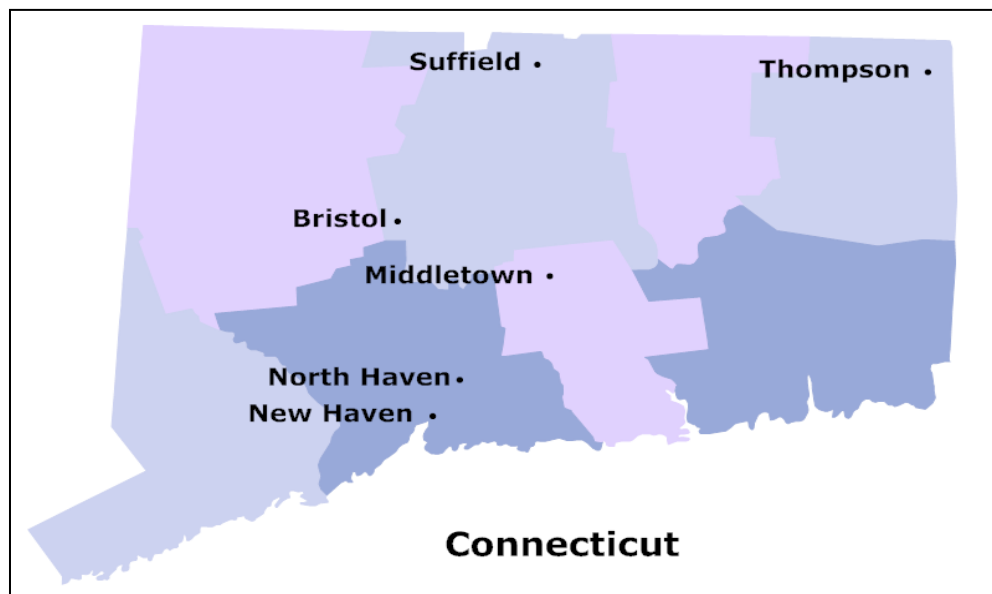
Connecticut is the least represented revival state in terms of quantity of towns examined, but in terms of the total percentage of youth converts, it ranks the highest. Of the 973 converts listed, 527 of those are specifically labeled as "young converts" equaling 54% (see Table 1.3 and Map 1.3). There were 378 converts whose age was unspecified and the remaining 68 were between ten and eighty years old. Bradley indicates that among these unspecified age groups "the greatest number have been from among the youths." This would suggest that at least half of the remaining 46% of unspecified converts were adolescents. Combining this 23% with the previously mentioned 54%, it is

²¹ These towns included Exeter, Sandbornton, Mount Vernon, Raymond, Hollis, New-Ipswich, Mason, Nelson, New Boston, New Chester, Danbury, Pembroke, Canterbury, Henniker, Claremont, Newport, and Loudon. Bradley, *Accounts of Revivals*, 162.

possible, according to these records, that 77% of the converts represented in these Connecticut revivals were youth.

The personal written accounts of these revivals support this quantitative data. One minister wrote about his overwhelming joy in watching this youthful harvest: “To see a large number of young persons from ten to twenty years old, crowding the places of worship, to hear the precious word, or to hear them relating God’s gracious dealings with their souls, singing praises to his name, and conversing on heavenly things, was truly affecting. Nor was it less affecting to see some who had been valiant soldiers in the enemies’ camp, yielding themselves the willing captives to victorious grace.”²²

Map 1.3 - Select Towns in Connecticut



²² Ibid., 67.

Table 1.3 - Number of Converts in Select Towns in Connecticut, 1810-1818²³

<u>Location</u>	<u>Date of Revival</u>	<u>Denomination</u>	<u>Age of Converts</u>	<u>Number of Converts</u>
North Haven, CT	1810-1811	Baptist	"young converts"	50
North Haven, CT	Sept, 1815	Baptist	"young women"	2
North Haven, CT	Sept, 1815	Baptist	"principally among the youths"	40
Thompson, CT	1813-1815	Baptist	N/A	112
Thompson, CT	1813-1815	"Other churches"	N/A	170
Suffield, CT	1815	N/A	"lad of 12 years"	1
Suffield, CT	1815	Baptist	greatest number were 10-20 yrs old	100
Suffield, CT	1815	Congregational	N/A	*3
Bristol, CT	N/A	Congregational	10-80 years	65
Bristol, CT	N/A	Baptist	N/A	63
Bristol, CT	N/A	Methodist	N/A	*30
Middletown, CT	1818 - Jan-May	N/A	Children, "greatest number under 25 years"	234
Middletown, CT	1818 - Jan-May	Baptist	"greatest number under 25 years"	*50
Middletown, CT	1818 - Jan-May	Methodist	"greatest number under 25 years"	*50
New Haven, CT	1818 - Jan-May	N/A	College aged	*3
TOTAL				973

Massachusetts

While Connecticut offers the most information about adolescent involvement in revivals, Massachusetts offers the least (see Map and Table 1.4). In fact, of the 6,164 converts that joined various churches from 1815-1819, there is only one instance that refers specifically to the youth. As was common in other parts of New England, the account reads that "the work was principally among the youth" in Canton,

²³ Ibid., 26-29, 59-77.

Massachusetts.²⁴ While the data does not specifically mention the number of youth converts, there is no reason to believe that the Massachusetts was an anomaly in terms of youth participation. The evidence of youth involvement is so strong in the surrounding states, namely neighboring Connecticut, that it is more reasonable to attribute this lack of data to poor record keeping rather than poor youth involvement.

Map 1.4 - Select Towns in Massachusetts

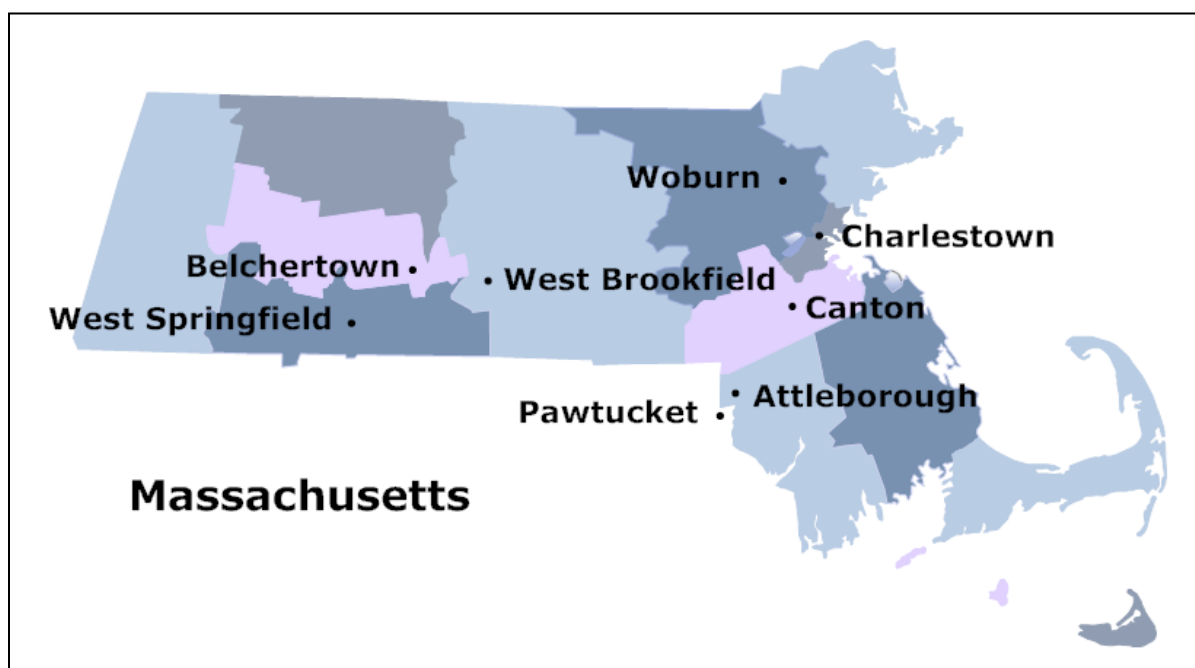


Table 1.4 - Number of Converts in Select Towns in Massachusetts, 1816-1817²⁵

<u>Location</u>	<u>Date of Revival</u>	<u>Denomination</u>	<u>Age of Converts</u>	<u>Number of Converts</u>
Woburn, MA	1816	Baptist	"every age"	160
Pawtucket, MA ²⁶	1815-17	Baptist	12-60, most under 30	100

²⁴ Ibid., 169.

²⁵ Bradley, *Accounts of Revivals*, 48–56, 78–79, 157–62.

²⁶ Pawtucket used to be part of Massachusetts, but is now located in Rhode Island.

Pawtucket, MA	1815-17	Methodist	12-60, most under 30	*3
Pawtucket, MA	1815-17	Episcopalians	12-60, most under 30	*30
Attleborough, MA²⁷	1815	Baptist	9-80 years of age	120
Attleborough, MA	1815	Congregational Church	9-80 years of age	130
Various MA towns²⁸	N/A	N/A	N/A	700
Canton, MA	June 1817	N/A	N/A	5
Canton, MA	June 1817	N/A	N/A	20
Canton, MA	June 1817	N/A	N/A	60
Charlestown, MA	N/A	Congregational	N/A	76
Charlestown, MA	N/A	Baptist	N/A	20
W. Brookfield, MA	N/A	N/A	N/A	*200
Belchertown, MA	N/A	Congregational	N/A	50
Belchertown, MA	N/A	Congregational	N/A	150
Various MA towns²⁹	1815-1819	N/A	N/A	4,000
West-Springfield, MA	N/A	Baptist	N/A	50
West-Springfield, MA	N/A	Presbyterian	N/A	*50
Various MA towns³⁰	N/A	Congregational	N/A	*400
TOTAL				6164

²⁷ Current spelling is Attleboro. All of the towns that end with the letters “-orough” are now spelled with “-oro” endings.

²⁸ Winchester, Norfolk, New Marlborough, Sandisfield, Goshen, Cornwall and Salisbury, MA.

²⁹ Colerain, Oxford, Ward, Athol, Becket, Worcester, Shrewsbury, Framingham, Monson, Leicester, Oakham, Princeton, Hinsdale, Greensfield, Rayalston, Northbrookfield, Richmond, Hardwick, Belchertown, Lansborough, Ashburnham, Bridgewater, Easton, Sharon, Foxborough, Beverly, West-Brookfield, Charlestown, and Boston.

³⁰ Hadley, North Hampton, Hatfield, Deerfield, Sunderland, Montague, Leverett, other towns in the vicinity.

Vermont³¹

The number of converts joining churches in Vermont during 1816 and 1817 is astounding (see Map and Table 1.5). Over 4,300 individuals were touched by these revivals and united themselves to a church of God. While Vermont, like Massachusetts, lacks an abundance of youth-specific data, the written experiences produce overwhelming evidence that young converts played a key role in these revival experiences.

It is from Vermont that we get a record of the formation of one of the first Sunday Schools as “a few pious individuals [in Greensborough, Vermont] desirous of training up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, commenced a course of catechetical instruction...without any knowledge of a similar institution in the United States.”³² This first school led to the emergence of many similar schools across the state, fueling the ever-growing excitement of religious enthusiasm.³³ Other accounts indicate that while ministers would teach whoever would listen to their words, they paid special attention to warning the youth.³⁴

The Vermont accounts also include reference to the catalytic role of youth, as revivals seemed to explode among the people after they caught fire among the young. In numerous instances one young man or young woman came unto the Savior, and then

³¹ Bradley does not include enough data about Rhode Island to be helpful.

³² Bradley, *Accounts of Revivals*, 150.

³³ For an in-depth look at the history and progress of American Sunday Schools see Boylan, *Sunday School*.

³⁴ Bradley, *Accounts of Revivals*, 115.. See also Pond, *Young Pastor's Guide*.

became an instrument in bringing hundreds of other converts into the fold. These young people were not second-class church members, but were “as faithful as any Christians.”³⁵

Map 1.5 - Select Towns in Vermont

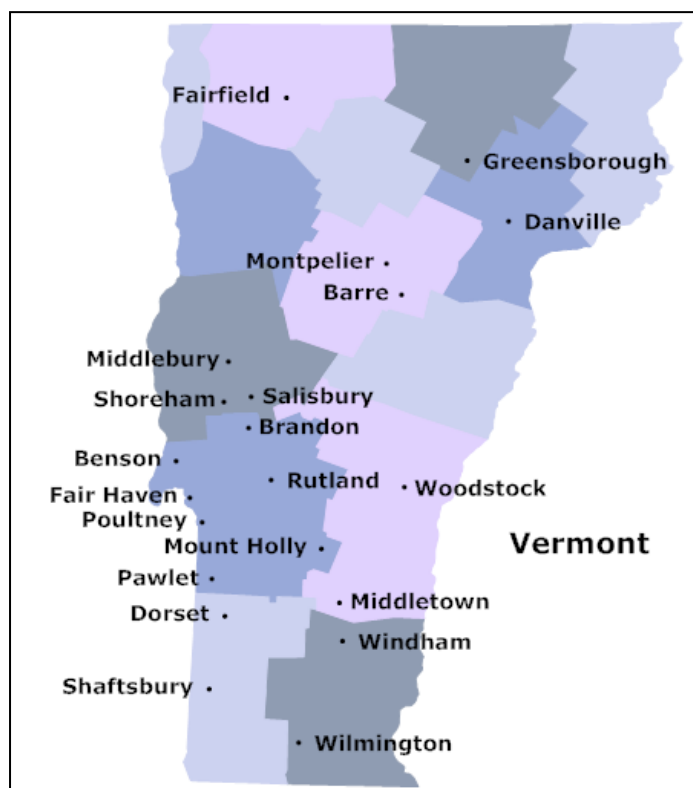


Table 1.5 - Number of Converts in Select Towns in Vermont, 1816-1817³⁶

<u>Location</u>	<u>Date of Revival</u>	<u>Denomination</u>	<u>Age of Converts</u>	<u>Number of Converts</u>
Fair-Haven, VT	1816	Methodist, Baptist, Episcopalian	the young and the old	103
Poultney, VT	1816	N/A	11-14 years old	*50
Poultney, VT	1816	100 to Baptist, 100 unknown	"in the bloom of youth"	200
Middletown, VT	1816	Baptist	N/A	110
Middletown, VT	1816	Congregational	N/A	*30

³⁵ Bradley, *Accounts of Revivals*, 135.

³⁶ Bradley, 95-99, 129-53.

Middletown, VT	1816	Methodist	N/A	*3
Dorset, VT	1816	Congregational	N/A	50
Dorset, VT	1816	Baptist	N/A	*30
Benson & Hubbardton, VT	N/A	N/A	N/A	200
Brandon, VT	Jan 1817	N/A	N/A	129
Brandon, VT	1816-1817	Baptist	N/A	60
Brandon, VT	1816-1817	Methodist	N/A	*30
Salisbury, VT	1816	N/A	1 youth, 32 others	33
Shoreham, VT	Oct 15, 1816	Baptist	N/A	35
Shaftsbury, VT	1816	Baptist	N/A	510
Woodstock, VT	1816	Baptist	N/A	178
Fairfield, VT	1816	Baptist	N/A	209
Barre, VT	1816	Baptist	N/A	65
Danville, VT	1816	Baptist	N/A	124
Middlebury, VT	1816	N/A	College-aged	14
Greensborough, VT	1816	N/A	Youth and parents	100
Windham, VT	June 1816- June 1817	Congregational	N/A	600
Wilmington, VT³⁷	Dec 1816	Congregational	N/A	200
Pawlet & Rutland, VT	N/A	Congregational	N/A	1200
Montpelier, VT	N/A	N/A	N/A	135
TOTAL				4398

As the revival accounts from Bradley indicate, youth and adolescents served a major function in the revivals of the Second Great Awakening across New England. In addition to their widespread attendance, it seems that in many instances their initial conversions were the platform from which the rest of the town members sprung into their own revival experiences.

Yet, this data is only helpful in showing general patterns of youth involvement at revival meetings and is limited to the period of 1815 to 1818. These records also show no indication of how these youth fared religiously after the revivals. Some scholars believe

³⁷ There is no modern town by this name, but since this town is mentioned immediately after Windham in the account, it seems to be the modern town of Wilmington, VT which is located near Windham.

that the youth impact was temporary and they experienced “intense but short-lived outbursts of moral fervor and religious conviction that occurred at intervals.”³⁸ Others claim that pastors’ reports of youth involvement were exaggerated because the youth had the most dramatic response of any age group, and ultimately because the clergy looked to this group as the future of the church.³⁹ In short, this data alone would be insufficient to make a strong case for lasting youth impact on the revivals of the Second Great Awakening.

Church records from the Methodist Episcopal Church in New York supplement this data and demonstrate a lasting role of youth in influencing the revivals throughout the entire first half of the nineteenth century. While the revival accounts shared by Bradley show general patterns through specific stories and experiences of clergy and lack specific numerical data, the Methodist records do just the opposite. The conference journals from the annual Methodist conferences are recorded for church record keeping purposes and they share no faith-promoting accounts as recorded by their clergy. While dry and seemingly lifeless, these records from the Methodist leaders of the New York

³⁸ Roth, “Whence This Strange Fire?,” 47.

³⁹ As noted in the introduction of this thesis, David Kling concluded that the clergy “portrayed the influence of youth in the village revivals far in excess of the actual numbers converted.” He claims that “some scholarly observers have taken the clergy at their word and so portrayed the Awakening as an adolescent phenomenon, but statistical data for the formative phase of the revival indicate otherwise.” The statistical data he refers to are the church records of the Congregational church in just two counties in Connecticut during a five year period. His data lacks the breadth necessary to make such a sweeping conclusion, leaving a statistical gap that must be filled.

While Kling dismisses the idea that the revivals were an “adolescent phenomenon,” he argues that the clergy exaggerated the accounts of youth conversion because the youth began revivals in many towns, they experienced the most tangible response of any age group, and ultimately because the clergy looked to this group as the future of the church. Kling, *A Field of Divine Wonders*, 208–09.

Nancy Cott disagrees with Kling about the motive of clergy to exaggerate youth involvement, contending that “it is unlikely that ministers exaggerated the role of youths, because such claims were also subject to the accusation that young people were volatile and susceptible to enthusiasms, and their professions of faith often specious.” Cott, “Young Women in the Second Great Awakening in New England,” 25.

conference list the ages of those brethren accepted into the ministry. Analyzing the ages and patterns of the men from 1801-1848 shows a vibrant, living class of youthful ministers who were responsible for taking the message of salvation to the entire state of New York. To my knowledge, no scholar or historian has utilized this wealth of information in analyzing the Methodist Episcopal Church's practice of placing the evangelical load squarely upon the shoulders of the young.

Youth Preachers in the Methodist Episcopal Church

The Methodist Episcopal Church was perhaps the most impactful denomination during the Second Great Awakening in terms of church growth, proselytizing effectiveness, and cultural influence.⁴⁰ Beginning with fewer than 1,000 members in 1770 to reaching nearly half a million in 1830, American Methodists made up a large percentage of church membership throughout the country. By 1850, American Methodism was nearly “half again as large as any other Protestant body, and almost ten times the size of the Congregationalists, America’s largest denomination in 1776.”⁴¹

Their influence was not limited to their sect alone. Due to the strict guidelines and rules that members of the Methodist church were required to adhere to, many people from other denominations would attend Methodist meetings and sermons but retain membership in other churches. Methodist Preacher William Capers explained that in 1811 “it was vastly more respectable to join some other Church, and still attend the preaching of the Methodists, which was thought to answer all purposes.”⁴² Francis

⁴⁰ See Wigger, *Taking Heaven by Storm*, 191–95.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁴² As the Methodist Episcopal Church grew, it became much more respectable to join, resulting in the great growth of the church. William Capers as quoted in *Ibid.*, 4.

Asbury estimated that in 1805 there were ten times as many non-Methodists “regularly attending our ministry” as there were Methodists.⁴³ Their reach was far beyond that of their own church members and had sweeping effects on members of all denominations. Thus, youth involvement with the Methodist church influenced thousands who attended their meetings, listened to their sermons, or studied their doctrines.

This growth and influence was being carried on largely by Methodist itinerant preachers who were mostly young men.⁴⁴ Methodist Scholar John Wigger describes this group as “predominantly young, single-minded, and remarkably dedicated” who “began their preaching at a remarkably young age.”⁴⁵ Conference records from the Methodist Episcopal Church indicate the ages of those being accepted into the ministry and are helpful in understanding the level of influence that these youth had, both on Methodism and the American religious landscape. As the data below suggests, there was not only a high level of youth-involvement, but a high level of religious longevity as well.

In the early nineteenth century, Methodists preachers were known for their “circuit riding.” The church organized itself into conferences, which were then broken down into circuits. Each circuit was assigned specific preachers who would travel around the circuit, preaching, conducting church business, holding class meetings, and administering to the members of their specific assignment.⁴⁶ In addition to having the

⁴³ See *Ibid.*, 4, 201, 202, fn 3.

⁴⁴ See Jones, “Methodist Conversion Narratives,” 99–100.

⁴⁵ Wigger, *Taking Heaven by Storm*, 48, 78.

⁴⁶ For more about Methodist itinerant preachers see *Ibid.*, 48–79.

religious desires to become a Methodist itinerant, each candidate was required to go through a difficult screening process in order to be fully admitted.

In 1806, Lorenzo Dow, Methodist preacher, described the process of being accepted into the ministry: “A young preacher first is recommended by a society to a quarter meeting; 2dly, from the quarter meeting to the district conference, where he is examined by the bishop before the conference; and by a majority received or rejected accordingly. After two years trials, he is admitted into full connexion, and ordained a deacon, and hath power to marry people; after two years more, ordained an elder, and can administer the Lord’s supper.”⁴⁷

This process of approval happened at the yearly conference meetings held for each specific conference and was recorded in conference journals. While the Methodists, and most other denominations, often didn’t record the ages of those joining the church, in some conferences they recorded the ages of those men who were “received on trial” to become Methodist preachers. Data from the journals of the New York Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church from 1801-1848 provides the ages of those who were seeking the ministry, showing a youthful army of new preachers joining themselves to the work.

New York Conference Records of the Methodist Episcopal Church⁴⁸

When attending his first annual conference meeting in New York City, Laban Clark was impressed with the sight of the assembled preachers. He explained that “the

⁴⁷ Dow, *Extracts from Original Letters to Methodist Bishops*, iv.

⁴⁸ All of the data from this section is taken from the Journals of the New York Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church published each year from 1801-1848, Methodist Library, Special Collections, Drew University, Madison, New Jersey.

conference was composed mostly of young men in the prime of life and none past the meridian and vigour of manhood.” Feeling a confidence in the future of Methodism under such hands, he said to himself “with such men we can take the world.”⁴⁹

Clark saw such men as Martin Ruter, who at age 16 had already had 1.5 years of preaching experience; Luman Andrus, age 23, who had preached since he was 18; and Elijah Hedding who at age 21 was “well gifted” and “ready equipped.” Each of these brethren would be admitted on trial at the conference that year.⁵⁰ The men were indeed young and “in the prime of life” with the average age of the 15 brethren who would be accepted on trial to preach throughout New York that year at only 26 years old.⁵¹

Examining the average ages of the 537 men who were admitted on trial in the New York Conference from 1801-1848 shows the extensive participation of youth in the ministry at this time (see figure 1). From 1801-1848, the average age of these preachers was only 25.79 and during the height of revivalism in New York (1815-1825) the average age was almost two years lower. In 18 of the 48 years examined, the average age was below 25, while 24 of those years averaged 25 and under, painting a clear picture of a church being greatly strengthened by young converts. This means that about half of all those becoming Methodist ministers during this era were youth. The youth were not just joining churches and sharing their feelings with their friends, but many of them were joining the ministry to share their feelings with the unconverted.

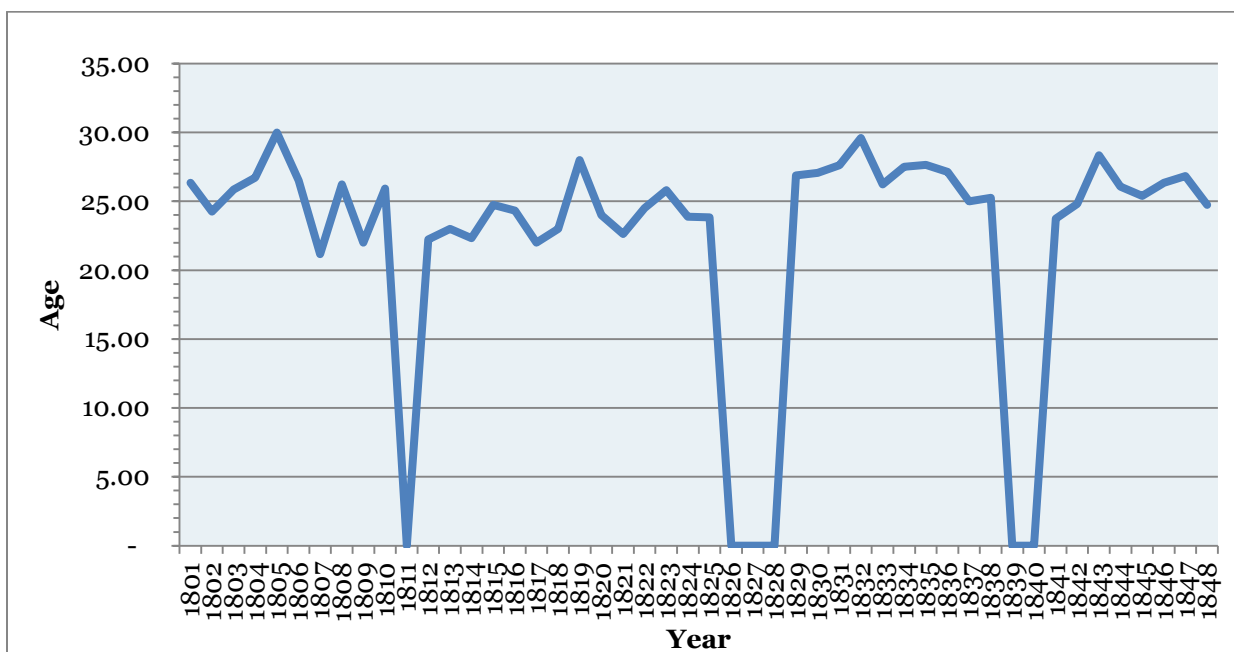
⁴⁹ Laban Clark as quoted in Wigger, *Taking Heaven by Storm*, 78. See also Clark, *Laban Clark*, 30.

⁵⁰ Journal of the New York Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church commencing 16 June 1801, 5–6, Methodist Library, Special Collections, Drew University, Madison, New Jersey.

⁵¹ The records for the New York Conference only mention men, but there were many successful female preachers as well during this time such as Nancy Towle, Jarena Lee, and others. See Catherine A. Brekus, *Strangers & Pilgrims: Female Preaching in America, 1740-1845*, Gender and American Culture (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1998).

This also shows the necessary role that young people played in the Methodist church. Each year, about half of their new ministers came from the ranks of the young and in some years this percentage was much greater. For example for the years 1817 and 1818, the average age of those being admitted on trial was 22.64 and youth accounted for every single individual admitted on trial during those years. Without this steady influx of every single individual admitted on trial during those years. Without this steady influx of new youth ministers, the Methodist growth could not have occurred at the same rate in which it did. The church must have known the importance of this group, as evidenced by their great efforts to strengthen the young. Many of the hundreds of thousands who joined the church during this time were joining at the hands of the youth.

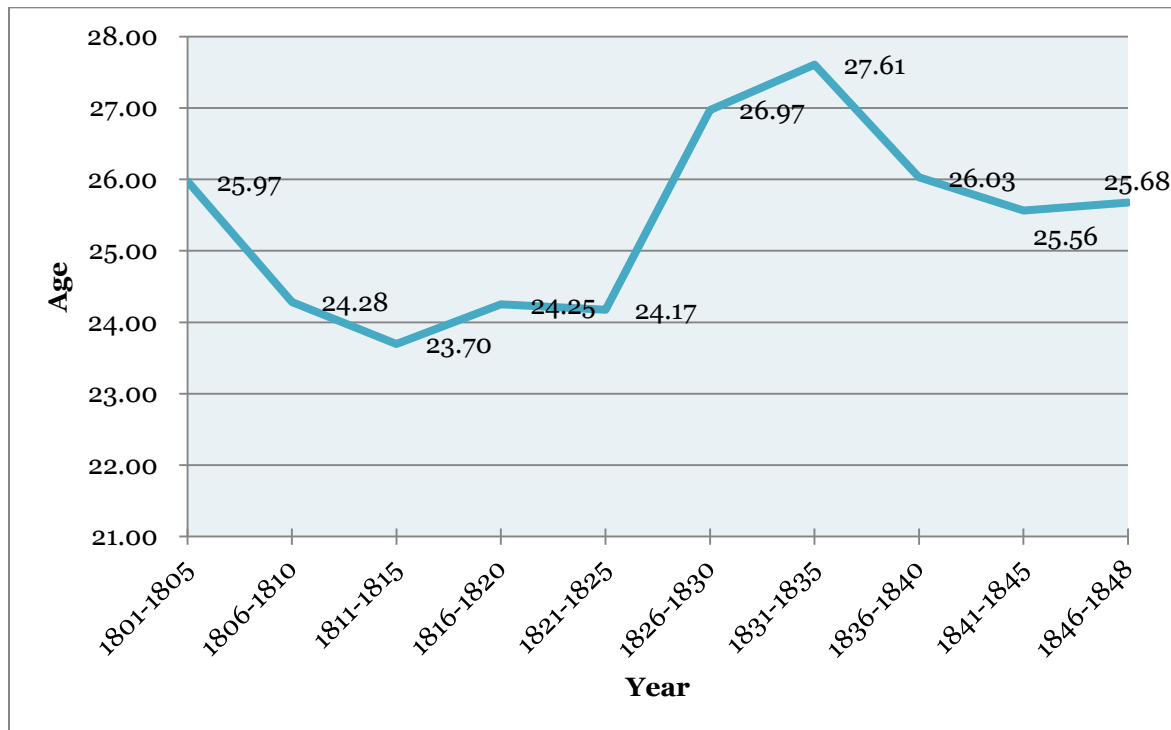
Fig. 1: Average Age of those Admitted Each Year from 1801-1848⁵²



⁵² All the average ages are calculated from only those known ages during each year. While there are some years that don't mention ages of some those admitted, this does not reflect in the calculation of average ages. No or very limited age data was given for the years 1811, 1826, 1827, 1828, 1839, and 1840.

By charting the average ages of those admitted during each five year period, we see a distinct pattern that follows the general periods of revival activity (see figure 2). As figure 2 shows, even at the start of the Second Great Awakening there were a significant number of youth who sought for the ministry. This suggests that Methodists looked to the young to lead even before they began to join the church in droves because of revivals. These patterns follow ministers' accounts of revival activity during these years. If accounts of widespread youth involvement at revivals are correct then statistically speaking, the age of those applying to be admitted should drop as more youth join the churches. If the revival accounts are exaggerated or incorrect, the age over time should theoretically remain fairly constant. As figure 2 shows, the average age of those admitted drops significantly throughout the first quarter of the nineteenth century, consistent with revival accounts. As more youth received conversion experiences and joined themselves to the Methodists, the pool for potential circuit riders grew larger. The young people who experienced conversion during the first phase of revivals would have most likely sought to be admitted on trial during the years from 1805-1815 as the graph suggests. For example, the average age of those admitted in 1807 was only 21.17, making a strong case that these individuals were the fruits of the early revivals.

Fig. 2: Average Age of those Admitted For Each Five Year Period from 1801-1848



The conference journals also describe the ages and status of those who were not accepted on trial, showing how the church felt about the strength of young preachers. While the specific reasons for rejection are not listed in the records, the average age of the men turned away from the ministry from 1820-1824 was 34, almost ten years older than those accepted, with only 2 of these 8 men being in their twenties. It is likely that age played a significant role in whether or not an individual was accepted on trial. Whether the church wanted preachers who had the potential to be in the ministry longer, whether they were concerned about the family responsibilities that these older men would have that might distract from their work, or whether they were worried about the physical hardships that accompanied circuit riding, the Methodists seemed to favor the youth.

Another important way to understand this data is by studying the age spread of those accepted during this time. Figure 3 shows the age breakdown of those accepted on

trial for each five year period during the first half of the nineteenth century. Figure 4 isolates just the percentage of those admitted on trial age 25 and under for each five year period to show how the pattern of youth involvement changed over the years. By comparing this data to revival accounts and seeing coinciding patterns over time, it can also help validate the claims of preachers that youth were as heavily involved in the work as they claimed.

This breakdown makes it abundantly clear that the most qualified candidates coming out of the ranks of the church were the youth. With their limited resources, the Methodist church only employed those whom they thought would be most successful and productive in bringing people to the church. In every five year period, young people were the largest age group that was being admitted into the ministry, and during some years they were the great majority. From 1816-1820, 74% or about 3 in every 4 new preachers were youth followed by 66% or 2 of every 3 from 1821-1825. These large numbers of new young preachers likely come from a larger population of faithful youth, rather than a stagnant or diminishing one.⁵³ Furthermore, the young circuit riders must have been working effectively, for the church recruited them heavily throughout the entire first half of the nineteenth century.

⁵³ This data also suggests that young people were not just leaving the church shortly after conversion but continued to be faithful. If large proportions of the youth joined the churches, then fell away soon afterward, these individuals would obviously not be joining the ministry. The fact that a greater percentage of those who are joining the ministry during the first half of the nineteenth century are youth, suggests that there are a greater percentage of the greater population who are eligible for this task.

Fig. 3: Age Breakdown of Those Accepted on Trial For Each Five Year Period from 1801-1848

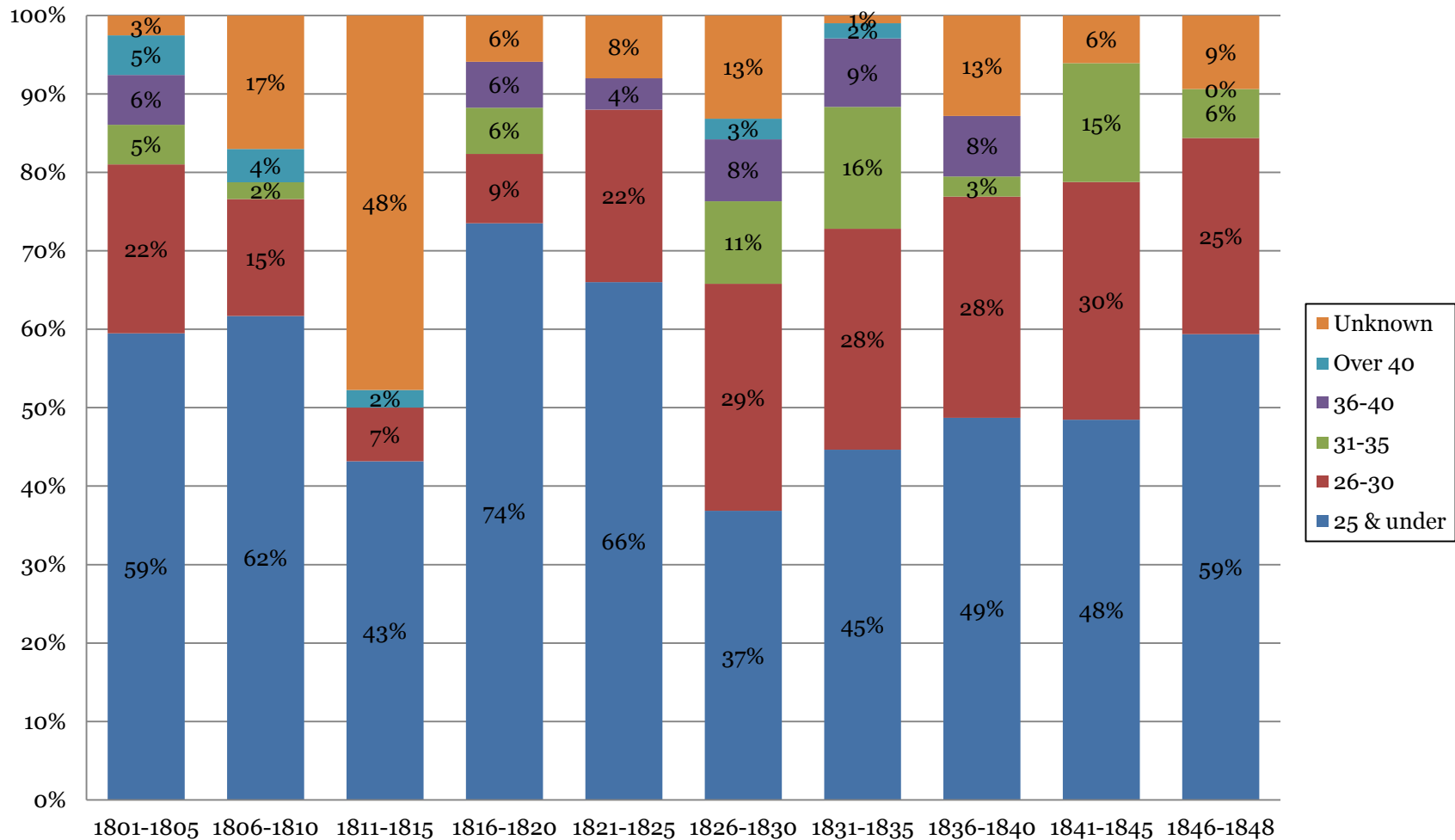
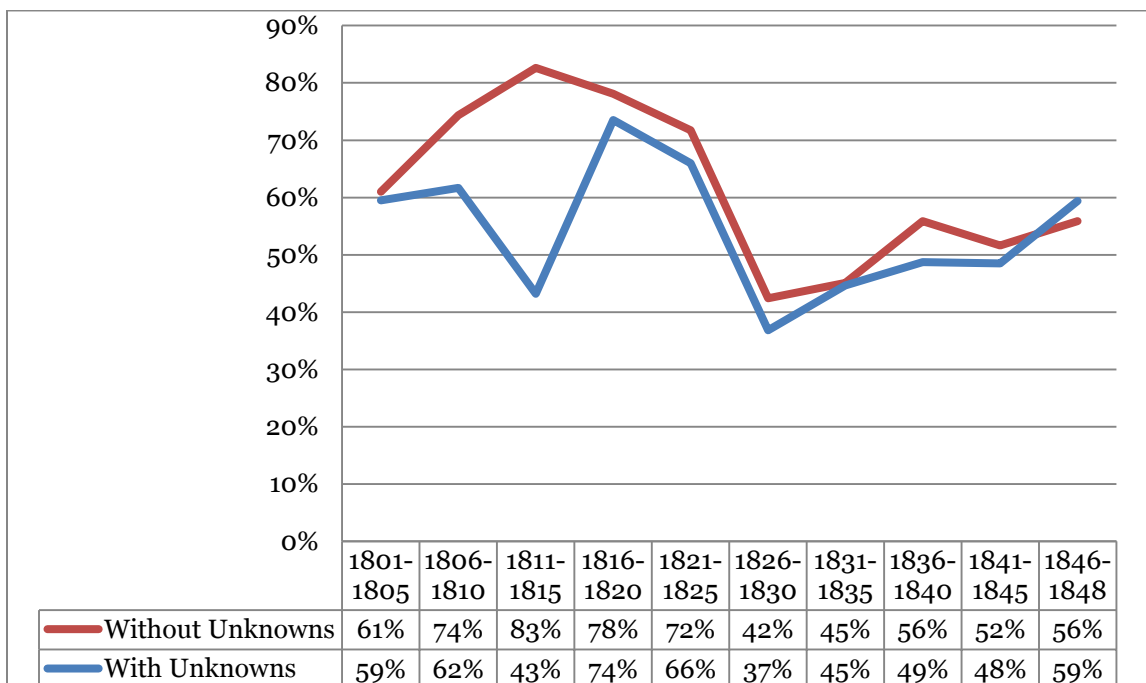


Fig. 4: Percentage of Those Admitted on Trial, Age 25 and Under, For Each Five Year Period⁵⁴



This information is also important in understanding conversion patterns. All of those individuals accepted on trial must have experienced conversion before they were admitted, for “their conversions formed a base of experience without which no Methodist could hope to obtain a public platform.”⁵⁵ Thus, as indicated in figure 3, the largest segment of newly accepted ministers experienced conversion as youth. Figure 5, shows that over the entire span of the Second Great Awakening, at least 53% of those recorded were converted and began preaching around the circuits before they were 25.

⁵⁴ The percentages of youth admitted on trial can be calculated two ways. By *including* those whose ages are unknown into the calculations, the data presents a more conservative estimate of youth involvement, but this leads to a skewed representation. For example, in the case of 1811-1815, 48% of those admitted have unknown ages, thus according to the graph it falsely indicates there was a drop in the number of youth admitted, when in reality, it was a lack of adequate record keeping. By *excluding* the unknowns, the pattern is more apparent, and it is clear that there were likely a greater percentage of youth admitted during these years than the others. Figure 4 shows both sets of data.

⁵⁵ Wigger, *Taking Heaven by Storm*, 53.

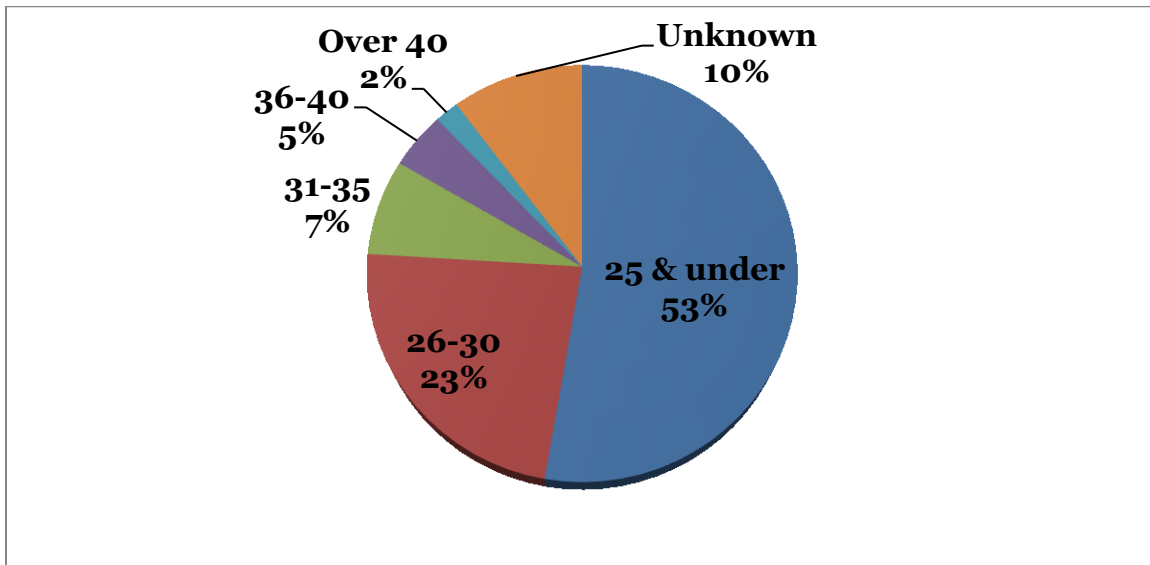
The numbers of youth converts that entered the clergy are likely much higher than this 53%. Wigger explains that among Methodist itinerants, “most experienced conversion at a relatively young age, often in dramatic fashion, and subsequently began preaching early in adult life.”⁵⁶ As such, many of those who joined the ministry after age 25 likely experienced conversion in their youth as well. A few examples from the conference journals prove this point. In 1838, the record indicates that John Armstrong of the “Haerlem Mission” was admitted after being a member of the church for 10 years.⁵⁷ Another brother, Samuel Meredith, was 28 at his time of admittance, but was converted when he was 17.⁵⁸ It is likely that the vast majority of the Methodist itinerants were first influenced and accepted religion as young people. This would provide a large percentage of the Methodist clergy with a unique knowledge and perspective that would allow them to better serve and target young people. They knew what it was like as youth to strive for conversion experiences and receive a forgiveness of sins. They knew which sermon or conversation topics had the greatest effect upon their own hearts as young people and could use those accordingly. Above all, they had a special interest in helping the young find religion, for their lives had been changed by their discoveries as young men.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Journal of the New York Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church commencing 16 May 1838, 269, Methodist Library, Special Collections, Drew University, Madison, New Jersey.

⁵⁸ Journal of the New York Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church commencing 14 June 1848, 28, Methodist Library, Special Collections, Drew University, Madison, New Jersey.

Fig. 5: Overall Age Breakdown of Those Accepted on Trial from 1801-1848



These records from the Methodist Episcopal Church are a previously unutilized asset that provides important insights into the significant impact that youth had upon the church, and consequently the lives of hundreds of thousands of people during the Second Great Awakening. While the records listed here are specific to the Methodists, this pattern of youth clergy was not unique to their denomination. Other denominations relied upon young people to carry the burden of the ministry as well. The Presbyterian publication *Utica Christian Magazine* describes a similar pattern: “young men of hopeful piety, and of promising talents, are taken from those occupations, to which their poverty hath confined them, and are educated for more extensive usefulness in the church, as gospel ministers; that associations of young people are formed, for the laudable purpose of sending the gospel to those [in need].”⁵⁹ Thus the pattern of instruction and conversion during this time was likely less of older adults telling the young how they should behave or what they should believe. Rather it was more of young ministers sharing with the

⁵⁹ Jacob J. Janeway, “Report of the General Assembly,” *Utica Christian Magazine* 1, no. 1 (July 1813): 35.

rising generations how they had found religion in their youth and the significant impacts it had made in their lives. In short, youth made up a crucial piece in the entire evangelical puzzle of the nineteenth century.

Evangelizing the Nation

In his assessment of Methodism, John Wigger describes the progress of the Methodist church and makes the simple conclusion that “Methodism’s numerical growth alone makes it credible.”⁶⁰ This same argument can be said of youth. Their numerical participation and impact upon the revivals of the Second Great Awakening cannot be ignored. As the data shows, discounting the youth would be disregarding the largest segment of the population involved in the revivals.

The revival records compiled by Joshua Bradley show a group of youth that participated in revivals in huge numbers across New England, inspiring thousands of others to seek conversion. While Bradley’s records are largely anecdotal, other more numerically-based records supplement their claims. The annual journals of the New York Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church provide crucial data in understanding the consistent and continual role of young people in both shaping and being shaped by the church. As the church focused their efforts on saving and retaining the young, thousands of young people were brought into the fold. From these groups came the rising generation of preachers who would account for the vast majority of Methodist preachers over the next half century.

The young people of the nineteenth century were a faithful, committed group whose influence upon the shaping of the Second Great Awakening and American culture

⁶⁰ Wigger, *Taking Heaven by Storm*, 190.

lasted throughout the nineteenth century. This influence was a result of the fact that they were “a cadre of zealous young preachers willing, at least for a time, to sacrifice all in their quest to evangelize the nation.”⁶¹ As a result of this sacrifice, they “forever changed the appearance and tone of American religion.”⁶²

⁶¹ Ibid., 68.

⁶² Ibid., 48.

Conclusion

The revivals of the early nineteenth century throughout New York and New England were a period of intense spiritual growth and widespread devotion to evangelical churches. This great awakening inspired not only religious involvement, but widespread economic and social reform, driven by patriotic and Christian principles of freedom, equality, and unification.¹ At the center of this spiritual movement were the youth. Like young Samuel from the biblical account, young people responded to the call for religious involvement by crying out “Speak, Lord; for thy servant[s] heareth” (1 Samuel 3:9).

Records indicate that these religious desires began at the feet of devout parents who sought to create households of faith. Doctrinal teachings and examples from their parents about such things as the importance of the Bible and the necessity to prepare for death created within the youth a desire to turn toward religious matters. As they saw their parents engage in personal and family prayer, young people began that habit themselves. These feelings that youth began to develop were strengthened further by religious meetings that were being held in their homes and inspired them to take the initial steps to personal religious devotion.

After being prepared and feeling a strong desire for religious understanding and peace, young people sought personal conversion experiences as a means of devoting themselves to God. Powerful feelings of guilt for their sins and fear of premature death, spawned by teachings of both home and church, caused young people to seek for initial

¹ Michael Barkun, *Crucible of the Millennium: The Burned Over District of New York in the 1840s* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1986); and Timothy L. Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform: American Protestantism on the Eve of the Civil War* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1980); Cope, “In Some Places A Few Drops,” 37; Cross, *The Burned-Over District*; Johnson, “Democracy, Patriarchy, and American Revivals, 1780-1830”; Johnson, *A Shopkeeper’s Millennium*; Johnson, *Islands of Holiness*; Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*.

relief through spiritual rebirth. While all conversion experiences came as a result of heartfelt prayers for relief and salvation, hundreds of conversion accounts express how they manifest themselves in various ways. Tears, fainting, overwhelming feelings of peace, impressions, and even visions were commonplace and accompanied conversion. These unforgettable manifestations of forgiveness were the turning point in a life-long struggle to overcome sin and live lives of piety and righteousness.

Once conversion occurred, it became the challenge of both the individuals and the church to maintain those commitments of personal devotion and to strengthen the newly converted. Churches of all denominational affiliations recognized the incredible potential of these young, fervent converts and went to extensive measures to keep them in the fold. Their primary tactics for this purpose were the use of revival meetings and personal clergy-youth relationships. By drawing thousands of young people to revival meetings, church leaders were able to initiate countless conversions, strengthen young converts, and use these converts as a tool for spreading the message. Preachers then developed personal relationships with the newly converted as a means of addressing their specific needs and helping with their distinct weaknesses. These tactics were mirrored by the young. Like the church, the youth organized large, revival-like meetings as a means of continuing in righteousness and inviting their peers to experience conversion. Furthermore, the young were known for their zealous, personal invitations to other youth, family members, and even adults as they excitedly shared the spiritual experiences they had just felt. In this regard, they were a “great instrument in awakening many.”²

These records of youth involvement in revivalism are commonplace and powerful. Early revival accounts gathered from thousands of individuals indicate that

² Bradley, *Accounts of Revivals*, 189.

heavy youth involvement was not an isolated event, but was widespread throughout the entire New York and New England region. Young people influenced the beginning of, the power of, and the spread of revivals throughout the first half of the nineteenth century because of their personal commitment to religion. Furthermore, these converted youth were not just joining the churches in droves, but adding themselves to the clergy in large numbers as well. Methodist conference records from New York indicate that young people accounted for over half of all newly admitted clergy members for almost fifty years.

Building off of those who went before them, youth involvement in and impact on the revivals created a culture of religiosity that would last for generations. Historical records tell the story of young people who were committed to spiritual matters. They were eager to be obedient to parents. They were self-reflective and sought to overcome personal sins and weakness. They struggled for a lifetime to overcome desires of the flesh and commit their hearts fully to God. They felt they were those of whom Joel wrote that the Lord would “pour out [his] spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy...your young men shall see visions” (Joel 2:28). Their diaries, memoirs, and letters reveal young men and young women who wanted to be free from sin, who showed a deep respect and reverence for things divine. In short, they were “children of promise” (Galatians 4:28).

Typical and representative of the youth of his day, George Peck’s writings about his experience reveal both the spiritually mature commitment and the youthful innocence that characterized young people of the day. Describing the impact of his adult-like efforts at his first camp meeting as a teenage circuit rider, George wrote: “A great commotion

arose all over the camp. Seekers were invited into the altar, and the meeting continued all night. Many were happily converted to God...Powerful sermons characterized the occasion, and its influence upon the Church and the whole community was great and salutary.”

Then, almost as a reminder to his readers that he was still a teenager, he ends his account: “At the close of the meeting I went home and spent a few days with my friends.”³

³ Peck, *Life and Times*, 63–64.

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