THE EQUIP INSTITUTE Theme: Christian Heritage Topic: The Protestant Century (1800-1910)

3rd Semester / Fall 2024

Introduction

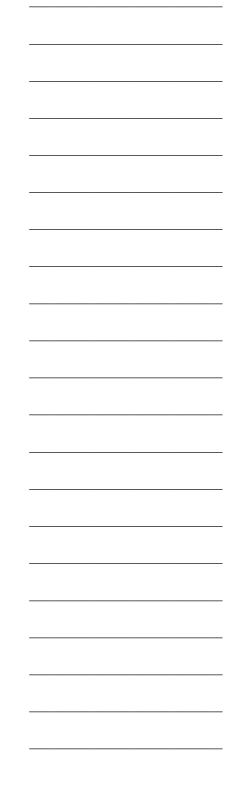
The Equip Institute exists to equip members of Taylors First Baptist Church to think rightly about God and His Word for the sake of living rightly before God in His world. The topic this week is the Protestant Century, which covers the years from roughly 1800-1910.

The Second Great Awakening

The Second Great Awakening was a series of revivals that occurred off and on during the first third of the 19th century. The earliest revivals were at Yale College in the late 1790s. **Timothy Dwight**, a grandson of Jonathan Edwards, preached on the need for revival during Yale's chapel services, leading to spiritual awakening. Dwight was a great opponent of Unitarianism. **Lyman Beecher** became the leading revival-minded pastor in the North, often wedding revival preaching with a commitment to social ministries. Beecher opposed alcohol consumption, child labor, and slavery.

A second outbreak of revival occurred at **Cane Ridge**, KY in 1801. As many as 20,000 people camped at Cane Ridge, where they listened to preaching from Presbyterian, Methodist, and Baptist speakers. The camp meetings were modeled after mass communion services in the Scottish Presbyterian tradition, but in America they became most popular among the Methodists. In the years after Cane Ridge, revival-friendly Protestants spread all over the "Old West" of KY, TN, and OH. Several new sects were also birthed out of the frontier revivals, including the Disciples of Christ, the Seventh-Day Adventists, the Shakers, and the Mormons. These groups competed and claimed they were either the true church or the tradition closest to the apostolic faith.

A third revival occurred in 1825 in Upstate NY under the preaching of **Charles Finney**, a converted lawyer. Finney adopted the practices of camp meeting Methodists and introduced them to East Coast Congregationalists and Presbyterians. His "new measures" included nightly revival meetings, public testimonies (both men and women), advertising, and the "anxious bench." During the





height of his revival ministry from 1825–1835, Finney popularized a view of salvation that combined semi-Pelagianism with an emphasis on personal conversion. He also adopted the belief that believers can experience a second baptism of the Holy Spirit and stop intentionally sinning, another Methodist idea. Finney was opposed by **Asahel Nettleton**, an older evangelist in New England who championed the traditional Calvinism of earlier revivalists like Edwards and Whitefield

The Second Great Awakening had tremendous influence on American Protestantism. As a general rule, revivalists emphasized methods and means far more than the leaders in the earlier revivals. Consistent Calvinism declined noticeably between about 1780 and 1820, with Arminianism and moderate forms of Calvinism becoming more acceptable. The South was thoroughly evangelized during this period by Baptists and Methodists. In 1730, the South had been the most unchurched part of America, but by 1830 it had become the Bible Belt. American Protestantism also became far more activist. Northern evangelicals especially formed denominational mission boards, founded parachurch Bible societies, frequently opposed liquor sale and consumption and slavery, often advocated for women's suffrage, and sent church planters to the South, Midwest, and Southwest.

Revival and Revolt

August 1857 was the start of the Panic of 1857. In September 1857, a NYC businessman named **Jeremiah Lanphier** began hosting an interdenominational lunchtime prayer meeting at a Dutch Reformed church. By the spring of 1858, thousands of similar groups had sprung up all over the country. The "**Layman's Revival**" (1857–1858) resulted in an estimated one million conversions and led to numeric growth in every major denomination. A similar revival occurred simultaneously in the UK, affecting Wales in particular. Unfortunately, the Layman's Revival didn't prevent the Civil War, which lasted from 1861–1865.

The Civil War not only divided the nation, but it also divided American believers. Between 1837 and 1846 the Presbyterians, Baptists, and Methodists all divided along northern-southern lines. In each case, slavery played a decisive role. The Civil War and especially Reconstruction hardened the regional animosity, even within denominations. Christians on both sides "baptized" their cause. Northern evangelicals tended to see the war as a

moral crusade against slavery. Southerners Christians tended to see the war as a defense of their more thoroughly evangelical society. **Abraham Lincoln**, whose own religious views were ambiguous, weighed in with his Second Inaugural Address, which suggested God might be on neither side and argued for national reconciliation. More positively, armies on both sides experienced revivals among the ranks.

The Evangelical Quilt

By the mid-19th century, the default civil religion in America was evangelical Protestantism. Evangelicalism was not so much a unified movement as it was a patchwork quilt of various groups that all emphasized biblical authority, the importance of conversion, and religious activism such as evangelism and mercy ministries. The intellectual center was Princeton Seminary, where **Charles Hodge** and **B.B. Warfield** championed biblical inerrancy and traditional Calvinism. A Southern Baptist version of the Princeton tradition was perpetuated at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, where the founding president, **James P. Boyce**, had studied with Hodge at Princeton.

The Holiness movements comprised a second patch on the evangelical quilt. Many of the Wesleyan groups, especially the Nazarenes, affirmed "Christian Perfection." The leading perfectionists were Phoebe Palmer, Hannah Whitall Smith, and William Boardman. Charles Finney, though not officially a Wesleyan, helped popularize this view. Some moderate Calvinists rejected the Wesleyan position and argued instead for gradual fillings of the Holy Spirit that gave temporary victory over besetting sins, furthered one's sanctification, and helped believers live the "victorious life" or "higher life." The Keswick view, named for a resort village in England, was popularized by F.B. Meyer, D.L. Moody, and R.A. Torrey.

A third influential movement was **premillennialism**, the idea that Christ would return to earth and physically reign over a kingdom that lasts one thousand years. This view had been advocated by some Puritans, but it became extremely popular among evangelicals after the Civil War. A new form of premillennialism called **dispensationalism** proved especially popular. Dispensationalists argued for a sharp continuity between the Israel and the Church and claimed the latter would be secretly raptured prior to a Great Tribulation that would last seven years before Christ

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returned to inaugurate the millennium. Dispensationalism was popularized through prophecy conferences and books, especially **Cyrus Scofield**'s *Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth* and his *Scofield Reference Bible*. Premillennialism, and especially Dispensationalism, motivated many Americans to enter the foreign mission field and "rescue the perishing" before Jesus returns.

Protestant Modernism

Some Protestants moved in a different direction after the Civil War. Younger scholars studied in Germany, where they embraced the historical critical method of interpretation. This approach emphasized the importance of the history "behind" the biblical text, often leading to interpretations that contradicted the Bible. **Charles Darwin** wrote *Origin of Species* (1859), challenging the biblical understanding of human origins. Early on, these "modernists" were still fairly evangelical when it came to sin and salvation, but by the turn of the 20th century many were downplaying the exclusivity of Christ and miracles like the virgin birth and the resurrection. The leading modernist schools were the University of Chicago and Union Theological Seminary in NY.

The most famous early modernists were **Crawford Toy** and **Charles Briggs**. Toy was an OT professor at Southern Seminary who embraced an evolutionary reading of Genesis 1–11 and argued there were historical errors in the biblical narratives. In 1879, he was forced to resign from Southern over his views. His fiancé also broke off their engagement because of Toy's views; her name was Lottie Moon. Toy took a post at Harvard Divinity School, where he became a Unitarian. Briggs, who was also an OT scholar, was a Presbyterian on the faculty of Union Theological Seminary. In 1892, Briggs was excommunicated from the Presbyterian Church for arguing against inerrancy, denying Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, arguing for two authors of Isaiah, and downplaying the exclusivity of Christ.

In 1893, Chicago hosted a World's Parliament of Religions. Most attendees were Protestant modernists. They typically embraced an evolutionary view of religion, arguing that Christianity was the most advanced pathway to God, but allowing that there might be other valid ways to God. In addition to Protestant groups, some heretical sects were represented. Eastern religions were also represented. In fact, some observers argued that the

Hindu teacher Swami Vivekananda was the most impressive speaker on the program. While most denominations were represented at the World Parliament, Southern Baptists and Roman Catholics refused to participate. Most scholars consider the World Parliament to mark the beginning of the interfaith dialog movement.

Foreign Missions

Throughout the 19th century, Protestant missionaries spread to Asia, Africa, and South America. By far, the largest mission field was China. Some missionaries were part of denominational mission boards, especially Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians. Many missionaries were single women, including **Lottie Moon**, who served as a Southern Baptist missionary in China from 1873–1912. After the Civil War, a growing number of missionaries raised their own support and served through interdenominational "faith missions." The most famous of these organizations was China Inland Mission, founded in 1865 by **Hudson Taylor**. Many nondenominational missionaries were premillennialists who hoped that Jesus would return when all nations were evangelized.

In 1886, the Presbyterian pastor **A.T. Pierson** and D.L. Moody helped launch the **Student Volunteer Movement** (SVM). The SVM was committed to mobilizing recent college graduates for "the evangelization of the world in this generation." Over 4000 young people became foreign missionaries in the next two decades, many of them serving through faith missions. The SVM accounted for just over half of the American missionaries who were recruited during this time. The key leader of the SVM was **John R. Mott**, a YMCA executive who also founded the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF) in 1895. The WSCF united Christian collegians in North America and Europe for the purpose of world missions.

In 1910, a **World Missionary Conference** was held in Edinburgh, Scotland. Over 1200 Protestant missions leaders convened, almost all of them from Europe and North America. Mott served as chairman of the conference. The conference took ownership of the SVM's agenda, sought to unite diverse Protestants for the purpose of missions, and sponsored books related to evangelism, missions strategy, social ministries, and Christian cooperation. Historians argue the World Missionary Conference represented the culmination of the 19th-century missionary movement and the birth of the

20th-century ecumenical movement. Unfortunately, the ecumenical movement almost immediately focused on cooperation and social ministries and downplayed evangelism and church planting. Though intended for missions, it became the seedbed for much of 20th-century Protestant liberalism.