



Robert W. Caldwell III (PhD, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School) is associate professor of church history at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. He is the author of *Communion in the Spirit: The Holy Spirit as the Bond of Union in the Theology of Jonathan Edwards* and co-author of *The Trinitarian Theology of Jonathan Edwards: Text, Context and Application*.

Tracing the Distinct Theologies of the Great Awakening Revivalists

Theologies of the American Revivalists is a historical theological look at the fascinating story of American revival theology between 1740 and 1840. In the book, Robert W. Caldwell III considers the theologies of the important figures and movements of the period, tracing the developments and disagreements of revivalist thinking in one insightful narrative that also challenges our understanding of Christian conversion today. In the following interview, Caldwell expands on the topic of his book and the thinking behind this unique angle on the First and Second Great Awakenings.

What drew you to write a book on the topic of American revival theologies during the Great Awakenings?

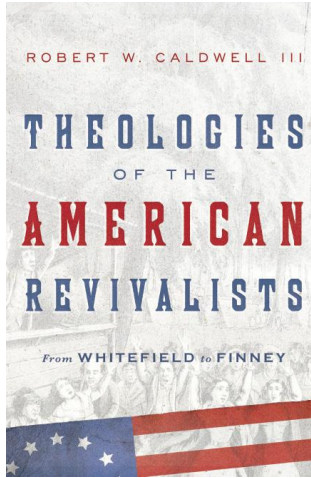
Robert W. Caldwell III: Ever since my seminary days, I have been fascinated at the interplay between theology and Christian experience or spirituality, most specifically related to Christian conversion. As a scholar working on the First and Second Great Awakenings, I found that many revivalists had a well-developed theology that combined soteriology (doctrine of salvation) with insights related to both how Christian conversion is supposed to be experienced and how the gospel is to be proclaimed. I found that from 1740 to 1840 there was a rich genre of literature that combined these three elements, which collectively I call “revival theology.”

What makes your book distinctive among others that consider the history of theology in America?

Caldwell: *Theologies of the American Revivalists* argues that American revivalists from the First and Second Great Awakenings (1740–1840) thought, preached, and wrote extensively on what I call “revival theology,” which I define as the three-fold combination of Protestant soteriology, conversion expectations, and preaching practices during a revival. There have been other works that examined the individual pieces of this study (history of American theology, studies on revival, conversion, and preaching), but to my knowledge no work has tried to unite these in one historical theological narrative. The book identifies, explores, and charts the historical theological developments of the various different schools of revival theology of the period, with specific attention given to the major controversies and writers in that century.

What are some of the different schools of revival that you consider in the book?

Caldwell: The book notes how the original Pietistic Calvinism of First Great Awakening Puritanism divided out into Reformed, Edwardsean, Arminian, and Radical streams. It also highlights forgotten schools of revival theology. Today, many evangelicals associate revivals



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Available April 2017

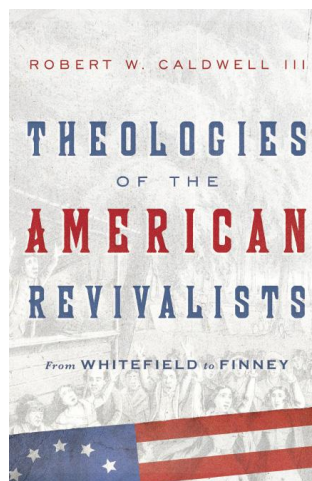
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with Arminianism and/or Pentecostalism, and some think of it as a Pelagian method for mass evangelism. My book counters this assumption and significantly expands it by exploring the forgotten schools of revival theology from a period when serious evangelical theologians and revivalists wrote on the topic – including the Edwardsean theological tradition, the Radical revival tradition, and the Biblicist antiemotional tradition of the Campbellites.

What do you hope readers will take away from this book?

Caldwell: The evangelical church today has not given much theological reflection on the nature of Christian conversion and revival. Much of our understanding of these topics is practically oriented and often pretheological. In this book, I desire to present the various stories of our evangelical forefathers who wrote deeply theological sermons and treatises on revival theology. My hope is that evangelicals today will be both informed and challenged by the various schools of thought presented in the book.



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“A sophisticated and thought-provoking analysis of revivalist theology”

“Revival—or even more, the longing for revival—has been central throughout American Christian history. But what is meant by *revival*? Robert Caldwell’s well-researched and exceedingly evenhanded book explains clearly what leaders of the American First and Second Great Awakenings taught concerning conversion, free will, the Holy Spirit, and how to interpret Scripture. He also explores with rare sensitivity what they assumed in their revival theologies. The result is a book rich in historical insight but also practical in guiding believers today in thinking about this vitally important matter.”

— Mark Noll, author of *The Rise of Evangelicalism*

“Since it entered the English language in 1820, the term *revivalist* has come to be used generically. Like a one-size-fits-all shoe, the designation has been deemed equally applicable to every evangelistic preacher from Whitefield to Moody, from Edwards to Graham. But these awakeners were not just so many duplicates. The strength of Robert Caldwell’s *Theologies of the American Revivalists* is that it helps us see that there were distinguishable ideas of Christian revival in circulation prior to the Great Awakening, that the Great Awakening immediately spawned competing theologies of revival, and that the early nineteenth century’s Second Awakening spawned still more. This is now the go-to volume for those wanting to trace these developments and understand their bearing on our time.”

— Kenneth Stewart, professor of theological studies, Covenant College, Lookout Mountain, GA, author of *Ten Myths About Calvinism*

“Robert Caldwell offers a sophisticated and thought-provoking analysis of revivalist theology, rooted in the peculiarities of Jonathan Edwards’s Reformed and evangelical theology, but developing and bearing fruit in ways that at times were flatly contradictory to Reformed doctrine. Linking Finney to post-Edwardsean theologians like Hopkins, Caldwell’s monograph will stimulate scholarly discussion on a topic important both for the history of theology and the practice of the modern church.”

— Joel R. Beeke, president, Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids

“How can we explain the transformation of American revivalism between Edwards and Finney? Why did Americans move from eighteenth-century convictions about the bondage of the will to nineteenth-century confidence in the will’s freedom? What drove the transformation of American theology from systematic constructs to common-sense

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ENDORSEMENTS

approaches? Caldwell's study provides new answers to these important questions. It is an immensely helpful work of historical theology that is well researched and clearly written. Recommended for all students of American religion and theology."

— **Gerald McDermott, Beeson Divinity School, author of *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards***

"*Theologies of the American Revivalists* should be a valuable resource for scholars, evangelists, and laypersons. It provides clear accounts of the various understandings of evangelical conversion from the days when proponents of revival thought carefully about and debated such matters."

— **George M. Marsden, author of *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* and *C. S. Lewis's Mere Christianity***

"Conversion experiences and narratives have long been central to evangelical identity, but the doctrines undergirding them are seldom understood with much clarity by their subjects, let alone most others. In this evenhanded history of theologies of revival from the time of George Whitefield to that of Charles Grandison Finney, Robert Caldwell helps us out. He supplies what we need to understand our own experiences, those of converts in churches with different doctrinal perspectives, and the engine of the evangelical movement itself. Everyone interested in American church history, evangelicalism, or the history of revival and evangelistic methods will want to read this reliable, comprehensive, and fair-minded book."

— **Douglas A. Sweeney, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School**

"Robert W. Caldwell's *Theologies of the American Revivalists* offers an illuminating and authoritative review of how leading American revivalists, from Jonathan Edwards to Charles Finney, grappled with issues such as the nature of gospel preaching, conversion, and sanctification. I recommend it highly."

— **Thomas S. Kidd, distinguished professor of history, Baylor University**

"In this one volume, Robert Caldwell has carefully traced the fascinating story of revival through an event-filled century of change. Dependent on primary sources and freshly locating figures from Fuller to Finney, this is important theology presented by an evenhanded guide."

— **Mark Dever, pastor of Capitol Hill Baptist Church, president of 9Marks.org**