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AN EXAMINATION OF RICHARD OWEN ROBERTS'S  
THEOLOGY OF REVIVAL

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A Dissertation  
Presented to  
the Faculty of  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Philosophy

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by  
David Rocky Coleman  
December 2017

**APPROVAL SHEET**

AN EXAMINATION OF RICHARD OWEN ROBERTS'S  
THEOLOGY OF REVIVAL

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For Sarah,

you have encouraged and challenged me to strive  
for more than I could have ever imagined.

I am always humbled by your constant  
love and support.

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## PREFACE

The process of writing a dissertation has taught me far more than simply what is found in the contents that follow. One of the benefits of writing on an itinerant preacher who teaches on a topic that one is passionate about is that the researcher gets to study, watch, and listen to a lot of his sermons. During this process, not only did I become sufficiently prepared for this project, but my spiritual life was encouraged, challenged, and renewed. This experience, coupled with the learning opportunities provided to me as a doctoral student at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, has brought lasting value to my spiritual life, as it has rooted me more firmly in God's Word.

While completing this project, I received a tremendous amount of encouragement, support, and prayer from Christ's body. I am particularly grateful to my church family at Ninth and O Baptist Church in Louisville, Kentucky. More specifically, I am thankful for the church members of the Bible Fellowship Group that I teach, as their unrelenting prayers, frequent words of encouragement, and continual support made this challenging endeavor less stressful. I also owe my gratitude to several professors at Southern Seminary for their guidance, as well as the opportunity to serve them as their Garrett Fellow—thank you, Dr. Timothy Beougher, Dr. David Sills, and Dr. Jeffrey Walters, for the privilege and honor of working with you over the last several years. Additionally, I am grateful to my supervisor in this project, Dr. Adam Greenway, and my committee members, Dr. Timothy Beougher and Dr. Donald Whitney, for their encouragement and direction throughout this entire writing process.

In addition to those listed above, this project would not have seen fruition without the cooperation of one individual—thank you, Mr. Richard Owen Roberts, for your openness, vulnerability, generosity, and hospitality. You were more than

accommodating and generous with your time and correspondence. Thank you for being open about your life, discussing your many opportunities and challenges, and continually seeking to be a Christ-like example for others to follow. It should be noted that any mistakes that might be found in the reporting of your life are certainly my own.

Finally, this dissertation would not have been possible without the support and encouragement of my wife, Sarah. Thank you for enduring my self-enforced deadlines and long periods of time at the computer. I am also appreciative to our four children: Caleb, Cade, Eliana, and Crosby—you have all been patient beyond your years. Lastly, I am thankful to God for his grace in directing me to this task—to him be the glory.

David Rocky Coleman

Louisville, Kentucky

December 2017

# CHAPTER 1

## REVIVAL AND THE CHURCH

### Introduction

In his class on revival and spiritual awakening, Timothy Beougher often shares the anecdote of a person driving down the road and passing a church sign that reads, “Revival on Sunday!” Further down the road, the driver sees another sign that states, “Revival: Every day but Sunday.” Beougher typically ends by stating that if revival is used simply to define a series of meetings then one could say, “We had a revival, but no one was revived.”<sup>1</sup> In many ways, this anecdote illustrates the confusion and misunderstanding of the term *revival* in the church today. Is revival really something that can be scheduled? When these churches are seeking revival do they have a good understanding of what they are pursuing? The answers to these questions often depend on whom one asks. Into this confusion enters a great number of books by authors seeking to guide readers towards true revival, yet in many ways these works simply add to the confusion, or simply present a poor understanding of the topic.<sup>2</sup> In contrast to those who may confuse the topic of revival are many authors who seek to present revival in its true

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<sup>1</sup>I have heard Timothy Beougher share this illustration several times in the classroom, and it can be accessed online at “Definition of Revival/Spiritual Awakening,” Principles of Spiritual Awakening: Course 32300WW, The Southern Baptist Theology Seminary, accessed August 22, 2016, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?list=PLCD3ubY2TVa01dwK-77LjYRe2CcF-bt3k&v=OC1\\_ZpomFtA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?list=PLCD3ubY2TVa01dwK-77LjYRe2CcF-bt3k&v=OC1_ZpomFtA) .

<sup>2</sup>A historical example would be Charles Finney, *Lectures on Revival* (1835; repr., Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1988). Other would include James Burns, *Revivals: Their Laws and Leaders* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1960); and Leonard Ravenhill, *America Is Too Young to Die: A Call to Revival* (Grand Rapids: Bethany House Publishers, 1979). Other recent works on revival are less helpful for gaining an adequate understanding of the topic. See Bill Bright, *The Coming Revival: America’s Call to Fast, Pray, and “Seek God’s Face”* (Orlando, FL: New Life Publications, 1995); Jimmy Davis, *Revival Sermons: Give Me that Old Time Religion* (Seattle: Amazon Digital Services, 2015), Kindle; Deb Wilson, *Revival: The 21 Day Challenge, Rekindle Your Passion for God* (Seattle: Amazon Digital Services, 2016), Kindle; and Christina Yarbrough, *Revival: Be a Fire Starter: A Month-Long Journey* (North Charleston, SC: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2016).

and biblical sense. Historically, Jonathan Edwards is seen as one of the primary writers in this area, and he made significant impact on the First Great Awakening through his preaching and writing on the topic of revival.<sup>3</sup> More recently authors such as Robert Coleman, Walter Kaiser, Iain Murray, J. Edwin Orr, and Martyn Lloyd-Jones have sought to follow Edwards's lead in defining biblical revival.<sup>4</sup> While there are similarities in how these men define and promote revival, there are still many conflicting opinions, ideas, and practices that muddle the evangelical understanding and use of the term.

### Thesis

Working to correct this confusion is one man who has spent his life seeking to teach the church and lead people to a proper understanding of revival—Richard Owen Roberts. While Roberts is not a widely-known figure among contemporary evangelicals, those who do know him regard him as one of the leading authorities and experts on the topic of revival.<sup>5</sup> His life and ministry have sought to bring clarity to this topic and to

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<sup>3</sup>Jonathan Edwards, *Jonathan Edwards on Revival* (1965; repr., Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1995).

<sup>4</sup>Robert Coleman, *The Coming World Revival: Your Part in God's Plan to Reach the World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1995); Walter Kaiser, *Revive Us Again: Biblical Insights for Encouraging Spiritual Renewal* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999); Iain Murray, *Revival & Revivalism: The Making and Marring of American Evangelicalism 1750-1858* (1994; repr., Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2009); J. Edwin Orr, *A Call for the Re-study of Revival and Revivalism* (Oxford: Oxford Association for Research in Revival or Evangelical Awakening, 1981); and Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Revival* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1987).

<sup>5</sup>A variety of sources when considered together support this claim. Henry Blackaby discusses his lengthy relationship with Roberts in a video clip. He states that in his opinion Roberts is the premier spokesman for revival in our day. See Henry Blackaby, "Dr. Henry Blackaby Endorses Richard Owen Roberts," College of Revival, last modified 2015, assessed May 24, 2017, <http://www.collegeofrevival.org/dr-henry-blackaby-endorses-richard-owen-roberts/>. Also, in a review of one of Roberts's books, Jim Elliff states that Roberts is well-known in the area of historical revivals. See Jim Elliff, review of *Scotland Saw His Glory*, ed. Richard Owen Roberts, *Christian Communicators Worldwide* (1999), accessed September 22, 2016, <http://www.ccwtoday.org/article/review-of-scotland-saw-his-glory-edited-by-richard-owen-roberts/>. Additionally, Roberts is regarded as a leading expert in the field of revival by the online magazine *Prayer Connect*. See "International Awakening Revival Institute Launches," *Prayer Connect*, last modified 2013, accessed August 22, 2016, <http://www.prayerconnect.net/news/prayer-connect-news/institute-launch>. Beyond printed material, many other sources demonstrate Roberts's extensive knowledge of revival. For instance, one of Roberts's books, *Revival Literature: An Annotated Bibliography with Biographical and Historical Notices* (Wheaton, IL: Richard Owen Roberts Pub., 1987) compiles almost 6,000 sources on the topic of revival. In the preface to this book, Roberts states that he has collected over 50,000 index cards with bibliographic information about revival literature. Similarly, the Richard Owen Roberts Trust reports that Roberts provided approximately 9,000 volumes regarding revival to the Graham Center Library at Wheaton College—these books were a

inspire the church to seek true revival. In his most simple definition of revival, Roberts states that revival is, “an extraordinary movement of the Holy Spirit producing extraordinary results.”<sup>6</sup> While this definition is quite basic, his complete teaching of the topic is much more complex. For Roberts, revival is heavily influenced by his understanding of repentance and of God’s movements in the history of the church. One indication of this is that his main book on the subject, *Revival*, is just as much about repentance as it is about revival.<sup>7</sup> He also writes in the introduction to his book *Repentance* that there are a surprisingly small number of books dedicated specifically to the topic of biblical repentance.<sup>8</sup> Among his many avenues for promoting revival, Roberts dedicated himself to publishing historical documents on the subject. Roberts’s teachings imply that it is through these three interconnected themes—revival, repentance, and history—that one can establish a complete picture of how God revives the church.

Even while connecting these themes, Roberts still seeks to answer basic questions about revival in his writings and sermons. In the previously mentioned book on the topic, Roberts arranges his chapters around questions he felt were most important to answer: “What is revival? When is revival needed? When can revival be expected? What truth must revival emphasize? What are the dangers of revival? What hinders revival? And will the fruits of revival last?”<sup>9</sup> Likewise, in a pamphlet that he published on the

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part of his personal collection and acted as a catalyst for the establishment of the library. See “About,” Richard Owen Roberts Trust, last modified 2016, accessed on September 22, 2016, <http://rortrust.org/about>. Finally, when Roberts was a guest on her radio show *Revive Our Hearts*, Nancy Leigh DeMoss introduced him by stating that he has impacted her understanding of revival more than any other person. See “When God Revives a Heart with Richard Owen Roberts,” *Revive Our Hearts*, last modified 2016, accessed September 22, 2016, <https://www.reviveourhearts.com/series/when-god-revives-a-heart-with-richard-owen-roberts/>.

<sup>6</sup>Richard Owen Roberts, *Revival* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1982), 16-17.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 37-53; 73-98. In chap. 4 of this book, Roberts states that the topic of repentance is too often ignored in churches today, and that is why revival is not more regularly experienced in our time.

<sup>8</sup>Richard Owen Roberts, *Repentance: The First Word of the Gospel* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2002), 16. In this introduction, Roberts discusses seven reasons for the lack of material in this area. He also introduces his bibliography with a paragraph reaffirming this idea on p. 347.

<sup>9</sup>These are the titles of the seven chapters which comprise this book. Furthermore, in each chapter, Roberts delves further into the topic by asking and answering several more questions. At the heart

topic of revival, Roberts seeks to answer twenty-four questions that he felt were vital for a person to be able to correctly evaluate a revival. Starting with Scripture, Roberts guides the reader through a process of thoroughly evaluating the event to decide of whether or not it was truly a biblical revival. From the questions in this pamphlet one can see that there are several key themes of revival for Roberts. He primarily evaluates an event through several standards which can be grouped into these three categories: whether it is initiated by God or by man; how it impacts the church's unity; and its impact on the spiritual condition of individuals involved in the revival.<sup>10</sup> These themes reverberate throughout his material on revival, and his concern for God's initiative is paramount to all other criteria. He displays this concern again when he writes in the editorial introduction,

We ought to do what we can by way of preparation of our minds and hearts for revival; and we ought even more to so thirst for the Lord God Himself that He will quickly come and pour water upon those that are thirsty, knowing full well that as our thirst is quenched, the floods will rise upon the dry ground of the heathen world in which we have been placed.<sup>11</sup>

It is clear through Roberts's writings and teaching that revival starts and ends with the movement of God; Roberts does not, however, remove human response and understanding from his definition of revival. Similarly, in an introduction to a volume on twenty historical sermons about salvation, he writes about the strong connection between what a person thinks about God, themselves, sin and salvation.<sup>12</sup> He goes on to expound

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of this book, it is evident that Roberts was seeking to make clear the most basic elements of biblical revival.

<sup>10</sup>Richard Owen Roberts, *Twenty-four Questions to Ask in the Face of Apparent Revival* (Wheaton, IL: International Awakening Press, 1998). Several questions seek to determine the source to the event, whether it is driven by people or by God. Additionally, Roberts shows a deep concern for the whole body of the church and whether all people are accepting of the event or only a select few participants. Finally, many of these questions seek to evaluate the effects of the event on the individuals—both Christian and non-Christian, to determine whether or not the impact will last.

<sup>11</sup>J. Edwin Orr, *Campus Aflame: A History of Evangelical Awakenings in Collegiate Communities*, ed. Richard Owen Roberts (Wheaton, IL: International Awakening Press, 1994), 13.

<sup>12</sup>Richard Owen Roberts, ed., *Salvation in Full Color: Twenty Sermons by Great Awakening Preachers* (Wheaton, IL: International Awakening Press, 1994), xi.

on how one should have a high view of God and low view of self when he writes, “When our view of God is right, our view of self will be so low that we will know ourselves to be nothing whatsoever before Him.”<sup>13</sup> According to Roberts, revival is “an extraordinary” work of God which leads to a powerful movement of repentance in individuals and throughout his writings he prominently displays this connection to his readers.

The second main area of Roberts’s theology of revival that must be examined is his focus on the history of revival. In many ways, like Jonathan Edwards before him, Roberts has sought to use history as an example for the church to imitate and follow today.<sup>14</sup> In the introduction to historical sermons on the solemn assembly and corporate repentance, Roberts explains his purpose in republishing historical literature. He writes that if the young people of an area were going to grow up in a situation prepared for movements of God, it would only be because their parents, “had grace sufficient to humble themselves, pray, repent of their sins, and seek God’s face in Solemn Assembly.”<sup>15</sup> Roberts desires to equip the parents for these tasks of seeking God’s face through the historical sermons from men like: Increase Mather, William Williams, John Cotton, and Gilbert Tennent.<sup>16</sup> From this list of sermons and preachers, it is clear that Roberts has studied in-depth the First Great Awakening and the men preaching beyond the well-known names of Edwards and Whitefield. Additionally, Roberts has displayed his appreciation for the history of revival simply through the vast volume of books he has edited, published, or annotated in this area of revival.<sup>17</sup> Overall, when studying Roberts’s

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<sup>13</sup>Roberts, *Salvation in Full Color*, xv.

<sup>14</sup>Jonathan Edwards regularly used historical events to spur the church on towards revival. One example can be seen in Jonathan Edwards, *A Narrative of Surprising Conversions* found in *Jonathan Edwards on Revival* (1965; repr., Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1995), 1-74.

<sup>15</sup>Richard Owen Roberts, *Sanctify the Congregation: A Call to the Solemn Assembly and to Corporate Repentance* (Wheaton, IL: International Awakening Press, 1994), 13.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, v-vi.

<sup>17</sup>Roberts edited several of J. Edwin Orr’s works on revival with the express purpose of putting the work before another generation of readers. Roberts mentions this as one of the primary reasons for reissuing *Campus Aflame* in his introduction. See J. Edwin Orr, *Campus Aflame: A History of Evangelical*

theology of revival, his focus on historical revivals, sermons, and writings must factor into his theology of revival as it clearly has been a main emphasis of his ministry.

The final main theme that arises when considering Roberts's work is the topic of repentance. In fact, repentance is an issue of primary concern for Roberts. In the end, Roberts is asking one to consider, what good is revival if it does not lead to true repentance and a changed heart? In his main book on the topic of repentance, Roberts explains that a person can be very religious without being repentant. He writes, "It does not take repentance to enjoy a form of religion, but repentance is mandatory for all who would live in the power of true godliness."<sup>18</sup> He further explains that a person could indeed 'enthusiastically' praise God and yet still remain unconverted.<sup>19</sup> It quickly becomes apparent that repentance is given such a prominent place in Roberts's texts because he views it as the litmus test for true revival. If a movement has experienced real repentance, and continues to regularly experience repentance, then Roberts could find confidence that true revival has been experienced in that place. Contrary, without repentance, no person, or movement, could truly claim to be impacted by God in revival. The natural conclusion, for Roberts, is that revival cannot be separated from repentance. This may be overly simplistic in the area of revival, but many of the sources previously cited offer very little on the subject of repentance—almost concluding that one could experience revival without ever going through the process of repentance—Roberts, of course, would vehemently disagree with this idea stating that repentance is necessary.

After briefly introducing three of the main themes present in Roberts's work, it must be noted that an additional purpose of this study will be to examine Roberts's life to

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*Awakenings in Collegiate Communities*, ed. Richard Owen Roberts (Wheaton, IL: International Awakening Press, 1994), 13. Also, the sheer volume of *Revival Literature* is impressive and shows a life dedicated to digging deeply into the subject area. Richard Owen Roberts *Revival Literature: An Annotated Bibliography with Biographical and Historical Notices* (Wheaton, IL: Richard Owen Roberts Pub, 1987).

<sup>18</sup>Roberts, *Repentance*, 14.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

preserve his legacy and knowledge about revival for future generations. Roberts's ministry continues the long and important work of promoting revival. His message of repentance and revival is one that must continually be put forth in each generation of the church. The timeliness of this study is crucial. Roberts was born in 1931, and while still in good health, he is approaching an age where preaching and interviewing has become more difficult. This study provides a crucial component to preserving Roberts's life and ministry for future generations to learn and grow from his insights. One goal is that through this study the church will be encouraged to earnestly seek an extraordinary work of God through revival that starts with repentance, and to also consider how God has worked in the past through the church and his people. The thesis of this project is that through Richard Owen Roberts's life and ministry the church has received a valuable theology of revival, which has purposely linked revival, repentance, and church history, into an interconnected relationship that provides a biblical understanding of revival.

This thesis addresses an important issue in the church today. An improper understanding of revival makes the task of seeking revival nearly impossible. Unfortunately, as demonstrated above, in the church today there exists a confusion over the meaning and practice of the term. Roberts's ministry has sought to correct this misunderstanding and his teachings should be considered by the church. By focusing this dissertation on Roberts's theology of revival and his connection between revival, history, and repentance, the desire is to present a biblical and healthy understanding of the topic. Through this understanding the church will be better prepared to pray for and to seek revival for its benefit, for reaching the community, and mostly for God's glory.

An additional reason for researching the life and ministry of Roberts is that it became apparent that an academic study of this nature has not been done previously.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>I asked Roberts if he knew of any studies of his life or theology that were being completed. Roberts stated that he did not know of any being done at that time. Richard Owen Roberts, telephone interview by author, March 10, 2016.

Roberts's ministry has been reviewed in some other formats, most notably when he was honored with the Homer G. Lindsay, Jr. Lifetime of Ministry Award at the Jacksonville Pastor's Conference in 2013.<sup>21</sup> Aside from this honor there have not been any academic attempts to evaluate, critique, and preserve the contributions of Roberts's ministry. This is one of the primary reasons that Roberts has been chosen as the subject of this research. His lifetime of ministry in revival brings a helpful and needed prospective for the church to consider and to learn from. It would be an unfortunate loss to the church if Roberts's teachings were not studied and applied regarding the topic of revival.

### **Background**

The topic of revival has been intriguing to me for most of my life. I can remember experiencing the desire for revival in middle school, high school, and during my undergraduate studies. When I started my pursuit of a Master of Divinity degree at Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, I was exposed to many more resources on revival and my interest in the subject continued to grow. One of the most impactful books early in my seminary studies was Elmer Towns and Douglas Porter's book, *The Ten Greatest Revivals Ever*.<sup>22</sup> During my studies at Liberty, I was introduced many works which further opposed me to the biblical and the historical aspects of revival.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>For this award, the conference produced a forty-six-minute interview during which Roberts discusses different aspects of his life and ministry. See "Richard Owen Roberts," Richard Owen Roberts Trust, accessed May 25, 2017, <http://rortrust.org/>.

<sup>22</sup>Elmer Towns and Douglas Porter, *The Ten Greatest Revivals Ever: From Pentecost to the Present* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Publications, 2000). This was a required text in the course Evangelism 500: Church Growth I: Spiritual Factors of Church Growth. The book took a historical look at ten revivals, including the First and Second Great Awakenings, the Baby Boomer revival, and the 1904 Pentecostal revival. This was the first book that exposed me to the long and significant history of revivals in the church. This course also provided insights into spiritual issues of revival.

<sup>23</sup>Some of the most significant books to which I was exposed during this time were Thom Rainer, *The Book of Church Growth: History, Theology, and Principles* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1993); Rainer, *Breakout Churches: Discover How to Make the Leap* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005); and Rainer, *Surprising Insights from the Unchurched and Proven Ways to Reach Them* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001).

After completing my Master of Divinity degree from Liberty, I spent several years in pastoral ministry. During this time, I recognized a desire to pursue further education to be better equipped to lead the church, make use of my personal giftedness, and to train others for ministry. Towards this goal, I enrolled at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in the fall of 2012 as a Th.M. student studying in the area of Evangelism and Church Growth. During this period of study, one course made significant impact on my understanding of revival. It was taught by Owen Strachan on the life and ministry of Jonathan Edwards. This course was significant for several reasons. First, I was exposed to an in-depth study of a significant figure in church history. Every text for the course was an in-depth portrait of Edwards, his theology, or his practice.<sup>24</sup> Second, this course provided me with a much greater knowledge of the period of the First Great Awakening and the other figures involved in this revival period. By studying Edwards, I was able to read in detail about many other people of that time and how the church experienced great growth through this awakening. Finally, this class helped to shape my ability to appreciate a significant figure in the church while still being able to critically analyze certain aspects of his theology and practice in the area of revival.

While the previous experiences were impactful, the most significant preparation for a study of revival has come from my work in the Ph.D. seminars and colloquium. As a Ph.D. student, I have majored in Evangelism and minored in Christian Missions. These two areas have combined well to help me have a broader understanding of the topic of revival. The courses in my minor have stretched my understanding of revival to include the global outpourings of God's spirit in different times and places.

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<sup>24</sup>The books required in this course included George Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (Hartford, CT: Yale University Press, 2004); Douglas Sweeney, *Jonathan Edwards and the Ministry of the Word* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2009); and Thomas Kidd, *The Great Awakening* (Hartford, CT: Yale University Press, 2009).

With a better global awareness, I have been able to evaluate the religious climate of a particular time and place in light of what is happening in the global church.<sup>25</sup>

Additionally, my studies in colloquium under Adam Greenway and Timothy Beougher have been helpful in preparation of my study of Richard Owen Roberts. One colloquium that directly benefitted my preparation for the study of Richard Owen Roberts was led by Beougher. The topic of the course was revival and it was in this course that I read Roberts for the first time.<sup>26</sup> In this colloquium I expressed interest in pursuing the topic of revival in general, and Roberts in particular. Beougher encouraged me to explore these areas further as possible dissertation topics.<sup>27</sup> Overall, the colloquium on revival rekindled my passion for the topic and solidified my desire to study revival further.

Another avenue through which I have been equipped for this study of Richard Owen Roberts is through my Ph.D. seminars in evangelism. In my first seminar, “Contemporary Church Growth,” I was asked to study a wide range of material on the topic of church revitalization and health. Through these works I evaluated how other individuals consider their own ministry and impact while seeking to encourage the church to pursue the principles by which they lived.<sup>28</sup> The second seminar by Greenway was

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<sup>25</sup>Several books were instrumental in my development of a global understanding of the church. One was *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation*, especially when evaluated in light of the author’s role as a sender of missionaries. Andrew Fuller, *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation*, ed. Joseph Belcher (1786; repr., Hinton, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 1988). Other specific texts from the Theology of Christian Mission course included David J. Bosch, *Transforming Missions: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991); Michael W. Goheen, *A Light to the Nations: The Missional Church and the Biblical Story* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011); and Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006).

<sup>26</sup>Roberts, *Revival*.

<sup>27</sup>Other texts in this colloquium included Jonathan Edwards, *Jonathan Edwards on Revival* (1965; repr., Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1994); Charles G. Finney, *Lectures on Revival* (1835; repr., Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1988); Iain H. Murray, *Revival and Revivalism: The Making and Marring of American Evangelicalism 1750-1858* (1994; repr., Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2009); Mark Shaw, *Global Awakening: How the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Revivals Triggered a Christian Revolution* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010); and Joseph Tracy, *The Great Awakening: A History of the Revival of Religion in the Time of Edwards and Whitefield* (1842; repr., Cambridge, MA: Andover-Harvard Theological Library, 1923).

<sup>28</sup>Additional books in the seminar that I have found helpful in preparation for this project were Gregg R. Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers: The Doctrine of the Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012); Richard P. Belcher, *A Journey in Purity* (Columbia, SC: Richbarry Press, 1996); Harry L. Reeder, *From*

“Spiritual Warfare in Evangelism and Missions.” The paper I wrote for this seminar was valuable in helping to build a foundation and bibliography in the area of revival. I wrote on the topic of spiritual warfare and revival, seeking to find connections between the spiritual warfare literature and revival literature. Surprisingly, I found very little overlap between the fields. In the paper, I argued that both fields would be improved if they interacted with one another at a greater level. Overall, it was a challenge through which I was exposed to a much wider segment of the revival literature.

In total, my academic endeavors to this point have all, in one way or another, worked to equip me for this study of Richard Owen Roberts. From a personal standpoint, I am drawn to study Roberts because of his commitment to a biblical understanding of revival and his focus on repentance and history. In my studies, I have found Roberts to be convicting, challenging, and encouraging. I marvel at his life dedicated to the topic of revival and preserving historical documents in the field. Roberts described revival as an extraordinary work of God and yet he recognizes and teaches that a Christian must be in a repentant state to truly be ready for this work. Roberts has travelled and taught extensively on the topic of revival over the last several decades, and I believe that there is great value in studying his teachings—both book and sermon format—to draw out his theology of revival and put it into written form through this dissertation. Roberts’s theology of revival is significant because of its historical connection to the First Great Awakening and its emphasis on repentance. For this reason, it can provide a needed correction to the misunderstanding on revival that is prevalent in the church today.

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*Embers to a Flame: How God Can Revitalize Your Church* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2004); and Andy Stanley, *Deep & Wide: Creating Churches Unchurched People Love to Attend* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012).

## Methodology

The successful completion this study involved a thorough examination of Richard Owen Roberts's life and ministry. Through several avenues I sought to gain access to primary materials. First, there is a small collection of Roberts's works at the James P. Boyce Centennial Library of Southern Seminary, and since my colloquium on revival I have been building my own collection of Roberts's texts. Additionally, a simple Internet search of Richard Owen Roberts revealed that he now has dozens of sermons or lectures available for immediate and instant access. Since the colloquium on revival I have viewed most of the available videos to find those that are most significant and representative of Roberts's teachings on revival. Roberts's teachings are also available on a significant website that contains twelve lectures recently given by him at Wheaton College. To my knowledge, this is the most recent and complete presentation of Roberts's theology of revival available and has been used extensively in this project.<sup>29</sup>

Finally, I made a trip to Wheaton, Illinois, to meet with Roberts in person and conduct a personal interview.<sup>30</sup> Through this trip I had the opportunity to view Roberts's bookstore and personal library firsthand, and I was also able to meet with a few people who have known him for a significant amount of time. The research of Roberts's life and ministry followed an inquiry methodology that led to strong understanding of his life, ministry, and most significantly his theology of revival. Through reading publications, viewing lectures and sermons, and finally, by interviewing Roberts the results of the research demonstrate that his synthesis of revival, repentance, and church history is significant, and often overlooked, when it is compared to much of the other literature available for the church in the topic area of revival at the present time.

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<sup>29</sup>This website can be accessed at: <http://www.collegeofrevival.org/> . It also contains links to purchase many of Roberts's pamphlets and books that otherwise are difficult to find.

<sup>30</sup>The transcript from this interview is included in the appendix.

## **Limitations**

At this point, several limitations of this study must be clarified. First, the main intent of this study was to interact with the primary sources of Roberts's ministry. His books and pamphlets are addressed because they are relatively accessible. A personal interview of Roberts was also conducted to gain a better understanding of his life. Access to personal notes or correspondence was not provided, therefore it was not concerned. A second limitation of this dissertation was that this work focuses on Roberts's theology of revival with an emphasis on the areas of repentance and church history. While there would certainly be value in seeking to understand Roberts's complete views on theology, that task is beyond the scope and intent of this project. My hope is that this first attempt to study Roberts's life and ministry will lead to further interest and studies of his teachings and impact by other researchers who are interested in the topic of revival.

Third, I have sought to remain within the realms of historical and theological study. This author will not purposely make attempts to analyze Roberts through a psychological lens. The intent of this paper has been to study Roberts's life and ministry, and to collect his theology of revival into an accessible mode for further study. The delimitations of the research sample for studying Richard Owen Roberts are as follows:

1. The research sample has been delimited to Richard Owen Roberts—through a personal interview. The sample does not include other authors on revival, although these works were considered when it was appropriate.
2. The research sample has been delimited to his published writings and other accessible writings. The sample does not include personal notes, journals, or correspondence unless the researcher was given express permission to use and cite these materials.
3. The research sample has been delimited to other accessible interviews. The sample does not include personal conversations about the subject that were not originally intended for this project unless the researcher obtained permission from the individual to use the information.
4. The research sample has been delimited to accessible sermons. The sample does not include sermons that cannot be accessed by the researcher. Roberts has a significant number of sermons that are available online that represent his teachings in the areas

of revival, repentance, and church history.

Finally, during the research and writing of this dissertation I sought to be aware of the temptation to draw conclusions from personal bias from my own background and understandings, instead of the actual facts, and by being aware of this danger, I sought to avoid this issue throughout the entire research process.

### **Conclusion**

To restate, the thesis of this project is that through Richard Owen Roberts's life and ministry the church has received a valuable theology of revival, which has purposely linked revival, repentance, and church history, into an interconnected relationship that provides a biblical understanding of revival. This research has sought to support this statement through a comprehensive study of Roberts's publications, a personal interview, lectures, and sermons. These elements will be displayed in the content which follows. In chapter 2, Roberts's life and ministry will be presented in the form of a short biography. The third chapter will focus on developing a complete theology of revival from Roberts's publications, lectures, and sermons. Chapter 4 will provide an in-depth examination of Roberts's focus on history and repentance in his ministry on revival. The fifth chapter will consider the significance of these three interconnected themes for the church's understanding and practice of revival. Finally, chapter 6 will conclude with a discussion of areas of further study and a short reflection on this work.

Throughout this study there were several areas in which I sought to evaluate further to gain a better understanding of Roberts's life and ministry. Some of these questions, which also helped to guide the research, included the following:

1. How did Roberts's early life impact his understanding of revival? Was his understanding of repentance a result of his conversion or later life events?
2. Has Roberts's shifted in his teachings on revival from the early nineteen-eighties to the present day? If there are any shifts, what brought these changes about, and how

has his ministry been impacted by the change?

3. What led Roberts to pursue a bookstore and publishing ministry instead of other ministry avenues? Has this decision been beneficial or detrimental to the overall impact of his ministry?
4. What are Roberts's views on the global church and God's movements in other areas of the world? How does he respond to movements that are outside of the American Evangelical norm?
5. Did Roberts intentionally pursue a strong connection between revival, repentance, and history or were these natural out workings of his convictions and interests?
6. In what ways have Roberts's views on revival, repentance and church history impacted his pastoral ministry?
7. Does Roberts believe that he has ever been involved with a true revival? If not, why does he think that this is so and is he disappointed about this?
8. How will Roberts's ministry be evaluated in the coming generation? Will he be remembered in his own right, or simply seen as one who preserved other's work such as J. Edwin Orr?
9. How does Roberts view his own life and ministry? What is his outlook for the future of the church in America? Is he hopeful or concerned?

This dissertation seeks to address these and other issues by pursuing a complete understanding of Roberts's theology of revival. The main question guiding this study is, "What is Richard Owen Roberts's theology of revival and how has his ministry impacted the church?" For me, the benefit of this study is not simply learning more about a particular man in ministry, but to better understand revival, and more importantly, to better know the God who moves to bring revival to his church and the world.

CHAPTER 2  
A BIOGRAPHY OF RICHARD OWEN ROBERTS

**Introduction**

In the entrance of the bookstore one is immediately surrounded by shelves and stacks of old and serious books.<sup>1</sup> Unlike many newer bookstores, there are not places to comfortably sit and drink coffee while one works on a computer, instead every nook and cranny of the building has been filled with shelves and stacks of books. As one walks through the rooms, the impression felt is that if the book cannot be found in this place, then it must either be very new, or not considered to be worth reading. This is a serious bookstore, and it is owned and operated by a serious man – Richard Owen Roberts. That is not to say that Roberts is unfriendly or unwelcoming, in fact, he was quite the opposite, and this can be seen in many other sections of the building. His personal office in the back corner of the store has a collection of chairs arranged for people to gather together in prayer. Upstairs, where Roberts and his wife live, his living room is also arranged to accommodate more than a dozen guests at a time. The seriousness that is felt in the bookstore, and in Roberts himself, stems from a dedication to work that matters very deeply to him. Roberts has spent his lifetime preaching and teaching the church about revival through repentance. His desire from a young age has been to preach God’s Word in a manner that it will reveal the heart of God to his listeners. The books in his bookstore, and in his personal collection, also reveal a desire to teach people about true devotion to the Lord. While one can learn some things about a person by walking into his

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<sup>1</sup>Unless otherwise noted, the content of this chapter is supported by a personal interview with Richard Owen Roberts at his bookstore and home on May 27, 2017. The transcript from this interview can be found in the appendix.

bookstore, it is certainly a limited source of information about a person's life. For this reason, a personal interview with Richard Owen Roberts was conducted. Questions about his childhood, conversion and call to ministry, education, pastoral and preaching ministry, his marriage and family, and his legacy were discussed. In this chapter, these topics will be presented to provide a short biography of the life and ministry of Roberts. Through this chapter it will be clearly seen that Roberts has passionately and purposely sought to serve the Lord through his life and ministry in the area of revival.

### **Cultural and Historical Background**

Richard Owen Roberts was born on September 9, 1931, in Schenectady, New York. The year, 1931, was certainly not the easiest time for a person to enter the culture of the United States, but it proved to be an ideal time for the Lord to mold a preacher deeply committed to declaring what he believed God had led him to speak. In some ways, to understand the dedication and perseverance that Roberts has displayed throughout his life, it is helpful to understand the difficulties that America experienced during the time in which he grew up and was called into ministry. For this reason, these first section will briefly describe the American culture and general events in the 1930s and into the 1940s.

While many mark the start of the Great Depression as officially beginning with the stock market crash the last week of October in 1929, the truth is that the stock market crash was only one piece of a complicated economic market which was full of numerous weaknesses.<sup>2</sup> When the New York Stock Exchange went through several turbulent weeks following the initial crash it shook the confidence of many leading business men and banks throughout the nation. As Burg stated, the effect of, "The Great Crash did not cause the worldwide depression that followed, but it did expose the underlying

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<sup>2</sup>David F. Burg, *The Great Depression: An Eyewitness History* (New York: Facts on File, 1996), 47-51.

weaknesses of the American and European economies.”<sup>3</sup> Burg pointed to the fact that the agricultural community in the United States had been in a depression throughout the 1920s because of overproduction and low crop prices.<sup>4</sup> While the stock market was actually able to recover and stabilize in the early parts of 1930, other industries were not able to overcome the challenge. In 1930, one-thousand-forty-five banks failed, and investments in production and employment plummeted.<sup>5</sup> By the end of 1932, thirteen-million Americans were unemployed, the gross national product had dropped twenty-nine percent in two years, and finally the values on the stock market completely dropped.<sup>6</sup> The effects of the Great Depression were felt in almost every home in the United States. Despite the numerous efforts of the American government, by the time that Roberts could walk his family was well used to day-to-day life with a scarcity of goods.

The whole decade of the 1930s was marked by depression and difficult times for Americans and many throughout the world. Natural disasters further devastated the agricultural industry, and government programs were slow to make any significant impact on the everyday life of most Americans.<sup>7</sup> In 1939, the world’s attention was on Germany and the movements of its leader, Adolf Hitler.<sup>8</sup> While the United States officially remained neutral to the issues in Europe, pressure began to mount, and in 1941 with the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor the country officially entered the war.<sup>9</sup> Roberts was ten years old at the time that war was declared. Although the impact of the war

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<sup>3</sup>Burg, *The Great Depression*, 50.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 51. At this time in the United States, one-fourth of the population of the United States operated a farm for its main source of income.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 64.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 64-65.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 114-21.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 244.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 272.

would be devastating in Europe, and cost the lives of many young men, the war also provided the opportunity for the United States to grow out of the depression, and it presented avenues of opportunity for industrious and resourceful Americans.<sup>10</sup> Burg stated the difficult reality of the coming war in connection with the depression by writing,

Full-scale mobilization, transforming the American economy to war status and inducting millions into service with the armed forces, would at last bring an end to the Great Depression. But the final cure, unfortunately, exacted a terrible ultimate cost in lost lives and wasted material resources.<sup>11</sup>

The impact of the Great Depression and World War II were significant on the young Richard Owen Roberts. During the depression, he learned to live on very little. During the war, he learned to work diligently with the opportunities that were put before him.

### **Early Life**

After examining the general trends of the country during the time of Robert's childhood, it is now possible to better examine some of the significant events that shaped him as a young man. Like many children, as a young man, Roberts was significantly impacted by his parents. His father's family had come to the United States from Wales, and although he had a religious background, his father was mostly concerned with worldly things. Roberts's father, John Earl, worked in the General Electric Company's factory in Schenectady, New York, and while his wages were meager the family found resourceful ways to meet their needs.<sup>12</sup> In reference to growing up during the Great Depression, Roberts stated, "I've often thanked the Lord for the privilege of growing up in a home of what today would be described as poverty stricken." Roberts described his father as a hardworking and kind man. Although he was only educated through the sixth grade, he was often able to provide Roberts with sound advice in difficult situations.

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<sup>10</sup>Burg, *The Great Depression*, 272.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Roberts stated that he remembers his father's weekly check being for twenty-six cents.

Additionally, Roberts was impacted by his mother, Mildred Hazel, who he described as

A very quiet woman, very sweet. A wonderful mother. I would say it would be hard for me to imagine a better mother. Not in any way a pushy person. A person with very strong personal convictions and standards after her conversion. And I would say the great influence of my mother was the simple fact that she was herself and a godly woman. And that constant awareness that my mother was praying that my life would not waste, but that the Lord would indeed touch at least some through me.

As Roberts described his parents, he was careful to highlight the impact that their conversion had on his life, and how as a result their house became committed to the Lord.

Roberts discussed how when he and his siblings were growing older, his parents felt that the children should attend a Sunday school. The children were sent to a local Methodist church, which taught them that the story of Jonah was a piece of fiction that could provide good principles to live by, but it should not be trusted as a historical document. After the children told this to their mother she responded, “We don't send children to Sunday school to learn to be unbelievers. We're all unbelievers by nature.” Roberts noted that this was an incredibly profound statement from his mother seeing that she had no religious background. After this event, Roberts's aunt and uncle started inviting his family to special meetings at a local holiness church. His parents attended and were converted to Christianity. The Roberts family started attending this church, and although it was marked by legalist rules about holiness, Roberts himself was impacted by the Scripture displayed throughout the sanctuary.<sup>13</sup> After some time, the family left this church and joined the First Presbyterian church that Roberts would grow up attending.

During this time, many Americans continued to struggle to meet daily needs, and Europeans felt the growing pressure of Fascist governments in Germany and Italy.<sup>14</sup> The early years of Roberts's life were marked by the effects of this global depression and

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<sup>13</sup>Roberts shared about the impact of the Scripture posted throughout the sanctuary in the interview. It is interesting that he discussed how impactful these banners were in his young spiritual development when one considers that his ministry has mostly emphasized preaching as the most significant means of delivering God's grace.

<sup>14</sup>Burg, *The Great Depression*, 71.

political uncertainty overseas. The Roberts family met these challenges the best that they were able. One of the impacts of growing up during this era was that by the time the United States entered World War II, Roberts had grown to be an industrious and resourceful boy. When Roberts was ten the United States entered the war, and he did what he could to help the effort. One of his main memories from this point of his life was growing Victory Gardens of vegetables and other produce. Among his several jobs, Roberts discussed cultivating several acres of gardens, and then selling his vegetables to people in the community. These efforts in small-scale business endeavors would help Roberts develop skills that would later become useful in owning and operating his bookstore business, which he would use to help support his preaching ministry.

While Roberts found some success in his work, school was another challenge. The main thing that Roberts recalled about school at this point in his life was that he was bored. Never one to conform to other people's expectations, Roberts lamented the fact that most of the task of the public-school system has been to get people to conform to the same pattern. Under this structure many students are stifled instead of encouraged to pursue their gifts and abilities. Along with finding it difficult to fit the pattern at school, Roberts recalled feeling unique among his siblings.<sup>15</sup> He had one brother and two sisters. His brother would grow up to be a missionary and leader in the Canadian Presbyterian church, and his sisters would marry and remain believers throughout their lives.<sup>16</sup>

Regarding his personality as a child, Roberts stated that he believes that he has

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<sup>15</sup>Roberts did note that it probably is not all that uncommon for a child to feel different than his siblings, but he also stated that most of his life he has not been one to conform to the expectations of others.

<sup>16</sup>In the interview, Roberts shared the story of the accident that brought his brother home from the mission field. During the Biafra War in Nigeria, his brother was ministering to troops on the frontlines, while his wife and sons remained in Lagos. One day the vehicle in which the wife and sons were riding in veered across the road and was hit by oncoming traffic. Two of the boys were killed on the scene, the wife and one son were badly injured. They were taken to a hospital, but not given much treatment because the outcome appeared to be bleak. Roberts stated that Shell Oil Company heard about the events, retrieved his brother from the war field, and then flew the three family members to London in the company's private jet. The wife and son recovered from their injuries, but after this event the family returned to Canada.

had the same demeanor throughout his life. He is very comfortable being alone for long periods of time to complete his work or study. Even as a young child, Roberts would busy himself in tasks and jobs that were suitable for his appreciation of solitude. Later in life, his wife Maggie commented that she has never felt bad if she leaves him alone for most of the day because it seems like he prefers it that way. While Roberts is certainly an introverted and reclusive man, he feels a very strong commitment to boldly proclaim God's Word when he is led to preach. In the pulpit, he is animated, and in his home, he is reserved. His personality impacted his call to ministry which is to be examined below.

### **Conversion and Call to Ministry**

When Roberts's parents were converted it had an immense impact on him and his own conversion; however, Roberts himself stated that he cannot point to a definite moment, or time, in which he became a believer.<sup>17</sup> Instead of discussing a moment in which he became a believer, Roberts discussed the process of transformation that his home went through which brought him to the point of complete devotion to the Lord. As mentioned previously, Roberts's family started attending a holiness church, and that during this time he was impacted deeply by the Scriptures written on the walls of the sanctuary. He stated that as a ten-year-old boy he remembers thinking that the most beautiful thing in the world was holiness. He would attend the church's regular prayer meetings with his parents, and although most of the content was over his head, he remembers greatly enjoying his time at these meetings. After some time at the holiness church it became clear that the family needed to go to a different church,<sup>18</sup> and so they became members of First Presbyterian Church in Schenectady. It was during his time at

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<sup>17</sup>In the interview, Roberts spent some time discussing the notion that a person must know the exact moment of his conversion to be saved as being completely absurd. He stated that he is certain that there are many genuine believers who do not know the exact time when they became a Christian, and many people who are lost who could quickly point to a day and time in which they made a profession.

<sup>18</sup>He remarked how the holiness church held to many legalist rules. For example, women's blouse sleeves had to go below the elbow and men could not wear wedding bands.

this church that Roberts became a believer and that he felt called into the ministry.

When Roberts was a young man, as was mentioned, he had several different jobs and activities which helped him to earn some money. At the end of one summer he had made enough money to send himself to a Christian youth camp. He used his money to attend the Sunrise Mountain Bible Conference in Lake George, New York. Roberts discussed how two important events happened at this conference that helped him to clarify his call into ministry, and to submit to God's will for his life. The first event was on the final night of the conference at the general meeting. An appeal was made to the group for people to commit to missions. Roberts had already felt that the Lord was calling him into ministry, so he responded to the call. His initial thought was that with his agricultural background he could go overseas and teach horticulture skills and share the gospel in that way. However, the Lord used an event from earlier in the day to ensure that Roberts had some time to consider his ministry calling and to submit to his directions.

Before the meeting on Friday, Roberts had joined a group of other campers on a hike up one of the local mountains. Being accustomed to strenuous labor, Roberts grew frustrated with the group's frequent breaks, and during one stop he decided to sit down on a stump to display his displeasure with the interruption. Unfortunately, the stump was covered with poison ivy, and by the time Roberts left camp the next morning the infection had gotten severe. Since the camp took place at the end of the summer break, Roberts was not able to attend the first two weeks of school, and he spent most of this time lying on a cot that his parents had set up in a small room of their house. While in recovery, Roberts spent time praying about, and considering, his future ministry. In his words, "I felt the Lord say to me, 'but I didn't call you to be a missionary.'" He continued this discussion by stating that he thought, "Well, Lord, that's what I know I can do, so that's what I'm planning to do." He felt that the Lord responded, "No, I didn't call you to do that. I'm grateful that you were responsive, but that's not what I called you to do, I called you to preach." After, what Roberts described as some back and forth he

came to a point of surrender, he recognized that if the Lord was calling him to preach that he would do it.<sup>19</sup> He stated his conviction on this matter in this way:

Well day after day of struggling with that, I became aware, well I can't, but I can. That if that's what the Lord is calling me to do. That's what he wanted me to do. So, I've had that deep-seated conviction that I was called of God to do it, and that all I could do was to respond to what he told me to do. And I didn't really have to know how. And I didn't have to do it well. I just had to do it faithfully. And so that's been my conviction through all the years.<sup>20</sup>

Roberts has carried the conviction to preach throughout his ministry, and he started preaching soon after this experience of listening to the Lord about his ministry call.

When Roberts's father was converted, he had started a ministry at the Schenectady Almshouse, or as it was commonly called, the poor house.<sup>21</sup> Roberts estimated that the home had four hundred to five hundred residents during this time. Each Friday, his father would go to the poor house and preach in several locations on the property.<sup>22</sup> Roberts would go with his father most weeks, and he remembered how on one week his father simply stated that he would be preaching that night, and so he did – Roberts was thirteen at the time. From that point forward, Roberts would preach regularly on Friday nights with his father. He also continued to improve upon his preaching by

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<sup>19</sup>Roberts discussed that he was very nervous to speak in front of people as a child and that preaching a sermon seemed to him to be impossible.

<sup>20</sup>The history page of First Presbyterian Church, Schenectady, New York, highlights the impact had on young people at that time. It states, "In 1942 six young people appeared before the session to share their decision to enter Christian service and a long line of volunteers followed." Roberts would have been eleven in 1942, and if he was not in the initial group of six, he is certainly included in the "long line" that followed that group. See Michael Alford, James Stewart, David Vincent, and James Mancuso, "Our History," *First Presbyterian Church, Schenectady NY*, accessed on June 27, 2017, <http://www.1stpreschurcschdy.org/index.php/about-us/our-history>.

<sup>21</sup>"The Schenectady County Almshouse and Almshouse Records in the Library," *Grems-Doolittle Library Collections*, August 23, 2011, accessed June 23, 2017, <https://gremsdoolittlelibrary.blogspot.com/2011/08/schenectady-county-almshouse-and.html>.

<sup>22</sup>Discussing his father's preaching ministry at this location, Roberts stated, "He would take a group of young people from our church with him. And they would visit the various places, my dad had four places where he preached each Friday night ... and young people would bring the people from their rooms in the wheelchairs or on their crutches and so on. And my dad would preach to them. I don't suppose it could be said he would have qualified to serve as pastor of First Presbyterian Church of Pittsburg, Pennsylvania, but I doubt that any group of people were ever exposed to more serious minded and faithful man than my father."

delivering messages on street corners, in prisons, and in the county mission throughout his teenage years. Before many preachers have delivered his first sermon, Roberts had become seasoned and completely confirmed in the conviction of his calling to preach.

Roberts certainly had unique opportunities to preach from a very young age, but one other event helped equip him for ministry as a teenager. When he was eighteen-years-old, the pastor of the Presbyterian church that his family attended accepted an assignment with the United States government to speak with troops throughout Asia. In the pastor's absence, the elders of the church asked that Roberts's fill in and perform the duties that the pastor would typically do during the week. For six weeks, Roberts delivered messages on Sunday morning, Sunday night, at the Wednesday night meeting, and he even led several Bible studies during the week. One incident during this time made a great impact on Roberts. In the church, there was a woman who thought that Roberts was "God's gift to the world," until he taught one night that there was no such thing as a carnal Christian, and to be carnal was to be spiritually dead. The woman became very angry with Roberts for this teaching. She changed from telling everyone how great he was to how terrible he was. In hindsight, Roberts stated, "she went everywhere denouncing me because I had slain her false prophet." This would certainly not be the last time that Roberts angered someone with his teachings, and it provides a good indication into how he would seek to remain more concerned with what he believed the Lord wanted him to teach, then he was with how the people listening would respond.

### **College and Seminary**

As Roberts gained experience in preaching, it helped to confirm his calling into ministry and God's equipping him for the task. At the encouragement of his pastor, Roberts skipped the eleventh grade of high school and was able to graduate when he was sixteen-years-old. In the Fall of 1948, Roberts left Schenectady to attend Gordon College in Boston, Massachusetts. He would stay there for a year and a half, but reflecting on this

time, he said that he did not gain much and he was, in fact, very bored. When he was eighteen he moved back to Schenectady unsure of what would be the next step in his life.

At a Wednesday night prayer meeting at his church, Roberts was approached by a stranger and offered a job in control engineering laboratory at the General Electric Company. Roberts accepted the job, and he began testing products to ensure that the item performed how the company was stating that it would to the consumer. He noted that in this laboratory he was one of the only uneducated persons with most of the other employees having earned doctorates in specific scientific fields.<sup>23</sup> After a year at this job, during which time he filled in for his pastor, Roberts realized it was time to finish his education for ministry. To accomplish this goal, he chose to attend Whitworth College.

Whitworth College located in Spokane, Washington, was Roberts choice, in part, because of its distance from New York. He was hoping a fresh start would be beneficial for him spiritually, but after crossing the country he realized that the man he was in New York followed him to Washington. He recognized at this point that in order to really change he had to be as fully aligned with Christ as he could possibly be. In addition to completing his undergraduate degree at Whitworth, Roberts continued to serve in different ministry avenues. Primarily, he partnered with an Air Force veteran and traveled throughout the Spokane area conducting Bible studies in different settings.

It was during this time, while being away from the godly example of his parents for the first lengthy period, that Roberts was really exposed to some of the hypocrisy in the church and in those who serve in ministry. He recalled two instances with the Air Force veteran that deeply impacted his desire to be faithful in his calling to

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<sup>23</sup>Roberts shared that during this time he had daily reminders that education did not always lead to wisdom. About some of the men that he worked with, he said, "I was practically speaking the only uneducated person in the laboratory. The rest were all doctors, and not frivolous, but earned doctorates. And what I discovered was that some of these men, who were doctor this, or doctor that, it almost seemed as if they couldn't even tie their own shoes without their mother's help. So, they were a critical specialist in some incredibly narrow area of interest, but in practical ways they knew nothing. That became a huge lesson to me. I thought true wisdom is not outward knowledge, but insight, understanding to the genuine motives and purposes of God."

serve Christ. The man, in one instance, treated his wife horribly in front of Roberts, and another time he purposely, and incorrectly, answered a question in a Bible study simply to try and impress the people. The question had been addressed to Roberts, and Roberts told the group that he did not know the answer, but that he would come back the following week prepared to answer the question. Instead, the other man interrupted and gave his reply. On their way home that evening, the other man scolded Roberts, and stated that he ruined his ministry by saying that he did not know the answer. His belief was that a minister must always have a response, even if he is just making up an answer in the moment. Roberts saw the hypocrisy in this practice and determined, as best as he was able, he would not follow this advice.<sup>24</sup> After finishing his degree at Whitworth, he decided it was time to continue his preparations for ministry in the seminary setting.

Staying on the West Coast, Roberts moved south to Pasadena, California, to attend Fuller Theological Seminary in the Fall of 1955.<sup>25</sup> After some time at Fuller, Roberts became concerned with the content of the teaching at the school. He realized that he was losing his confidence in Bible as God's Word. The impact of the teaching was that it was leading him to make concessions on the authority of Scripture. He had basically decided that he would hold to the New Testament, but view the Old Testament with suspicion. This was troubling to him, because he wanted to believe the Bible, but his studies were not helping in this struggle, so he went to visit the dean, Charles

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<sup>24</sup>In a related story, but later in his life and ministry, Roberts shared how he was invited to preach at this man's church, the Whitefield Chapel in London. During this visit, Roberts discovered that the man was actively in an adulterous relationship and he exposed the man's sins to the church leadership. Unfortunately, based on the man's actions and prayers, Roberts was not even certain that he was a believer.

<sup>25</sup>Roberts's pastor in Schenectady had been Hebert Mekeel. Mekeel was one of the first men offered the position of dean at Fuller, but he declined the initial invitation by Harold Ockenga. He later did join the faculty as dean and professor of practical ministry, but his stay was short lived as the presbytery in California refused to accept him over their concern that other, more liberal, men from Fuller would apply to join the presbytery as well. This left Mekeel with a difficult decision; if he stayed at Fuller he could not remain a Presbyterian. Ultimately, he decided to return to pastoral ministry in New York. See George Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 28, 103, and 107.

Woodbridge.<sup>26</sup> Woodbridge listened to Roberts's concerns, and then asked him if he would be willing to follow his lead after the semester. Roberts said that he would have to know what Woodbridge was planning on doing before agreeing to follow him.

Woodbridge stated that he was resigning from the seminary after the semester. Roberts replied that he could certainly follow Woodbridge in that example, and at the end of the semester both men left the school to pursue other opportunities.<sup>27</sup>

Leaving Fuller Seminary before he graduated left Roberts in a difficult position. He was thousands of miles from his home, and he knew that neither his parents nor his pastor would be happy to hear his decision. Despite these difficulties, Roberts knew that the issue of biblical authority was too significant to take lightly, or one to compromise on. He decided to return to the Spokane area to spend time to settle the issue and determine what his next steps should be in ministry. Without any income, or a place to stay, Roberts approached a director of a local mission and explained the situation to him. The director agreed to provide Roberts with a room, food, and time to settle the questions he was having about the Bible. Roberts described the time in this way:

I closed myself up in my room, and day after day, I compared the New Testament with the Old Testament. The first thing that really gripped me was if I was going to throw out the Old, I had to throw out the New. Because the New is full of quotations from the Old. Well, I didn't want to do that. And so, I determined just to press on in studying. And one day I just suddenly realized I believe every word of God's book. And I went and told the superintendent, and he said, praise the Lord for we been praying that the answer would come, and it has. Well then, I was ready for ministry.

Roberts was prepared for ministry, maybe not in the traditional sense, but in a unique manner, which in many ways prepared him for his unique ministry that would follow.

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<sup>26</sup>While Woodbridge was educated in Europe, it is reported he was not impacted by the liberal teaching prevalent at that time. Marsden states this about Woodbridge: "One of the last to study in Germany in this era was Charles Woodbridge of the early Fuller faculty, who had studied there in 1928 and in France in 1932. Woodbridge, however, was so thoroughly hardened against European thought as to be seemingly untouched by it." Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism*, 100.

<sup>27</sup>Woodbridge's leaving Fuller in 1957 is not as well-known as these later departures of faculty members, such as Harold Lindsell, but about Woodbridge's decision Lindsell wrote that he had left Fuller "presciently." Harold Lindsell, *Battle for the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 111.

## Pastoral Ministry, Research, and Travel

Roberts had settled the issue of biblical authority, and firmly landed on the conservative side of the issue.<sup>28</sup> After this event, he was called to pastor a Congregational church in Portland, Oregon in 1957. When he was called to the church he felt that only one person in the church was a genuine believer, and after some time in the church he realized that this person was clearly not saved.<sup>29</sup> Roberts had preached in the church just a few weeks when he felt that his messages were impacting the people in the church. After one sermon, he stated that if anyone in the congregation would like to know what it meant to have their sins forgiven that he would be available to meet with them at two o'clock that afternoon in the church. Roberts was thinking that one or two people would come to meet with him and that he could provide some personal counsel regarding their spiritual condition. To his astonishment, thirteen people came to the church that afternoon. He could no longer provide the individual counsel that he had intended, so he carefully presented the gospel to the group. After his discussion, he asked each person to meet with him personally during the next week to tell him how God had transformed his or her life. Again, to his surprise, over the course of the next six days, eleven of the thirteen people met with him to share how Christ had transformed their life. This event started a season of great movement in the church. About this period, Roberts stated,

The evidence from then on was mounting up that the Lord was at work doing something wonderful. And, I feel as I look back that there was a time in this country when there was a more general movement of the Holy Spirit than now. But, at the same time, I've also felt the Lord gave me that season of incredible blessing just so as I could look back from time to time, and thank Him and have that awareness that I didn't know anything then, and I don't know very much now, and it wasn't anything I knew, or really anything I did except faithfully proclaim what I knew to be true. And it was the blessing of God upon his own Word, not upon me.

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<sup>28</sup>In some ways, Roberts's struggle was like Billy Graham's on the issue of biblical authority. He had people he respected in ministry making statements against the authority of Scripture, but after some time alone he determined to trust every word of the Bible. For Graham's account of his decision on biblical inerrancy see Billy Graham, *Just as I Am: The Autobiography of Billy Graham* (Grand Rapids: HarperOne – Zondervan, 2007), 137-40.

<sup>29</sup>Roberts later met an elderly man in the church who had been ill when Roberts was called as pastor. This man was a believer, and he was faithfully praying for his church and its new pastor.

Roberts continued to serve in this church for about four years and he experienced many of the blessings and challenges of ministry. After his time in this church he decided to go to London and start research on two of his significant volumes in the area of revival.

In the early 1960s, Roberts went to London to start his research in revival. At first, this research was personal in nature as Roberts desired to build an extensive personal library about the topic of revival. In the process, the research became the published works, *Revival Literature*<sup>30</sup> and *Whitefield in Print*.<sup>31</sup> Both volumes are comprehensive annotated bibliographies which contain the significant works in their area of focus.<sup>32</sup> During this research trip, Roberts studied at the Evangelical Library, Dr. William's Library, and the British Museum, and he attended Westminster Chapel.

The Westminster Chapel was pastored by Martyn Lloyd-Jones at the time of Roberts's studies, and he was impacted by his preaching and ministry in several significant ways. The first impact occurred when Roberts was introduced to Lloyd-Jones after the service one Sunday morning. For several weeks, one of the deacons at Westminster, who also volunteered at the Evangelical Library, had been telling Roberts that Lloyd-Jones wanted to meet him. At first, Roberts disregarded this as the deacon just being polite and trying to make him feel welcome. As Roberts was preparing to leave one Sunday the deacon came and took him by the arm and escorted him to a hallway full of people waiting to speak with the Doctor.<sup>33</sup> He was taken to the front of the line and after a

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<sup>30</sup>Richard Owen Roberts, *Revival Literature: An Annotated Bibliography with Biographical and Historical Notices* (Wheaton, IL: Richard Owen Roberts Pub, 1987).

<sup>31</sup>Richard Owen Roberts, *Whitefield in Print: A Bibliographic Record of Works By, For, and Against George Whitefield: with Annotations, Biographical and Historical Notices, and Bibliographies of Associates and Contemporaries* (Wheaton, IL: Richard Owen Roberts Pub, 1988).

<sup>32</sup>These volumes are discussed in detail in chap. 4 of this dissertation.

<sup>33</sup>Martyn Lloyd-Jones had trained to be a medical doctor before entering the ministry, and this training led to many referring to him as *the Doctor* throughout his ministry. For a summary of Lloyd-Jones's ministry see American Family Studios, *Logic on Fire: The Life and Legacy of Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones*, DVD, directed by Matthew Robinson, 2015. This DVD also includes Roberts retelling his meeting with Lloyd-Jones as part of the extra footage.

little time he was invited into Lloyd-Jones's office and the two of them discussed revival for about twenty minutes. Lloyd-Jones was interested in revival, and therefore, very curious about Roberts's studies on the topic. Despite Roberts's misgivings, Lloyd-Jones did, in fact, want to meet with him and discuss his studies on the topic of revival.

After his discussion with Lloyd-Jones, Roberts and the deacon returned to the main area of the church and Roberts decided to question the deacon about the long line of people in the hallway. He asked the deacon to tell him who were all the people in the hallway lined up to see the Doctor. The deacon stated that the people were inquirers. Roberts was astonished that he was taken to the front of that line, he would have gladly waited as those who were concerned over their spiritual condition talked with Lloyd-Jones. The deacon reassured Roberts that Lloyd-Jones did indeed want to meet him, and that the line was not that unusual for a Sunday morning service. This too, surprised Roberts, and the deacon asked him not to share this information while Lloyd-Jones was alive, because Lloyd-Jones did not like keeping statistics on spiritual matters. The deacon, along with the other deacons, believed that an average of twenty-five people were converted every Sunday under Lloyd-Jones's ministry in London. Roberts stated that throughout his life this impact has been confirmed during his travels to the United Kingdom. As Roberts has been in London, he has met many people who would point to Lloyd-Jones's preaching as the instrument that God used to bring them to Christ.

A second impact that Lloyd-Jones had on Roberts during this time was in his understanding of preaching and its purpose. From Lloyd-Jones, Roberts came to see that preaching was not simply an exercise for the church to perform, but, in his words, "true preaching is the experience with God in his Word." At this point, Roberts determined that his purpose in preaching would be to help people experience God, his character, his purposes, and his heart, through the Bible. From Roberts's perspective, Lloyd-Jones never did anything more than preach Scripture, and make connections to current world events. He was struck by the fact that an invitation was not given, and the only

announcements at the end of the service were to state the time of the Sunday night service, Wednesday night prayer meeting,<sup>34</sup> and the passage that would be preached the following week. The simple preaching of God's Word was enough to convert people.

The impact of Lloyd-Jones's preaching was significant on Roberts. As he prepared to return to the United States and to continue his own preaching ministry he would seek to incorporate some elements that he observed in his time at Westminster and in his study of revival. After his studies, Roberts returned to the United States and started his itinerant preaching ministry, but other significant changes were coming to his life.

### **Marriage and Family Life**

Roberts returned to the United States, and while visiting his parent's home in New York, his mother encouraged him to go to the university age group meeting prior to the evening service one Sunday. As Roberts walked into the sanctuary the group was singing out of the InterVarsity hymnal. He did not know many of the songs, and one young woman, noticing this, stood next to him and offered to share her songbook. Without even directing looking at the young woman, Roberts thought about who this woman could be, and if she would be the one that he would marry. Roberts had always desired to be married, but it was a matter he felt could only be handled with prayer and patience. Although he was getting older, he remained faithful to trusting that the Lord would guide him in this area of his life. The woman holding the song book, although younger than Roberts, was approaching the subject of marriage in a similar fashion. After this initial meeting, they both spent time in prayer on the matter, and after a short while, Roberts and Margaret Ann Jameson (Maggie) became engaged to be married.

The manner in which Roberts approached his engagement with Maggie helps to demonstrate his confidence that the Lord would lead him to a suitable spouse. Instead

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<sup>34</sup>Roberts stated that the announcement for the Wednesday night prayer meeting would be "Prayer meeting at seven on the Wednesday, all believers required to be in attendance."

of planning an elaborate, and romantic, event which would lead up to the big question, Roberts prepared a detailed list of reasons why she should not marry him. His reasons included the fact that he was quite a bit older than her, and that his itinerant preaching would mean that she would regularly be left alone with any children that they might have. Maggie listened to the difficulties that would be ahead of them in marriage, but after consideration she determined that she understood the challenges and she still desired to marry Roberts. Shortly after their engagement, the Fuller Foundation arranged a honeymoon, and preaching opportunity, in Bermuda for the following June.<sup>35</sup> Roberts informed Maggie of the plans, but she declined the opportunity because she had already agreed to be a nurse at an area summer camp. Instead of an early summer marriage, the couple was wed on September 8, 1962, the day before Roberts thirty-first birthday.

As a newly married couple the two adjusted to life together and the realities of an itinerate ministry. They would have two children, Robert Owen Roberts<sup>36</sup> and Gwynne Margaret Roberts.<sup>37</sup> Even after having children, Roberts continued to travel regularly to preach, but he became convicted that he could not properly lead his family in this way. He remembered returning home one time and his young children did not recognize him. For this reason, he and Maggie started to pray for an opportunity for a ministry that would be equal in need and challenge as the itinerate ministry. This prayer was answered with an opportunity to pastor a large church that was located in Fresno, California.

The church was called the Free Evangelical Lutheran Cross Church. Roberts

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<sup>35</sup>Roberts regularly received offers to preach in churches from the Fuller Foundation. When Charles Fuller was unable to accept an invitation to preach somewhere, the foundation would often recommend Roberts. This connection started shortly after Roberts had become an itinerant preacher because he simply informed a director at the seminary that he had entered the itinerate ministry.

<sup>36</sup>Robert Roberts would later assist his father in the bookstore ministry, living in an apartment next to his parents above the bookstore in Wheaton. He and his wife would have six children. He currently lives in Maryville, Tennessee, and works for InterVarsity.

<sup>37</sup>Gwynne has had developmental issues that limited her mental abilities in some ways. She lives in Wheaton near her parents. She participates in regularly in a special needs program through the College Church near Wheaton College, in Wheaton, Illinois.

humorously recalled that only one word in the title was true of the church. It was not a free church because members had to pay dues. It was not evangelical, because Roberts believes that he and Maggie were the only believers in the whole church. It was not a Lutheran church, and in fact, the local Lutheran churches sent a letter to the church asking that the title be taken out of the name as it misled people in the area. Roberts said that the one word in the church's name that fit was cross, because the people in the church were the crossiest people that he has ever served in ministry. Roberts's discussion of the name of the church in many ways illustrate his tumultuous time at the church. He was called to be pastor after a church vote that was substantially short of a majority.<sup>38</sup> Additionally, after his first sermon as pastor some of the deacons approached him because they were unhappy with his message. Their plan was to have Roberts submit his sermon notes to them on Tuesdays, and they would then edit his notes telling him what he could preach the following Sunday. Roberts stood his ground, and pointed the deacons to the church's constitution, which stated that the deacons were to serve the pastor, not provide oversight over him. He firmly told them that when he needed something he would ask them; however, if they knew of a church member who was hospitalized and would need him to visit then they could inform him of those matters. The deacons were not very happy with their new pastor, and they threatened to have him voted out of the church. Roberts responded that he could not stop them from trying, but he was certain that he would be at the church until the Lord removed him from his position. About one year later, Roberts preached his last sermon as pastor of the church. His passage was Matthew 6:13, "deliver us from evil." Roberts recalled it as a fitting end to his ministry there because both sides felt like they were being delivered from evil.

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<sup>38</sup>The church voted on three men at one time. Roberts received the most votes, about eight hundred, the second man received about seven hundred votes, and the third man received about six hundred votes. More people voted against calling Roberts than those who voted for him. Roberts said he knew all this information entering the situation, but he believed that he was called by God to be there, and so he would faithfully serve the church until he was directed to go to another ministry opportunity.

After his time at the Free Evangelical Lutheran Cross Church in Fresno came to an end, Roberts remained in the Fresno area and planted a church. He would pastor the church plant for about eight years, and he remembered this time as being good for his family and rewarding in his ministry. One of his favorite memories from this time was the time that he spent with his children on Wednesday nights after the church's prayer meetings. His wife, Maggie, would sing in the church's choir, which practiced after the prayer meeting each week. This meant that on Wednesday nights it was solely Roberts's responsibility to take the children home and put them to bed. In this process, Roberts started telling an ongoing story that he would make up for the children. Every week the children would excitedly get into the car and ask their father to continue the story, but Roberts said it was difficult for him to make such a sudden switch from a serious prayer meeting to an engaging children's story. Instead of entering the story immediately, Roberts would ask the children to review what had happened in the story the previous weeks. As the children reviewed the story, it would help Roberts mentally transition, and once the kids got to the place where the story stopped the previous week he was ready, much to the delight of his children, to continue forward with the always evolving tale.

Roberts and his family remained in Fresno at the church plant for about eight years before the call of itinerate preaching drew him back out of the pastorate. He remembered having a conversation with Wilbur Smith, an old contact from Fuller Seminary, and in the conversation Smith had suggested that Wheaton, Illinois would make a great place to have a serious Christian bookstore. The idea seemed good to Roberts, who had already started a book business to help support himself in ministry. In 1975, Roberts and his family relocated to Wheaton to continue his preaching ministry, develop his bookstore, and to serve with the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association.

## Preaching Ministry

For most of his life, Roberts has been an itinerant preacher. As mentioned previously, he was a pastor in Portland for about four years, a year at the established church in Fresno, and about more eight years at the Fresno church plant. Most of the remaining years of his ministry were spent traveling to different churches and conferences preaching on the topic of revival. From this ministry Roberts has been able to experience the church from a unique prospective. He has seen conflicts, exposed sins, and watched as denominations shifted in both theology and practice. Through all these experiences his hope has been to faithfully proclaim God's Word to the church in anticipation of revival. Despite the many shortcomings easily apparent in the American church, Roberts has maintained hope that God might still bring revival to his people.

As Roberts contemplated starting his itinerate ministry he had two main obstacles to overcome. First, he recognized that the Presbyterian system would not allow him the flexibility to travel and preach as widely as he would like to do. Second, he knew that it would be difficult to support a family on the inconsistent money of an itinerate. To address his first issue, Roberts decided to become a Congregationalist. This movement between denominations did not force Roberts to make any substantial changes to his theological beliefs, and it provided him with the freedom to accept invitations to preach at many different denominations.<sup>39</sup> In addressing the second issue, Roberts decided to start a book selling business. In its earliest years, most of the books were sold mail-order and he did not have a physical store front. The benefits of the book business were that Roberts could provide some level of consistent income for himself, and later his family, and that he also did not have to ask for any amount to preach in a church. When a church

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<sup>39</sup>Roberts stated that his beliefs align closely with Baptists in all areas, except baptism. He said, "I have never tried to pretend to be a Southern Baptist, but I'm not aware of any area in my life where I would disagree with true Southern Baptist doctrines as far as I know. I'm probably much more baptistic than anything else, though I don't really think baptism by immersion is essential in any way to salvation. I've not been baptized by immersion, I'm not about to be. But I do think it's the preferential way, and by all means it carries the greatest significance. But other than not being one, I'm probably about as close as you can get without being [one]."

asked Roberts how much they would have to pay, he would simply reply that the church could give whatever they felt was appropriate. In this way, Roberts has felt that money was never a significant factor in deciding whether to accept an invitation to preach.

In addition to the issues discussed above, itinerate ministry brought challenges to Roberts's family life. He remembers one time returning home from a preaching trip and entering the house without Maggie knowing that he was home. She was on the phone telling the person on the other end that he would not be home for several more days. When she turned and saw him standing in the room they both had a good laugh over the fact that it was so difficult to keep track of his travel schedule. Despite the difficulties, Maggie was supportive of the ministry. When she was asked about whether it was difficult to be home alone with the children so often, her response was that she could handle it because she knew what her husband was doing was what God called him to do. If he was travelling this much as a salesman, selling some product, then she might find it difficult, but with him preaching she knew they were both being faithful to God's call.

Throughout the seventy plus years of Roberts's preaching ministry there has been a noticeable shift in the denominations that send him invitations to preach in their churches. As a young man in New York and Washington, most of Roberts's invitations came from denominations located in the northern portion of the country. His background provided him opportunities in Presbyterian and Congregational churches regularly. As an older man, many of his invitations to preach come from Baptist and Church of Christ churches.<sup>40</sup> He has also preached at Assembly of God, Episcopal, Lutheran, and

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<sup>40</sup>Roberts determined at a young age to not focus on issues that were divisive when preaching in a church that held to a position different from his own. He feels that most denominational differences revolve around baptism, the Lord's Supper, and eschatology. In his words, "I came to the conclusion that there were three areas of great divisiveness; eschatology, which I've already spoken ever so briefly about, and the ordinances; baptism and the Lord's supper. And huge conflicts and splits have occurred, and we can almost account for the multitude of denominations, just on the basis of those three issues. So, I set my heart, not to violate in those three areas, and although I have personal convictions, I don't find it important to pay any attention to essential issue in the whole doctrine of eschatology to my way of thinking is be ready at all times. The essential in human baptism is not the amount of water that's involved, or the means in which that water is utilized, but that you have a transforming experience with Christ which you are giving public testimony to in baptism. And in the Lord's supper, that the Lord's table must not be open to

Methodist churches throughout his ministry. From these groups, Roberts most regularly preaches in Southern Baptist churches, one reason for this was Henry Blackaby.

The connection with Blackaby started when Roberts was invited to preach at the Rocky Mountain Keswick Conference along with a retired missionary named Bertha Smith.<sup>41</sup> Smith was a leading figure in the Shantung Revival in China.<sup>42</sup> However, Smith died shortly before the conference was to be held and the event was cancelled.<sup>43</sup> The pastor organizing the conference invited Roberts to come and preach, but this time in partnership with Blackaby. Roberts remembers preparing to preach on the last night of the conference. He was struggling with what he should preach on that night because he felt like he should preach from Joel and discuss the solemn assembly. His struggle was he had already preached on this topic earlier in the week. Despite his misgivings, he determined that God was leading him to preach on this topic. After speaking Blackaby approached him to thank him for the message. Blackaby was scheduled to lead a group of Southern Baptist denominational leaders over the next several days, and he was not sure what he was going to speak to them about. After hearing the message on the solemn assembly, he had determined that is what he would teach. After this conference, Roberts began receiving regular invitations to preach in Southern Baptist churches.

Before concluding this section on Roberts's preaching ministry there are several items that should be noted. First, Roberts's sermons are often quite long compared to most contemporary preachers. He will regularly preach for one and a half to

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anybody any everybody, but carefully fenced and involving only those who have truly sought the Lord and have repented of every known issue in their life where they are in conflict with him.”

<sup>41</sup>Roberts stated that this conference was not actually a Keswick conference; instead it was just that group's best understanding of what a Keswick conference should be.

<sup>42</sup>Mary K. Crawford, *The Shantung Revival* (Shanghai: China Baptist Publication Society, 1933).

<sup>43</sup>Roberts has mentioned Bertha Smith regularly as an illustration of faithful service to the Lord in both her missionary career and in her “retirement” in his sermons. It is clear that he has been impacted by her ministry, and while he has not stated this, it seems like he would have liked to meet her personally.

two hours in length in a Sunday morning setting. He will preach for longer at a conference. Roberts has often explained that the reason his sermons are so long is because Sunday is the Lord's day, not the Lord's hour. He lamented that many churches are so tied to their schedule, due to multiple services, that the church cannot give adequate time in a sermon for God to use his Word to convict and change people. Roberts's also firmly believes that Christians should crave to hear the Word of God preached, and that the shortness of most sermons is an indictment against the unconverted nature of many of the people in the pews. When people are converted, and faithfully seeking God, Roberts believes that they will have no issue sitting through lengthy sermons. Roberts also noted that the one comment he has received most about the length of his sermons is from people who say that they wish he would preach longer. An additional characteristic of Roberts's sermons is that he has had a heavy emphasis on the Old Testament. When asked about this emphasis, Roberts often will open a Bible between the Old Testament and New Testament, demonstrating the larger Old Testament section. He then simply states that since about two-thirds of the Bible is Old Testament, more preaching would come from the Old Testament than from the New.<sup>44</sup> Even when Roberts does preach from a New Testament passage he will often return to sections of the Old Testament to support his points and for illustrations. While his preaching does not conform to many of the characteristics of the modern church, it is still impactful for those who hear. In his preaching, Roberts has not sought to be successful by human standards, but only to be faithful to what the Lord has called him to do. In this endeavor, it can be seen that Roberts has been faithful to the Lord's leading and this has blessed the church.

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<sup>44</sup>Roberts does this in a somewhat humorous manner at the beginning of this message: Richard Owen Roberts, "What does Christ want?" accessed on May 12, 2017, <https://heart-cryforrevival.org/fusionlivestream/>.

## **Bookstore Ministry**

While Roberts has had a significant impact on the church through his preaching on revival, he has also had an impact through his bookstore and publishing. As mentioned previously, one of the main reasons that Roberts started his bookstore was to provide financial support for his preaching ministry. The bookstore might not be considered a great success in the business sense, but it certainly has provided the regular and consistent income that Roberts sought for his family.<sup>45</sup> Roberts started the bookstore ministry as a mail-order business about the time that he started his itinerate preaching ministry. When the opportunity presented itself to relocate his family to Wheaton, in a connection with the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (BGEA), Roberts purchased a couple buildings adjacent to the Wheaton College campus.<sup>46</sup> The buildings were previously used by various ministries as office space, but Roberts converted the downstairs into his bookstore and office. The upstairs was remodeled into several apartments. Roberts and his wife, Maggie, have lived in one of the apartments, and for a period of time, his son Robert and his family lived in another one of the apartments.

When discussing the bookstore, Roberts stated that individual customers were never really the main patrons of his business. In fact, his primary customers were institutions seeking to buy large quantities of material on various subjects to build libraries. Typically, a school, or institution, would approach Roberts needing a collection of books on topics like psychology, Baptist history, or other subjects. The entity would sometimes be seeking six to eight thousand books. Roberts would locate the volumes and

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<sup>45</sup>Roberts even stated that Wheaton, Illinois, was probably one of the worst places that he could have located his physical bookstore because he feels the city has a culture of religion without the spiritual life from God's grace.

<sup>46</sup>Roberts worked with the BGEA to help start a library collection on revival. According to Roberts's website he contributed over 9,000 volumes to provide the nucleus of the library. Roberts also would appraise other library collections that the BGEA was interested in bidding on for different reasons. It is unclear how official Roberts's connection with the BGEA ever was, but some evidence suggests that the relationship soured after some time with Roberts even stating that he was deeply hurt in the connection. See "Richard Owen Roberts," Richard Owen Roberts Trust, accessed May 25, 2017, <http://rortrust.org/>.

sell them to the institution. He stated that for years this was the primary task of the business.<sup>47</sup> It is in connection with his business of selling large quantities of books to institutions that Roberts started his publishing business. While working with institutions Roberts discovered that large payments for orders would often be sent to him at unpredictable and inopportune times for preparing for taxes. He said that more than once he would receive a large check that would then require him to pay substantially more in taxes than he had been planning to do. For this reason, Roberts decided that it would be to his benefit to start publishing material through the book business. When he would receive a large check from an institution he could invest most of the money back into publishing costs and therefore spread the income out through the sale of published books.

In connection with starting a publishing business, Roberts would have to determine what type of material that he would publish. At first, he considered publishing a wide range of material, but eventually he settled on only publishing material in the area of revival. More specifically, he was going to focus on publishing material that dealt with strong periods of church history, particularly the Puritan period. Roberts stated,

I had to make some decision, will we try to become general publishers or will we regulate our activity on some sound basis. Well, because I was of the conviction that the puritan period came as close to New Testament Christianity as you could find, that we would designate that our publishing activity would be solely in the area of revival as it was blended in with strong periods of church history.

The first set that Richard Owen Roberts Publishers printed was the works of Thomas Boston.<sup>48</sup> The set consisted of twelve volumes. Other works that were published included pamphlets by Roberts, several books that he authored or edited, historical works from men like R. Philip Roberts and W. Vernon Highman, and works by J. Edwin Orr.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup>He also mentioned that this has changed in recent years because most institutions are not building printed book libraries. Instead most institutions are selling their books whenever possible.

<sup>48</sup>Books were published under the Richard Owen Roberts Publishers label or International Awakening Press label.

<sup>49</sup>See R. Philip Roberts, *Continuity and Change: London Calvinistic Baptists and the Evangelical Revival 1760-1820* (Wheaton, IL: International Awakening Press, 1989); and W. Vernon Highman, *The Turn of the Tide: When God Floods His Church with True Revival Blessing* (Wheaton, IL:

The connection between Roberts and Orr is significant, not just in publishing but also in their preaching ministries. The two men had served together in revival ministry in a number of different locations, and they considered each other friends. According to Roberts, Orr tried on several occasions to get him to pursue higher education degrees, and at one time was seeking to have a doctorate degree rewarded to him based off of his research for the book *Revival Literature*.<sup>50</sup> The connection between the two men led to Roberts being appointed the president of the Orr Association after Orr passed away. In this role, Roberts considered the purpose of the organization, which was to facilitate preaching for J. Edwin Orr, and determined that the best course of action would be to close the ministry rather than completely alter its purpose. The board followed Roberts's decision and many of the assets of the ministry were given to International Awakening Ministries – this was a ministry, also lead by Roberts, which sought to help promote revival. Included in the assets from the Orr Association were several unpublished works that he was not able to complete before he died. Roberts edited and published these works to make them available to others in the hope that Orr's final words on revival would be an encouragement to those in the church seeking it.<sup>51</sup>

A final topic to consider while discussing the bookstore ministry from Roberts's life is the knowledge of theological literature that he gained through working with books. As Roberts collected and sold historical and academic theological material he became an expert in this area. Other book collectors, or appraisers, would often seek his advice on the value of collections or volumes. He was employed several times by the

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International Awakening Press, 1995). J. Edwin Orr's works are discussed individually below.

<sup>50</sup>Roberts, *Revival Literature*.

<sup>51</sup>The Orr books that Roberts edited and published after his death are J. Edwin Orr, *An Apprenticeship of Faith*, ed. Richard Owen Roberts (Wheaton, IL: International Awakening Press, 1993); Orr, *Campus Aflame: A History of Evangelical Awakenings in Collegiate Communities*, ed. Richard Owen Roberts (Wheaton, IL: International Awakening Press, 1994); Orr, *The Event of the Century: The 1857-1858 Awakening*, ed. Richard Owen Roberts (Wheaton, IL: International Awakening Press, 1989); and Orr, *My All, His All*, ed. Richard Owen Roberts (Wheaton, IL: Richard Owen Roberts Pub, 1989).

Billy Graham Association to appraise a library collection that was on auction, and to help them prepare an appropriate bid.<sup>52</sup> Roberts considered this one of the great blessings of his dealings in the book industry. In this role, he spent several days browsing through the Spurgeon Library when William Jewel College was selling it.<sup>53</sup> He remembers feeling extremely blessed by the Lord to have the opportunity to handle that material and even for the opportunity to read many of Spurgeon's own inscriptions in some of the books. On another occasion, he was sent to appraise a collection of material in the Hartford Theological Library. He remembers this collection containing a great collection of theological works, including six to eight hundred volumes of incunabula.<sup>54</sup> The library was also significant because it was founded by a group that included Asahel Nettleton.<sup>55</sup>

Overall, Roberts's bookstore ministry has served its purpose in providing a steady and reliable income for his family, and by allowing him to consider preaching engagements without money being an issue. As it has been demonstrated, the bookstore also provided other avenues for Roberts to promote revival and draw attention to historical works that he found significant in this area. When remembering his many experiences that have been a result of the bookstore, Roberts simply remarked that it has been an incredible experience, and that he was blessed to have the bookstore in his life.

### **Prayer Meeting Ministry**

Another one of the important aspects of Roberts's ministry, that has not been

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<sup>52</sup>Other seminaries and colleges would occasionally employ him for his appraisal skills as well.

<sup>53</sup>In this instance, he went as a representative for Midwestern Theology Seminary in Kansas City, Missouri. With Roberts's guidance, the seminary was able to acquire the Spurgeon library.

<sup>54</sup>*Incunabula* is a term used in the book industry to refer to books published prior to AD 1500. See Roberts's explanation in the appendix.

<sup>55</sup>On the significance of Nettleton's life and ministry in the area of revival, see John Thornberry, *God Sent Revival: The Story of Asahel Nettleton and the Second Great Awakening* (1977; repr., Grand Rapids: Evangelical Press, 1993).

examined in any of the sections above, has been his continued emphasis on gathering believers to pray together for personal and corporate revival. In the section on his conversion at a young age, it was discussed that Roberts enjoyed attending prayer meetings as a young boy, and he has continued to attend and host prayer meetings ever since. In his office, and in his home, Roberts has set up chairs that will accommodate groups of people gathered together in prayer. At one point, Roberts had hosted a weekly prayer meeting that involved about twenty men for twenty-five years, but the meetings ended when his partner moved from Wheaton and he could not find someone to help him lead the meetings when he was out of town. Despite the end of this group, prayer meetings have continued to be a significant part of Roberts's life and ministry.

There are numerous reasons why Roberts hosted the prayer meetings, but the most significant reason is that he has always been convicted that believers will gather regularly for prayer. Additionally, Roberts has taught that prayer is an action that precedes revival. When believers are prepared for revival, they pray in a manner that displays their willingness to conform to God's will. Roberts referenced James 1 on prayer and revival to discuss that there are cheap and costly prayers. He said, "Don't trouble God for something you are not willing to pay for."<sup>56</sup> Revival is a costly experience, and through these meetings Roberts has often met with men willing to pay the price.

Finally, it must be noted that Roberts did not gather people to pray thinking that in some manner he could work up, or that the group could force, a revival. His conviction has been that prayer is a necessary component to be properly equipped for revival, but he also believes that it is a mandated action for church members. He said, "People who are not involved in the prayer life of the church are not involved in the real

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<sup>56</sup>Richard Owen Roberts, "Part 4: Is It Too Late for Another Great Awakening?" accessed December 19, 2016, <http://www.collegeofrevival.org/part-4-is-it-too-late-for-another-great-awakening/>. This lecture is one teaching from a set of twelve lectures that were delivered by Roberts on the campus of Wheaton College. The whole set can be found at <http://www.collegeofrevival.org>.

life of the church.”<sup>57</sup> In a similar manner, he taught that prayer was a not gift for a select few people in the church, but it is an action that all believers must participate in to be faithful followers of Christ. Roberts explained that prayer for revival is something that has historically preceded revivals, again, not as the originator of the revival, but as a display of the faithfulness of God’s people. For Roberts, a prayer meeting was a natural extension of his ministry in the area of revival as he sought to equip people for revival through prayer by regularly facilitating, hosting, and attending group prayer meetings.

### **Legacy**

As Roberts as grown older he has been asked on several occasions to discuss the legacy of his life. One notable example of this question occurred is when he received the Homer G. Lindsey Lifetime of Ministry Award, and he was interviewed to share his reflections on his ministry.<sup>58</sup> Roberts’s response in this setting, and others, was consistent with a man who has simply sought to be faithful to the Lord in his daily tasks. In response, he stated that his legacy is not something that he has considered very much, mostly because he has very little control over it. Additionally, in the interview for this section, Roberts discussed how his time with books has impacted his thinking in this area. He discussed men like Andrew Murray or A.W. Tozer, who really did not have much of an impact in their own day, but later their books were rediscovered and their impact on the church was significant. He believes that some projects that he has been involved with will continue to impact the church, including the College of Revival lecture series, but for the most part he thinks that new voices must be used of God for each generation.

Despite Roberts’s thoughts on his legacy, he will be leaving the church with

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<sup>57</sup>Richard Owen Roberts, “Part 8: Have Prayed, Is There Anything Else to Do?” accessed December 26, 2016, <http://www.collegeofrevival.org/part-8-having-prayed-is-there-anything-else-to-do/>.

<sup>58</sup>For this award, the conference produced a forty-six-minute interview during which Roberts discussed different aspects of his life and ministry. See “Richard Owen Roberts,” *Richard Owen Roberts Trust*, accessed May 25, 2017, <http://rortrust.org/>.

some significant resources in regard to his published writings and teachings. His books, particularly *Repentance*, have the ability to continue to speak to readers for years to come. Additionally, Roberts has impacted many younger preachers and teachers who will continue to seek biblical revival in the church. In many ways, Roberts's words on revival correspond with his life. He said, "Revivals were not intended to last perpetually, but the impact lasts forever."<sup>59</sup> Similarly, "True revival endures, its fruits never pass away."<sup>60</sup> Like the effects of revival, Roberts's ministry legacy is one that will never completely disappear simply because of the spiritual benefit he has brought to individuals and to the church through his teachings on revival and the works that he has published.

### **Conclusion**

Through the process of examining and researching Richard Owen Roberts's life for this project, it was a privilege to be invited into Roberts's personal study and home to hear him reflect on his life and ministry. In this process, I was struck by Roberts's continued pursuit of living a Christ-honoring life and equipping the church for revival. Even at this late stage of his life, with the church at arguably its weakest point in the last one hundred years, Roberts has clung to hope that the Lord, at any moment, could decide to move among his people and bring incredible revival. He believes that any significant revival would need to bring about drastic changes in most churches today. Changes that impact not only the people's practices, but their beliefs as well. Roberts stated that without question the most neglected doctrine in the church today is the doctrine of God. As he considers the American church, he believes that most church members have a distorted view of the character of God. The focus is too much on his

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<sup>59</sup>Richard Owen Roberts, "Part 3: The Place of True Revivals in the Cycles of Human History," accessed December 8, 2016, <http://www.collegeofrevival.org/part-3-the-place-of-true-revivals-in-the-cycles-of-human-history/>.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid.

love, while neglecting aspects of justice, holiness, and wrath. As people follow this distorted view of God, it leads the church to improperly view the work of Christ, salvation, and even their Christian duty. Despite this negative view of the American church today, Roberts has remained hopeful because he knows that it is not beyond the power of God to revive his people and reform their beliefs. This chapter has considered Roberts's life and ministry in a biographical format. The next chapter will focus on his theology of revival in a systematic manner. The chapter will seek to develop a theology of revival from his published material and available teachings that will help explain the reasons for Roberts's hope that God can still revive the American church today.

CHAPTER 3  
RICHARD OWEN ROBERTS'S THEOLOGY  
OF REVIVAL

When a person has spent more than three-quarters of a century preaching, teaching and writing on one topic, the sheer volume of material can make it a challenge to organize and discuss without first bringing some structure to it. This is certainly the case for Richard Owen Roberts and the topic of revival. Throughout his life, he has been focused on the topic of revival, and while the pieces of a complete theology of revival are present throughout his ministries, a structured and comprehensive discussion has been lacking.<sup>1</sup> The purpose of this chapter is to examine his writing, preaching, and teaching to organize his theology of revival into one concise format. The chapter will examine his definition of revival and his discussion of these topics: God, man, conversion, Christ, the church, the community, results, hindrances, and genuine revival. Through this study, one will gain an understanding of Roberts's theology of revival and be prepared to explore the connection that he has made to repentance and history in the following chapter.

**Definition of Revival**

In the introductory chapter of this dissertation, an illustration was presented about the various uses, understandings, and meanings applied to the term revival. This discussion demonstrated that portions of the American church use the term revival to refer to a prolonged series of meetings with an evangelistic intent, whereas many others define it as a unique work of God in the church. Due to this confusion, it is imperative that terms be defined for proper understanding to be possible. Richard Owen Roberts

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<sup>1</sup>See chap. 2 for a detailed presentation of Richard Owen Roberts's life and ministry.

recognizes this in his book on the topic of revival, and therefore he carefully defines his words in the beginning of the book. He states, “If I ask you to agree with my definition of revival you may find it difficult, but if I ask you to understand my *use* of the term, you can then think with me on this grand and vital subject.”<sup>2</sup> Roberts recognizes that many might not agree with his use of the term, but to properly understand his book on revival one must understand how he uses the term. In a similar manner, many other men who have had an impact on Roberts were also very careful to define the term. For this reason, this section will first discuss the definition of several influential men, starting at the First Great Awakening, and conclude by examine Roberts’s definition of the term.

When examining the topic of revival, especially in the American context, one man is often regarded as the starting point for the discussion. That man is Jonathan Edwards, a prominent pastor during the First Great Awakening. Edwards is regarded by many as not only an authority on revival, but as one of America’s leading theologians. In his biography of Edwards, George Marsden writes, “Edwards was extraordinary. By many estimates, he was the most acute early American philosophers and the most brilliant of all American theologians.”<sup>3</sup> Edwards certainly was a gifted and thoughtful man, and his impact went far beyond his own congregation through the printing of sermons and accounts of revival.<sup>4</sup> Thomas Kidd addresses this impact when he writes, “[Edwards’ books were] critical for generating excitement about the revivals and expectations that awakenings could happen in towns receiving those publications, too.”<sup>5</sup> In this regard,

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<sup>2</sup>Richard Owen Roberts, *Revival* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1983), 15. Emphasis original.

<sup>3</sup>George M. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 1.

<sup>4</sup>See Jonathan Edwards, *Jonathan Edwards on Revival* (1965; repr., Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1995).

<sup>5</sup>Thomas S. Kidd, *The Great Awakening: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martins, 2008), xviii.

Edwards is still impacting the church today through his written word and his impact has had an evident effect on the life and ministry of Richard Owen Roberts as well.

Edwards does not provide a short and concise definition of revival that is typical of modern writing; instead his work *The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God* provides an extended discussion of what defines revival.<sup>6</sup> In this publication, Edwards describes revival as “days of grace,”<sup>7</sup> which raises the esteem of Jesus<sup>8</sup> and hinders the work of Satan.<sup>9</sup> Additionally, revival is marked by a greater response to God’s Word,<sup>10</sup> with people being able to more clearly see truth from error.<sup>11</sup> Finally, according to Edwards, revival will lead to a greater love towards God and others.<sup>12</sup> Edwards sets the tone for the church’s early understanding of revival, but by the end of the Second Great Awakening another voice had captured the church’s attention.

The man who greatly impacted the definition of revival during, and following, the Second Great Awakening was Charles Finney. Finney not only defined revival for the church, but he brought a completely different perspective when compared to Edwards and most of the early American church fathers. His book starts by presenting the impact of revival and how it stirs the church towards a greater love for God, and then how it impacts the larger community. He writes, “Revival is the renewal of the first love of Christians, resulting in the awakening and conversion of sinners to God.”<sup>13</sup> Furthermore,

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<sup>6</sup>Edwards, *Jonathan Edwards on Revival*, 75-147.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 75.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 109.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 111.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 113.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 114.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 115.

<sup>13</sup>Charles Finney, *Lectures on Revival* (1835; repr., Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1988), 15.

Finney continues by stating, “Revival presupposes that the church is mired in a backslidden state.”<sup>14</sup> Where Finney took a dramatic turn from those who were before him was on the issue of how revivals start. To this point in church history, most would state that revival happens when God chose to make it happen—that revival was in fact a miracle. In a complete contrast to this long-held position, Finney disagrees:

For a long time the church believed a revival was a miracle—an interposition of divine power with which they had nothing to do. They had no more a part in producing a revival than they had in producing thunder, hail, or an earthquake. Only recently have Christians realized revivals should be *promoted* by tools and resources designed for that purpose.<sup>15</sup>

For Finney, revival was not a miraculous work of God, instead a church simply had to follow the correct means to make revival start. It is clear that Finney’s ideas have had a profound impact on the American church, in contrast, much of Roberts’s ministry has been aimed at correcting many of the practices that have resulted from these teachings.<sup>16</sup>

While Edwards and Finney have set the stage for revival in America, several more recent voices have had a significant impact on Roberts’s understanding of revival. Three men, in particular, must be mentioned: Martyn Lloyd-Jones, J. Edwin Orr, and Stephen Olford. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Lloyd-Jones impacted Roberts when he was a young man studying revival in London.<sup>17</sup> Roberts regularly refers to the times that he sat under Lloyd-Jones’s preaching and the impact that the Holy Spirit had on him in those occasions. Lloyd-Jones defines revival in numerous places, but this definition summarizes his understanding, “The essences of a revival is that the Holy

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<sup>14</sup>Finney, *Lectures on Revival*, 15.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 17. Emphasis original.

<sup>16</sup>For greater detail about this change, see Iain H. Murray, who provided great insight into the shift from promoting revival to practicing revivalism that happened during the Second Great Awakening. Iain H. Murray, *Revival and Revivalism: The Making and Marring of American Evangelicalism 1750-1858* (1994; repr., Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2009).

<sup>17</sup>For more detail about this relationship and the impact that Lloyd-Jones has had on Roberts, see chap. 2 of this dissertation.

Spirit comes down upon a number of people together, upon a whole church, upon a number of churches, districts, or perhaps a whole country.”<sup>18</sup> Or in other words, “[Revival is] a visitation of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>19</sup> Lloyd-Jones’s definition of revival impacted Roberts as he modified how he defines the term over the course of his ministry.

In addition to Lloyd-Jones, Roberts has also been impacted greatly by J. Edwin Orr—he even sought to preserve Orr’s work by republishing some of his writings.<sup>20</sup> Orr defines revival as a spiritual movement which brings the church back to its New Testament founding and leads to more engagement with evangelism, teaching, and social action.<sup>21</sup> Orr’s desire was to see the church return to its historic roots and this is also evident in Roberts’s ministry as he continually seeks to remind the church of its glorious history. Finally, Stephen Olford’s definition of revival must be considered because he and Roberts regularly spoke at the same events. Roberts occasionally mentions the connection that he had to Olford through ministry and he is appreciative of his work.<sup>22</sup> Olford defines revival as “the sovereign act of God, in which He restores His own backsliding people to repentance, faith, and obedience.”<sup>23</sup> Roberts’s ministry highlights many aspects of Olford’s definition, particularly his focus on backsliders and God reviving them.

While many more definitions of revival could be examined, the five listed above are sufficient in that they represent main influences in the topic area of revival,

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<sup>18</sup>Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Revival* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1987), 100.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup>For more on the connection between Roberts and Orr, see chap. 4 of this dissertation.

<sup>21</sup>J. Edwin Orr, *The Flaming Tongue: The Impact of the Twentieth-Century Revivals* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1973), vii-viii.

<sup>22</sup>Richard Owen Roberts, “Psalm 33: Christianity: Personal & Corporate (2),” accessed February 2, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RghtV5iWEP4&index=2&list=PLmmTx77FrqRcmfBrKjoDC8QUz-dOBslVj>.

<sup>23</sup>Stephen Olford, *Heart Cry for Revival: Expository Sermons on Revival* (Westwood, NJ: Revel, 1962), 33.

particularly influencing Roberts on the subject. Roberts regularly defines revival in his teaching and preaching, but the first place that he is often quoted from is his book on revival. In the first chapter of the book he defines revival as, “an extraordinary movement of the Holy Spirit producing extraordinary results.”<sup>24</sup> He further explains his definition by stating that revival is extraordinary because it is so rare, that many years can pass between God’s movements. He writes, “When an entire generation of Christians can live and die without ever having come close to genuine revival, such a movement of God is extraordinary indeed!”<sup>25</sup> In addition, Roberts describes revival as a work of God. He clearly states that man cannot do anything that will force revival even though there are many things that a Christian should do in an obedient life.<sup>26</sup> Finally, Roberts points out that revival produces extraordinary results. He states, “When revival comes, so powerful will be the conviction that persons who once thought themselves well worthy of heaven will stand in wonder and amazement that they are not already burning in the fires of hell.”<sup>27</sup> According to Roberts, in revival one will be more aware of their sinfulness and God’s holiness—it will bring the person to a greater understanding of God’s character.

During much of his ministry, Roberts used the definition above to explain his use of the term revival, however in recent years he has modified his definition. He now explains, “True revival is God in the midst of His people.”<sup>28</sup> He acknowledges that he has changed his definition, but he also explains that his new definition better captures the idea that he is trying to convey. In another lecture, Roberts notes that revival is a time

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<sup>24</sup>Roberts, *Revival*, 16-17.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 21.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 22.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 23.

<sup>28</sup>Richard Owen Roberts, “Part 1: The Nature and Incredible Beauty of True Revival,” accessed December 1, 2016, <http://www.collegeofrevival.org/part-1-the-nature-and-incredible-beauty-of-true-revival/>.

when heaven is closer to earth than any other time.<sup>29</sup> Additionally, he highlights other terms that are often used when he discusses revival, these terms are: awakening, fire, fullness, glory, judgment, outpouring, Pentecost, power, progress, rain, reformation, refreshing, renewal, visitation, the wind of God, and God’s working.<sup>30</sup> Each of these terms reflect a different aspect of revival that he often discusses in different messages when he teaches on the topic. The reality is that revival is not something that can be explained in one sentence, but it is something that requires study from multiple viewpoints. To accomplish this understanding of revival the following sections will discuss Roberts’s beliefs about revival in several specific theological categories.

### **Revival and God**

Roberts’s writings and teachings about revival make it abundantly clear that revival starts and ends with God. It happens when God moves, and it ends when he recedes. Roberts’s confidence in this fact is evident in his preaching—many of his messages focus on God’s character or man’s sinfulness—where he implores his hearers to more fully know the God who revives.<sup>31</sup> In his messages at conferences, Roberts regularly makes the comment that a person’s view of God is the most critical component of his theological thoughts.<sup>32</sup> He states that what a person thinks about God impacts how he views himself, and how the person views himself determines what he thinks about sin.<sup>33</sup> In essence, Roberts states that with a correct view of God a person will properly

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<sup>29</sup>Richard Owen Roberts, “Part 3: The Place of True Revivals in the Cycles of Human History,” accessed December 8, 2016, <http://www.collegeofrevival.org/part-3-the-place-of-true-revivals-in-the-cycles-of-human-history/>.

<sup>30</sup>Roberts, “Part 1: The Nature and Incredible Beauty of True Revival.”

<sup>31</sup>For an example, see Richard Owen Roberts, “Moses, Aaron, and the Golden Calf,” accessed February 1, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zNVHiKb7xcc>.

<sup>32</sup>A. W. Tozer reflects a similar thought in his writings. He writes, “What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.” *Knowledge of the Holy* (1920; repr., Glendale, CA: Bibliotech Press, 2016), 1.

<sup>33</sup>Richard Owen Roberts, “Richard Owen Roberts – G3 Conference Atlanta – Sermon 2 of 2,”

understand all the aspects of God’s character. With this understanding, a person will have a good foundation for considering his sins—thus he will be prepared for revival.

When discussing God and revival, Roberts regularly returns to three main topics in his writings and teachings—the presence of God, the judgment of God, and the glory of God. He addresses each of these topics separately in many different places, but his message titled, “Moses, Aaron, and the Golden Calf,” provides the most depth on all three topics.<sup>34</sup> His message starts by discussing the presence of God. Roberts states what he believes to be an obvious, but overlooked, fact of the story. When God’s anger burned against the idolatrous Israelites and he threatened to destroy them, he was on the mountain with Moses and he was in the valley with the people. In God’s omnipresence, he was with the people in the valley, and in his manifest presence he was with Moses on the mountain.<sup>35</sup> While this point is not difficult to understand, it leads to Roberts’s teachings on the presence of God. He acknowledged that while God is omnipresent, Scripture is clear that he does often withdraw his presence from a place or person. He states, “We can be foolish and pretend that God is always near,”<sup>36</sup> or one can view examples in Scripture that implore the reader to draw near to God and he will draw near to you (Jas 4:8 and Ps 73:28). Roberts carefully explains that sin is one way to ensure that God will not be near a person. He particularly condemns the America church, quoting statistics about certain sins to show why he believes that God has withdrawn from it.<sup>37</sup>

An additional example that Roberts uses to support his point of God withdrawing his presence from people is the temple in Jerusalem. He often highlights

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accessed February 4, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N8aYhRfnAqw> .

<sup>34</sup>Roberts, “Moses, Aaron, and the Golden Calf.”

<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

<sup>36</sup>Roberts, “Part 1: The Nature and Incredible Beauty of True Revival.”

<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

how Christ refers to the temple in Matthew 21:13, calling it “my house,” compared to Matthew 23:38 where he refers to the temple as “your house.” Based on these verses, Roberts argues that the presence of God left the temple at that time, even though religious rituals continued for several more decades. While the priests performed sacrifices and acts of worship, the actions were meaningless and not pleasing to God. In a similar manner, he condemns the American church—stating that the presence of God has left most congregations.<sup>38</sup> While many churches go through the motions and rituals of worship each Sunday, God is not among the people and the actions are not pleasing to him. In his lecture on the topic of the nearness of God, Roberts states, “The presence of God is not the same as the nearness of God.”<sup>39</sup> While God is always present everywhere, he is not always near. When studying Roberts’s teachings on God and revival, God’s presence explicitly manifesting itself among his people is one critical elements—without God’s nearness revival is not possible. God nearness is mandatory for true revival.

A closely related topic which Roberts addresses in the area of God and revival is God’s judgment. Roberts draws the connection between God removing his nearness to a people and his divine judgment. When teaching on God’s judgment Roberts typically presents the two distinct judgments that God brings on people. The first type is remedial judgment and the second type is final judgment.<sup>40</sup> Remedial judgment is when God is acting in a way to awaken people to their sins to induce repentance. One of the primary ways in which God brings remedial judgment is by withdrawing his clear presence.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>Richard Owen Roberts, “Real Revival,” accessed February 2, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SJ3T4IOtWjU>.

<sup>39</sup>Roberts, “Part 3: The Place of True Revivals in the Cycles of Human History.” Roberts is careful to not deny God’s omnipresence – that he is always present everywhere. However, he does argue that God’s manifest presence can be removed depending on the situation. Roberts argues this point through Scripture and church history. He states that in revival God’s manifest presence is strong and impactful on those who are involved. For a helpful discussion of God’s presence see Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 173-77.

<sup>40</sup>Roberts, “Moses, Aaron, and the Golden Calf.”

<sup>41</sup>Roberts, “Part 3: The Place of True Revivals in the Cycles of Human History.”

When God acts in remedial judgment he is giving people time to respond, repentant, and turn back to him. The example of the Israelites and the golden calf is one example of remedial judgments. On the mountain, God tells Moses that he was going to destroy the people and start over with Moses, but Moses pleads for the people and God brings remedial judgment upon them (Exod 32:9-10). An additional example can be seen in the story of Jonah preaching in Nineveh. God sends Jonah to state that in forty days everything would be destroyed, but the people of Nineveh heed the prophet's words, repent, and turn to God; therefore, his final judgment does not come (Jonah 3:10). Numerous examples could be provided on God using remedial judgment, but it is already clear that God uses remedial judgment to awaken people to their sins and turn them in repentance back to him in worship. In many ways, this turning can be the start of revival.

The second manner in which God brings judgment is through final judgment. By its name, it is clear, that final judgment means that God does not provide time for repentance or change. The clearest example of final judgment in Scripture is the story of Ananias and Sapphira in the book of Acts. The moment that they were confronted with their sin God removes them from this world—there was not an opportunity for repentance (Acts 5:5; 10). While the distinction between remedial and final judgment may not appear to be that significant, for Roberts it is vital in his understanding of revival and the American church. Roberts clearly condemns the church today as being backslidden, and for its empty worship, but he continues in his ministry because he does not believe that the church has come under God's final judgment.<sup>42</sup> He believes that God has not yet warned the American church of a final judgment, and that until that warning comes there is still great hope. He states, "God does not destroy a people without a warning."<sup>43</sup> According to Roberts, the warning of God's final judgment may come

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<sup>42</sup>Roberts, "Part 3: The Place of True Revivals in the Cycles of Human History."

<sup>43</sup>Richard Owen Roberts, "Part 5: The Four Things That Always Precede True Revival," accessed June 18, 2016, <http://www.collegeofrevival.org/part-5-the-four-things-that-always-precede-true->

anytime, but until it does he will keep preaching hoping that revival might still come.

The final prominent subject in Roberts's discussion of God and revival is the topic of God's glory. In his teaching of revival, Roberts points out that one of the primary reasons for a lack of vitality in the church today is an improper view of God. When one views God incorrectly everything else is wrong as well.<sup>44</sup> Per Roberts, "A proper view of God is fundamental to revival."<sup>45</sup> Roberts believes that the primary reason why the Puritans, and those who followed, experienced successive periods of revival was because they had a proper view of God and his glory. At the end of the Second Great Awakening, Charles Finney introduced his new measures on revival and with those measures he substantially lowered the church's view of God. Based on Finney, revival became an event that could be expected if men took certain measures. It was no longer about God doing a glorious and wonderful work, it was simply part of a natural process. Comparatively, Roberts teaches that revival must point to God's glory and nothing else. Once something, or someone, else takes credit for revival it no longer brings God glory and he will no longer continue in the movement. God's glory is the purpose of revival.

The discussion of God's glory often leads into a follow-up topic of phenomena in revival. While almost all revivals will be marked with some kind of extreme phenomena, it is how the church responds to the extremes that often determine the extent and impact of the revival.<sup>46</sup> Roberts considers this topic in connection with God's glory because he believes that when phenomena are allowed to remain in a revival, the focus will shift from God to the actions of people. The primary example that he used to support

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[revival/](#).

<sup>44</sup>Richard Owen Roberts, "Part 2: The Mandatory Nature of True Revival," accessed December 2, 2016, <http://www.collegeofrevival.org/part-2-the-mandatory-nature-of-true-revival/>.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid.

<sup>46</sup>Even the First Great Awakening preachers often dealt with people wailing or fainting during the message; however, in some areas the phenomena went much greater extremes. For an example, see the history of James Davenport in Kidd, "The Great Awakening," 138-55.

this point is the 1904-1905 revival in Wales. In the introduction to the book, *Glory Filled the Land*, Roberts highlights the leadership of Evan Roberts in the movement. He draws the reader's attention to the fact that after the revival Evan Roberts felt great responsibility for bringing the movement to a premature end by encouraging excesses instead of dissuading people from them. Richard Owen Roberts writes,

It seems apparent that the revivalist [Evan Roberts] came to realize he was not only a major contributor to the growth and development of the revival, but also to very large degree influential in its decline and "early death." Put that together in your thinking! Evan Roberts, an Ezekiel-like servant of God, sighs and cries over the abominations in the land and is greatly used by the Holy Spirit in reviving the church. This same earnest servant of the Most High is pushed on his head (to use an expression of Jonathan Edwards) and becomes, in his excesses and extremes, the hinderer of the very work he sought earnestly in sighs and tears, in prayers and supplications.<sup>47</sup>

When phenomena are allowed to remain in a revival setting, the focus shifts away from God's glory to actions of men. Roberts states that when this happens the movement will fade and the effect will not be as great as it could have been if the extremes were halted.<sup>48</sup>

As stated above, Roberts teaches that revival starts and ends with God. Revival happens when God draws near to his people in an extraordinary manner. Roberts remains consistent in this point as he focuses on God's presence, judgment, and glory. Revival impacts people with the nature of God when his presence is manifested in a mighty way.

### **Revival and Man**

After discussing God's leading role in revival, Roberts often answers the objection that he believes many would make against his position. He argues that while God is the lead agent in revival, he has given man specific and vital roles in the process.

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<sup>47</sup>H. Elvet Lewis, G. Campbell Morgan, and I.V. Neprash, *Glory Filled the Land: A Trilogy of the Welsh Revival (1904-1905)*, ed. Richard Owen Roberts (Wheaton, IL: International Awakening Press, 1989), xiv.

<sup>48</sup>Richard Owen Roberts, "Revival: Experience Centered & God Centered," accessed February 4, 2017, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ec\\_MscSLaUU&index=5&list=PLmmTx77FrqRcmfBrKjoDC8QUz-dOBslVj](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ec_MscSLaUU&index=5&list=PLmmTx77FrqRcmfBrKjoDC8QUz-dOBslVj).

Man cannot force revival, but he must live in a manner that prepares the church for revival.<sup>49</sup> The starting place for man and revival is prayer. Roberts typically introduces the topic of praying for revival in the context of four events that precede revival.<sup>50</sup> He teaches that the four things that precede revival are: a horrible spiritual decline, righteous judgment from the Lord, people with a burden for God, and extraordinary actions by people. It is in the last two topics that Roberts often discusses the topic of prayer. As his primary example, he returns to Moses on the mountain pleading with God for the Israelites (Exod 32:31). Moses, after seeing the idolatrous sins of the people, returns to the Lord and pleads for mercy. He talks to God and asks him to not destroy the people, even stating that if the people cannot be saved then God should remove Moses from his book as well. Roberts uses this biblical account to show that before revival came to Moses and the people of Israel, he had to plead before the Lord and then God moved.

Throughout his teachings, Roberts also connects many historical revivals and the prayers that precedes God's movement. In this context, he laments over the lack of hope in the American church today. With great concern, he discusses how many of the Christians he meets while traveling to preach are praying for Christ to return, and are not praying for revival.<sup>51</sup> He questions how so many people could be praying for Christ to come and usher in eternity when those people have unbelieving children, friends, co-workers who will spend eternity in damnation.<sup>52</sup> Instead of praying for Christ's return, Roberts exhorts people to pray for God to pour out his grace in revival, stating that when the church starts praying for revival, it is preparing itself for God's glorious work. Per

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<sup>49</sup>Richard Owen Roberts, "Part 8: Have Prayed, Is There Anything Else to Do?" accessed December 26, 2016, <http://www.collegeofrevival.org/part-8-having-prayed-is-there-anything-else-to-do/>.

<sup>50</sup>Roberts, "Real Revival."

<sup>51</sup>Ibid.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid.

Roberts, “the true church is a house of prayer.”<sup>53</sup> Additionally, he states that he is disgusted with the condition of most church prayer meetings. He views prayer as so vital to the church that he believes that people who are not involved in the prayer life of the church are not really a part of the body. Prayer is foundational for the church and revival.

While Roberts teaches that a person, and the church, should pray for revival this is not the only thing that he believes that should be done to prepare for revival. In one of his lectures he seeks to answer the question, “having prayed, is there anything else to do?”<sup>54</sup> The question quite naturally follows his discussion of prayer, but Roberts does not provide steps to revival, as might be expected.<sup>55</sup> He, instead, pushed people to embrace what he calls the means of grace.<sup>56</sup> By this term he is stating that there are actions which God has designed to bless his people with grace in the church.<sup>57</sup> Roberts states that to prepare for revival God’s people must be faithful and fervent in prayer, preaching, stewardship, observing the Lord’s Supper, worship, and even church discipline.<sup>58</sup> Throughout Scripture God provides the church with guidelines on how to worship and serve him, if the church is not faithfully seeking to follow these patterns then it should not expect for revival to come among its people. Roberts states, “It’s heartless to pray for God to send revival when we are unwilling to do what we are called to do.”<sup>59</sup> The two primary tasks to prepare for revival, according to Roberts, are prayer and pursuing the

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<sup>53</sup>Roberts, “Part 8: Have Prayed, Is There Anything Else to Do?”

<sup>54</sup>Ibid.

<sup>55</sup>To answer this question many would think that an outline, or plan, to follow for revival would be appropriate, however, this would be following in the footsteps of Finney and his new measures. Instead of providing a plan, Roberts focuses on repentance and the character of God.

<sup>56</sup>Richard Owen Roberts, “The Means of Grace,” accessed February 1, 2017, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hL\\_ayRYlr4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hL_ayRYlr4) .

<sup>57</sup>For an evangelical understanding of this term that closely aligns with Roberts’s teaching please see, P. E. Hughes, “Grace, Means of,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 522.

<sup>58</sup>Roberts, “The Means of Grace.”

<sup>59</sup>Ibid.

means of grace. When these two areas are being faithfully pursued in the church, God's people are in the best position to receive an outpouring of his spirit in revival.

A final area of Roberts's teaching to explore when discussing man and revival is the topic of experience-centered versus Word-centered revivals. While Roberts acknowledges that all revivals have elements of both experience and Word, the church should pray for Word-centered revivals.<sup>60</sup> His reasoning for this thought is that he believes that Word-centered revivals will last longer and have a greater impact than experience-centered revivals. He states that experiences eventually fade, but God's Word continues in power to impact those who have been transformed.<sup>61</sup> Roberts uses historical revivals to build his case for seeking Word-centered over experience-centered revivals. He mentions that the 1858 prayer revival was an experience-centered revival,<sup>62</sup> and while it had profound impact, it was over, and largely forgotten, after a couple of years.<sup>63</sup> Roberts compares this to the First Great Awakening which he says was a Word-centered revival. He argues that the movement went forth on the preaching of God's Word and therefore it carried on for several decades and impacted the foundations of the United States.<sup>64</sup> His argument is that Word-centered revivals will last because their focus is on Christ, whereas experience-centered revivals fade as they are more focused on people.

It is in this area of experience-centered revivals where Roberts most clearly shares his concerns with several of the more recent revival movements in North America. He very clearly condemns the Toronto Blessing and the Brownsville Revival, both

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<sup>60</sup>Roberts, "Revival."

<sup>61</sup>Roberts, *Revival*, 18-20.

<sup>62</sup>For a resource on the 1858 Prayer Revival, see Samuel Prime, *The Power of Prayer: The New York Revival of 1858* (1859; repr., Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1991).

<sup>63</sup>Roberts, "Revival."

<sup>64</sup>*Ibid.*

experienced, and phenomena, based movements outside of the evangelical norm.<sup>65</sup> It is when discussing the 1995 Wheaton Revival where Roberts reveals his genuine apprehension of experience-centered revivals.<sup>66</sup> Roberts lived in Wheaton, next to the campus, during this revival and he shares the event as he remembers it during his discussion of experience-centered revivals.<sup>67</sup> Roberts states that shortly after the revival started the administration of the school released a statement prohibiting the faculty, staff, and friends of the college from participating in the movement.<sup>68</sup> He believes that this decision greatly hindered the work because it removed the opportunity for older men to come in and preach to the students. Instead, the movement remained an experience-centered movement that focused on public confession. It is not that Roberts thinks that the Wheaton Revival was not really a revival, it is that he grieves over how the movement was hindered and the impact did not last. He shares how three months after the revival the student papers at Wheaton were writing about the revival being a fraud and

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<sup>65</sup>Roberts, "Revival."

<sup>66</sup>For a firsthand account of the 1995 Wheaton Revival, see Timothy K. Beougher and Lyle W. Dorsett, eds., *Accounts of a Campus Revival: Wheaton College 1995* (Wheaton, IL: Harold Shaw Publishers, 1995), 75-91. In the fourth chapter, Lyle Dorsett gives an account of the events leading up to the revival and of the revival itself. In the chapter, Dorsett even credits Roberts and Mary Dorsett for their work on a pamphlet to discuss the history of revival on Wheaton's campus. This pamphlet became the basis for the third chapter of the book. While Roberts is critical of the Wheaton revival, it must be noted that he was not present at the meetings, and therefore other sources are needed to verify the structure of the meetings. The main structure of the revival was open confession, but it was saturated with Scripture. Throughout the evenings students would intersperse Scripture readings through the confession time, and on Wednesday evening, Duane Litfin, Timothy Beougher, and Lyle Dorsett delivered messages of exhortation from the faculty to the student body. While the event did not focus on expository preaching in a manner like the First Great Awakening, most of those who were present at the events would state that it was an event saturated with Scripture.

<sup>67</sup>Roberts, "Revival." He discusses the Wheaton Revival between the twenty-eight-minute and thirty-five-minute mark; this discussion is during a question and answer session before his sermon.

<sup>68</sup>While Roberts recalled this statement being released by the college, I could not verify that it happened. I had a conversation with Timothy Beougher, who was on faculty and present at all the revival services, and he stated that he had not seen any statement released that prohibited anyone from attending the event. In fact, the services moved from the Wheaton College campus across the street to College Church partially to accommodate more people. There were some on the campus who were opposed to the events, but the revival had the full support of upper administration. As mentioned, Duane Litfin, the president of the college, spoke at the service on Wednesday evening. While Roberts may not be clear on all the details of this event, what is clear from my study is that he was deeply hurt by Wheaton College at some point during this time. It is possible that he may be associating other events with the revival that took place at another time.

how the general spiritual condition of the campus was worse after the event.<sup>69</sup> His concern is that it was clear that God sought to move on the campus, but because the movement had to remain an experience-centered revival its impact was not as lasting.<sup>70</sup>

Revivals start and end with God moving among his people; there is nothing that man can do to bring revival about, or to force God to move. Despite this truth, in his teachings, Roberts regularly exhorts his listeners and readers to prepare themselves for revival. Man must be prepared for revival through prayer and through the means of grace. Furthermore, the church should seek Word-centered revivals where Scripture is preached and the focus is narrowed on God alone. God brings revival, man must prepare for it.

### **Revival, Conversion, and Christ**

Revival impacts the church in two primary ways. First, it convicts those believers who have been lax in their faith. Second, it converts those who may have been regular church attenders, but who were never really Christians. Roberts addresses both groups in his teachings on revival. The first group he labels as backsliders,<sup>71</sup> and to the second group he presented the complete gospel.<sup>72</sup> Following his lead, this section will first discuss the issue of backsliding and revival. After this discussion, Roberts's understanding of conversion will be examined through his teachings on significant terms.

The term backslidden is not as widely used in the contemporary church, but

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<sup>69</sup>The article to which Roberts refers to in the interview could not be located in the course of this research. While it is likely that many were skeptical of the event during and afterwards, many more have gone on record to support the revival's genuineness. In a personal discussion, Timothy Beougher recalls Wheaton having to add additional sections of the missiology course in the Fall semester because student interest in missions remained very high because of the event. Additionally, Kevin Engel presents written testimonies from many impacted by the revival in the sixth chapter of Beougher and Dorsett, *Accounts of a Campus Revival*, 99-138.

<sup>70</sup>Roberts, "Revival." He states, "In a Word-centered revival there is virtually no falling away of the converts, but in an experienced-revival revival there is a considerable falling away of the converts." Additionally, "An experience-centered revival will have little to no societal impact."

<sup>71</sup>Roberts, *Revival*, 32.

<sup>72</sup>Richard Owen Roberts, ed., *Salvation in Full Color: Twenty Sermons by Great Awakening Preachers* (Wheaton, IL: International Awakening Press, 1994), xvi.

when Roberts wrote his book on revival in the 1980s it was a common idea. Roberts uses the King James version of Jeremiah 8:5-7 to introduce the term backsliding, but he then spends the remainder of the second chapter explaining what he means by it.<sup>73</sup> His basic definition of a backslider is, “a person who was once emptied of his own ways and filled with the ways of God, but gradually allowed his own ways to seep back in until he was all but empty of God and full of himself again.”<sup>74</sup> The essence of a backslider is one that has allowed the things of the world to overtake their former devotion to the Lord.

Roberts uses twenty-five statements that, if affirmed by the reader, likely means that the person is a backslidden believer.<sup>75</sup> While it is not necessary to reproduce all twenty-five statements here, several will be presented as a representation of his teachings on this topic. His first statement is, “when prayer ceases to be a vital part of a professing Christian’s life, backsliding is present.”<sup>76</sup> This statement is followed by similar remarks about biblical knowledge, thought patterns, and Christian service.<sup>77</sup> In his eighth warning on the backslidden condition, Roberts states, “When sins of the body and of the mind can indulged in without an uproar in your conscience, your backslidden condition is certain.”<sup>78</sup> Most of the remaining statements focus on a particular area of sin or neglect in which a believer might struggle with. The main impact of this list is that it is comprehensive and forces the reader to consider their spiritual life and the condition of their faith. While admitting struggle in one, or several, of these areas does not necessarily mean that one is backslidden, it should bring enough concern to the believer that he seeks

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<sup>73</sup>Roberts, *Revival*, 31-52.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., 32-33.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., 37.

<sup>76</sup>Roberts, *Revival*, 37.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid., 38-40.

<sup>78</sup>Roberts, *Revival*, 41.

the Lord on the issue. For Roberts, one of the primary purposes of revival is to awaken backslidden Christians and bring them back to the faith that was once vital in their life.

The second main area of impact in the discussion of revival and conversion is the bringing to faith those who were not believers. In revival, Roberts argues that many in the church recognize their deficient understanding of God, man, sin, and/or salvation and through the preaching of God's Word the person comes to true faith for the first time.<sup>79</sup> God uses times of revival to draw those in the church who have never been converted to become Christians. For Roberts, this is one of the primary reasons why he insists that the most impactful revivals are Word-centered, preaching led revivals.<sup>80</sup> It is through the Word of God that the Holy Spirit convicts a man of his sins, and then brings him to repentance and faith. Additionally, Roberts discusses the significance of preaching on the doctrines of salvation and how God used sermons in this area during the First Great Awakening to redeem many people.<sup>81</sup> Roberts states that the doctrines of salvation are often treated in Scripture as an eschatological item because many of the events of salvation are still to come. He argues that these are not topics for the believer to hear once, and then move on, instead the whole church body is strengthened, encouraged, and revived through the regular and repeated preaching of these vital doctrines.<sup>82</sup>

It is important to examine Roberts's teachings on the doctrines of salvation to see what exactly he means by preaching through these topics. Roberts recognizes that there are many different teachings on these doctrines, and that theologians often debate over the precise order of the events. Despite this, he argues that faithful preachers will

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<sup>79</sup>Roberts, *Salvation in Full Color*, xvii-xx.

<sup>80</sup>Roberts, "Revival: Experience Centered & God Centered."

<sup>81</sup>Roberts, *Salvation in Full Color*, xx-xxi.

<sup>82</sup>*Ibid.*, xxi.

continually revisit these themes.<sup>83</sup> In his book, *Salvation in Full Color*, Roberts carefully selected twenty sermons that together present his complete understanding of the doctrines of salvation. These sermons are primarily from the First Great Awakening, although a few were preached before the movement, and one at the beginning of the Second Great Awakening.<sup>84</sup> For the sake of organization and consideration, Roberts's order of salvation can be roughly categorized by the four-part gospel: God, Man, Redemption, and Restoration.<sup>85</sup> In the category of God, Roberts includes the topic of his character and the law of God. In the category of man Roberts covers the topics of total depravity, heinousness of sin, and dead works. The category on redemption represents the largest portion of the book. The topics include: divine love, the atonement, regeneration, effectual calling, the work of the Holy Spirit, seeking the Lord, repentance, justification, adoption, conversion, and love to God. The final four sermons in the book fit into the restoration section of the four-part gospel. The topics included in this section are perseverance of the saints, sanctification, divine retribution, and final warnings.<sup>86</sup>

Unfortunately, Roberts does not include any substantial discussion on these doctrines in this book,<sup>87</sup> but he does regularly address these topics in his other books, lectures, and sermons.<sup>88</sup> Even though the book does not directly make statements on Roberts's beliefs on these topics, he does reveal several important considerations based

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<sup>83</sup>Roberts, *Salvation in Full Color*, xx.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid.

<sup>85</sup>This is a slight modification of Greg Gilbert's four-part gospel in *What Is the Gospel?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010).

<sup>86</sup>This list of Roberts's order of salvation is drawn exclusively from the table of contents from *Salvation in Full Color*. This is an appropriate place to study Roberts's views on the doctrine of salvation because he states, "All these twenty sermons are arrayed in this book in the order in which they appear in the lives of persons who are being saved," xvi.

<sup>87</sup>The book simply consists of his introduction and the twenty sermons. Each sermon is preceded by an article, written by Roberts, which includes basic biographical information about the preacher.

<sup>88</sup>Roberts's twelve-part lecture series from the College of Revival contains his most thorough and systematic teachings. Links for all twelve lectures are available in the bibliography.

on his terms and sermon selections. First, Roberts uses terms consistent with a reformed perspective on salvation.<sup>89</sup> Second, his sermon selections are from men who were Calvinistic in their theology and ministry.<sup>90</sup> When one considers that Roberts had no constraints on his use of terms and selection of sermons it is a clear demonstration of his theological position on these issues. Roberts approaches the doctrines of salvation from a reformed perspective and this is consistent with his teachings on God's leading role in revival. When God moves, revival comes. When God moves, sinners are saved. For Roberts, in revival, and in the doctrines of salvation, God moves first, then man responds.

### **Revival and the Church**

Revival impacts individuals by convicting them of their backslidden condition or through the conversion of unbelievers in the church. While these are both vital aspects of revival, they are only focused on individuals. When God brings revival, he works among individuals and among corporate entities, yet many in the church overlook the corporate impacts of God's movement. For this reason, Roberts often addresses the corporate components of revival and repentance as it impacts the church.<sup>91</sup> He addresses this primarily through the topics of preaching and the Solemn Assembly.<sup>92</sup> These two issues will be discussed in order to consider Roberts's views on revival and the church.

For Roberts, one of the most overlooked truths about revivals in Scripture is the fact that they are corporate events.<sup>93</sup> He laments the fact that most preaching will consider the individual impact of the passage and completely ignore the corporate

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<sup>89</sup>Total Depravity, Effectual Calling, and Perseverance of the Saints are three examples.

<sup>90</sup>Gilbert Tennant, Solomon Stoddard, and Asahel Nettleton are three such men.

<sup>91</sup>Roberts, "Psalm 33."

<sup>92</sup>Richard Owen Roberts, *The Solemn Assembly* (Wheaton, IL: International Awakening Press, 1989).

<sup>93</sup>Roberts, "Psalm 33."

application. This is detrimental to the church and individual believers because Christianity is both individual and corporate in nature.<sup>94</sup> By ignoring the corporate aspects of passages in preaching, pastors often miss opportunities to address the whole congregation on issues of sin and the need for corporate repentance. Instead, many pastors seek to grow the church through methods and programs rather than through faithful preaching of the Word of God.<sup>95</sup> Whether Roberts's assessment of most preaching in churches today is valid or not, his point is a critical reminder for churches. Churches will experience impactful revival through the preaching of God's Word and through God moving among the individuals *and* the whole body of the church.

Before discussing Roberts's teachings on the Solemn Assembly, it is important to consider ways in which he saw church bodies as hindering revival. In his book, *Revival*, Roberts presents five ways in which a congregation can hinder the work of God and prevent revival. First, he states that a love of tradition is a common hindrance to revival.<sup>96</sup> He writes, "*Revival* and *change* are almost synonymous terms, and both clearly cut across the grain of traditionalism. There is no way true revival can occur without major changes disrupting and reordering the life of the church."<sup>97</sup> A church that experiences revival will experience changes and those who resist change will resist revival. The second way that congregations hinder revival is through a love of disorder.<sup>98</sup> By this idea, Roberts does not mean disorder in the worship service, business meetings, or personal interactions, instead he means a disorder in priorities.<sup>99</sup> He uses some

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<sup>94</sup>Roberts, "Psalm 33."

<sup>95</sup>Ibid. Roberts has been critical of the Church Growth movement and the more recent multi-site church and mega church movements. Instead of seeing the work of God in these movements, Roberts states, "Flourishing mega churches are often only evidence of clever men, not revival."

<sup>96</sup>Roberts, *Revival*, 137.

<sup>97</sup>Ibid., 137-38. Emphasis original.

<sup>98</sup>Ibid., 139.

<sup>99</sup>Ibid.

statistics that reflect the reality in churches: “2,400 persons in attendance on Sunday; 600 in attendance on Sunday evening (when the weather is not too good or not too bad); 60 for prayer meeting.”<sup>100</sup> While Roberts wishes that these statistics were of the average church, he actually states that they reflect the reality of strongest evangelical churches in the country. His point is that most churches have disordered their priorities, placing almost no emphasis on prayer. This disorder hinders and even prevents the work of revival.

The third hindrance to revival that Roberts presents is the love of brevity.<sup>101</sup> His opening comment on this issue discusses the average church member’s concern about getting out of church “on time.” He states, “Many congregations do not really seem to care what the pastor says as long as he says it quickly and within the allotted hour.”<sup>102</sup> Roberts believes that in an effort to keep a worship service within the one-hour time frame many sermons lack the time necessary for the Spirit of God to truly work in the hearer’s heart. Since many churches are more concerned about their schedule, then giving God time to move, revivals are hindered. The fourth manner in which congregations hinder revivals is through the love of comfortable truth.<sup>103</sup> People generally do not like to be made uncomfortable, and Roberts states that many pastors are aware of this fact and craft their sermons in a manner to make people feel comfortable. According to Roberts, this is a tragic situation because revival and comfort rarely go together. He writes,

Revival and the exclusive love of comfortable truths are bitter enemies. Churches may fill their padded pews with careless listeners who love the low lights, soft organs tones, and conversational sermons on pleasant subjects, but they will never

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<sup>100</sup>Roberts, *Revival*, 139.

<sup>101</sup>Ibid., 140. Roberts typically shares this hindrance the first time that he preaches in a church because most of his sermons last over an hour and sometimes extend beyond two hours. He likes to make statements about Sundays being the “Lord’s Day,” not the “Lord’s hour.”

<sup>102</sup>Ibid.

<sup>103</sup>Ibid., 141.

fill heaven until they declare all the truths of Scripture with the convicting, disturbing power of the Holy Spirit.<sup>104</sup>

Convicting truth is uncomfortable for people because it clearly displays that change needs to happen. When a man recognizes his need for change he is more prepared to turn to God for that change, and in turning to God the man may be at the beginning of a revival.

The final area in which congregations often hinder revival is because the people have a love of respect.<sup>105</sup> Roberts's concern in this area is that churches too often ask the question, "What will people think?" instead of asking, "What will God think?". He teaches that this concern for man, over a concern for God, is rooted in the fact that these churches, people, or pastors, want to be respected. Instead of seeking respect of others, Roberts exhorts the church to seek the favor of God. When God is pleased with the actions and behavior of a church the congregation is in a better place for revival.<sup>106</sup>

These hindrances to revival point to a deficiency or sin in the congregation, and yet most Christians have not considered how to handle corporate sins. Roberts's answer to dealing with sin in the church is to call a Solemn Assembly. The Solemn Assembly is an intentional time for prayer, fasting, and seeking God's grace.<sup>107</sup> While the Scriptural examples of a Solemn Assembly are all found in the Old Testament, Roberts argues for the Assembly's usefulness in the church today.<sup>108</sup> In his pamphlet on the topic Roberts highlights twelve Old Testament revivals that all had four common themes: a tragic declension, a righteous judgment from God, the raising up of an immensely burdened leader, and extraordinary action.<sup>109</sup> In each of these instances the extraordinary

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<sup>104</sup>Roberts, *Revival*, 142.

<sup>105</sup>Ibid.

<sup>106</sup>Ibid., 143-44.

<sup>107</sup>Roberts, *The Solemn Assembly*.

<sup>108</sup>Ibid.

<sup>109</sup>Roberts listed these revivals are under the leadership of particular men: Moses (Exod 32ff.), Samuel (1 Sam 7), David (2 Sam 6, 7), Asa (2 Chr 14-16), Jehoshaphat (2 Chr 17-20), Jehoiada (2 Chr 23-24), Hezekiah (2 Chr 29-32), Josiah (1 Chr 34-35), Zerubbabel (Ezra 1-6), Ezra (Ezra 7-10), Nehemiah

action involves some form of the people gathering to repent their sins and be still before the Lord in prayer. Roberts recognizes that some would discount his arguments for a Solemn Assembly because of its Old Testament roots, but he points out that the time leading up to Pentecost in Acts 2 was a Solemn Assembly that prepared the foundation of the church.<sup>110</sup> Roberts further argues for the historical foundations of the Solemn Assembly in the American church. His book, *Sanctify the Congregation*, is a collection of early American sermons delivered in conjunction with a Solemn Assembly.<sup>111</sup> Roberts often suggests that churches call a Solemn Assembly as a corporate time of repentance.

The Solemn Assembly can be a significant event for a church if it is done with pure intentions and genuine concern over sin and God’s judgment. Just as individuals must repent of sins so too corporate entities, especially churches, must seek times of repentance for their sins. To aid in this process, Roberts provides ten practical suggestions for a church seeking to hold a Solemn Assembly.<sup>112</sup> First, normal daily work should be set aside. Second, all people affected must be required to attend. The third element is that it should be a time of fasting. Fourth, it is a time of sacrifice – Roberts highlights that participation is a major sacrifice of time. Fifth, the Solemn Assembly should be of protracted duration to allow sufficient time for “humiliation, prayer, repentance and seeking God’s face.”<sup>113</sup> Sixth, it should be a time of earnest prayer. The seventh aspect of a Solemn Assembly is that should be a time of corporate repentance. Eighth, Spirit-anointed preaching should mark the time, and ninth the assembly should be

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(Neh 1-13), and Joel (Joel 1:2:27). Roberts, *The Solemn Assembly*.

<sup>110</sup>Roberts, *The Solemn Assembly*.

<sup>111</sup>Richard Owen Roberts, *Sanctify the Congregation: A Call to the Solemn Assembly and to Corporate Repentance* (Wheaton, IL: International Awakening Press, 1994). The introduction to this book contains the same content as the pamphlet titled, *The Solemn Assembly*.

<sup>112</sup>Roberts, *The Solemn Assembly*.

<sup>113</sup>Roberts, “Solemn Assembly.”

a good model of Christianity to the children of the church. Finally, Roberts states that the Solemn Assembly provides a moment for God to respond to the church unlike other times when sin hinders the relationship. Overall, Roberts teaches that the Solemn Assembly is an opportunity for the church to corporately confession any sins that may be causing God to remove his blessing from the ministry.<sup>114</sup> As a congregation seeks the Lord through corporate repentance and biblical preaching it is more likely to experience revival.

### **Revival and the Community**

When many Christians refer to the term revival it is often connected to evangelism and unbelievers accepting the gospel.<sup>115</sup> While this idea is not completely false, Roberts and others have typically used the term revival to refer to God's work in the church, and reserve the term awakenings for times when God reaches out beyond the church to convert unbelievers. Even with this distinction, Roberts still states that true revivals should impact the community.<sup>116</sup> In one sermon, while discussing the Brownsville revival of the mid-1990s, Roberts states that one way to measure the extent and impact of a revival is to consider its effect on the crime rate of the community.<sup>117</sup> In this instance he counseled a woman investigating the movement to interview the police chief to see what impact the revival was having on crime in the area. He states that if the movement was truly a revival then the police chief of the community would notice a change. Roberts reports that the woman did indeed interview the police chief and he stated that crime had increased and that he had noticed that many of the offenders were

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<sup>114</sup>Roberts, "Solemn Assembly."

<sup>115</sup>See discussion in chap. 1 on defining terms such as revival, awakening, and renewal.

<sup>116</sup>Roberts, *Repentance*, 148-52.

<sup>117</sup>Richard Owen Roberts, "Marks of True Revival," accessed January 30, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=28Opn19Eino>. He counseled the woman against studying and viewing the movement at all, comparing her actions as foolish as going to studying an outbreak of yellow fever for no other reason than being curious about the disease.

people who had been claiming to be a part of the revival. Roberts is critical of the Brownsville revival for this, and several other, reasons. He states that the events of this movement were not of a true revival, and that what happened there helped to do more to solidify the kingdom of darkness in that community than it did to honor the Lord.<sup>118</sup>

In contrast to the Brownsville Revival, the revival of 1904-05 in Wales had a profound impact on the community. Accounts of the Wales revival discuss how judges would enter their courtrooms for many days and place a pair of white gloves on the podium to signify that they had no cases to oversee that day.<sup>119</sup> In other instances, Roberts points to J. Edwin Orr's account of the Welsh revival and its impact on the crime rate, how alcohol consumption decreased, and on the improved conditions in the coal mines.<sup>120</sup> Roberts also shares how the only task that the policeman had during this revival was to make sure the auditoriums used for preaching were not filled to unsafe levels.<sup>121</sup> Finally, in reference to the Welsh Revival, Roberts cites sources on how the coal miners had to retrain their mules because the animals did not understand any commands without cursing.<sup>122</sup> His conclusion is that true revivals will be noticed because the movement will dramatically impact the community in significant and noticeable ways.<sup>123</sup>

The context of Roberts's view of revival and the community is practical place to discuss his four marks of true revival. Roberts states that all revivals include these four elements: a breaking, a remaking, a pouring full, and a great overflow.<sup>124</sup> He uses the

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<sup>118</sup>Roberts, "Marks of True Revival."

<sup>119</sup>Ibid.

<sup>120</sup>Orr, *Flaming*, 17.

<sup>121</sup>Roberts, "Marks of True Revival."

<sup>122</sup>Ibid.

<sup>123</sup>Ibid.

<sup>124</sup>He discusses these four elements in numerous places; specifically, see Richard Owen Roberts, "Part 4: Is It Too Late for Another Great Awakening?," accessed December 19, 2016, <http://www.collegeofrevival.org/part-4-is-it-too-late-for-another-great-awakening/>.

illustration of a tea cup to illustrate that through judgment God will break a person or community. After the breaking, God remakes the person or community through his grace and then fills them with his goodness. It is in the overflow stage of revival when the wider community beyond the church is most impacted.<sup>125</sup> As believers are remade and refilled with God's grace the overabundance flows out and blesses those nearby. When true revival comes, it not only impacts the church, but it impacts the community around the church as well. In the instances of the First and Second Great Awakening the overflow of God's grace was so powerful that it extended over from communities to other countries and for a significant amount of time.<sup>126</sup> In Roberts's theology of revival there is little need to pray for a revival that does not impact the community, instead he urges his listeners to plead for God to pour out his grace in a way that will impact the whole world.

### **Results of Revival**

There are numerous ways in which one can measure the results of revival. As mentioned, a revival could be measured by its impact on the community issues like crime. It could be measured by statistics regarding church attendance or claims to conversion. Some even just measure it by the incalculable emotions people experience during the moment. While Roberts uses some of these measurements to evaluate the results of a revival, he is primarily concerned with one issue, the fruit of the revival.<sup>127</sup> So important is the topic of fruit regarding revival that Roberts writes, "It is almost impossible to talk about revival without talking about its fruit."<sup>128</sup> Revivals will have a dramatic impact on two groups of people: new converts and backslidden believers. The

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<sup>125</sup>Roberts, "Part 4."

<sup>126</sup>For an account of the First Great Awakening, see Joseph Tracy, *The Great Awakening: A History of the Revival of Religion in the Time of Edwards and Whitefield* (Boston: Tappan and Dennet, 1842).

<sup>127</sup>Roberts, *Revival*, 153.

<sup>128</sup>Ibid.

difficulty in viewing the results of revivals in these two groups is that one cannot know for certain the change experienced inside another person. The evidence of the revival will be a lifetime of faithful service to the Lord by the individual and the church affected.

Since Roberts measures the results of revival by its lasting impact on those who were part of the revival, he does not simply rejoice that revival happened, but instead he provides guidance to those affected to help them preserve in their faith. First, he gives instructions to new converts.<sup>129</sup> Roberts carefully explains that not all converts during a revival will last and that many will fall away from the faith. To guard against this he urges the convert to verify his position in Christ.<sup>130</sup> Referencing the parable of the wise man building his house upon the rock in Matthew 7:24-27, Roberts encourages new believers to seek Christ as the only foundation to their faith. He states, “No one can build a house upon rock who has not first learned where rock is.”<sup>131</sup> In order to verify that the person is trusting in Christ in a saving manner Roberts reiterates the gospel by discussing the sinfulness of man, the need for payment, Christ’s atonement, and assurance of faith.<sup>132</sup> He then provides the new convert with three tests for genuine faith. The believer must verify that he has a real love for others, a spirit of forgiveness, and a desire to be free from all sin.<sup>133</sup> After the believer has confirmed his position in Christ, Roberts encourages the person to be baptized, join a church body, and find a place of service in the church.<sup>134</sup> Through these instructions, Roberts reveals that revivals are not the pinnacle Christian experience, but instead they are a starting point for a lifetime of

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<sup>129</sup>Roberts, *Revival*, 154.

<sup>130</sup>Ibid.

<sup>131</sup>Ibid., 155.

<sup>132</sup>Ibid., 156-58.

<sup>133</sup>Ibid., 158-59.

<sup>134</sup>Ibid., 160.

service and devotion to the Lord. Faith must grow after a revival or the fruit will not last.

The second group affected by revivals are the backslidden believers who were made aware of their condition. To this group of people, Roberts refers to the story of the demon returning to the swept-out house (Matt 12:43-45). He encourages his readers to fill their life with the things of Christ and to not allow Satan a moment, or place, to return.<sup>135</sup> To do this Roberts provides practical points to consider. First, refuse to compromise to any sin. Second, do not consider temptation. Third, establish habits of prayer and be faithful in them. Fourth, find ways to grow in faith without having to rely on others for your growth. Fifth, forgive regularly and freely. Sixth, focus on Christ. His final six points revolve around the point of monitoring oneself regularly for growth in faith and service.<sup>136</sup> Again, from the instructions to backslidden Christians who have been revived, it is clear that Roberts does not simply measure the short-term gains of revival. He desires to see long lasting fruit in the lives of revived believers and churches.

A final result of a revival that Roberts directs attention to is that revival will bring glory to God through the outpouring of his Word.<sup>137</sup> Roberts teaches that when true revival comes God is in the midst of his people, the Word of God is preached with power, and the church becomes a powerful witness to the world around it.<sup>138</sup> Through this process God is glorified. In a pamphlet titled, *Lord, I agree*, Roberts highlights the significance of God's glory in his list of statements that those in a revival should agree with. The statements explain how a revived person should recognize that God alone is to be exalted, the he alone is worthy of praise, and that the believer has nothing to boast

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<sup>135</sup>Roberts, *Revival*, 163.

<sup>136</sup>Ibid., 163-74.

<sup>137</sup>Richard Owen Roberts, "Humble Yourselves," accessed January 26, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2zCrEl6B72Q>.

<sup>138</sup>Ibid.

about in comparison with God.<sup>139</sup> Roberts concludes his statements on God's glory by asking the reader to affirm these words, "*Lord, I agree* that You despise corporate pride as much as individual pride and in consequence I commit myself to do everything in my power to eliminate the pride that exists in both the church and in society at large."<sup>140</sup> When pride is allowed to have a place in the church, or in believers, God is not glorified and the revival will end, however, when revivals lead to God's glory the movement is able to continue without disruption. Glory to God is a result and requirement for revival.

### **Hindrances to Revival**

As one continues to consider Roberts's theology of revival it is important to consider the ways in which he teaches that revival can be hindered. Roberts regularly addresses how revival can be hindered, but the two primary places are in his lectures on revival and his book on the topic.<sup>141</sup> In these two places Roberts discusses how the primary hindrance to revival is sin and a lack of repentance.<sup>142</sup> About the sin that is hindering the American church from revival, Roberts states, "Most of the church has had band aids placed on external wounds, when they are dying from sin on the inside."<sup>143</sup> Sin in the church is an obvious hindrance to revival, but Roberts also covers several other ways in which a body of believers can intentionally, or unintentionally, hinder revival.

In his book on revival, Roberts begins by focusing on how pastors are often one of the main hindrances to revival.<sup>144</sup> The pastor has significant impact on the life of a

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<sup>139</sup>Richard Owen Roberts, *Lord, I Agree* (Wheaton, IL: International Awakening Press, 1990).

<sup>140</sup>Roberts, *Lord, I Agree*, Emphasis original.

<sup>141</sup>See Richard Owen Roberts, "Part 12: The Common Hindrances to True Revival," accessed January 22, 2017, <http://www.collegeofrevival.org/the-common-hindrances-to-true-revival/>; and Roberts, *Revival*, 125-49.

<sup>142</sup>Ibid.

<sup>143</sup>Ibid.

<sup>144</sup>Roberts, *Revival*, 127.

church. Regarding this impact, Roberts writes, “The role of the pastor affects virtually all aspects of Christian endeavor. His influence for good or evil is truly profound. The depth of the pastor’s responsibility for the revival of the work of God in his own parish is staggering.”<sup>145</sup> The pastor can be either a great instrument for God to bring revival, or an equally great tool that promotes sin and rebellion against God. After stating this point, Roberts makes the connection between Christian ministry and the ungodly men that Jude addresses in his epistle (Jude 4-13). He highlights the illustrations of promise and judgment in the metaphors of reefs, clouds, trees, waves, and stars. Godly leadership provide safety, growth, and guidance, whereas ungodly leaders bring ruin, death, and bad counsel.<sup>146</sup> After discussing these metaphors, Roberts makes his point by stating that a congregation deserves a pastor that is a source of godly leadership. He writes,

Your people have every right to expect profound and powerful spiritual blessings from your ministry. They have reason to look to you as a shining light, a pillar of strength, a tree of righteousness, a harbor of divine graces, a harbinger of showers of blessing. The question is, *are they or will they be disappointed?*<sup>147</sup>

Roberts believes that a faithful pastor will regularly examine himself to determine if, at that time, he is helping or hindering revival in his ministry to the church.

In addition to calling attention to the Jude passage and asking pastors to examine whether he is being a blessing or a curse to his congregation, Roberts also provides eight portraits of pastors who hinder revival. The following characteristics in a pastor will be detrimental to revival: slothfulness, idolater of books, clamoring for attention in social functions, passion for material gain, unresolved personal problems, lover of words, personal life does not match ministry life, and lack of resolve on essential Christian doctrines.<sup>148</sup> When a pastor consistently ministers in one of these fashions he is

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<sup>145</sup>Roberts, *Revival*, 127-28.

<sup>146</sup>*Ibid.*, 128-29.

<sup>147</sup>*Ibid.*, 130. Emphasis original.

<sup>148</sup>*Ibid.*, 131-35.

putting other things in the place of God, therefore revival will be hindered. About this issue, Roberts writes, “Throughout history pastors have either been great friends or great foes of revival. For a pastor, a genuine revival can be either a source of marvelous joy or a cause of great anguish.”<sup>149</sup> Further, he states that a pastor truly seeking the Lord will be exceedingly glad when revival comes, but those pastors who are pursuing other desires will oppose the work of God.<sup>150</sup> Pastors should seek to be an encouragement to revival.

After discussing how pastors can hinder revival, Roberts mentions how congregations can also exist in opposition to God’s work. The five false loves of a congregation were mentioned already in the section on revival and the church. To review, the five false loves of a congregation which hinder revivals are: a love of tradition, love of disorder, love of brevity, love of comfortable truth, and love of respect.<sup>151</sup> When a congregation is more concerned with any of these things it is devastating to revival.

The final area which Roberts teaches on that hinder revival are general hindrances to God’s movements. General hindrances can affect individuals, churches, or even whole denominations. In this area, Roberts lists three qualities that will impede the work of revival. The first hindrance is erroneous interpretation of Scripture, particularly in the area of eschatology.<sup>152</sup> Roberts states that many preachers do not help the work of revival simply because he teaches that the world is in its final days. The logic is that if the world’s end is moments away then the church should simply persevere, not plead for God to move among his people. Roberts argues against this idea, boldly writing, “To hinder revival by arbitrarily announcing that it cannot come because of the late hour of history in which we live is to abandon our role as faithful servants of Jesus Christ and to pose as

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<sup>149</sup>Roberts, *Revival*, 135.

<sup>150</sup>Ibid.

<sup>151</sup>Ibid., 137-43.

<sup>152</sup>Ibid., 144.

God.”<sup>153</sup> Improper interpretation of Scripture in any area can certainly lead a church away from the true God and this of course would hinder revival.

The second general hindrance to revival is prayerlessness. Out of all the things mentioned which hinder revival, Roberts most regularly returns to the lack of prayer in the American church as a primary reason that revivals are not prevalent in recent history.<sup>154</sup> Churches that are not regularly meeting for corporate prayer are severing the connection between God and the congregation. In contrast, Roberts writes that congregations must awaken to the need to pray for revival. He states, “A mighty concert of prayer is needed. Prayer meetings for revival should spring up in offices, homes, factories, and schools across the nation.”<sup>155</sup> But before these take place Roberts points out that individuals must be faithful in their own prayers. When a person or church prays regularly for revival and expectantly seeks it, the Lord is often preparing them for revival.

The final general hindrance to revival is faithlessness.<sup>156</sup> Roberts connects this strongly with prayer, citing Jesus’s words that those who have faith can move mountains (Mark 11:22-24). He rhetorically asks his readers which is easier for God to do—move a mountain or revive his church? The answer is that neither one is difficult for God and he can do whatever he chooses to do in creation. For this reason, believers should pray with faith that God can bring revival, if that is what he wants to do. Contrary, those who pray without faith lack the trust that God can and will bring revival in his time and therefore hinder revivals.<sup>157</sup> Before leaving the topic of praying in faith, Roberts briefly addresses

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<sup>153</sup>Ibid., 146.

<sup>154</sup>This quote was mentioned previously, but Roberts regularly uses it as an illustration in his sermons, and it is pertinent to this point: “2,400 persons in attendance on Sunday; 600 in attendance on Sunday evening (when the weather is not too good or not too bad); 60 for prayer meeting.” Ibid., 139.

<sup>155</sup>Roberts, *Revival*, 147.

<sup>156</sup>Ibid., 148.

<sup>157</sup>Ibid.

that those who pray in faith for revivals should pray that in the revival God is glorified and that the revival will advance the work of the church for Christ in the world.<sup>158</sup>

In summary, there are numerous ways in which revivals can be hindered by believers and churches. Additionally, the sinful state of the world means that on some level all Christians will be living in a manner which could hinder revival. Despite this reality, pastors should strive to lead churches which are fruitful beds for revival. A pastor should be leading the people of his church to pursue holiness, live in expectation, and to be fervently praying for revival. When these elements are present, it is pleasing to the Lord to send revival and to use the church as a glorious witness to his name. Conversely, when congregations of believers are distracted and not seeking the Lord, they become a hindrance to revival, and they must repent of this condition to return to their former faith.

### **True and False Revival**

In the final section of this study of Roberts's theology of revival it is important to consider many of his remaining teachings on true and false revival. The reality is that when one studies a lifetime of ministry on a particular topic there are often many pieces that do not nicely fit into a specific category. For this reason, this final section will discuss some items of Roberts's teaching on revival that did not fit into categories above, with the goal to further delineate his understanding between true and false revival.

First, one of the characteristics of true revival that Roberts regularly teaches is that it produces faith. When discussing faith, he typically refers to Hebrews 11 and uses the word faith as an acronym to show the fruit of revival.<sup>159</sup> According to Roberts, when someone grows in faith through true revival it will include: facts about God, active obedience, intimacy with God, trials and perseverance, and hope for God's future

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<sup>158</sup>Roberts, *Revival*, 148.

<sup>159</sup>Richard Owen Roberts, "Richard Owen Roberts – G3 Conference Atlanta – Sermon 1 of 2," accessed February 3, 2017, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GZ\\_FRS53PCY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GZ_FRS53PCY).

work.<sup>160</sup> When a person grows in faith he will learn more facts about God and his character. A correct understanding of God is essential for a healthy faith. Roberts writes, “What I think about God impacts my thoughts about myself ... What I think about myself impacts what I think about sin.”<sup>161</sup> Of course, a person’s view of sin then impacts his understanding of the atonement. A biblical understanding of the facts about God is necessary for a person to respond in true faith and for a true revival to be possible.

In his teaching about active obedience, Roberts uses the example of Mary, the mother of Jesus at the Cana wedding in John 2. He points to Mary’s faith and how it led to actions by the servants as an example of how Christians should always respond to Christ’s words to believers. In the passage, Mary says, “Do whatever he tells you” (John 2:5). In a similar manner, Roberts exhorts his hearers that their faith should lead to obedience, and they should also do whatever Christ tells them to do.<sup>162</sup> Following active obedience, faith will produce an intimacy with God. When discussing intimacy with God, Roberts asserts that God is present in different manners at different times. He acknowledges God’s omnipresence, which he labels God’s essential presence.<sup>163</sup> He also discussed how God makes himself present in special ways during times of revival and personal renewals. This presence is labeled God’s manifest presence; however, this is not the presence that he is referring to in regard to intimacy with God. It is the final type of God’s presence that he is speaking about – God’s cultivated presence.<sup>164</sup> A believer can cultivate God’s presence in his life by faithful obedience to the means of grace.<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>160</sup>Roberts, “Richard Owen Roberts – G3 Conference Atlanta – Sermon 1 of 2.”

<sup>161</sup>Roberts, “Richard Owen Roberts - G3 Conference Atlanta - Sermon 2 of 2.”

<sup>162</sup>Roberts, “Richard Owen Roberts - G3 Conference Atlanta - Sermon 1 of 2.”

<sup>163</sup>Richard Owen Roberts, “True Saving Faith,” accessed February 25, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s9fYIquITS8>.

<sup>164</sup>Roberts, “True Saving Faith.”

<sup>165</sup>For Roberts’s teachings on the means of grace, see Richard Owen Roberts, “The Means of Grace,” accessed February 1, 2017, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hL\\_ayRYlr4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hL_ayRYlr4).

Through activities like Bible intake, prayer, and worship the believer can cultivate God's presence in his life. This cultivation is one of the marks of true faith and true revival.

Roberts also teaches that a believer with true faith will persevere through trials and difficulties. In his teaching on this topic he points to the believers in Hebrews 11 as examples of those who have persevered in their faith before Christ. His point is that genuine faith will persevere through difficulties especially considering what Christ has already done on the cross.<sup>166</sup> The last element of true faith for Roberts is hope. The Old Testament believers died before seeing that which they hoped for happen. As New Testament believers, Christians can look back on the work that God has done and this should fill them with hope for what he is still going to accomplish through the church and at the end of the age. This hope should also extend into the area of revival. Faith should produce a hope for God to continue to work in a mighty way among his people.<sup>167</sup>

The final area to consider in this study of Roberts's theology of revival are elements that he presented as clues of false revival. The danger of false revival is that it only helps to solidify the kingdom of darkness by bringing false assurance to nonbelievers.<sup>168</sup> One of the clearest marks of false revival is when the excesses become the focus or the goal of revival. Roberts is critical of the Toronto movement because of its focus on holy laughter. He asks his hearers how laughing so loudly that the Scripture readings cannot be heard brings glory to God.<sup>169</sup> In a similar manner, the revivals in Florida, called the Brownsville Revival, are viewed by Roberts as a false movement because of its focus on the phenomena and the miraculous instead of on God.<sup>170</sup> True

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<sup>166</sup>Roberts, "Richard Owen Roberts - G3 Conference Atlanta - Sermon 1 of 2."

<sup>167</sup>Ibid.

<sup>168</sup>Roberts, "Marks of True Revival."

<sup>169</sup>Ibid.

<sup>170</sup>Ibid.

revivals will ignore the excesses and return the attention to the preaching of God's Word and the presence of God among his people.<sup>171</sup> This does not mean that all revivals must look exactly the same, in fact, just because a revival appears to be different than past movements does not make the revival false. Instead, it is important to note that revivals come in different forms because God is their author. Roberts states, "Since God is the author, no two revivals are the same."<sup>172</sup> One of the most important measures to use against a movement which claims to be a revival is the people's focus. If the focus is on the preaching of the Word of God and the presence of God among his people, then the movement is likely genuine. If the focus is on any other aspect, then it should be considered a false revival and it should be avoided by genuine believers.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter started by considering the very basic question, what is revival? While many basic definitions of the term were provided, the main emphasis of these pages was to consider Richard Owen Roberts's definition and understanding of revival. It was stated that Roberts has defined revival in this way, "True revival is God in the midst of His people."<sup>173</sup> While his definition is short and simple, it is still very complex. For this reason, a comprehensive view of Roberts's theology of revival was developed and explored. The purpose of this chapter was to examine his writing, preaching and teaching and to organize his theology of revival into one structured and concise format. A lifetime of ministry in the area of revival has provided numerous books, articles, sermons, and lectures which present Roberts's theology of revival in a multi-faceted manner.<sup>174</sup> To

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<sup>171</sup>See discussion above regarding James Davenport and the excesses of the First Great Awakening. For Roberts, the Awakening is validated because it did not focus on the excesses that were present, but instead the movement continually went back to the preaching of the Word.

<sup>172</sup>Roberts, "Marks of True Revival."

<sup>173</sup>Roberts, "Part 1: The Nature and Incredible Beauty of True Revival."

<sup>174</sup>It is important to acknowledge that Roberts provides some structure to his views on revival through his book, *Revival*, and his lecture series on the website <http://www.collegeofrevival.org>. While

seek organization and clarity, this chapter examined his understanding of revival as it intersected these topics: God, man, the church, the community, results, hindrances, and genuine revival. While no imposed structure can seamlessly organize Roberts's complete body of work in revival, this structure provided the needed guidance to come to a clear understanding of his views on revival. In this process, Roberts's theology of revival did become apparent and the reader is now prepared to explore the significant connection that he has made in his ministry to repentance and history in the following chapter.

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these structures are helpful they do not include all the categories discussed in this paper. Additionally, the structure of this chapter seeks to discuss Roberts's theology of revival in a manner that is more consistent with a systematic theology pattern.

## CHAPTER 4

### HISTORY AND REPENTANCE

The previous chapter considered Richard Owen Roberts's theology of revival, and through that study it became apparent that there are two interwoven elements in both his writings and teachings. These elements are history and repentance. Both topics in Roberts's ministry will be considered in detail below for the purpose of examining how they impact his theology of revival. It is interesting to consider how both elements have been prevalent in Roberts's ministry even from a young age. One of his goals as a young man was to read all of the books ever written on the topic of revival. About this goal, he writes, "It almost surprises me now as I acknowledge it, but as a young teen-ager I determined to read every book on the subject of revival which was ever published."<sup>1</sup> Along with this lofty goal he determined to create a complete bibliographic resource on the topic of revival and to gather a significant personal library of material. In the process of attempting these tasks he discovered the enormous volume of literature in the field and quickly recognized the impossibility of the endeavor. After decades of research he discusses the problem of not being able to provide a complete work by writing,

For more than forty years I have pursued this goal, and while I am a long way from having fulfilled it, I have managed to read a great deal more of the literature of revival than many believers know to exist, a substantial library of revival literature has been gathered, and this annotated record is offered in partial fulfillment of these youthful determinations.<sup>2</sup>

As one considers Roberts's stated goals in interacting with the revival literature it is

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<sup>1</sup>Richard Owen Roberts, *Revival Literature: An Annotated Bibliography with Biographical and Historical Notices* (Wheaton, IL: Richard Owen Roberts Pub, 1987), ix.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid. The reader should note that this quote is over thirty years old, and since this time Roberts has continued to pursue these goals. His work in this area is still incomplete.

difficult to not be impressed by his determination and perseverance in the task. Studying and researching the history of revival has clearly been a primary objective in his life.

The second major element that is prevalent throughout Roberts's ministry on revival is the topic of repentance. The topic of repentance is in fact the area in which most evangelical Christians would be familiar with his work. His book, *Repentance*, seeks to call the church back to this topic because Roberts strongly believes that it is too neglected in the American church today. He writes, "It is time for alarm, however, when the church that the Lord Jesus Christ established knows scarcely any more about repentance than does the sin-loving world. Tragically, that is the situation today."<sup>3</sup> Roberts acknowledges that the term repentance is still regularly used in the churches, but he laments that it is grossly misunderstood and practically disregarded by most believers.<sup>4</sup> For this reason, many messages that Roberts has delivered, and most of his books, have a strong emphasis on repentance and its importance in the Christian's life.

The purpose of this chapter is to examine these two elements in more detail in order to gain an understanding of their significance in Roberts's ministry. From the emphasis that Roberts gives to these topics one will see their importance to the church in the area of revival. This purpose will be achieved by considering Roberts's major written works in these areas and making connections with many of his more recent teachings on the topics. In this chapter, it will become apparent that for the church to truly understand revival it is necessary to discover how God has moved in the past through the study of history and how he impacts convicted sinners through the study of biblical repentance.

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<sup>3</sup>Richard Owen Roberts, *Repentance: The First Word of the Gospel* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2002), 16.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

## History and Revival

Based on Roberts's definition of revival one could argue that there has not been a period of history that has not experienced revival on some level.<sup>5</sup> Obviously, some time periods have been more fruitful in this area than others, but throughout history God has been drawing near to his people in special ways. To attempt to chronicle all that God has done to revive individuals, churches, and even denominations would be an impossible task. Even if one limits the study to major movements within the larger church it would still be necessary to focus on specific time periods or locations. As a young man, Roberts recognized the challenge of limiting his scope of study in terms of revival. He discovered quickly that many in the church use the term revival and evangelism interchangeably. As he compiled his annotated bibliography on revival he struggled with where to draw the line when considering whether to include a text. He determined to include all books that had the word revival in the title, even if he felt that the subject of the book was actually evangelism.<sup>6</sup> The simple act of trying to compile a resource on the history of revival forces one to consider how to define revival and God's movements. One guide that Roberts used in the process of considering the history of revival was to separate the events based on the one who initiated the movement. If the movement was started by God, then Roberts considered it under the category of revival; however, if the movement was started by a man he would consider it evangelism. On this distinction between the impetus of revival Roberts states the following:

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<sup>5</sup>Roberts defined revival as "an extraordinary movement of the Holy Spirit producing extraordinary results." Richard Owen Roberts, *Revival* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1982), 16-17. He later modified this definition and now defines revival as "true revival is God in the midst of His people." Richard Owen Roberts, "Part 1: The Nature and Incredible Beauty of True Revival," accessed December 1, 2016, <http://www.collegeofrevival.org/part-1-the-nature-and-incredible-beauty-of-true-revival/>.

<sup>6</sup>Roberts, *Revival Literature*, xiii. He wrote, "In the book before you I have sought to include only those volumes that by my definition are actually on the subject of revival, that include a section on revival, or that portray details of consequence concerning men used of God in revival. I have made one continual exception to this rule, and that is, I have included volumes where the word revival is used in the title even when, by my understanding, it is referring to something else – usually evangelism."

In the early years of my gathering information I saw little difference between evangelism and revival and was inclined to suppose that anything that fell under the broad spectrum of “revivalism” should be included in a bibliography on revival. In more recent years I have come to the conviction that evangelism is something very necessary we do for God, whereas revival is something perfectly wonderful which God does for us.<sup>7</sup>

Anytime that a person is studying historical topics he must, by necessity, be selective. Terms must be defined, scope must be narrowed, and through this process the researcher reveals much about himself. This idea holds true for Roberts’s study of the history of revival as well. By necessity he had to narrow his scope, define his terms, and exclude many items just to make the topic manageable. This section will consider several of his significant writings in the area of history and revival. The reasons why Roberts published each work, the content included, and its significance will be discussed in each section. Through this examination, Roberts’s understanding of revival will become more evident and his concern over the study of the history of revival will be explicitly clear.

### **Roberts's *Revival Literature***

Roberts’s *Revival Literature* has already been discussed in detail above, but when considering his emphasis on history and revival, this is easily his most significant work. The book was published in 1987 after years of research and writing. While it is comprehensive, it is not complete. Roberts acknowledges this fact when he writes, “No one is more aware than myself of the inadequate nature of this book I set before you. Several more years of labor might improve it and enhance its usefulness.”<sup>8</sup> While stating that more time would be beneficial he recognizes the need for his work:

I publish at this time because I do not know how much longer I will have to complete my assigned tasks, because I believe this volume is needed at the present time, and because I believe it contains information which can make a major difference in the future of the church throughout the world.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Roberts, *Revival Literature*, xiii.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., xi.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

Roberts's perceived need for the book was his primary reason for compiling these annotations. The book itself contains five-thousand-eighty-three entries that relate specifically with the topic of revival.<sup>10</sup> By collecting such a large volume Roberts hopes that students of revival would have one reference source for a study of the topic.

A second reason for publishing this book was that Roberts desires to reawaken a passion in the broader church about the topic of revival. He admits that studying about revival will never in itself produce a revival,<sup>11</sup> but it is still the church's responsibility to study this important topic because it reveals much about God's character. He writes, "I have no hesitation in saying the church cannot possibly excuse its long-standing neglect of a matter so vital to its own welfare and so central to the issue of the glory of God."<sup>12</sup> As noted in the previous chapter, Roberts teaches that true revival is focused on God and his glory. It is for this reason that Roberts focuses on the history of the church in revival. When a person can see how God has moved in the past, he is able to see God's character more clearly. Conversely, when the church fails to study how God has previously brought revival, then that body of believers is limited in its understanding of God. This limited understanding of God likely leads to spiritual decline. Roberts explains this process in this way, "A church in moral decline produces discontented believers. Discontented believers strengthen the confidence of a cynical world. A cynical world robs God of glory due his name."<sup>13</sup> Ultimately, Roberts produced this book to highlight the significant

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<sup>10</sup>This total includes only one entry regarding the works by George Whitefield. The entry refers the reader to another significant book on annotations that Roberts collected: *Whitefield in Print: A Bibliographic Record of Works By, For, and Against George Whitefield: with Annotations, Biographical and Historical Notices, and Bibliographies of Associates and Contemporaries* (Wheaton, IL: Richard Owen Roberts Pub, 1988), 493.

<sup>11</sup>Roberts, *Revival Literature*, xi.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

publications that discuss what God has done throughout history. He firmly believes that a fruitful believer should be equipped with this knowledge of past revivals in the church.

The content of the book covers a massive, but selective, amount of material on revival. Roberts admits that certain figures and movements received more attention in the book because of his personal interests. In the introduction, he discusses how his interest in men like Brainerd, Edwards, Dow, and Finney had led him to include more of their works. In a similar manner, he omits many works on the history of Methodism because he felt that the movement was well documented in other resources.<sup>14</sup> Additionally, there are noticeable differences in the entries, both in style and content, throughout the book. Roberts attributes this to the changing nature of the project over the span of forty years. He started this book with the intent of building his personal library and later recognized the value that it brought to the broader church in the area of revival history.

The difficulty one finds when browsing through the content of this work is that it can be a challenge to not become overwhelmed by its size. Instead of seeking to consider the work in its entirety, it is better to consider the content of each entry and to see the book's usefulness as a reference resource. The book is set up alphabetically by last name.<sup>15</sup> Each entry starts with the entry number that Roberts assigned it. This is followed by the author's name and the dates of his life. The line under the author contains the book title, sub-title, publisher, and copyright year. After the bibliographic information, Roberts then lists some of the libraries which hold a copy of the work.<sup>16</sup> For many of the entries

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<sup>14</sup>Roberts, *Revival Literature*, xiii.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid. The book also includes a significant subject index which would allow a researcher to study movements or geographical locations without first knowing what authors need to be considered.

<sup>16</sup>Roberts used a code system for library names to reduce the space for each entry. The reader must refer to the "Key to Library Symbols," in the front of the book to see at which library Roberts was able to find the book. This is particularly significant for rare books on the list, several of which Roberts only found a copy of in personal libraries to which he was given access. Additionally, when reading the annotations, one will notice the extent of Roberts's personal library as many entries simply list "ROR" as the library symbols—this code referring to Roberts's personal library. Many of the volumes in his library are now housed in an archive at the Billy Graham Library on the campus of Wheaton College in Wheaton, IL. Ibid., xiv.

Roberts ends with some brief remarks on the work listed. For example, Roberts includes three entries on John Gillies's book, *Historical Collections of Accounts of Revival*,<sup>17</sup> for each entry he provides short comments, but when collected together the three entries show his appreciation of the work. For the original 1754 edition he writes, "A truly wonderful work."<sup>18</sup> On the updated 1845 version Roberts comments, "Bonar's additions make this an even more splendid work."<sup>19</sup> Finally, on the Banner of Truth reprinted edition from 1981, he writes, "The Banner of Truth has done a great service in making this precious volume available again. No serious student of revival should be without it."<sup>20</sup> While the contents of these annotations are not significant in length they do reflect Roberts's opinion of the book which is helpful to the researcher.

Another helpful example of Roberts's annotations of a book in this volume can be seen in his comments on Charles Finney's works. The first entry for Finney is not actually for a book, but instead Roberts provides a brief outline of his life and ministry.<sup>21</sup> In this sketch, Roberts is very critical of Finney, and states that just as many of his contemporaries predicted, his views on God brought a quick end to revivals. He writes,

Thus, while very successful in his itinerations, the excitement generated by his ministry alarmed many sober leader of his day who knew that the new doctrines which he preached and the new methods he employed not only brought division and tension on every hand but would in time bring great harm upon the churches of the land. Some of Finney's contemporaries went so far as to say that if Finney's view prevailed it would mark the end of true revival in America. Undaunted by such criticism, Finney continued to follow his own convictions. Yet, just as predicted, the seasons of revival ended considerably before the death of Finney, and true revival has been scarce indeed in America since his day.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>John Gillies, *Historical Collections of Accounts of Revival* (1754; repr., Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1981).

<sup>18</sup>Roberts, *Revival Literature*, 205.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 181.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

Roberts is very critical of Finney's ministry, yet he recognizes his significance to American church history. For this reason, Roberts includes fifty entries on Finney alone, and through these entries he provides a short overview of Finney's life and ministry.<sup>23</sup> In this overview, Roberts comments on Finney's changing perspective on revival as he matured in life. In an annotation on Finney's *Letters on Revivals*, Roberts writes, "A lesser known work providing somewhat more mature views on certain aspects of revival than will be found in the lectures."<sup>24</sup> While Roberts discusses some growth in Finney, he determines that the overall impact of his ministry has negatively affected the church.

The impact that Finney had on the church is the main significance of Roberts's entries on his works. He certainly does highlight the positive and negative aspects of Finney's ministry, but the result was that Finney's views has damaged the American church to this day. Roberts final evaluation states, "While one must not question Finney's personal devotion to the Lord Jesus Christ, the blind acceptance of his position depletes the prospects of revival even in this hour."<sup>25</sup> For Roberts, the lessons that one can learn from history is a significant reason to study history in connection with revival. Through this study, the church today can learn from the past, see its current deficiencies, correct them, and then turn to the Lord in an anticipation of revival. Regarding Finney, Roberts believes that the church must turn away from a man focused theology to a God focused theology. He writes, "A return to a view of a high and lofty God is the primary prerequisite to revival in any age."<sup>26</sup> Without studying the history of revival it would be

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<sup>23</sup>Roberts, *Revival Literature*, 181-185.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 183. While Finney's *Lectures on Revival* is probably his most well-known book in *Letters on Revival*, which was published later in his life, Finney corrects and modifies many of his previously taught ideas on revival. Those interested in Finney's theology of revival must consider his views in *Letters on Revival*.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 181.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid.

difficult for one to see the impact that Finney has on the church today. In a similar way, studying the history of revival provides a more complete view of God and revival.

The final area to consider in this discussion of *Revival Literature* is the result of this work by Roberts. This work is significant for several reasons. First, the collection displays Roberts' depth of study on the topic of revival. Roberts spent forty years compiling this resource through his diligence and desire to learn about revival. Second, the work highlights the importance of history in the area of revival. While many of the works annotated are practical in nature, discussing things like the purpose and nature of revival, many of the entries are purely historical accounts of what God has done in revival.<sup>27</sup> Roberts could have narrowed the scope of his research by only focusing on practical books, but he purposely kept his search broader because of his value on the historical accounts and what they can reveal about God. A final significant impact of the book is that it provides all students of revival a good resource from which to start his study on the topic. The book can easily provide an overview of the resources produced by significant figures or movements, giving the student a solid bibliography from which to start his own research. Roberts provides a great service to the church in this work.

While there are certainly many positive qualities about this work, there are also several deficiencies. The most glaring deficiency is the fact that Roberts does not provide content annotations on all the books included. This of course would quickly expand the book and make it necessary for multiple volumes, but its value would be much greater. A second area in which the work could be improved would be to bring consistency to each entry in formatting and structure. Finally, this work would benefit from technology that is

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<sup>27</sup>Two examples of historical accounts of revival included in this resource would be Jonathan Edwards, "An Account of the Revival of Religion in Northampton 1740-1742," in *Jonathan Edwards on Revival* (1965; repr., Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1994), and John Gillies, *Historical Collections of Accounts of Revival* (1754; repr., Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1981).

available now that was not available when Roberts first published the book thirty years ago. Simply updating and digitalizing this work would add great benefit to the church.<sup>28</sup>

Overall, this volume is significant in the study of Roberts's theology of revival because it very clearly displays his passion to connect his understanding of revival to the history of how God has worked in revival. Despite its few shortcomings, the book is still an excellent resource in the area of revival. Roberts's desire was to build his library and add to his knowledge on the topic of revival, in the process he provides the church with this work which highlights many of the time periods and ways in which God has brought revival to his people. Throughout this work one is impacted not only by historical accounts, but by a God who poured out his presence in specific times for his glory.

### **Roberts's *Whitefield in Print***

After considering *Revival Literature*, the second main resource that must be considered when studying Roberts's connection between revival and history is the book, *Whitefield in Print*.<sup>29</sup> The two books are similar in that they are both comprehensive annotated bibliographies, but they differ in focus and structure. In *Whitefield in Print*, Roberts focuses his study on only those publications that dealt with George Whitefield and the First Great Awakening. For this reason alone, he could develop a more complete reference resource in this book. The subtitle of the book helps the reader to know the scope and purpose of the book by stating that it is a "bibliographic record of works by, for, and against George Whitefield."<sup>30</sup> In addition, Roberts includes bibliographies of Whitefield's contemporaries so that he could state that this book creates a literary history

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<sup>28</sup>For example, in a digital form the book could link to World Cat and instantly provide the researcher with a list of all libraries which hold a copy of the book under consideration.

<sup>29</sup>Roberts, *Whitefield in Print*.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, title page.

of the First Great Awakening.<sup>31</sup> Overall, the book provides a comprehensive record of publications that focus on an important revival movement in the early American church.

Another way in which this book is similar to *Revival Literature* is that Roberts's primary purpose in writing the book was not to gain knowledge of a historical time period of the church, but instead he is striving to learn more about the God who brought the revival.<sup>32</sup> In the preface to the book, Roberts continually refers to this volume as a memorial stone to remind the church of what God has done in the past.<sup>33</sup> He presents his primary motivation is to create a memorial for God's great works in the First Great Awakening. He discusses this motivation by writing, "One single, grand, and valid purpose has gripped me; and in my effort to fulfill it, I believe my time has been wisely invested. I speak of a desire to memorialize the mighty acts of God among our Fathers of the eighteenth century."<sup>34</sup> As he discusses this motivation in compiling these publications into one source pointing readers back to God, he writes, "This memorial can direct attention once more to the fact that God can when man cannot."<sup>35</sup> Additionally, "The very God who revived His church then is able to do so again."<sup>36</sup> Throughout this discussion it becomes very clear that Roberts's desire to connect history and revival does not stem from a passion for history, but a passion for God. Roberts connects history to revival because he believes that in studying history the church can learn more about God.

The content of *Whitefield in Print* is structured and arranged in a similar manner as *Revival Literature*, but Roberts includes several elements that provide more

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<sup>31</sup>Roberts, *Whitefield in Print*, title page.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., xiv.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., xii.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., xiv.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., xiii.

value in this volume. In addition to the bibliographic entry, in many instances Roberts provides a brief description of the content of the publication. He also includes helpful remarks on similar works for the researcher to consider, and finally, on historical figures other than Whitefield, he provides a brief historical sketch of that individual. For these reasons, this book is substantially larger than *Revival Literature*. Additionally, it contains almost three thousand more entries for a total of eight-thousand-eighty-six total annotations.<sup>37</sup> Finally, this book ends with a helpful textual index to Whitefield's sermons which allow the researcher to locate his sermons arranged by Scripture reference.<sup>38</sup> Overall, this volume contains valuable information to guide any research of Whitefield and the First Great Awakening with the purpose of studying this movement of God.

In a similar manner to *Revival Literature*, the significance of this book has been reduced by advancements in technology which allow a researcher to access much of this information on a digital library catalog. Despite this drawback, the result of this work is still significant regarding this study and Roberts's ministry. Each of the over eight-thousand entries represent a book that Roberts has studied and contemplated. The entries are from the time period which Roberts believes was the last wide reaching Word-based revival.<sup>39</sup> As he studied these publications he learned much about the church's view of God and man during this era, and this study has greatly impacted his own theology of revival. Roberts places a heavy emphasis on God's sovereignty and his control of revival movements. In many ways, this book displays the scaffolding from which Roberts's theology was constructed. His hope through this work was that the researchers who used this volume would come to see God in a similar manner, and through that view, the church would be better equipped to experience another great Word-centered revival.

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<sup>37</sup>Roberts, *Whitefield in Print*, 722.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*, 723.

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*, xii.

## J. Edwin Orr

The two books previously discussed are both significant indicators of Roberts's initial focus on history and revival. They represent decades of his labor and toil in studying God's movements in church history. In the introductions to both of the works Roberts clearly articulates his desire not to study history, but to highlight the God who moved in history. Beyond these volumes, Roberts has been diligent in connecting the church to revival history in several other emphasizes. First among the remaining areas would be Roberts's connection with J. Edwin Orr. The reason for this attention to Orr is that Roberts edited and published four of his works which discuss revival.<sup>40</sup> Out of these four books, two, in particular, will be examined to demonstrate that Roberts specifically chose Orr's works because he places spiritual value on historical revival events.

The first book to consider is *Campus Aflame* which is an edited version of Orr's dissertation. In preface, Roberts discusses the value of this work because a comprehensive written account of campus awakenings does not exist. He also feels that Orr was uniquely qualified to write this book because of his deep concern and involvement with campus revivals. Regarding these two topics, Roberts writes,

Few in the history of the world have ever known so much on this precious theme of campus awakenings as the author, J. Edwin Orr. Perhaps even fewer have cared so much and prayed so long to see it happen again and again. Certainly, almost none at all have themselves been used as instruments of awakening on so many campuses in so many nations as our beloved friend now in glory.<sup>41</sup>

Based on the passage above, it is clear that Roberts views Orr's ministry with admiration and respect. Further in his introduction to the work, Roberts approvingly comments on how Orr stood against the majority of his time period who, following Finney, taught and

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<sup>40</sup>See J. Edwin Orr, *An Apprenticeship of Faith*, ed. Richard Owen Roberts (Wheaton, IL: International Awakening Press, 1993); Orr, *Campus Aflame: A History of Evangelical Awakenings in Collegiate Communities*, ed. Richard Owen Roberts (Wheaton, IL: International Awakening Press, 1994); Orr, *The Event of the Century: The 1857-1858 Awakening*, ed. Richard Owen Roberts (Wheaton, IL: International Awakening Press, 1989); and Orr, *My All, His All*, ed. Richard Owen Roberts (Wheaton, IL: Richard Owen Roberts Pub, 1989).

<sup>41</sup>Orr, *Campus Aflame*, 11.

practiced that revival came through the proper means and methods. He writes,

While Dr. Orr found it impossible in his lifetime to stand fully in accord with those whose theology made revival “nothing other than the right use of the right means,” he did believe, as do the principles of International Awakening Ministries, that we ought to do what we can by way of preparation of our minds and hearts for revival; and we ought even more to so thirst for the Lord God Himself that He will quickly come and pour water upon those that are thirsty, knowing full well that as our thirst is quenched, the floods will rise upon the dry ground of the heathen world in which we have been placed.”<sup>42</sup>

It is clear that in Orr, Roberts finds a man of similar theology and practice. He also presents one who had a desire to preserve the history of revivals, and for this reason Roberts edited, or reprinted, several of Orr’s work which intertwined history and revival.

The value that Roberts describes in *Campus Aflame* is that it clearly displayed the continual and ongoing revivals which have been prevalent on American college campuses since the time of the First Great Awakening. Roberts notes that one of the reasons for ongoing revivals was that the impact of a campus revival rarely went beyond the student body; therefore, it was necessary for a new movement every four years.<sup>43</sup> One of the exceptions to this pattern which Roberts points out was Professor Albert Hopkins who taught at Williams College.<sup>44</sup> Sometime after his graduation from the college, Hopkins was converted, and when he returned to the school as a faculty member he had a deep burden for the student body. About this burden, Roberts writes, “Before God, he made the solemn determination, the Lord making it possible, no generation of students would graduate from Williams College during his tenure without the benefit of having experienced firsthand a true outpouring of heaven’s rain.”<sup>45</sup> Roberts continues by stating that God did indeed grant this request to Professor Hopkins and the college. Orr’s book

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<sup>42</sup>Orr, *Campus Aflame*, 12-13.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 11-12.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., 12.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid.

following this introduction carefully presents movements of God on college campuses. It powerfully displays the strong history that higher education has had with revivals.

The second book that will be considered to make the connection between Roberts and Orr is *The Event of the Century*. This book is a detailed history of the 1858 prayer revival which started in New York.<sup>46</sup> Orr uses the first several chapters to present the spiritual condition of the United States leading up to the movement. The middle section of the book highlights the beginning of the revival in New York, and then trace the movement throughout North America. The end of the book outlines some general characteristics of revival and its lasting benefits for the church. The book was written shortly before Orr passed away, and in many ways, it reflects his lifetime of ministry in the area of revival. Roberts acknowledges that sections of the book appeared in other publications, but in total it represents a significant work in history and revival.<sup>47</sup>

In the introduction to the book, Roberts lists seven reasons as to why he feels that Orr's work needs to be published. First, he notes that Orr had a passion for revival that started as a young man. When he was young, Orr regularly traveled and wrote about his experiences throughout the world with churches in revival.<sup>48</sup> The second reason that Roberts published this work was because he believes that it continued to highlight Orr's desire to see scholars focus on revival movements.<sup>49</sup> Third, Roberts notes Orr's ability to recall statistics about revival and to use these figures to inspire others. He writes,

I have often been with him, and in his presence never felt like more than a kindergarten boy when it came to the details of awakenings. His ability to rattle off statistics must be considered one of the phenomena of modern times. Who else ever acquired such a vast array of information on, and so comprehensive a grasp of details concerning revivals, and was able to use them with such telling and

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<sup>46</sup>Orr, *The Event of the Century*.

<sup>47</sup>*Ibid.*, ix.

<sup>48</sup>*Ibid.*, vii.

<sup>49</sup>*Ibid.*

delightful effect?<sup>50</sup>

Roberts writes that Orr's worldwide status as a man of revival was the fourth reason why he decided to put this book into publication.<sup>51</sup> He states, "While some God-honored evangelists are better known than J. Edwin Orr, no revival scholar has gained a broader audience or had a greater impact on this century."<sup>52</sup> The fifth reason that Roberts lists as to why he published this work was that Orr's life was marked by revival in his personal friendliness and warmth towards other people.<sup>53</sup> Sixth, Roberts admires his work effort, stating that Orr accomplished more through personal discipline than many did with larger budgets and support staff. He writes, "By tremendous personal discipline and exertion he accomplished more than most men with secretaries and large budgets even dream possible."<sup>54</sup> The seventh, and final, reason that Roberts provides for desiring to publish this work was because in his marriage Orr was blessed by a wife who supported and enhanced his ministry in the area of revival. Roberts notes that Orr's wife Carol's support of his work has had an extremely positive impact on the worldwide church.<sup>55</sup>

From an outsider's perspective, the seven reasons listed above may not equally justify the publication of Orr's work, but they do all display Roberts's appreciation and respect for his life and ministry. In Orr, Roberts admires a man who was gifted and called to equip the church in the area of revival. Many of Orr's works were historical in nature, and this book, in particular, had a strong connection between studying a historical event and teaching the church about the elements of revival. By editing and publishing this book, Roberts reinforces his desire to educate the wider church about the history of

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<sup>50</sup>Orr, *The Event of the Century*, vii.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., viii.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid.

revival, and through that process to help believers better see the God who brings revival. In this purpose, Roberts once again displays his desire to strongly connect church history to the study of revival. Overall, Roberts's connection with Orr through editing and publishing has almost a complete emphasis on historical works focused on revival.

### **The Welsh Revival**

The Welsh Revival of 1904-05 is another topic which clearly displays Roberts's concern with connecting history and revival. While he mentions this awakening in several settings,<sup>56</sup> the primary source for his connection with this revival is in the book that he edited and published, *Glory Filled the Land*.<sup>57</sup> In this book, Roberts compiles three different viewpoints on the Welsh revival which he feels accurately portray the remarkable works of God at that time. He writes, "The three volumes of this trilogy present the reader with the unique opportunity of viewing the revival not only through the eyes of three men, but from three totally different perspectives."<sup>58</sup> Roberts edited these works for publication so that the church could learn from this important time of revival.

An additional reason which Roberts discusses for publishing this volume is to provide correction to the church. The Welsh revival was not heavily influenced by strong preaching like the First Great Awakening. It was, what Roberts would call, an experience-centered revival.<sup>59</sup> While many would suggest that this emphasis on experience is a great strength of the movement, Roberts writes that it is its weakness:

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<sup>56</sup>One instance would be Richard Owen Roberts, "Revival: Experience Centered & God Centered," accessed February 4, 2017, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ec\\_MscSLaUU&index=5&list=PLmmTx77FrqRcmfBrKjoDC8QUz-dOBsIVj](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ec_MscSLaUU&index=5&list=PLmmTx77FrqRcmfBrKjoDC8QUz-dOBsIVj).

<sup>57</sup>Lewis, H. Elvet, G. Campbell Morgan, and I. V. Neprash, *Glory Filled the Land: A Trilogy of the Welsh Revival (1904-1905)*, ed. Richard Owen Roberts (Wheaton, IL: International Awakening Press, 1989).

<sup>58</sup>*Ibid.*, xiii.

<sup>59</sup>Roberts, "Revival: Experience Centered & God Centered."

Some have thought that one of the great strengths of 1904-1905 was its lack of preaching. A more sober judgment makes that lack as one of its most grievous weaknesses. The Church will never be strong enough to fulfill its world-wide mandate if it moves forward merely on the basis of experience. The powerful, Spirit-anointed preaching of the Word of God always have been and always will be both the Church's best safeguard against inner error, and its one truly effective tool for bringing the world into submission to Jesus Christ.<sup>60</sup>

While Roberts believes that the movement was less effective because of its emphasis on experience over preaching, he still sees great value in putting the movement into books for the church. The value in learning from this movement is through the process the church could become better prepared to lead in coming revivals. He writes,

While we rejoice with great joy at all that God did and accomplished in the Welsh Revival of 1904-1905, and while there can be no question but that "Glory" truly "Filled the Land" in those days, we must not fail to *learn* the precious *lessons* our brother Evan Roberts learned. By the grace of God, let us *learn* them before the revival comes, instead of waiting until we have harmed the fragile and precious work of the Holy Spirit by our own insensitivity and foolishness.<sup>61</sup>

In this statement, Roberts clearly articulates his main desire in connecting church history and revival. It is his hope that he can help the church learn from past errors, so that the church would be better equipped to follow the Lord's leading in upcoming revivals.

### **First Great Awakening**

The final area to consider Roberts's connection between history and revival is the First Great Awakening. In this area, Roberts has published two books of note: *Salvation in Full Color* and *Sanctify the Congregation*.<sup>62</sup> The content of these books was discussed in the previous chapter; therefore, it is sufficient to restate that these books both demonstrate Roberts's understanding and appreciation of this period of church history.

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<sup>60</sup>Roberts, *Glory Filled the Land*, xv. Additionally, as discussed previously, one of the leading figures of the movement, Evan Roberts, reflected later in life that his emphasis on experience over preaching during the revival most likely led to a premature ending of the movement, see xiv.

<sup>61</sup>Roberts, *Glory Filled the Land*, xv. Emphasis added.

<sup>62</sup>Richard Owen Roberts, ed., *Salvation in Full Color: Twenty Sermons by Great Awakening Preachers* (Wheaton, IL: International Awakening Press, 1994); Roberts, *Sanctify the Congregation: A Call to the Solemn Assembly and to Corporate Repentance* (Wheaton, IL: International Awakening Press, 1994). Additionally, the annotated bibliography on Whitefield could certainly fit into this category, but it is such a significant work for Roberts that it was given its own section above.

Both books are a collection of sermons that Roberts personally chose to teach his readers about an issue. In *Salvation in Full Color*, Roberts provides sermons which present the full gospel message to the reader.<sup>63</sup> For this book his selection of historical sermons were all delivered around the time of the First Great Awakening. Many of the preachers were prominent men during this time, but Roberts also highlights lesser known figures who were preaching sound biblical messages to their churches at that time. The point of highlighting this fact is that when Roberts could choose any sermon that he desired, including his own, to carefully describe the work of salvation, he selects historical sermons. This only serves to reinforce his desire to connect the church with the historical revivals for the purpose of connecting believers to God's previous work in revivals.

The second example of Roberts's connection with the First Great Awakening is in the book *Sanctify the Congregation*. This book is a selection of sermons that have been edited by Roberts to demonstrate the practice of a solemn assembly.<sup>64</sup> In the introduction to the book, Roberts highlights the fact that the sermons selected were all delivered between 1645 and 1753. His reason for focusing on this time period is because he believes the church of early America has much to teach the modern church about corporate repentance. Regarding this concern with repentance, he writes,

Early Americans, despite their faults, knew that God hated sin and punished it in the unrepentant, including unrepentant believers and churches. Because they feared God and His ability to punish, they sought to lead their people in quick and thorough repentance.<sup>65</sup>

To teach believers about the need for corporate repentance, Roberts looks back to the First Great Awakening. He purposely highlights this movement because he believes that this is certainly one area where a historical revival has much to teach Christians today.

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<sup>63</sup>Roberts, *Salvation in Full Color*, xvi-xix.

<sup>64</sup>Roberts, *Sanctify the Congregation*, xiii.

<sup>65</sup>*Ibid.*, xii.

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this first section was to demonstrate the intentional connection that Roberts has fostered between history and revival. By examining several of his written and edited works it has been established that Roberts sees value in pointing believers back to earlier time periods to teach about revivals. When one examines the strengths and weaknesses of previous revivals he can learn from successes and failures of the church leaders at that time. From this knowledge, one can become better prepared for the next time God brings revival. Ultimately, for Roberts the greatest reason for connecting revivals with history is that through the study of the ways in which God has worked in the past, the Christian can better know God and prepare for true revival.<sup>66</sup>

## **Repentance and Revival**

The second main section of this chapter will examine the connection that Roberts cultivated between revival and repentance. In one of his messages on revival, Roberts introduces the topic by asking his listeners to consider what type of revival they were praying for God to bring. He asks if his listeners really desire for God to revive the church in its current state of licentious faith. He asks his listeners if they really desire for God to revive the church with its current leaders more concerned about man's opinion than about God's opinion. Roberts states that he, of course, prays for and desires revival, but the revival he prays for starts with repentance.<sup>67</sup> He further elaborates that he sees no need to pray for God to continue, or to increase, the general state of things in the church, but that his desire is for God to bring the church to repentance which would lead to its

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<sup>66</sup>While Roberts may be unique in his time for connecting revival and history, he is certainly not the first person to make this connection. Jonathan Edwards regularly wrote out accounts of revival so that others could hear about what God had done, and through learning this history that person may be encouraged towards revival. He shares the account of how the revival of the First Great Awakening spread from town to town on the testimonies of those impacted in *A Narrative of Surprising Conversions* found in *Jonathan Edwards on Revival* (1965; repr., Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1995), 16-17.

<sup>67</sup>Richard Owen Roberts, "What does Christ want?," accessed on May 12, 2017, <https://heartcryforrevival.org/fusionlivestream/>.

holiness.<sup>68</sup> In this sermon, and throughout his ministry, Roberts teaches that genuine revival starts with repentance. He discusses the issue of repentance in numerous sermons and lectures, but the importance of this connection will be examined primarily by considering three of Roberts's works that make his purpose explicitly clear: *Repentance, Revival* and "The Solemn Assembly".<sup>69</sup> In these three resources it will be demonstrated that Roberts purposely connects revival and repentance because he believes that true revival will always start with biblical repentance in sinners and believers.

### ***Roberts's Repentance: The First Word of the Gospel***

When discussing the topic of repentance in Roberts's ministry the place to start is his book titled, *Repentance*. It is in this work that Roberts most fully develops his understanding and teaching on the topic. For this reason, the contents of this book will be examined with the purpose of overviewing Roberts's theology of repentance. The subtitle of this book firmly displays the value that Roberts places on repentance by stating that repentance is the "first word of the gospel."<sup>70</sup> Roberts builds his case for supporting this statement through three main sections: biblical repentance, statements on repentance, and what repentance leads to.<sup>71</sup> Each of these three sections will be considered below.

Before the first section of the book, Roberts introduces his topic and considers the reasons for why he believes that many in the church do not have a biblical view of repentance. First, Roberts describes a general disregard of the doctrine in the church.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>68</sup>Roberts, "What does Christ want?"

<sup>69</sup>Richard Owen Roberts, *Repentance: The First Word of the Gospel* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2002); Roberts, *Revival!* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1982); and Roberts, "The Solemn Assembly," (Wheaton, IL: International Awakening Press, 1989).

<sup>70</sup>Roberts, *Repentance*, front cover.

<sup>71</sup>*Ibid.*, 5. These divisions are from the author, but they are still helpful for dividing the fifteen chapters of this book for overviewing its contents.

<sup>72</sup>*Ibid.*, 16.

Second, those who do preach on repentance do not consider the topic enough in their preaching.<sup>73</sup> Third, the church often fails to understand the mandatory nature of repentance.<sup>74</sup> The fourth reason is that many have embraced the false teaching that repentance has nothing to do with salvation. Fifth, repentance is neglected because the church is too focused on positive messages, therefore it avoids difficult topics that are not considered encouraging.<sup>75</sup> Sixth, Roberts writes, “the doctrine of repentance has suffered at the hands of the church’s large-scale commitment to success.”<sup>76</sup> Finally, Roberts closes his reasons for writing this book by stating that there is a “tragic lack of moral earnestness” in church leadership.<sup>77</sup> With these reasons presented, Roberts then moves into his first section of the book which develops a portrait of biblical repentance.

In chapter 1 Roberts demonstrates that the first words of John the Baptist, Jesus, and the twelve’s messages to the people is to repent.<sup>78</sup> He also argues that it was the focus of Peter’s preaching<sup>79</sup> and the core of the apostle Paul’s message.<sup>80</sup> The chapter closes with a brief presentation of Jesus’s final words to the churches in Revelation and his call to them to repent.<sup>81</sup> Following this first chapter, Roberts highlights God’s call to his people to repent throughout the Old Testament. He writes, “God Himself is grieved over the failure of His own people to repent, and He has issued many passionate calls for

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<sup>73</sup>Roberts, *Repentance*, 17.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., 18.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., 23, 27, 32.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., 33.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid., 35.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid., 37-39.

them to repent and turn back to Him.”<sup>82</sup> Through this calling to repentance, God displays many of his characteristics such as patience, holiness, and love. God was patient with the people of Israel despite their continual unfaithfulness. God’s holiness was evident in his continual reminders that sinful people cannot be his people. Finally, God demonstrates his love for his people by delaying his judgment and by sending a line of prophets to speak for him. Throughout the Old Testament the need for repentance is portrayed through the nation of Israel’s unfaithfulness and God’s call to them to turn back to him and avoid his wrath and judgment. Roberts carries this forward to the church as he calls his readers to repent of their sins and marvel at the fact that God would forgive:

The true import of repentance is heightened by a thoughtful consideration of the divinely ordained lot of every sinner. All people are sinners and none have a right to expect mercy, but strangely and wonderfully, God does bestow mercy on those who repent.<sup>83</sup>

For Roberts, the call to repent that is found in the Old Testament is still the same wonderful call to people today to repent and receive God’s mercy and grace.

After reviewing repentance in the Old Testament Roberts focuses on repentance in the New Testament in chapter 3. In this chapter, Roberts presents seven doctrines on repentance found in the New Testament. Doctrine one is that repentance is a universal necessity.<sup>84</sup> All people, regardless of race, ethnicity, or religious background must hear the gospel and respond in repentance and faith to avoid the eternal wrath of God for their sins. The second doctrine that Roberts presents is that there is an unbreakable connection between faith and repentance.<sup>85</sup> About this pairing, Roberts writes, “True repentance does not stand alone, but it is always linked with true faith. True

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<sup>82</sup>Roberts, *Repentance*, 45.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid., 61.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., 63.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid., 68.

faith does not stand alone, but it is always linked with true repentance.”<sup>86</sup> Additionally, to those who would argue that one can have faith without repentance Roberts states, “It is impossible to believe when you are going the wrong direction.”<sup>87</sup> The chapter continues to develop Roberts’s teaching on New Testament repentance with doctrine three, which stated that God’s hatred of sin demands that people must repent.<sup>88</sup> Roberts’s hope in discussing the wrath of God on sinners is that it will lead them to repentance. He writes, “The hope that sinners will flee to Christ in repentance and faith is vastly increased when the wrath of God on unrepentant sinners is tenderly taught and preached.”<sup>89</sup> Roberts’s aim in teaching the wrath of God is to bring people to repent and trust in Christ.

The fourth doctrine of repentance that Roberts presents in this chapter is the conditional nature of God’s mercy on sinners makes repentance necessary.<sup>90</sup> His point is that God in his mercy offers forgiveness to sinners, but this offer is contingent on a person responding with faith and repentance. He writes, “God has chosen to be merciful to hell-deserving sinners by providing an atonement for their sins. The benefits of this atonement are freely provided and yet are conditioned upon repentance and faith.”<sup>91</sup> Roberts follows this point with his fifth doctrinal emphasis on repentance, which states that the devastating impact of every sin makes plain the need for complete repentance.<sup>92</sup> In this section, Roberts discusses how often people will perceive their own sins as being

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<sup>86</sup>Roberts, *Repentance*, 68.

<sup>87</sup>*Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>88</sup>*Ibid.*, 70. It should be noted that even while building a New Testament doctrine of repentance most of Roberts’s scriptural references come from the Old Testament. He does turn to the New Testament passages for additional support. This is consistent with much of Roberts’s preaching which has a much heavier emphasis on Old Testament passages than many contemporary preachers.

<sup>89</sup>*Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>90</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup>*Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>92</sup>*Ibid.*, 79.

less offensive to God than other people's sins, but he carefully explains that this is very arrogant and unbiblical. Roberts emphasizes that there is not an insignificant sin in the eyes of God. He writes, "That means that your sins, no matter how small you reckon them, are among the sins that nailed Christ to His cross. You are indeed the sinner for whom Christ died."<sup>93</sup> He then continues, "Every sin you have committed is as wicked and loathsome in God's sight as the worst sins of the most vile sinner who ever lived."<sup>94</sup> His point is that it does not matter how a person views his sin, even one sin is an eternal offense against God and it requires the sinner to turn in repentance and faith.

The sixth doctrine which Roberts presents in this chapter is that the process of sanctification makes repentance necessary for a believer.<sup>95</sup> Sanctification is the process in which the Spirit of God continues to work in the Christian bringing their life to greater holiness and obedience. Certainly, an important part of that process is repentance. As a believer is convicted of sin by the Holy Spirit he must decide to turn to God in repentance of that sin or to continue to live in disobedience. Roberts writes, "Sanctification occurs as the believer keeps on repenting and believing [...] by daily reckoning ourselves dead to sin and alive to God, the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit moves steadily forward in our lives."<sup>96</sup> The final doctrine of repentance that Roberts presents in this chapter was that to be a fruitful Christian one must repent.<sup>97</sup> In this section Roberts considers a number of Scripture passages which lead him to the conclusion that fruit bearing is a required characteristic of a believer's life.<sup>98</sup> His purpose in this section is to display that all fruit

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<sup>93</sup>Roberts, *Repentance*, 79.

<sup>94</sup>Ibid.

<sup>95</sup>Ibid., 80.

<sup>96</sup>Ibid., 81.

<sup>97</sup>Ibid.

<sup>98</sup>Ibid., 82

bearing in the Christian's life is dependent on the believer's continual repentance.

After concluding his chapter on the doctrine of repentance, Roberts uses the next nine chapters to present general statements on the topic. In each chapter, he provides seven statements that are arranged around a theme. He writes on the seven myths, maxims, motives, graces, fruits, models, dangers, and words of advice on repentance.<sup>99</sup> Each list is unified on the idea that all people must come to a point of repentance before God for his sins, turn to God for forgiveness, and place his faith in Jesus Christ. Apart from this process there is no hope for any person. Roberts concludes this section of the book by asking the reader to not delay in his repentance, but to heed his words, and the words of Christ, by repenting of sin and believing in Jesus Christ for salvation.<sup>100</sup>

The final main section of the book, *Repentance*, discusses the results of repentance in the believer's life. In chapter thirteen, Roberts discusses the breadth of repentance. He presents how every person must repent of every sin personally,<sup>101</sup> he states that repentance cannot be done by proxy,<sup>102</sup> and finally, repentance is even needed by organizations or entities.<sup>103</sup> This chapter concludes with a discussion of the character of God as it pertains to the issue of repentance. The main portion of this chapter considers the story of Job and how God's character drove him to repent in dust and ashes.<sup>104</sup> Roberts's point is that a correct view of God will lead a person to a correct view of himself, which will ultimately lead that person to repentance. About this idea, he writes,

There exists a very critical link between our view of God, our view of ourselves, our view of sin, and our view of salvation. When our view of God is right, our view of

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<sup>99</sup>Roberts, *Repentance*, 5. It would provide little benefit to reproduce each of these lists in this section as Roberts's seven points in each chapter can easily be gleaned by skimming through the sections.

<sup>100</sup>*Ibid.*, 270.

<sup>101</sup>*Ibid.*, 273-87.

<sup>102</sup>*Ibid.*, 293.

<sup>103</sup>*Ibid.*, 287-92.

<sup>104</sup>*Ibid.*, 302-17.

self will be right, and thus our view of sin and salvation can be right also; but if we tolerate a low view of God, we are almost certain to have an excessively high view of ourselves and erroneous views of sin and salvation.<sup>105</sup>

When a person knows God's character he will see his sin, and this will bring repentance.

In the last chapter of the book Roberts highlights the many instances in Scripture where a person repents in sackcloth and ashes. His purpose in these remaining words is to ask the reader to consider whether he has truly ever repented at a level like those modeled in the Bible. Using Job as an example, Roberts concludes that many believers must really see their sins for the offense that they are against God. This clear view of sin, according to Roberts, will drive the person to repentance. He states,

Our urgent need now is very much like Job's then. We must go beyond an understanding of what repentance is to an experience of repentance so deep that no single portion of our lives is left untouched. Only a Job-like encounter with the living God can produce that. No artificial use of dust, ashes, or even sackcloth will bring us anywhere near the repentance that accompanies an awesome encounter with the living God.

The purpose of this chapter, then, is certainly not to seek to compel you to use dust, ashes, and sackcloth in your repentance. If anyone were to try to do so merely at my urging, it could be a very shallow experience and one highly offensive to God. If you ever come to repentance in dust, sackcloth, and ashes, it is my hope that you will have been driven to it by an experience with the living God of such vast proportions that you can find no other means as suitable for humbling yourself before Him.<sup>106</sup>

In his views on revival and repentance Roberts is consistent. Revival starts and ends with the movement of God. Repentance starts and ends with the movement of God. Certainly, men can do all sorts of things to try and reproduce these events, but at best it will be a wasted effort, at worst it will be a great offense to God, and it will lead to his wrath on the church and the people. In the previous chapter, it was demonstrated that revival cannot be worked up through steps or processes, in this section it has been demonstrated from Roberts's *Repentance* that he also believes that repentance cannot be produced through any human effort. Repentance, like revival, only comes from God.

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<sup>105</sup>Roberts, *Repentance*, 299.

<sup>106</sup>Ibid., 320.

## Roberts's *Revival* and “The Solemn Assembly”

While the book *Repentance* is the most comprehensive of all Roberts’s teachings on the topic, he certainly discusses the issue in many other places. Of these other teachings two more will be considered here to illustrate his purposeful and significant connection between revival and repentance. The first resource that will be considered is his book *Revival*.<sup>107</sup> The second writing that will be evaluated in this portion of the chapter is Roberts’s pamphlet titled, “The Solemn Assembly.”<sup>108</sup> These two sources, along with the book *Repentance*, give a good representation of Roberts’s continued connection between revival and repentance in his complete teachings.

The book *Revival* has been considered previously, but the purpose of this section is to briefly revisit it with a focus on the topic of repentance.<sup>109</sup> In *Revival*, Roberts seeks to provide a basic overview of the topic by answering questions about revivals. The second chapter’s question is “When is revival needed?”<sup>110</sup> and Roberts primarily states that revival is needed when repentance is needed. It is in this chapter that Roberts presents the idea of the backslidden believer, and asks the reader to consider twenty-five questions regarding his spiritual condition. Roberts’s conclusion of the chapter is that revival is needed when there is sin present in the believer and the church:

When professing Christians are filled with their own ways and backsliding is evident everywhere, it is definitely time to pray in the words of Habakkuk: “O Lord, I have heard thy speech, and was afraid; O Lord, revive thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make known; in wrath remember mercy” (3:2).<sup>111</sup>

For Roberts, revival is needed when repentance is needed. The need for repentance leads to the need for revival. These two things are linked together and cannot be separated.

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<sup>107</sup>Roberts, *Revival*.

<sup>108</sup>Roberts, “The Solemn Assembly.”

<sup>109</sup>See the discussion in chap. 3 of this book in the context of Roberts’s theology of revival.

<sup>110</sup>Roberts, *Revival*, 29.

<sup>111</sup>*Ibid.*, 52.

Additionally, he continues in the next chapter of the book to outline when a revival should be expected. His answer to this question is to have the reader consider the state of the culture. The more prevalent sin is in the culture, the more revival is needed. Again, Roberts is making it explicitly clear that when repentance is needed revival is too.

One of the significant points about Roberts's book on revival is that it dedicates so much attention to the issue of repentance. Consider an additional chapter in the book which discusses what the focus of a revival should be on. In this chapter, Roberts writes that revival should emphasize repentance.<sup>112</sup> Three of the seven chapters in this book place a heavy focus on repentance. To a lesser degree, the four chapters not mentioned in this section all deal with the topic as well. The purpose of highlighting this is that Roberts is intentional in making his connection between revival and repentance. He is adamant that a revival must emphasize repentance for it to have any value:

This is the great truth revival must emphasize. Without repentance, the Body of Christ is doomed to limp when it was designed to fly, to drag when it was called to draw, to drift when it should set its sails to catch every wind of the Spirit.<sup>113</sup>

Repentance sets the believer and the church right for revival. Roberts focuses his teachings in the area of revival on the great need for repentance. He regularly seeks to persuade his readers and listeners to repent of their sins and humbly approach God.

The third resource to consider in this section on repentance and revival is the pamphlet that Roberts wrote titled, "The Solemn Assembly."<sup>114</sup> This short pamphlet presents the need for, and the process of, having a solemn assembly. A solemn assembly is a time for the corporate church to gather together and confession its sins before God.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>112</sup>Roberts, *Revival*, 73-98.

<sup>113</sup>*Ibid.*, 98.

<sup>114</sup>This resource was discussed in some detail in the previous chapter. It is mentioned here again just to reiterate the point that Roberts has taught that repentance is both an individual and corporate process and it must be sought in both settings.

<sup>115</sup>Roberts, "The Solemn Assembly."

In the pamphlet Roberts presents the biblical basis for such an event, the historical precedence in the church, and some practical suggestions for holding an assembly. The overall purpose of the document is to implore the church to consider its corporate sins and its need for repentance. Roberts laments the lack of concern over corporate sin in the modern church as he asks the reader to consider the early American church leaders, “Our Fathers believed God was offended by sin. They themselves were deeply troubled both by the existence of personal sin in their own lives and by the presence of unconfessed corporate sins in the churches and in the nation.”<sup>116</sup> In his teachings on revival, Roberts desires to see the church return to regular times of corporate repentance, because through these moments the church becomes better prepared for God to bring revival.

The second section of this chapter sought to examine the connection that Roberts cultivates between revival and repentance in his writings and teachings. By examining his books *Repentance* and *Revival* and his pamphlet, “The Solemn Assembly,” it was demonstrated that Roberts makes explicit and purposeful connections between these topics. This connection is drawn out of his theology of revival which taught the idea that true revival will always start with, and be marked by, genuine biblical repentance.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this chapter was to demonstrate the connection that Roberts made between history, repentance, and revival, throughout his writing and teaching ministry. It became apparent through this study that Roberts believes that for a church to truly be equipped for revival it must have a solid understanding of how God has worked in previous revivals. It also became apparent that, according to Roberts, true revival is always marked by biblical repentance. In this study it was shown that these connections with history and repentance stem from his theology of revival and that Roberts believes

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<sup>116</sup>Roberts, “The Solemn Assembly.”

that both areas are vital to the church seeking revival. This chapter examines several of Roberts major works in the area of history and repentance which demonstrates his passion for the topics and his desire to connect these overlooked issues for a church concerned with revival. Roberts's ministry has been focused on revival, but because of his theology on the topic, he makes the connection between history and repentance a major focus. His study of the history of revival starts with times of biblical revival and followed the movements of God through church history. He emphasizes the early American church with the hope that the modern American church will turn back to its founders for guidance in this area. Roberts's study of repentance is mandated by his belief that true revival starts with God moving believers and sinners to conviction over their sins. When a person is convicted of sin the only acceptable response is repentance. Without repentance there is no hope for revival. For these reasons, Roberts desires to place these two topics before the church for its consideration and for its benefit.

CHAPTER 5  
A SYNTHESIS OF REVIVAL, REPENTANCE,  
AND HISTORY

The purpose of the previous chapter was to highlight the significant emphasis that Richard Owen Roberts places on repentance and history in the study of revival. These themes are also evident in the second chapter biography of Roberts's life and ministry, and in the third chapter which examines his theology of revival. After thoroughly displaying these themes in Roberts's ministry, the final objective of this dissertation is to demonstrate why these connections are significant. While it may be easy to recognize the traits of repentance, and the emphasis on history, in Roberts's works, it now must be considered whether this is a unique characteristic in the field of revival literature. Finally, if it is unique, what do other contemporary authors say about revival, and how is Roberts's work comparable or different? In this chapter, Roberts's vital connection between revival, repentance, and history will be summarized. It will be demonstrated that his understanding of true revival and true repentance necessitates that he makes continual connection between the two topics. Also, Roberts's understanding of revival forces him to rely on revival history to return to church eras which align more closely with his practice. After reviewing Roberts's connections between these items, this chapter will then consider a sample of literature on revival to determine how several authors have handled issues of repentance and history in their understanding of the topic. Finally, the chapter will conclude by examining several critiques against Roberts's ministry with the purpose of further learning from him. Through this process, it will become clear that Roberts's vital connection between revival, repentance, and history is a needed, and valuable, correction for much of the contemporary literature on revival.

## **Robert's Vital Connection: Revival, Repentance, and History**

Before turning attention to contemporary literature on the topic of revival it will be helpful to review Roberts's teachings which demonstrate his vital connection between revival, repentance, and history. Roberts's published definition of revival, as discussed in the third chapter of this dissertation, is "an extraordinary movement of the Holy Spirit producing extraordinary results."<sup>1</sup> Additionally, he has modified this statement slightly over his years of ministry on the topic. In recent teachings on revival, he defines it as, "True revival is God in the midst of His people."<sup>2</sup> While both of these statements are simple, and clear, Roberts's complete teachings on revival, as demonstrated above, has been much more complex. In his teachings on revival, he discusses how revivals are preceded by "a breaking, a remaking, a pouring full, and a great overflow."<sup>3</sup> By the term breaking he means that believers will become broken over their sins and turn back to God in repentance. This will be followed by a remaking of the believer as he is forgiven and restored in his relationship to God. After the remaking, the believer will be filled with God's grace (pouring full) until the grace is so abundant in his life it overflows into the lives of those around him. What is noticeable in this teaching on revival is that, for Roberts, it starts with believers repenting. Per Roberts, any event labeled as a revival without evidence of repentance is counterfeit and not a true revival.

A second important aspect of true revival that Roberts regularly teaches on is the distinction between experience-centered and Word-centered revivals. An experience-centered revival is one in which believers are revived through prayer, worship music, or

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<sup>1</sup>Richard Owen Roberts, *Revival* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1982), 16-17.

<sup>2</sup>Richard Owen Roberts, "Part 1: The Nature and Incredible Beauty of True Revival," accessed December 1, 2016, <http://www.collegeofrevival.org/part-1-the-nature-and-incredible-beauty-of-true-revival/>.

<sup>3</sup>He discussed these four elements in numerous places, specifically see Richard Owen Roberts, "Part 4: Is It Too Late for Another Great Awakening?" accessed December 19, 2016, <http://www.collegeofrevival.org/part-4-is-it-too-late-for-another-great-awakening/>.

some other means other than preaching. It is a revival that is often described as an emotional and moving experience from those involved.<sup>4</sup> A Word-centered revival is initiated and sustained by the preaching of the Bible. In Word-centered revivals men faithfully preach the Bible. Often the men preach in a similar manner that they have their whole ministry, and yet in revival, people are impacted, convicted, and changed by God's Word.<sup>5</sup> Roberts states that both types of revivals are legitimate, but Word-centered should be desired because its impact is greater and longer lasting.<sup>6</sup> While Roberts makes a distinction between these types of revival, both types must begin with the repentance of sin by believers for them to be considered true revival.

After considering true revival in the teachings of Roberts it is also important to revisit what he teaches on repentance. Roberts's main teaching on this topic is his book *Repentance*.<sup>7</sup> In this book he argues that the gospel message starts with repentance. Additionally, he laments that much of the church today neglects this significant doctrine. The reason that he believes that the church neglects repentance is because it has an improper view of God.<sup>8</sup> According to Roberts, the church has focused too much attention on the love and grace of God, while neglecting his holiness and need for justice. This imbalance has caused much of the church to have a licentious attitude towards sin and its impact—after all if God is loving and graceful he will forgive all sins anyway. For

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<sup>4</sup>According to Roberts, the 1858 New York prayer revival and the Welsh Revival of 1904 are historical examples of experience-centered revivals. See Richard Owen Roberts, "Revival: Experience Centered & God Centered," accessed February 4, 2017, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ec\\_MscSLaUU&index=5&list=PLmmTx77FrqRcmfBrKjoDC8QUzdOBslVj](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ec_MscSLaUU&index=5&list=PLmmTx77FrqRcmfBrKjoDC8QUzdOBslVj).

<sup>5</sup>Per Roberts, the First Great Awakening is the best example of a Word-centered revival. Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Richard Owen Roberts, *Scotland Saw His Glory: A History of Revivals in Scotland* (Wheaton, IL: International Awakening Press, 1995), viii.

<sup>7</sup>Richard Owen Roberts, *Repentance: The First Word of the Gospel* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2002).

<sup>8</sup>Roberts discussed this improper view of God toward the end of the interview with this researcher. His exact comments can be viewed at the end of the transcript included in the appendix.

Roberts, this opinion has been a tragic distortion of the gospel. He believes that the main hope for the church in this condition is a revival which will draw people to repentance and reform their understanding of God and the practice of their faith.

In addition to repentance the other vital connection that Roberts makes in the area of revival is with church history. A short review of this connection before examining contemporary literature will be helpful. It has been demonstrated that Roberts places a strong emphasis on history in his writing and publishing ministry. When he started his publishing business he had a decision to make about what type of material he would like to publish. Instead of simply publishing any kind of material, Roberts decided to focus on historical documents—particularly those which were connected to the First Great Awakening.<sup>9</sup> The reason that Roberts selected this time in the history of the American church is that he believes it is the period in which the church most closely resembled a New Testament church. An important principle drawn from Roberts's decision to publish historical documents about revival is that when believers recognize their need for revival it is inspiring and helpful to study when God revived the church in the past. For Roberts historical times of revival are a source of encouragement today.

Roberts's ministry also displays his connection between revival and history through the books that he edited and authored. As the editor of several books Roberts could select the documents from which to make his point, but he exclusively chooses to use documents from the historical times of revival in the church. A primary example of his selection of material in this manner is *Salvation in Full Color*.<sup>10</sup> This book is a collection of sermons built around the order of salvation, and all the sermons were originally delivered around the time of the First Great Awakening.<sup>11</sup> An additional

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<sup>9</sup>See interview transcript for Roberts's discussion of this decision.

<sup>10</sup>Richard Owen Roberts, ed., *Salvation in Full Color: Twenty Sermons by Great Awakening Preachers* (Wheaton, IL: International Awakening Press, 1994).

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid*, xvi-xix.

example of Roberts's intentional focus on history is a book that traced the history of revival in Scotland from the time of John Knox until D. L. Moody.<sup>12</sup> This book, *Scotland Saw His Glory*, follows the extraordinary works of God on the island of Scotland by drawing extensively from historical works written by W. J. Couper, Mary Duncan, James Burns, and others.<sup>13</sup> The book does not contain many words written by Roberts, he instead focuses his effort in making rare historical works available to a broader audience in a new generation. A third book to revisit in this discussion of Roberts's historical focus is *Glory Filled the Land*.<sup>14</sup> This book, which Roberts edits, is a collection of three accounts of the Welsh revival written close to the event. It also demonstrates Roberts's intentional focus on bringing historical revivals to the wider attention of the church today.

The final area to reconsider to strengthen the argument for the connection between history and revival is Roberts's publishing of J. Edwin Orr's material. As was mentioned in the previous chapters, Roberts published four of Orr's written works after he had passed away.<sup>15</sup> His purpose in publishing these works was once again to highlight some of the ways in which God has moved in the past, hoping that it would inspire the current generation of believers to seek similar movements. The purpose of this section is not to revisit the discussion of these works completely, but to simply refresh the idea that throughout his ministry Roberts has been intentional in connecting the topic of revival with the history of how God has revived the church in the past.<sup>16</sup> This connection with

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<sup>12</sup>Roberts, *Scotland Saw His Glory*.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid, ii.

<sup>14</sup>H. Elvet Lewis, G. Campbell Morgan, and I. V. Neprash, *Glory Filled the Land: A Trilogy of the Welsh Revival (1904-1905)*, ed. Richard Owen Roberts (Wheaton, IL: International Awakening Press, 1989).

<sup>15</sup>J. Edwin Orr, *An Apprenticeship of Faith*, ed. Richard Owen Roberts (Wheaton, IL: International Awakening Press, 1993); Orr, *Campus Aflame: A History of Evangelical Awakenings in Collegiate Communities*, ed. Richard Owen Roberts (Wheaton, IL: International Awakening Press, 1994); Orr, *The Event of the Century: The 1857-1858 Awakening*, ed. Richard Owen Roberts (Wheaton, IL: International Awakening Press, 1989); and Orr, *My All, His All*, ed. Richard Owen Roberts (Wheaton, IL: Richard Owen Roberts Pub, 1989).

<sup>16</sup>This section has not even revisited Roberts's two significant works: Richard Owen Roberts,

history, and his focus on repentance, is beneficial for revival literature because, as it will be demonstrated in the next section, many contemporary authors have not given much attention to these themes, and therefore the church's understanding of revival suffers.

### Correcting the Shift in the Church

In the third chapter of this project several definitions of revival related to Roberts were presented and discussed. The definitions came from men like Martyn Lloyd-Jones,<sup>17</sup> J. Edwin Orr,<sup>18</sup> and Stephen Olford.<sup>19</sup> It was noted that although these men all defined revival in slightly different terms, they were all similar in the fact that they believe revival is a work of God, that must be initiated by God, and that cannot be manufactured by believers. While Roberts and these men could be grouped into similar camps on the topic of revival, these men can no longer be considered as contemporary authors for the church today.<sup>20</sup> While the men served the church during a similar time frame, their impact is fading in respect to the current church generation. For this reason, it is important to consider some of the more recently published works on the topic of revival and discuss what current authors are emphasizing to the church today.

It would be difficult to survey all the books published in the last several years on the topic of revival.<sup>21</sup> For this reason, this section will highlight a selection that

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*Revival Literature: An Annotated Bibliography with Biographical and Historical Notices* (Wheaton, IL: Richard Owen Roberts Pub, 1987); and Roberts, *Whitefield in Print: A Bibliographic Record of Works By, For, and Against George Whitefield: with Annotations, Biographical and Historical Notices, and Bibliographies of Associates and Contemporaries* (Wheaton, IL: Richard Owen Roberts Pub, 1988).

<sup>17</sup>Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Revival* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1987), 100.

<sup>18</sup>J. Edwin Orr, *The Flaming Tongue: The Impact of the Twentieth-Century Revivals* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1973), vii-viii.

<sup>19</sup>Stephen Olford, *Heart Cry for Revival: Expository Sermons on Revival* (Westwood, NJ: Revel, 1962), 33.

<sup>20</sup>Of the four men being discussed, only Roberts is still living at the time of this writing. Stephen Olford passed away in 2004, and the other two men passed away in the 1980s.

<sup>21</sup>The topic of revival has a wide appeal, even outside of Christian literature. For example, even Stephen King has written a novel which is set in New England during the 1960s and includes elements of church revivals. Stephen King, *Revival: A Novel* (New York: Gallery Books, 2014).

represent the wider literature being published and marketed towards Christians on the topic. Yet, before moving into recent books, it is important to highlight one book which has impacted the church on the topic of revival simply because of the author's fame.

In 1995, Bill Bright's book *The Coming Revival* was released, and because of Bright's popularity it quickly found an audience.<sup>22</sup> The main idea of the book is that Bright is calling two million Americans to fast for forty days.<sup>23</sup> He believes that the Lord had told him that if this happened the church and the country would be revived and that America would become a Christian nation once again.<sup>24</sup> While there are several areas of difficulty with this idea, the problems stem from Bright's definition of revival. To define revival, Bright follows the guidance of Charles Finney and his new measures, even stating that Finney is, "revered as the father of modern revival."<sup>25</sup> Bright defines revival as, "a sovereign work of God—in answer to sincere prevailing prayer."<sup>26</sup> He follows this definition by explaining that in revival God grips his people with deep conviction over sin, fills them with the Holy Spirit, fills the community with his presence, and causes non-believers to seek him.<sup>27</sup> While on the surface this sounds like a decent definition and understanding of revival, the problem is that the remainder of the book focuses on the part of the believer in prevailing prayer—and fasting—in essence seeking to force the hand of God to move in revival. With Finney, Bright is stating that if believers do things the right way, with the right attitude, then God must bring revival to the church.

The believer praying is certainly part of revival, but revival is not something

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<sup>22</sup>Bill Bright, *The Coming Revival: America's Call to Fast, Pray, and 'Seek God's Face'* (Orlando, FL: New Life Publishers, 1995).

<sup>23</sup>Roberts discussed this book, and Bright's definition of fasting, in the interview. His critical thoughts on Bright can be viewed in the transcript.

<sup>24</sup>Bright, *The Coming Revival*, 37.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 15.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

that God can be forced into—no matter how many believers are praying for it. A more accurate way to describe the prayers that proceed revival are that believers are led by the Spirit of God to pray for revival and under God’s direction revival comes. The size of the group praying matters very little to God, he can use two, or two-million, the ultimate purpose of revival is to bring God glory and this cannot happen when others get credit for starting the movement through their actions. Bright believes that two-million people praying is the answer for the spiritual decline, and lack of revival in the church. He followed this book with two other books which sought to build momentum in the movement.<sup>28</sup> It is not difficult see how two-million people fasting and praying could have benefits to the church, but forcing revival is not one of those benefits. Unfortunately, the year 2000 came and went without another revival in America, and the movement that Bright sought to begin started to fade away.<sup>29</sup> Bright’s revival did not come to the wider church, or to the country, but in many ways his approach to revival has carried forward.

As Bright follows Finney’s approach to using measures to bring revival, other authors have also approached the topic from this direction. In Jimmy Davis’s book, *Revival Sermons*, he provides the reader with sermon outlines to deliver in a series of meetings he labels as revival meetings.<sup>30</sup> His book contains about twenty sermons that he delivered in various contexts throughout his ministry, and while it could be a helpful in several ways, bringing proper understanding to revival is not one of those ways. The

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<sup>28</sup>See Bill Bright, *7 Basic Steps to Successful Fasting & Prayer* (Orlando, FL: New Life Publications, 1995); and Bright, *The Transforming Power of Fasting and Prayer: Personal Accounts of Spiritual Renewal* (Orlando, FL: New Life Publications, 1997). While Bright’s movement did not produce its desired result, more recent authors have taken up a similar plan to impact America. See Lou Engle and Dean Briggs, *The Jesus Fast: The Call to Awaken the Nations* (Minneapolis: Chosen, 2015).

<sup>29</sup>The year 2000 was the deadline that Bright believed the Lord had given him to gather the people into the forty-day fast. Bright, *The Coming Revival*, 36.

<sup>30</sup>Jimmy Davis, *Revival Sermons: Give Me that Old Time Religion* (Seattle: Amazon Digital Services, 2015). Kindle. Davis was connected to Bright towards the end of Bright’s ministry. This book is examined here because of its high Amazon ranking at the time of this research. When the average person searched for recent publications on the topic of revival on Amazon Davis’s book would be one of the first listed.

book could be used as a personal devotion, illustration finder, or sermon preparation guide. Davis's book demonstrates one of the most glaring misunderstandings of revival in recent church history. The idea is that a revival is a series of meetings where a guest preacher comes to a church to deliver sermons. The motivation behind these meetings is to strengthen believers and present the gospel to those who are lost, but the meetings cannot truly be labeled revival. This practice has faded in many churches today, and some even lament this fact believing that a vital aspect of Christianity is being lost. Davis displays this sentiment with his subtitle, *Give Me that Old Time Religion*.<sup>31</sup> This idea carries forward Finney's teachings that the right means will lead to revival. It unfortunately neglects the fact that God's hand cannot be forced into bringing revival.

Another book, which reflects a trend in revival literature, is Deb Wilson's *Revival: The 21 Day Challenge*.<sup>32</sup> In this book Wilson provides three weeks of devotions, questions, and prayers which are designed to bring about personal revival. The book starts with a good understanding of revival. For example, in the foreword, Blake Bennett presents an important question about revival with an equally helpful answer. His question, "Why is there no magic formula for revival?" is answered by stating that there is not a formula for revival because revival can only come from God.<sup>33</sup> He then, helpfully, explains that a believer should prepare for revival through spiritual disciplines, but the believer cannot force revival. Wilson also continues forward in her introduction with the

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<sup>31</sup>The subtitle does accurately reflect a church practice of recent history, but the revival meetings, or tent meetings, are not old-time religion in the New Testament sense. Instead these meetings became popular through Charles Finney, followed by men like D.L. Moody, Billy Sunday, and most famously Billy Graham. For a resource on the foundations of the revival meetings see Iain H. Murray, *Revival and Revivalism: The Making and Marring of American Evangelicalism 1750-1858* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2009).

<sup>32</sup>Deb Wilson, *Revival: The 21 Day Challenge, Rekindle Your Passion for God* (Seattle: Amazon Digital Services, 2016. Kindle). Again this book was selected for this section because of its high Amazon ranking at the time of this research, meaning that those looking for recent literature on revival would be presented with this option at the beginning of their search.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, locs. 78-92.

idea that revival can only come to those who are humble before God.<sup>34</sup> Beyond this foundation, the book falls into the trap that the Christian can do certain practices to bring revival in his own life, and then extend revival into other people's lives. Wilson does not express the book explicitly in this way, but its set up demonstrates this understanding. She provides a twenty-one-day guide that will lead people into powerful prayer and God's awakening. This book is a good devotional guide, but it cannot produce revival for the reader. Instead, Wilson's book should be viewed as an aid in spiritual growth, because faithfulness and persistence in spiritual disciplines like prayer, Scripture reading, and meditation, will likely lead to spiritual growth. These spiritual disciplines are a necessary component of a believer's life, but they cannot mandate God to bring revival.

A final book to consider in discussing contemporary literature on the topic of revival is Christina Yarbrough's book *Revival: Be a Fire Starter*.<sup>35</sup> In a similar manner to Wilson's book, Yarbrough presents a thirty-day guide to bring revival. Her intention through the thirty devotions is to lead the reader into a personal revival that will then ignite others in revival as well. Again, as a devotional, the book is fine it is how the author connects spiritual disciplines to revival that is troubling. Like Wilson, Yarbrough implicitly states that the reader will experience personal revival by working through her book. Unfortunately, this presentation is Finney's new measures redressed in personal spiritual devotions, and it simply does not guarantee revival. Throughout church history there have been men and women who have faithfully read their Bibles every day, who had remarkable prayer lives, and who lived with spiritual vitality, but they never experienced God in a season of revival. The misunderstanding of revival in these last two books has been that intentional personal disciplines should cause revival – again, this is

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<sup>34</sup>Wilson, *Revival*, locs. 143.

<sup>35</sup>Christina Yarbrough, *Revival: Be a Fire Starter: A Month-Long Journey* (North Charleston, SC: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2016). This book was also selected for this section based on its high Amazon ranking at the time of this research.

simply changing Finney's measures from a corporate to a personal nature. God cannot be forced into bringing revival through believer's efforts or devotion. There is not a formula that will necessitate revival in the corporate or individual sense. Instead, as it has been demonstrated through this study, revivals are "an extraordinary movement of the Holy Spirit producing extraordinary results."<sup>36</sup> Practicing regular spiritual disciplines is not something that can make God move in remarkable ways, faithfulness in this area should be the natural response of a grace filled believer in Christ. Revivals are times that go beyond the regular movements of God in believer's lives. Revivals are times when God draws nearer to his people in an extraordinary manner for his purposes and his glory.

Additional books could certainly be examined in this section and each would display some elements of proper revival and many elements of misunderstanding. Mark Shaw's book, *Global Awakening*, does an excellent job of highlighting movements in Christianity throughout the world during the last century.<sup>37</sup> His global view of the movement of God is helpful, but his wide inclusion of various sects leads one to wonder about his ecclesiology. In another example, Jim Cymbala provides the church with an inspiring story of how God impacted his ministry and church, but his conclusions imply that faithful prayer will lead to church growth or revival.<sup>38</sup> Finally, Robert Coleman provides helpful guidance and biblical support of revival in the first half of *The Coming World Revival*, but unfortunately, the second half of the book becomes very pragmatic and focuses on conducting a successful series of meetings.<sup>39</sup> In total, these books

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<sup>36</sup>Richard Owen Roberts, *Revival* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1982), 16-17.

<sup>37</sup>Mark Shaw, *Global Awakening: How the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Revivals Triggered a Christian Revolution* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010).

<sup>38</sup>Jim Cymbala, *Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire: What Happens When God's Spirit Invades the Hearts of His People* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997).

<sup>39</sup>Robert E. Coleman, *The Coming World Revival: Your Part in God's Plan to Reach the World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1995). The first half of Coleman's book is a valuable study of revival and the great need for it. Coleman clearly articulated that revival starts and ends with God in the book. The second is more of a reflection of Coleman's years of ministry when revival meetings were effective, then it is his prescribing the meetings as the only way in which God will revive the church.

demonstrate the broad understanding of revival present in the church today; however, most of them contain elements of believers working up revival. Correcting this misunderstanding is where Roberts's teachings can bring great value to the church. His connections with repentance and history help to clarify what is revival, and it helps provide discernment to evaluate what it is not. A discerning voice in this area is needed.

### **Lack of Repentance and History**

Now that several examples of books from contemporary literature on the topic of revival have been examined it is important to note two elements that are emphasized by Roberts, but lacking in much of the current literature. The first element is repentance. While many of the books mentioned above recognize that repentance is part of revival, the authors do not give the topic significant attention like Roberts does in his works. In many ways, this fits with the pattern followed in the books. The books open with a brief acknowledgment of God's role in revival, and then the authors focus most of their attention on what the believer must do to bring revival. For example, Bill Bright writes that revival is "a sovereign act of God,"<sup>40</sup> in one section and then later states that believers do not need to wait for God to bring revival. In his own words,

In America today, we need not wait for a sovereign act of God to bring revival. We do not have to wait for a general outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the church and the nation. Our task is to surrender to the Lordship of Christ and the control of the Holy Spirit, fast and pray, and obey God's Word. Meeting these conditions, we can expect the Holy Spirit to transform our lives.<sup>41</sup>

The main issue here is that Bright has mixed up the ideas of revival and spiritual growth. A believer faithfully pursuing spiritual disciplines can expect to grow in his faith, that is how God designed it to be; however, pursuing spiritual disciplines does not necessitate that revival will follow.<sup>42</sup> In the recent literature reviewed it would be helpful to

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<sup>40</sup>Bright, *The Coming Revival*, 82.

<sup>41</sup>*Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>42</sup>See Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New

acknowledge that regular practice of spiritual disciplines does not guarantee revival, instead the disciplines put the believer in an appropriate condition to be prepared if God does send revival. In a similar manner, the authors would do well to consider that repentance is not something that a believer can decide to do apart from the work of God. The Holy Spirit must bring conviction and move the believer into a time of repentance. This repentance is not something that a person can do without God's work in his life.

The second element that is lacking in much of the current literature on revival is a focus on how God has moved in the past. Roberts has intentionally focused his efforts on publishing material on how God has moved in the past revivals. Unfortunately, much of the current literature surveyed gave very little attention to historical works. Part of the explanation for this is that much of the contemporary literature has transitioned from discussing corporate revival to individual renewal. As mentioned above, the Wilson and Yarbrough books, which claim to be books on revival, were personal devotions better suited for spiritual growth. From the books surveyed, one that considers revivals in a corporate sense is Davis's *Revival Sermons*; however, his interaction with history is limited to short sermon illustrations to support a point that he is making in his message. Even Shaw's book, which provides some historical elements, only considers what has happened in the last one hundred years of church history. The church today would benefit from books which display the highs and lows of spiritual vitality, and how in moments of spiritual decline, or disinterest, God has sent his Spirit and brought about great revival. One possibility in examining historical revivals is that it could open a believer's eyes to consider more than his own personal revival, but to start pleading in prayer for a great movement of God. By examining how God has moved in the past, the wider church could start to see the hope that God could certainly do a similar work again. The true hope for a

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York: HarperCollins e-books, 2002), 248, Kindle; Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2014), loc. 146, Kindle; and Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* (New York: Harper One, 1988), xii.

declining church is God moving in his people through revival.<sup>43</sup> Sadly, the current literature on revival is lacking this connection with history, and from this deficiency the church lacks in its knowledge of how God has revived his people in the past. Without this vision of what God has done in the past, many believers simply turn inward and believe that the only hope they have is for personal renewal, and that the larger church is beyond the ability to truly be revived. Yet, consider the church before the Reformation, or the spiritual condition in America before the First Great Awakening. The church today needs revival, and God has demonstrated that he can bring it in situations worse than what the church is currently experiencing. Roberts's focus on the history of revival is vital since it can bring hope and encouragement for this generation of believers.

### **Critique of Roberts's Ministry**

While much of this dissertation has been favorable to Roberts's ministry and intentions, it must be noted that there are certainly shortcomings in his teachings. This section will examine several items that were evident to me during this project. The purpose of this section is not to degrade, or detract, from the ministry that Roberts has provided to the church, instead it is simply recognizing that no one has a flawless ministry, and that people can often learn and grow by examining shortcomings in others.

### **Lack of Global Focus**

The first critique to mention regarding Roberts's ministry is its lack of global focus. Roberts almost exclusively focuses his attention on the American church and Western Christian history. In several ways, this missing element is explainable. First, Roberts's life and ministry has been in the United States, so he is most familiar with the condition of the church in this country. Second, his research in the area of revival has

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<sup>43</sup>Bill Henard, *Can These Bones Live? A Practical Guide to Church Revitalization* (Nashville: B&H Books, 2015), 218.

been conducted in the United States and England, therefore most of the literature available to him would be focused on Western church history. Finally, much of Roberts's focus has been on the time-period of the First Great Awakening, a time when the church was centered in Europe and America. For these reasons, it is reasonable to see why Roberts's attention is primarily on this section of the world. Despite this fact, Roberts could have been influential on the global church had he focused and taught about movements in other parts of the world. It would be interesting to have Roberts speak to movements in a similar manner as Mark Shaw.<sup>44</sup> Certainly, many of these movements would be critiqued heavily by Roberts, but much could be gained from his insights.

### **Lack of Balance – Sin and Grace**

Another area in which Roberts's ministry must be examined is the continual controversy that he found himself in with his contemporaries regarding the exposing of sin. It is not a critique that Roberts confronted sin when he saw it, it is more a critique that it appears like Roberts prefers the role of condemning prophet than that of proclaiming grace.<sup>45</sup> This preference can be seen in his discussion of his interactions with the Air Force veteran and his pastoral ministry in London. In the interview Roberts shared the time when he was invited to preach in the veteran's church in London for a week-long series of meetings. Through this time, it became apparent to Roberts that the man was in an adulterous relationship and that his relationship with God was not what he claimed it to be.<sup>46</sup> Roberts first confronted the man about his sin, and the man responded poorly with anger and fleeing the situation. Later at the church, the man made a vague

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<sup>44</sup>Shaw, *Global Awakening*.

<sup>45</sup>These two roles are not mutually exclusive, and a healthy pastor will function in both these ways when it is appropriate. Roberts's preference in this area is likely an over correction of the strong emphasis on God's love and grace in the church today and church leaders avoiding topics of God's judgement, wrath, and condemnation.

<sup>46</sup>Roberts claimed that during one prayer time with this pastor it was apparent that he was praying to an unknown God, rather than to a God that he knew intimately through Jesus Christ.

confession of his sin in front of his church, but Roberts made it very clear to the church that the pastor was living in serious sin. With the leadership of the church, Roberts helped put together a plan for the man to have time to come to repentance before the future of his ministry was decided. At this point, Roberts ended his story without providing the resolution. In many ways, Roberts did what he needed to do in this situation. He confronted the man in private about the sin, and after the man tried to downplay his sin in front of the church, Roberts made it clear that it was much worse. He even led the leadership to take important steps in providing room for repentance in this man's life. The reason that this example is mentioned in critique of Roberts is that it illustrates that he appears to minister in the role of condemning prophet more than in the role of a graceful pastor.<sup>47</sup> Throughout many of his examples of interacting with churches Roberts appears more often as the person pointing out the sins which need repentance, than as the one leading the person through the process of repentance, forgiveness, and grace. To illustrate in another manner, in the ministry of Jesus, it appears that Roberts would be more comfortable confronting the rich young ruler in his sins (Mark 10:17-27), then he would be in extending grace to the woman at the well (John 4:1-42). In another analogy, Roberts's ministry has been notable in his role as salt in the world (condemning sin) rather than light to the world (proclaiming grace).<sup>48</sup> Both roles are certainly needed, but Roberts has reflected more of one and a better balance would improve his ministry.

The preference that Roberts has demonstrated in this area, in part, stems from the lack of true repentance that he has seen in the wider church. It also is a by-product of his emphasis of true revival stemming from biblical repentance. Roberts would likely

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<sup>47</sup>This critique is not to imply that Roberts's never acts as a graceful pastor, it is simply to highlight that when viewing his ministry, he tends to prefer being the prophet. This in part can be explained by his role as an itinerant preacher, and his desire to correct the church's over emphasis on grace, but a stronger emphasis on the hope that a sinner can find in the work of Christ would be a welcomed addition.

<sup>48</sup>John Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1978), 57-68. In his commentary on Matt 5:13-16, Stott argues for a need for balance in the Christian life of being salt (preserving the world from sin) and being light (displaying the truth to the world).

answer this critique by asking, what is the purpose of sharing grace and God's blessing if one has not come to truly understand the magnitude of his sin before God? Yet, with God's complete Word being revealed in Christ, the minister today must strive to seek a balance between condemnation and grace in his preaching and ministry.<sup>49</sup> Even in an itinerant ministry there can be opportunity to lead people to conviction and repentance, but still exhort the hearers to accept God's grace and forgiveness. In fact, it is sometimes through the presentation of God's grace that a person will come to an understanding of how costly his sin has been, and in discussing grace a person can be moved to repentance. It could be beneficial for Roberts's ministry to present both sides in his teachings.

### **Lack of Balance – Preaching**

An additional area to examine Roberts's ministry is his selection of passages from which to preach. It has been mentioned previously that Roberts's preaching has a strong Old Testament emphasis. It was even demonstrated that Roberts's explanation for this fact is that almost two-thirds of the Bible consists of the Old Testament; therefore, more preaching should come from these passages. One of the reasons that Roberts preaches so often from the Old Testament is to correct what he perceives to be an over emphasis on New Testament preaching by most pastors today. While it is difficult to argue against him on this point, it cannot justify his overcorrection in his own ministry.

In preparation for this project I viewed over thirty-five sermons delivered by Roberts that are available online. These sermons, listed in the bibliography, represent a sample of Roberts's recent preaching.<sup>50</sup> The sermons also roughly divide as two-thirds Old Testament and one-third New Testament as the main passage being expounded.

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<sup>49</sup>Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount*, 57-68.

<sup>50</sup>Additionally, I attended a church service in Carpentersville, Illinois, when Roberts was preaching. He had been preaching through the book of Ephesians to this church as an interim preacher, but on the Sunday that I attended, his passage was 2 Cor 7:1-16.

While this does not seem excessive, or out of line, it does only reflect Roberts's starting point for his messages. Many times, Roberts starts with a New Testament passage as his text, but then spend a majority of the sermon discussing an Old Testament narrative or example. This emphasis would probably not be as noticeable if Roberts served in the same pulpit for an extended period, and in many ways, it would be beneficial for the church body to hear Old Testament preaching to that degree. The critique of Roberts on this point stems from the fact that in an itinerant ministry he often only has four to five opportunities to preach to a gathered audience. In these time, he must seek to bring the people to an understanding, and practice of, biblical repentance, and then to the point of receiving God's offer of grace and forgiveness in Christ. For this reason, his ministry should emphasis passages which cover these foundational themes more explicitly. It may seem minor, but with limited time before a given audience, Roberts might be able to proclaim the whole gospel more clearly by developing the themes of repentance, forgiveness, and grace through a New Testament passage or message.

The apostle Paul provides some support for this argument in his words to the Ephesian church. In the third chapter of his letter to the believers, he wrote in verses four to five: "When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit (Eph 3:4-5)." The point is that in New Testament passages the church has God's redemption fully revealed in Jesus Christ, whereas passages in the Old Testament are limited unless one makes connections to what is revealed in the New Testament. For this reason, a critique of Roberts's preaching ministry is that he could emphasize New Testament passages more given his time constraints before congregations and his need to present the full gospel in Jesus Christ.

A closely connected point to this critique is that Roberts's ministry is focused on the issue of sin and repentance sometimes to the omission of Christ and grace. Again, Roberts has been seeking to correct a perceived error in the church. He believes that the

church has neglected the full character of God. In fact, he teaches that too many churches act as if there is a different God in the Old and New Testaments.<sup>51</sup> He criticizes churches today as viewing the God of the Old Testament as a god of judgment and wrath, whereas the god of the New Testament is filled with grace and love. He correctly emphasizes that God is unchanging throughout Scripture and that the church must have a proper view of God; however, his preaching tends to focus on the judgment of sin and the need for repentance without including a strong offer of grace in Christ. Again, this critique is not that Roberts never presents God's grace in his messages, it is simply to highlight that he sometimes lacks balance in this area. One would like to see his teachings become more Christocentric. Certainly, one must focus on the need for true repentance, both in the individual and the corporate church, but every message must point the hearer to Christ and God's provision of forgiveness and grace. Roberts often abruptly ends his messages with a prayer for repentance to come, but he should also include instructions to those who are experiencing God given repentance and who need counsel in how to respond.

### **Conclusion**

There were several purposes in this chapter. The first purpose has been to examine contemporary literature to determine if it included similar emphasizes that Roberts's as put on repentance and history. After examining a sampling of recent literature, it has been determined that the literature is lacking in the areas of repentance and history. This chapter discusses why this connection is significant, and therefore, why Roberts's ministry is important for the church today. Roberts has brought an emphasis on God's sovereign control over revival, and the fact that no human measures can force God to act. Additionally, he emphasizes biblical repentance to a church that as overly

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<sup>51</sup>Richard Owen Roberts, "Part 5: The Four Things That Always Precede True Revival," accessed December 23, 2016, <http://www.collegeofrevival.org/part-5-the-four-things-that-always-precede-true-revival/>.

accentuated God's grace. Roberts deliberate actions to highlight the period of the First Great Awakening has kept valuable literature available for coming generations. Overall, his ministry, whether spoken or written, has benefitted the church in numerous ways.

Countering this praise of Roberts's ministry, an additional emphasis of this chapter has been to critically evaluate his ministry, and to present areas in which he may be critiqued. The purpose of the critique was not to diminish his ministry in anyway, but to provide another avenue for others to learn and grow from his example. Roberts's ministry is critiqued for being too focused on the American church and for lacking balance in the areas of sin-grace and in his preaching texts. In each of these areas, Roberts can be critiqued, but overall, these are very minor issues when one considers his almost eighty years of public ministry. Like any minister, Roberts has not been perfect to any degree, and he would himself admit to many other faults. By and large, he has been a faithful example of what it should look like to faithfully follow Christ in life and ministry. In the interview for this project, Roberts remarked that one of his goals in ministry has been to be in his life what those in public have thought him to be. Throughout his years he has made mistakes, but when confronted with an area of sin he has gone before the Lord to seek forgiveness and grace to improve. Throughout years of blessings and challenges, Roberts has sought to be faithful in his call to preach the Bible, lead churches in understanding of revival and its history, and to call Christians and unbelievers to repentance before God. In these endeavors Roberts has been a man of God and a faithful example for believers to follow.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

At a time when many in the church either have a complete misunderstanding of revival, or it is a concept that is completely ignored, Richard Owen Roberts has sought to bring forward a biblical perspective on the topic through his writings and teachings. Throughout his lifetime of ministry, he has mostly observed the American church in a state of numerical decline. Instead of feeling defeated, he has remained faithful to his task, recognizing the impact of his ministry is solely in the Lord's hands. In addition, his prayer for the church has not only been for revival but for reform as well, he said:

I have a doctrine of revival that doesn't quite fit the pattern of the church. But here's a very critical issue – in urging people to pray for revival, what we have been doing is urging them to pray for an increase of what's going on. And I've come to the realization that's not what I want at all. I don't want to see the church revived. I want to see the church reformed. I want to get back to the Scripture. I want to ask fundamental questions like, what does God want? Is he concerned about these vast numbers of converts that we're making? Or rather than a thousand, would he rather have one single person that radiated the life and the holiness of Jesus Christ. And I know I've always been aimed in that general direction, I am only saying that it is becoming clearer to me than it ever was before that we just don't want any more of what we've got. We want to get back to the Scripture.<sup>1</sup>

In his decades of studying revival, he has not wavered in his hope that the Lord could move in the American church, and his prayer, and hope, for the church has even grown to seek from the Lord dramatic changes that would make the church more faithful to its mission. Despite the many faults that could be put against the church, Roberts has remained confident that the Lord can use believers who are willing to be broken and

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<sup>1</sup>See interview transcripts for these remarks. These comments were made in a larger discussion of the Heart-Cry for Revival Conference. Roberts lamented the change that this conference has experienced over the last decade as it has become less focused on biblical revival and God's character and more focused on pragmatic matters of how to *do* revival.

remade through his reviving work. The American church certainly needs God's reviving work to renew and reach a new generation of people, and those seeking this movement would benefit greatly from examining Roberts's contributions to this important topic.

### **Issues Discussed**

In the introduction to this study of Roberts's life and ministry several issues were presented to be examined and discussed. These issues were divided into three main subject areas: a biography of Roberts's life, an examination of his theology of revival, and an evaluation of his connection between revival, repentance, and history. Through these areas the following issues were addressed and several questions were answered.

First, how did Roberts's early life impact his understanding of revival? And was his understanding of repentance a result of his conversion or later life events? These questions were addressed through the biography of Roberts's life. His childhood was presented with a particular focus on the impact of the Great Depression, Second World War, and his conversion. Through these events it was displayed that Roberts's upbringing in a conservative Presbyterian church brought him to a reformed theology which impacted his understanding of revival and carried forward into his teachings as an adult.

Second, has Roberts's shifted in his teachings on revival from the early nineteen-eighties to the present day? The answer to this question was handled in the third chapter as part of the examination of Roberts's theology of revival. While Roberts has modified his definition of revival from his book on the topic to his more recent teachings, he has not demonstrated any significant shift in this area. This is also evident by the shift in preaching invitations that Roberts has received. Early in his ministry Roberts regularly received invitations from Presbyterian and Congregational churches, but as these denominations experienced shifts in theology and practice, Roberts started to receive invitations from more conservative groups. Later in his ministry he has primarily taught

in Baptist and Church of Christ settings. This reflects more on the changes in the denominations than it does on any shifts in Roberts's understanding and teachings.

Third, what led Roberts to pursue a bookstore and publishing ministry instead of other ministry avenues? Has this decision been beneficial or detrimental to the overall impact of his ministry? In the interview, Roberts discussed these issues in detail. He started his bookstore ministry to provide steady income to allow him to preach without financial concerns. The publishing aspect became a natural extension of the bookstore as Roberts sought to be responsible in managing his business. While Roberts started the bookstore and publishing under a secondary purpose, both aspects grew to be significant components of his overall ministry, and both have proved to be beneficial to the church.

Fourth, what are Roberts's views on the global church and God's movements in other areas of the world? How does he respond to movements that are outside of the American Evangelical norm? These questions were addressed under the critique of Roberts's ministry in chapter five. It was discussed that Roberts's ministry focused on the American church, and Western Christian history, and that he did not interact with the global church to any significant degree. One could speculate that if Roberts interacted with the global church on the topic of revival he would find many areas in which to critique it. One reason that he would likely critique these movements is that much of the activity that has been labeled as revival in the global church does not conform to the biblical examples of revival as Roberts has taught them.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, these movements also appear very different than the First Great Awakening, which is a movement that Roberts views as a solidly biblical revival. Overall, Roberts has provided very little interaction with the global church to answer these questions about the global movements.

Fifth, did Roberts intentionally pursue a strong connection between revival,

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<sup>2</sup>For examples of these global revivals, see Mark Shaw, *Global Awakening: How the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Revivals Triggered a Christian Revolution* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010).

repentance, and history or were these natural out workings of his convictions and interests? Of all the questions examined in this research, this question was answered the most directly through the research. Chapter four developed the connections between these three issues in detail. Roberts was intentional in his pursuit of connecting revival, repentance, and history. His desire has been to connect today's church with the historical church and to bring attention back to the time when God brought true biblical revival.

Sixth, in what ways have Roberts's views on revival, repentance and church history impacted his pastoral ministry? This question was addressed in the second chapter and interview transcript of this research. Roberts spent some time during his ministry in the pastorate and as an interim pastor, but for the bulk of his ministry he has been an itinerate preacher. Throughout his ministry Roberts has remained consistent in his teachings on these topics, and churches have either embraced him or not – his ability to fit the pastoral role has been determined by the church's response to his views. Two examples from his life illustrate this well. The first was his experience in the established church in Fresno, in which he struggled through a year as the pastor. The second was the church plant in Fresno in which he experienced almost eight years of fruitful ministry. Overall, Roberts pastoral ministry was impacted both positively and negatively by his views on these three topics, whatever the impact, Roberts sought to be consistent.

Seventh, does Roberts believe that he has ever been involved with a true revival? If not, why does he think that this is so and is he disappointed about this? These questions were answered in some ways in the biography section, the interview transcript, and in the examination of his theology of revival. If revival is personal or among a small group of people, then Roberts would state that he has experienced moments of revival in his life. If revival is a larger movement of God in which the church is transformed and the wider community is impacted, then Roberts would state that he has not, and neither has the recent church, experienced true revival. Despite the lack of corporate revival, Roberts has remained hopeful that God may still move in the church in a powerful revival.

Eighth, how will Roberts's ministry be evaluated in the coming generation? Will he be remembered in his own right, or simply seen as one who preserved other's work such as J. Edwin Orr? These questions on Roberts's legacy were asked during the interview and his response is included in the transcript. His connection with Orr was examined, and it has been demonstrated that although the two men had overlap, and a friendship, their focus and intents were different. Roberts did publish four books written by Orr after he passed away, but the content of the books fit into his general guidelines for publishing. Roberts sought to put Orr's work before more readers because he saw its value for the church, but Roberts's ministry will be evaluated on its own standing.

Ninth, how does Roberts view his own life and ministry? What is his outlook for the future of the church in America? Is he hopeful or concerned? These final questions were addressed primarily in the interview with Roberts. He does not measure his ministry success through standards such as numbers or through audience response, instead he considers his ministry through faithfulness to his call. In evaluating his ministry Roberts focused on how well he has followed the Lord's leading. He believes that he has been faithful, but allows for God to be the judge of his service. In several places throughout this research it has been discussed that Roberts has remained hopeful that God can bring revival to the modern church. He believes that God has not pronounced final judgment on the American church; therefore, there is still time to repent to God and to be revived.

### **Areas for Further Study**

In every research project, one is limited to the extent and scope of what can be studied and to what degree. This project, which examined Roberts's life and ministry to understand his theology of revival, has been limited in many ways. For this reason, there are several areas which could be studied further regarding Roberts's life and ministry.

The first area in which this study could be built upon would be to continue to develop the biographical information on Roberts's life and ministry. In this area, this

research was limited to resources available online and through a single interview with Roberts. One could certainly improve upon the research by on-site studies in Schenectady, Fresno, and Wheaton. In these locations, one would be able to examine material in archives to verify and support the events that Roberts has recalled. Additionally, much could be gained by careful study of Roberts's collection of revival literature in library at the Billy Graham Center at Wheaton College. Finally, if access would be granted, the biography could be strengthened through access to Roberts's notes and personal correspondence. Roberts's life provides a steady example of faithfulness which is deserving of study and what is provided here may simply be a starting point.

Some additional areas which could be pursued further in research would be Roberts's connections with the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association and Wheaton College. For the second half of his life and ministry, Roberts has lived within a short walk of the Billy Graham Center on Wheaton's campus. He has had numerous interactions, both positive and negative, and it would be interesting to further consider these relationships in a formal study. One could consider how the relationship started, to what extent the two worked together, and what difficulties resulted through these interactions.<sup>3</sup> In a similar manner, another area of study would be to consider Roberts along with his contemporaries in the area of revival. A comparison analysis of how he fits into broader revival community would be an interesting and beneficial study. This study would provide an important glimpse into the broader understanding of revival during the last century and better equip the church to see areas to grow in the coming years.

### **Final Reflections**

At the conclusion of this study, as one considers all the avenues in which

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<sup>3</sup>Roberts mentioned that he was hurt by Wheaton College, and the college asked him to never step foot on its campus again. He did not provide details on what led to this interaction, and in the scope of this study it was not possible to verify this course of action from Wheaton College.

Roberts has impacted the church in the area of revival, it is difficult to not lament that the wider church as largely ignored his teaching. This is unfortunate because the church is in great need of true revival, but it is largely remained confused, or in error, about the topic. With this confusion, the church is not able to properly prepare itself to seek revival. At the same time, this confusion leads many to label movements revival, when in fact the movement is much less. Of course, God can overcome even these difficulties, and move among the church, reviving his people and returning them to proper understanding of his character and his work. While the church's misunderstanding of revival is troubling, according to Roberts, the greater tragedy is its misunderstanding of God. He writes,

Many tolerate a view of God which is vastly beneath the revelation which God makes of Himself in Holy Scriptures. God describes Himself in the Bible in such language as, "I am that I am" (Exodus 3:14); "I change not" (Malachi 3:6); "I am holy" (1 Peter 1:16); "I fill heaven and earth" (Jeremiah 23:24); "I will do all My pleasure" (Isaiah 46:10); "I know thy works" (Revelation 2:2); and "I will ease Me of Mine adversaries" (Isaiah 1:24). He never portrays Himself as soft on sin or as loving perpetually unrepentant sinners. He does not favorably compare Himself with man but in a great variety of ways insists that our thoughts are not His thoughts and our ways are not His ways.

God does not indicate that He needs us but insists on our need of Him. He does not accommodate Himself to our life-style but demands that we conform our ways to His. Contrary to the thinking of many, God is not evolving into a softer, more cuddly Being, but is as full of righteous indignation now as when He flooded the earth, destroying the civilization of Noah's day and when He poured fire and brimstone from heaven upon Sodom and Gomorrah. The meek and gentle Jesus is the very God who pronounced, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!" and asked, "Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can you escape the damnation of hell?" (Matthew 11:21,22); at the same time warning, "Thou, Capernaum, which art exalted into heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee" (verses 23,24).<sup>4</sup>

Roberts's point is that the church needs to return to a full understanding of God. The church cannot simply view God in the ways in which it desires, but must continually return to Scripture to grow in its understanding. Through the Bible, God has revealed his

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<sup>4</sup>Richard Owen Roberts, ed., *Salvation in Full Color: Twenty Sermons by Great Awakening Preachers* (Wheaton, IL: International Awakening Press, 1994) xi.

character to the church, and a proper understanding of God best prepares the church for revival. Roberts states, “A powerful relationship exists between what a person thinks of God, what they think of themselves, what they think of sin, and what they think of salvation.”<sup>5</sup> Proper understanding of God is necessary to gain proper understanding in other areas of salvation. When the church has a proper understanding of these important topics it is best equipped to seek and pray for revival among its people and community.

Overall, Roberts has provided the church with a needed correction and refocus in the area of revival. His understanding of the character of God has led him to base his understanding of revival as purely a movement in which God is in sovereign control. For this reason, he defines revival as, “an extraordinary movement of the Holy Spirit producing extraordinary results.”<sup>6</sup> If revival is simply the natural progression of a church working through certain steps, then Roberts could not make this claim. Instead, revivals are those special moments in church history when the Lord has decided to visit his people in an extraordinary manner, for his glory and purpose, to make his name great.

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<sup>5</sup>Roberts, *Salvation in Full Color*, xi.

<sup>6</sup>Richard Owen Roberts, *Revival* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1983), 16-17.

APPENDIX  
INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

**ROR:** I think maybe for a moment before you to start your questions for me to make a statement that's essential.<sup>1</sup> We recently had a conference at the Cove, in Asheville. It will be twenty-two years, this is the end of twenty-two years in which I have participated in this conference. It's called the Heart Cry for Revival conference, which was started by the Sutera twins and Stephen Olford, and a group of men of substance like that. And I am the only one that's participated each time over the twenty-two year span, but it's become increasingly difficult to do so, and in a very inconsequential way because the Cove is a terribly expensive place and the speakers all pay their own expenses. That's pretty dubious whether that makes sense or not. But then that's a very inconsequential thing, the issue really is a concept of revival that others hold to. And I had a call this morning from Al Whitinghill, I don't know if you know Al, but he's the head of the, oh I've forgotten the name at the moment, anyway a group of itinerants who started in Australia years ago. Street preachers, and it's small, but it's quite substantial. And he said just a few minutes ago, 'well you know the reason people go is to hear you because you're the last of your kind and the rest of it is sheer nonsense.' Well that's what I'm trying to say. The bulk of the time is spent on strategizing. Now what has strategy to do with the work of Christ? He's already laid out the strategy. We just have to follow. So, my impression is that the interest in revival, at a time when it is more needed than ever before, is just zero. Those

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<sup>1</sup>This appendix is a verbatim copy of the interview that I had with Richard Owen Roberts for this dissertation. As such it is conversational in nature and not intended to be a polished written document. Its purpose is to accurately display what was discussed in the interview. Roberts has signed a statement of verification which can be found at the end of the transcript. Finally, since this is verbal transcript one may find errors in facts or recollection. I have not made any corrections or changes in these instances, but have simply provided what Roberts recalled at the time that we spoke.

who are talking about it still, like the IHOP movement and so on, there's just a lot of nonsense that has nothing to do with Christ or Scripture. And to think that you can do some planning that will make revival happen, it's so utterly absurd. It is deeply grievous to me. And I don't think I've wasted my life. In fact, I think I've done exactly what the Lord has called me to do, but in terms of impact, there's no evidence that it's had any impact. But then, the glorious thing about revival is when God suddenly decides to do something, it's done. No matter how black it looks before.

**DRC:** Yes, I appreciate you sharing that. I watched your message from the Heart Cry conference.

**ROR:** It was out of tune with the whole the conference.

**DRC:** It seemed like there was something bothering you when you got up, but I didn't want to spend the time to watch the other messages.

**ROR:** I don't know if you have ever considered this, and I think I made mention of it in that message, and this happened, it came about in a rather odd way for me. Several years back, I recommended to a fellow who had served as a missionary in Russia for some time that he do some serious biblical work and that he get a set of Keil and Delitzsch, and pay close attention to their word studies. So, he's been doing that, and so he called me several months back and said, 'I'm in a pickle.' He said 'I never saw this word before, and I don't have any idea of the correct pronunciation, but let me read and spell what I can't pronounce and you tell me what Kyle and Delitzsch says?' Well it was a reference to Hosea and the heart of it was, in most English translations the Lord chose to destroy Israel because of the lack of knowledge. But the actual word used is the word, sagacity. And this is what I have been seeing, that there is an incredible lack of sagacity in the American church. And I want to be very careful in this next statement because as perhaps you have discovered by now, I am not a Southern Baptist. Nor have I ever been. Nor will I ever be. At the same time, I receive more invitations from Southern Baptists than any other group in America. And I think more highly of Southern Baptists than any other

group because despite all that's wrong there is a body of true believers among Southern Baptists. But nonetheless the bulk of the Southern Baptists is operating from the position that they suppose that God over-built heaven. And he needs their help in filling it up. And so, the average the Southern Baptist pastor acts as if his great task is to get as many people to agree to a few misinformed facts as he possibly can, and then he feels obliged to tell them that they've been converted, and that they are now a Christian. And I began to see this a long time ago. I don't know to what extent you got at all acquainted with my past, but we came here to Wheaton roughly forty-five years ago to work with the Graham Association at Wheaton College. And I was deeply troubled by the constant emphasis upon, you were saved - don't let anybody convince you that you are not saved. And I often spoke out against that in gatherings with Graham Associates. And time after time the men would say, 'we want you to sit down with Billy and explain this to him, we don't think he understands.' But I said I'd be willing to do that, but it will never happen. Well he's been guarded against all influence that is old fashioned or that is in keeping with the Biblical position other than what they've embraced. But anyway, this was where I began with the Heart Cry conference. I think that the church is characterized by this lack of understanding what the real purpose of God is. Although I'm not intending to go into detail, I would like to remind you at the outset, the New Testament gives a very clear picture of the church, and you know I don't know a single local church anywhere in America that tries to match that. But you know in the New Testament the church is made up of living stones and Christ is the chief cornerstone. And it does not add one single dead stone to the temple that God is building. Well the Southern Baptist is probably at least 70 percent dead stones, maybe worse than that. And then of course you have the teachings say in Peter. Every person who is born of God is born of that same incorruptible seed as resulted in the conception of Christ, and how can two who were born of the same seed be squabbling with one another. And yet the Southern Baptists are marked by squabbling. So. So where as the obvious purpose of God is to provoke Israel

to jealousy through the Gentile church, there is not a chance in the world of that happening because Jews regard Christians as disgusting and they're not at all inspired or affected by the holiness of Christ, within the Christian community. So, whenever you talk about that you're out of step with the crowd and that of course is what happened at the Heart Cry Conference, and the amazing thing is they don't dare to cancel me out because they know that of the relatively small attendance a fair percentage come just to hear the ancient truths. Anyway.

**DRC:** I appreciate that. And I will say some of these questions, even in the Heart Cry, you referred to one of my questions, I have to ask you, and you referred to it as a silly question, and there are other things involved in here than just what I would like to ask you. I've had some questions I've been told to ask. And so, we get to a silly question just know - I've heard your answers and I know your answers to some of these questions, but I still have to ask them. Basically, opening questions. You've obviously had a long ministry, and you're still preaching. What are some of the practices in your life that have helped you sustain your ministry?

**ROR:** Well to try to keep my eyes on the Savior, not on the people I am trying to help. I don't know of anything more discouraging than looking at the results of your labors. And if somehow one were to convince themselves that results are somehow connected with failure on your part you would give up. What would be the point in continuing with something that doesn't matter in the long run. But the thing that has sustained me has simply been the realization that the Lord didn't necessarily call me to be effective or successful, but to state as clearly as I know how what He himself has said. And I often remind myself, and that's true of the situation, I pray very seriously, should I keep going on with this and the answer that comes to me, well for the time being they need to have ample evidence that they are. And when they stand under judgment and say we never heard. They will not be able to get away with that because the Lord can say I can tell you of at least one instance when you heard very plainly. So that realization that I am just

called to do what the Lord gave me to do. But if I look at what's happening I get discouraged. I just keep my eyes on Christ I am not affected by the response.

**DRC:** Talking about results, when looking back over your ministry, can you describe a time that was most personally rewarding to you?

**ROR:** Well the Lord, in his grace, gives us seasons of unreasonable results. I only mean by that, results that you could just have not anticipated. They don't seem to fit the situation, and I would say in the early years of my life in ministry I was a pastor of a Congregational Church in Portland, Oregon. At the time that I became pastor, I was under the impression that there might be one Christian in the group. It turned out I was mistaken, the person I hope was a Christian most certainly was not. But I was also mistaken in that there was an elderly man, who was ill, at the time that I considered the church. And so, I didn't get to meet him, and he was a true believer and a praying man. But anyway, I think it was the third, possibility the fourth Sunday, when I preached there, I made a statement like this, 'there may be some here who can no longer live without the knowledge of sins forgiven. I will be at the church at two this afternoon to meet with anyone in that condition.' Now that was provoked really because I thought I saw a face on which there were some tears as I preached, and I tried not to be carried away with enthusiasm, but I honestly thought I saw tears on a second face. And, a single tear on a third face. So, I felt when I gave that invitation there was at least one would come. Well to my astonishment thirteen came, and so many that I could not do as I had intended by way of counsel to each one. So, I laid out the specifics of what it would take to surrender to Christ, and for him to become Lord and master. And then I said, 'now I would like to meet with each of you privately in the course of the next six days. You could come to ask questions or for help, but what would be much more wonderful would be if you came to tell me how the Lord had transformed your life.' Well it's incredible to me as I look back over the next six days, eleven out of that thirteen came telling me how Christ had transformed their lives. And the evidence from then on was mounting up that the Lord

was at work doing something wonderful. And I feel as I look back that there was a time in this country when there was a more general movement of the Holy Spirit then now. But at the same time, I've also felt the Lord gave me that season of incredible blessing just so as I could look back from time to time and thank Him and have that awareness that I didn't know anything then, and I don't know very much now, and wasn't anything I knew or anything really, I did except faithfully proclaim what I knew to be true. And it was the blessing of God upon his own Word, not upon me. And so that's been a great help and encouragement.

**DRC:** That's good. Thank you. On the other side, ministry can often to be challenging, so would you describe a time that you found particularly challenging in your ministry?

**ROR:** Well I've had an experience when I was quite young that was immensely helpful, and which I think is worth stating. I had, at the urging of my pastor, I had skipped the eleventh grade of high school, so I graduated high school when I was sixteen and I had no interest in college or education. I don't know that would be correct to say that I was a dummy. But at the same time, I was disinterested in academic matters, and I didn't really care to go to school. But after a few months I got up enough wind so to speak. So, I went off to Gordon College in Boston, at that time. And it was a rather ridiculous time. I didn't gain much there, but I was for a year and a half. And I was so bored with the whole thing I just quit. And I was in my own home church that was in Schenectady, New York on a Wednesday night at the prayer meeting of our church. A total stranger stepped up to me. And he said, 'I've been informed that you're looking for a job.' 'Well, yes,' I said, 'that's true.' 'Well,' he said, 'I'm the head of the control engineering laboratory at the General Electric Company. And I would like to ask you a question.' 'Well,' I said, 'alright.' He said, 'I want you to explain electricity to me.' I said, 'that's preposterous, I couldn't, I couldn't begin. I won't have the foggiest notion.' 'Splendid,' he said, 'your hired. I want you to appear at the employment office at two o'clock or ten o'clock. I'll make an appointment for you at ten o'clock in the morning. It will just to be to fill out the

necessary paperwork, but the job is assured you.’ Well in astonishment I said, ‘why would you say that because I couldn't even answer the basic question?’ ‘Oh,’ he said, ‘I was quite sure that because you didn't attempt to answer it that you are the very kind of person we're looking for.’ Well, then it happened exactly as he said I had a job at the control engineering laboratory at the General Electric Company. It was a huge situation, and my task was to test equipment that was being manufactured, life test it and make sure that it had all of the necessary components and that it would more than adequately fulfill what they were advertising it would do. But now here I come to my point, I was practically speaking the only uneducated person in the laboratory. The rest were all doctors, and not frivolous, but earned doctorates. And what I discovered was that some of these men who were doctor this, or doctor that, it almost seemed as if they couldn't even tie their own shoes without their mother's help. So, they were a critical specialist in some incredibly narrow area of interest, but in practical ways they knew nothing. That became a huge lesson to me. I thought true wisdom is not outward knowledge, but insight, understanding to the genuine motives and purposes of God. So that's has sustained me for a very long time. I am constantly reminded, I respect men who are well educated, but I understand their range of knowledge is severely limited. The fact that a man has a degree, even a Ph.D., doesn't prove a thing except that he knows more on a given subject, in which virtually nobody's interested, than anybody else. But the critical question is always, does he have the wisdom of God, and because of that type of thinking that was inspired at that time, I began to realize that what the Bible is really talking about is the beginning of wisdom is the fear of God. So, a man who lacks the fear of God is guaranteed to lack wisdom, though he can be intensely intelligent in a small range.

**DRC:** Thank you. Now moving into your life, in general, and trying to put together a picture of from when you were young to today. Described some of the things you remember from your early childhood, and state where you were born, the day, and the year.

**ROR:** Well I was born in Schenectady, New York, in 1931. Now 1931 was a bad year during the history of this nation. We were in the midst of a great depression at that time. My father worked as laborer, a factory worker, in the General Electric Company. One of the memorable events of our childhood was his coming home with his check for a week's worth for twenty-six cents. And we learned to live on very little, and I've often thanked the Lord for the privilege of growing up in a home of what today would be described as poverty stricken. My parents paid rent on the home in which we lived, and the rent was twenty-six dollars a month. And as I said, dad's employment check was twenty-six cents. If a kid got a job at twenty cents an hour it was a huge income. As a boy, I was one of the wealthiest kids on our street because I worked regularly at twenty cents an hour, or did various types of jobs. Like during the time of the Second World War one of the issues was Victory Gardens, and everybody was requested to make the best of what they had. So, if you had a little plot of ground and you planted a Victory Garden. Well as a youth, I was involved in Victory Gardens, and I was peddling vegetables all around our village that I grew in my several Victory Gardens that I was able to exploit. So, there was a huge benefit that came to me living leanly and having as little as possible to get by on. And yet at the same time having the influence of parents who were profoundly converted, and this might be helpful to consider, when I was eight years of age my parents decided that the children, I had an older brother and an older sister and a younger sister. So, there were four of us. They decided that we older kids should attend Sunday school. We went to a Methodist Sunday school where we were taught the story of Jonah and the whale was a piece of fiction that had certain nice applications that would be wise to remember. We came home, I was, as I said, eight at the time, and we told our mother that we had been learning about this fairy story of Jonah, and my mother's words were extraordinary. She said, 'we don't send children to Sunday school to learn to be unbelievers. We're all unbelievers by nature.' Now what made that incredibly urgent was my mother had absolutely no religious background. Her father had been a very successful businessman.

Her mother died when she was very young. Her father remarried the critical, typical wicked witch step-mother. My mother had a very, very sad childhood and no religious training. My dad on the other hand, his family came from Wales, the principality of Wales. And he had a religious background, but he was totally disinterested in anything spiritual. But after we came home telling our mother about the fairy story, an aunt and an uncle began putting pressure on my folks to attend special meetings in a little holiness church. And within a few days they were profoundly converted, and our home just radically transformed. And so, I had the benefit throughout all of life until nineteen or thousand-two, my mother died in thousand-two. I had the benefit of a praying mother all those long years, and that was a huge factor in my childhood. And then, we were originally in this little holiness church that was making warfare over little things that were utter stupidity. Just to illustrate if a woman wore a blouse with a sleeve that came below the elbow it was considered holy, but if she had a blouse with the sleeves that was cut off above the elbows she was considered wicked. If a person wore a wedding band that was considered a sign of great worldliness. So, the church was loaded with all kinds of stupidity, but all around the walls of this little sanctuary were plaques. Over the pulpit, an arch that said, "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, today, and forever." And as I said around the walls, plaques with biblical references on them. I was every Sunday studying these plaques and this inscription over the pulpit. So, by the time I was ten I had a deep conviction that the most beautiful thing in all the world was holiness. And I began to desire a life of holiness, and to see that was the greatest thing that could ever happen to anyone. So that deep sense of true Christianity inspired by that miserable little church and then praying parents. And then, wisely my parents left that little church when I was eleven, and we were taken to a Presbyterian church that was still faithful to Scripture. So, I had this incredible background of spiritual things. And although it would be very impossible for me to declare when I became a Christian, well I honestly don't know, but I do know that right after my parents were converted they began attending cottage prayer

meetings, and I loved to go to these prayer meetings as a boy of nine and ten years of age. And although they were way over my head they were of incredible importance. So, I am personally grateful for a childhood of that sort.

**DRC:** Finding an outline of your life has proved to be challenging. I did find a website. I think some of it is accurate, and other parts of it is not, because it says you've pastored in Jamaica, which I don't think is accurate. So, I'm saying I don't think this is a hundred percent accurate. So, I wonder if you could just briefly outline your life with rough years. So, you grew up in Schenectady and lived there through college time, and then I believe went to Portland from there.

**ROR:** I went to Gordon College when it was in the city of Boston, and I was seventeen, I think when I went there. I was there for roughly a year and a half. And I was not getting any real ground and so I left. I then had a job in Schenectady at the General Electric Company as I said in the engineering laboratory. And that lasted for a year. And then I went to college in Spokane, Washington, at Whitworth College where I graduated. And then, went from there to seminary in Pasadena at Fuller Theological Seminary. And then I was only there for, I think, a year and a half, and I was deeply troubled by what was going on there. And in, above all else, what really troubled me greatly was I realized I was losing my confidence in the Word of God and I had reached a place where I would say to myself, I want to believe the Bible. The Old Testament was highly suspicious, but I'm going to hold to the New Testament.

So, after some days of struggling with that I decided there would be wisdom in talking to the Dean. So, I went into the Dean and made an appointment, and went in to see the Dean. And when he heard my brief story he said, 'I want you to do what I'm going to do at the end of this quarter.' 'Well,' I said, 'I couldn't possibly agree to that without knowing what you're going to do.' 'Now look,' he said, 'you trusted me enough to come and talk to me, and to lay out this problem that you're facing. Now I want you to trust me enough to agree to do what I'm going to do.' 'No,' I said, 'I am sorry.' Well he

said, 'I'm leaving here at the end of the quarter.' 'Oh well,' I said, 'I can do that.' So, I left seminary and I returned to Spokane, Washington. Where I had rather an extensive ministry as a young fellow in the churches around the whole inland empire. I went into the rescue mission. And I said to the director, 'this is my circumstance, I have no money. My parents will be immensely grieved when they learn I have quit school. My pastor will be terribly upset with me. But this is what's happened to me, and I need some help.' And this dear man said to me, 'we have a room here at the mission that I will assign to you. You can stay there as long as you like. You can come to the dining hall for meals, or we'll have the men bring up meals to you. Whichever suits you best. But, you stay there until this problem is resolved.' So, I closed myself up in my room, and day after day, I compared the New Testament with the Old Testament. The first thing that really gripped me was if I was going to throw out the Old, I had to throw out the New. Because the New is full of quotations from the Old. Well, I didn't want to do that. And so, I determined just to press on in studying.

And one day I just suddenly realized I believe every word of God's book. And I went and told the superintendent, and he said, 'praise the Lord for we been praying that the answer would come and it has.' Well then, I was ready for ministry, and a church in Portland, Oregon, called me. And then I served for roughly four years there in Portland, Oregon. Then I went abroad. I had started two books on revival bibliographies. The first one was called, *Revival Literature* when it was finally published. And the second one was called, *Whitefield in Print*. And so, I went to Europe and I was doing the research work in various libraries.

And at that time, I heard Martyn Lloyd-Jones preach at Westminster Chapel, and the very odd thing took place, or at least seemed odd to me. I was doing a lot of studying at the Evangelical Library, as well as [Dr.] William's library and the British Museum. But a great deal of time spent in the Evangelical Library. And a deacon from the Westminster chapel was serving as a volunteer there, and he kept saying to me, 'the

doctor wishes to meet you.’ Now many who are acquainted with Martyn Lloyd-Jones know that he was a medical doctor before he entered the ministry. And thereafter he was always referred to as the doctor. Anyway, the man kept telling me the doctor wished to meet me, but that sounded absurd to me. I couldn't imagine any reason why the doctor would wish to meet me, so I paid no attention to his constantly telling me that. But then one Sunday after service, he was quite a large man, with huge hands. He took me by the upper arm and he said, ‘the doctor wishes to meet you. He will be grieved if you keep resisting.’ ‘Well,’ I said, ‘I haven't really resisted, it just seems preposterous to me.’ And he said, ‘now is the day.’ So, he took me from the sanctuary through this doorway in the front, and there was a long hall. It was crammed with people. And I tried to stop at the end of that line, but he dragged me clear to the front of the line. And we stood just outside the pastor's study and in a few moments, someone came out, and I was ushered in. And it became immediately apparent that the doctor did wish to meet me. And honestly it was a simple enough matter when I thought through the issue. He had this great burden for revival. And anybody that shared this burden he was deeply interested in. So, we had the most lovely conversation about revival and the things that we were both deeply interested in. I have no idea how long it lasted, maybe twenty, twenty-five minutes. And then we left, and when we got back out in the sanctuary, I thanked the deacon for taking me to meet the pastor, but I said I would have gladly stopped at the end of the line. ‘Why did you drive me to the front of the line?’ ‘O,’ he said, ‘Mr. Roberts you must understand I'm a man under orders.’ ‘Well now wait a minute,’ I said, ‘now don't give me that.’ ‘No,’ he said, ‘you and I have had some serious conversations. You know what it means to be a man under orders.’ ‘Well yes,’ I said, ‘but I can't interpret that in the light of what you told me. Now answer me this question. Why was I taken to the front line? I told you I would have gladly stopped at the end of the line.’ ‘Oh,’ he said, ‘you were taken to the front of the line because the doctor wished to meet you.’ ‘Well then, who were all these people standing in line?’ ‘Oh,’ he said, ‘were all

inquirers.’ ‘What?’ ‘Now look, Mr. Roberts we've had these careful conversations. We agree on what an inquirer is.’ ‘Well now look,’ I said to the deacon, ‘I think you owe me something here. I want to know what is the impact, what’s really taking place?’ And this dear man said to me, ‘you know the doctor hates statistics. He would be greatly offended if he knew I gave you statistics.’ ‘Look,’ I said, ‘I really must know.’ ‘If you'll promise me,’ said he, ‘that you'll never breath a word of this in the Doctor’s lifetime, I'll tell you what I think, and what the other deacons think. We think that there are an average of twenty-five persons converted every Lord’s day.’

Now I didn't breathe a word of that while the doctor was alive. But I have made jillions of trips to Great Britain, and I've met loads of men, and I have met a great many who have shared with me that they came to London to begin their life work as an accountant, a dentist, a lawyer, or a medical doctor, whatever, and someone got them to go to Westminster Chapel where they met Christ and were profoundly altered. So, I've never had any reason to doubt that there was a great work taking place there. I was in my twenties at the time. I was already deeply convinced of the authority of Scripture. But it really became clear to me I had one great task in life. And that was to preach the Word of God, and leave the results in God's hand. So that was a highly influential season. At the same time, I want to share something that happened to me at the chapel. Now the doctor had a usual method I don't suppose he always did this, but typically he would start a message with some event that was sort of in the minds of the people. Well one Sunday night when I was there, the Russians had sent their first cosmonaut into space. This fella had traveled around a bit, and he said he'd been all over heaven, and looked-for God, and there was no such thing as God. And so, clearly this idea of there being a God is sheer nonsense. And that's how the Doctor began that sermon, and then he said now this evening I want to draw a comparison between the man's view of God and God's revelation of himself.

As I sat there listening to this message something happened. I'm hesitant to talk about this because some people might suppose I'm nothing but weird charismatic full of all kinds of crazy stuff. But if they knew me they would know that's not even slightly true. But that evening, I came to an understanding I had never ever faced before. True preaching is the experience with God in his Word. And I set my heart on that occasion, if ever God would allow it I would like at least once before I died to preach in such a way that people experienced God in His Word. That's been my goal ever since. That was way, way back in nineteen-sixty. But my heart has not moved from that, and I long that might be true. And then I would like simply to add this, having described that hall full of people, who were labeled by one of the deacons as inquirers. I would like to make reference to the invitation that was given every Lord's day. In giving the announcements, as we would call them, or the intimations as that church described them, the deacon dressed in a frock coat would stand in front of the congregation and read from a slip of paper. 'The intimations this week. Service this evening at six, all believers suggested that they come. Prayer meeting at seven on the Wednesday all believers required to be in attendance. Next Sunday, the Lord willing, the doctor will be preaching from...,' and the passage was stated. And it dawned on me. When people have experience with God in his Word, that's the only invitation that's needed to produce a true conversion. And so that thinking has governed me over the years.

**DRC:** So then, you were you were in London completing your studies. You come back, and at some point, you plant a church correct?

**ROR:** I was gone from the church in Portland for somewhere approaching a year, working on these annotated bibliographies. And it was at that time I felt it appropriate to start the book business which I have had ever since. Because it dawned on me that the kind of ministry that I felt called to could not prosper sufficiently to earn enough to support myself, or a family, and that I ought to start a business that I could work at part-time that could support my family. So that when I accepted an invitation, or I should say

considered an invitation, to a church or a conference I would never have to discuss money. So that I really made the decision then if a church asked me how much I charged to come and lead special meetings, my response would be anything that you feel lead of God to give something to the ministry fine otherwise it's no expense.

So that was the decision that was made at that time, as I said I started the book business at that time. And then, I entered the itinerate ministry, and that really began in a way that I think was truly providential. When I was a student at the seminary in Pasadena, I had become somewhat familiar with Dr. Charles E. Fuller, who was the founder and spokesman of the Old-Fashioned Revival Hour. And it was his family money, his father was the founder of the Sunkist Orange Company, and it was money from that which actually brought into existence Fuller Theological Seminary. Anyway, I notified the man in charge at the seminary that I was ready to enter the itinerancy, and by the grace of God some of the invitations that Dr. Fuller had received, and could not honor, were turned over to me. So, that my life and ministry as an itinerate began that way. We then continued in that ministry for several years. I was in the meantime married, during that period, and then when we had young children, about say five and three, I was away from home so much in the itinerate ministry. But I didn't see how that could possibly be right because my children didn't really recognize me when I came home. They might hide under the table because they had no idea who this strange man was that was so familiar to their mother. And so, both Maggie and I began to pray for some sense of solution to this problem. And we were praying specifically for an opportunity of ministry that was at least equal to in need and challenge of the itinerate work. And to our amazement I was invited to serve as pastor of one of the strangest churches in the world. Its name, The Free Evangelical Lutheran Cross Church in Fresno, California. And a very odd thing occurred, that I was quite mindful of, they had decided to vote on three different men at the same time. And it was a church of some size, in fact, at that time it had a sign out front saying, Central California's largest church. That was

probably an exaggeration, but none the less it was a very sizeable church. So then as I said they voted on three men at once. I received something like eight hundred votes, the next fellow seven hundred votes, and the third fellow six hundred votes. So, there were vastly more who voted against me than vote for me. But I became the pastor under those circumstances. And, as I said, I was quite mindful of that, none of that took me by surprise. And it was a perfectly glorious answer to a prayer for a challenge that was at least equal to the itinerate work that I was doing.

So, every Sunday I had the immense privilege of preaching the gospel to people who hadn't the foggiest notion what Christianity was all about. Now just a reference to the name, as I said, Free Evangelical Lutheran Cross Church. Only one word fit the situation. The word, cross, they were the crossest people we ever had dealings with. It was not free because membership was determined by paying dues. At the time I went there, there were two-thousand-four-hundred people paying their dues. There were five-thousand families on the constituency list. It was not Evangelical because I was the only Evangelical pastor they ever had. It was not Lutheran, in fact, while I was there they received a letter from all the Lutheran denominations in Central California asking them to drop the name Lutheran because they were not a Lutheran church. They were in actual fact, a congregational church. The mother church of five-hundred German Congregational churches that existed in United States at that time. But they were, as I said, cross. We were there and had this glorious privilege for a year. But the first Sunday that I was there as pastor the deacons waited on me and informed me that they didn't like my sermon, and they would not allow me to preach that way. And that from then on, I was to submit my sermons to them on Tuesday, and they would go over it and remove the things they didn't like. And I said to them, 'I have read the constitution of this church, and the constitution says that the deacons are to assist the pastor. So, let it be understood, from now on you are my assistants. I am not your servant. I serve the Lord God Almighty, and I don't take directions from anyone other than him, but if you know

somebody sick or a person who is dying and you feel some hospital ministry or home ministry might be effective feel free to let me know. But otherwise, I will give you directions and I will not receive directions from you.' And they said, 'we'll put out.' And I said, 'I can't prevent you trying, but I know I'll be here until the Lord removes me.' So, I had a wonderful year of preaching. I preached twenty-six messages out of the Sermon on the Mount and the last Sunday the text was, 'deliver us evil.' And we've often laughed, and said they thought that they were delivered from evil, we know that we were delivered from evil. We then started to church where we served for about eight years, and then came here to Wheaton to work with the Billy Graham Association. So that's a bit of the history.

**DRC:** The church you started, that was in California?

**ROR:** That was in Fresno.

**DRC:** So, you've mentioned a little bit about your father growing up. But again, what was your father like when you were growing up and how did your relationship with him change as you grew into an adult?

**ROR:** My father was an uneducated man, he had been through the sixth grade. His family came from the principality of Wales, as I already said. He was a laboring man, but a very kindly, and an outgoing man. A warm, personable person. I think he was a splendid father. But he was completely orientated toward the world until his conversion. And then after that he was oriented toward the Lord. So, over the years my dad was of incredible help to me because, he didn't speak much, and I was not ever living in the immediate area where he and mom were, but they would come to see me. I mentioned the time I was in Fresno; the time I was in Portland, they would come and visit. But Dad would always give me very sound advice. For instance, one time somebody had hurt me very grievously, and had spoken terrible lies. My dad happened to be with me, and he knew I was thinking about writing a letter to correct these grievous errors. And my dad said, 'Dick, has not the Lord been your guardian over the years?' 'Well yes, certainly.'

‘Then will you take advice from your father, and throw that letter away and leave it in the Lord's hands?’ So that was the kind of advice I got from my dad, and constant assurance, mom and I are praying for you every day and we're praying that you will have a ministry that is pleasing to the Lord, whether any man is ever pleased or not.

**DRC:** The other part then is your mother. What was she like growing up, you've talked some about her, and was your relationship with her and how did it change as you grew into an adult?

**ROR:** My mother was a very quiet woman very sweet. A wonderful mother. I would say it would be hard for me to imagine a better mother. Not in any way a pushy person. A person with very strong personal convictions and standards after her conversion. And I would say the great influence of my mother was the simple fact that she was herself and a godly woman. And that constant awareness that my mother was praying that my life would not waste, but that the Lord would indeed touch at least some through me. And I had that assurance, constantly, never any variation in that.

**DRC:** I guess you've already shared this some, but if you want to add anything on what ways your parents have influenced your ministry?

**ROR:** Principally, I would say through example. If I ever had any reason to wonder what a real Christian was, I had only to think of my parents. And to know that their stalwart example, my father, as I said was uneducated, my mother had no religious background in her childhood or youth. But when they were converted, they were truly converted. My mother for instance was in a regular attendance and participation in a very serious prayer meeting that went on for years in Schenectady, and she was involved in that as long as she was physically able to get to these gatherings. My dad was a very urgent Christian. My own preaching ministry began in an extraordinary way, I would say. Soon after his conversion my dad got a burden for the poor house. At that time, virtually every county had a poor house, and those poor houses were places where the inhabitants who were incapable of supporting themselves. They were looked after by the county. The poor

house in our county had, I think, between four and five hundred inhabitants. My dad started a ministry at the poor house soon after his conversion, and for all the years that I can remember he went every Friday night to the poor house. And he would take a group of young people from our church with him. And they would visit the various places, my dad had four places where he preached each Friday night. For some rooms in this poor house and young people bring the people from their rooms in the wheelchairs or on their crutches and so on. And my dad would preach to them. I don't suppose it could be said he would have qualified to serve as pastor of First Presbyterian Church of Pittsburg, Pennsylvania, but I doubt that any group of people were ever exposed to more serious minded and faithful man than my father.

Soon after my call to public ministry, I was at that time thirteen, Dad said to me one night, 'now you'll preach here tonight.' And so, my preaching ministry began because I went with my dad regularly to these Friday evening gatherings and that's where I started preaching. And by God's grace, I discovered I could still preach on street corners, and in prisons, and at the county mission. And so, opportunities came of every sort.

**DRC:** You've mentioned your siblings, I think you said one brother, two sisters.

**ROR:** Yes. My brother finished his schooling in Canada, and so he became a Canadian Presbyterian. He still lives in Toronto area. For many years he was a missionary under the Canadian Presbyterian Church in Nigeria. At one point, he was on the front line. There was a huge war in Nigeria called the Biafra conflict. He was on the front lines ministering to the troops. His wife and three of his four sons were in Lagos, Nigeria, and they had arranged to pick up a missionary family who was returning from Canada at the airport. They had a native driver and somehow the native driver veered across the highway as he was going to the airport and plowed into a big truck. Two sons were instantly killed, and the third son badly maimed, and the wife badly maimed. They were dumped on the floor in a hospital in Lagos. And I don't know the full details but

somehow Shell Oil learned of this. They sent men to the front to find my brother. Brought him back to Lagos, and flew the family to London in their own private plane. And my sister-in-law and the one son that survived the accident were treated in London and restored to a significant measure of health. But because of the severity of that accident my brother was unable to continue his missionary labors. He became the head of the Presbyterian Board of Missions for Canada. And at one point he became a state clerk of the Presbyterian church of Canada. He's now of course out of ministry by a very severe problem with diabetes, but still a faithful Christian.

My two sisters married, one a business man and one an employee in one of the technological companies in America. And they have remained faithful Christians over the years.

**DRC:** Do you want to share a moment you remember in regards with your siblings growing up that you think would represent you as children growing up in your home?

**ROR:** Well that might be a bit difficult. I don't think this is uncommon for children to feel as if they don't belong. But I always wondered if maybe I wasn't adopted because I never really seemed to fit with my brothers and sisters. That was silly, because one has only to look at a picture of my dad and a picture of me to know that I was no orphan taken off the street. But I always had that strain, and because my brother is a wonderfully earnest Christian, but a Presbyterian, and therefore quite straight laced, and I never quite fit that pattern. I never felt any need to conform for anything except to the Lord and his Word. And so, I was really over the years something of a misfit with them. My sisters, I think I felt closer to, particularly the younger sister partly because the younger sister's husband was a very effective and successful businessman but not a very serious minded Christian. And so, I was more attached to her because I was able to be of some help and encouragement to her. And because I've never lived anywhere near where any of the rest of the family lived, we never have had an awful lot of contact, but there is a vital, warm relationship that we keep in touch, but not in a very prominent way.

**DRC:** You just describe a little bit of your personality as a child. How might you say your personalities changed as you aged through life?

**ROR:** I don't know that it would be accurate to say that it has changed at all. I don't know that. It might be helpful to give just a little the background of my call to ministry. As I said we were raised in a very poor family, and I was born thirty-one, and that meant that at the time that the Second World War began I was ready to respond. Although I was only ten, young people back then acted more like adults. So, I had a job, full-time job, I worked in the grocery store during winter. I worked on a farm during the summer. I had to these Victory Gardens, I pedaled vegetables in our community. I was always at work at something. For years we would collect newspapers and earn a little money that way. But the result of all those odds and ends of things was said that at the end of the summer when it was twelve years of age I had accumulated a fair amount of wealth. Now that had to be put in connection with the times. I mean, somebody with two dollars in their pocket was wealthy compared to somebody who couldn't even get a nickel together. So, I had enough money to send myself to a Christian camp for a week at the end of the summer. And so, I registered at Sunrise Mountain Bible Conference at Lake George, New York.

Now two things of incredible importance happened there. On the Friday night, which was the last night of the week, because we would return home then on the Saturday. A call was issued in the public meeting for volunteers for missions. And I felt very strongly and very determined to be ready to hear from the Lord and respond to a call. So, I stood and volunteered as a missionary. Now at that time as I said, I was deep into Victory Gardens, I had two or three acres I was actually working myself. I was selling vegetables. I worked on a farm, as well. So, I had quite an orientation in the agricultural direction. And the second thing that happened in addition to this call on the Friday night, because this was in the Adirondack Mountains there was a lot of hiking that went on with the young people in this conference. And each day we would have some kind of a mountain climb. Well, I was very small, but quite vigorous, and quite used to

strained effort to doing things, and the rest of the young people tended to be kind of the city slickers, or sissies, if you will. So, we'd go on a mountain climb and after just a little distance they'd have to rest. Well on the Friday, in disgust, while the rest were resting, I sat down on a stump to rehearse my discontent with the sissified people at the conference. So that's Friday morning. Friday night there's the call to missions. I go home on Saturday and it turns out that what I did was sit down on a stump that was covered with poison ivy. So, I got an incredible case of poison ivy which was under way pretty strongly by Saturday. Now this was the end of the summer. It was ordinary in those days for public schools to start the day after Labor Day, the Tuesday of that week. I couldn't go to school because I had too severe a case of poison ivy and I needn't go into details as to where I had it considering that I sat down on it.

Anyway, my parents fixed a cot for me in this little tiny room of our rental home. And I was home from school for two weeks, and every day I was dealing with this issue of having responded to this call to missions. And I was explaining to the Lord, that although I couldn't say anything, if I was called upon in the public school to answer a question, I would just freeze up and I really couldn't say anything. And the Lord knew that. So, I instructed him that what I would do I would prepare tracts and put tracts in the bushel of beans or whatever and I could teacher people in other countries about how to do agriculture and I would serve as an agricultural missionary. I was very pleased to be able to do that. But I felt the Lord say to me, 'but I didn't call you to be a missionary.' 'Well Lord, that's what I know I can do. So that's what I'm planning to do.' 'No, I didn't call you to do that. I'm grateful that you were responsive, but that's not what I called you to do, I called you to preach.' 'Oh Lord, it's not that I wouldn't do whatever you asked me to do, it's just that I couldn't. I wasn't made to do anything like that. So, I'll do what I can, but I cannot preach.' Well day after day of struggling with that. I became aware, well I can't, but I can. That if that's what the Lord is calling me to do. That's what he wanted me to do. So, I've had that deep-seated conviction that I was called of God to do it, and

that all I could do was to respond to what he told me to do. And I didn't really have to know how. And I didn't have to do it well. I just had to do it faithfully. And so that's been my conviction through all the years.

I don't know, has my personality changed? I don't think so. My wife often says that she doesn't mind go off shopping for the day and leaving me because it looks to her like I prefer to be alone. Well, I think that's probably pretty true. But when I have an opportunity to proclaim God's Word, then I feel a very strong sense of call, and urgency, and response to that.

**DRC:** The next several questions were about your conversion, which you shared some bits and pieces of, so I will summarize all these questions. Is there anything else about your conversion or that time of your life when God called you into ministry that you would like to share?

**ROR:** Well I'm fearful that a great mistake is being made in many of our churches. I've heard men say, that if you don't know that hour that you were converted, you're not. Well I think that's garbage, just sheer nonsense, doing a great deal of damage and if any good at all I can imagine what good such a false statement could possibly accomplish. I believe very, very, deeply, in the second birth. I made mention, in referring to Peter, of that statement all who are born again are born of imperishable seed. And that being the same seed that which Christ was conceived of the Word and the Holy Spirit. And what I truly believe is that as the Word is preached, God, in an incredible way, just opens up a person's mind and heart and enables them to realize, Christ is all I need. And if I will come to the end of myself and turn everything over to Christ, that that is what makes a person true Christian. And that doesn't necessarily happen in a point of time. That can happen over a season, over a period. Now that's not to say that a person cannot be converted in the moment of time because some most certainly are, but it is to say that there are multitudes who truly are yielded to Christ who could not pin point the day or the hour. I made reference earlier to the prayer meeting, the cottage prayer meetings, that my

parents attended. Those were of immense importance to me. Now, why would a ten-year-old be interested in cottage prayer meetings where older people are praying? I don't pretend to know why, I just know that they were immensely important to me. And studying the Scriptures and understanding not merely what the passage says but what the heart of God is conveyed in that passage has been of great importance to me. So, I would like to see the church place less emphasis upon the false and greater emphasis upon the true. I have myself been delighted on numerous occasions to look out over a congregation and to see some very blank faces in that congregation. And then as I have preached, it's one of the truly thrilling things to me. I don't know to what extent you have experienced what I am talking about, but the congregation begins just seated back causally in the pew. And gradually you see them moving forward. And soon, the whole congregation is hanging on to the rail in front, and this perfectly blank face suddenly is lit up with the joy of the Lord. And that person rushes up afterward and says, something marvelous happened to me tonight, I came to a real relationship with Jesus Christ. And it's so obviously the work of God, not the work of man. And to have experienced the thrill of that and then to resort to twisting somebody's arm to try and get them to make a decision for Christ that just seems so absurd.

**DRC:** Moving on to some questions about education in general. You said as a child you're probably more disinterested, then applied and interested, are there any significant events you remember from elementary through high school?

**ROR:** I don't know if what I am about to say is even accurate, but my memory of school is boredom. I don't have the notion that everybody is the same. I'm deeply convinced that God loves variety. Now, I think we, most all, sense that in terms of fingerprints. And that perhaps registers strongly with many. But I think what impressed me even more greatly than fingerprints was the realization that snowflakes are all different. Now when you live in Louisville, that might not amount to much, but when you live in Wheaton and you get about 24 inches of snow at one time, and you consider every single flake varies from

every other flake it's quite remarkable. But anyway, the notion that God loves a variety makes it difficult for me to create categories and to suppose that everybody fits into one of these categories. I remember that as a youth I was determined to write my first book, and I had entitled it in my mind, *The Evangelism of Jesus*. And as I was seeking to prepare myself to write this book it gradually dawned on me that Jesus didn't have any method. That he in fact treated every person as an individual. And I realized, well now to write a book on the methodology Jesus in evangelism is absurd. That if I'm going to say anything about Jesus I'm going to have to talk about his love of the individual, and his ability treat them as very, very, different. Well, setting that into school, it just seems to me that school is an attempt to make everybody fit the same mold, and it doesn't work. And there are lots of brilliant students that are bored almost to tears with school, and a lot of dummies who seem to be doing splendidly. But if you could put any reliance on IQ, which I don't think you can, but if you could you would find some who excelling have an IQ of a hundred and one, and some who are doing terribly have an IQ of one-hundred-fifty-six. So, it seems to me there's more than ample evidence that's not the answer. But for each person to be treated as they truly are as an individual, then I can see some great merit in that. So, I suppose at this late date of my life I have less interest in college and theological seminary, than I have for discipleship and training people for service in the Lord.

**DRC:** You mentioned you started preaching at thirteen, so throughout high school you're preaching at these different opportunities. Do you think that had an impact, in what ways did ministry opportunities impact your life? While your world would say, you're supposed to be a student, but you're exploring God's call for your life.

**ROR:** Well, I suppose in great candor what has to be said is I never felt any call to anything other than to preach the Word. I didn't feel called to school. I don't feel called now to formal studies, but I do feel called to understand fully and completely as I can the Word of God. And not, as I said earlier, not to simply have the knowledge of these things

but sagacity to see inside, and to see the mind and heart of God as revealed in Scripture. And if I can preach in such way that somebody understands the mind and the heart of God and can enter into it. I think by God's grace I've been of some service to that person.

**DRC:** When you went to Whitworth, in Spokane, what was your major in college?

**ROR:** Well, that's an interesting question. I had been, as I said, working in the General Electric Company, for a year. I had discovered that highly educated men were mostly ignorant. And, I thought when I went to college that would go a long ways away from home. I mean from New York to Washington State is some considerable distance. I thought that maybe with a fresh start in a brand-new area would be beneficial. But, I found that the guy that moved from New York to Spokane who was the same guy. And that I hadn't really changed, and that to what I had to be was myself as fully aligned with Christ as it was possible for me to be. And I had some experiences in college which are immensely important to me. Soon after I had entered the college, I became friends with a fellow who had been in the Air Force. And then was on the G.I. Bill and was gaining an education, and he seemed to have a fervent heart for the Lord. And he and I became great friends, and we became involved in various ministries throughout what's called the Inland Empire. And that would be to say distances up to two-hundred-fifty miles or so from Spokane. And one of the things that we did was we conducted Bible classes in areas just outside the city.

I don't know if you been to Spokane, but Spokane is a city in a sense constructed differently than say the Chicago area because you have the relatively flat area of the city itself and then you have the prairies all around seven-mile prairie, five-mile prairie, nine-mile prairie. These would be elevated places with very rich farmland on the top of these prairies. Well we were holding Bible classes on these various outreach places. And one night, we went to a Bible class, and we took turns. One night he would speak, the next I would, and we would alternate that way. At this Bible class. I think it was on seven-mile prairie, someone asked me a question. And, I said, 'oh I'm sorry I

don't know the answer to that, but I do know where I can get the answer. And if you'd be willing to hold till next week I'll come back next week with the answer.'

Well my friend, immediately proceeded to answer the question. Well as we were leaving he said, 'you have completely ruined your ministry. Nobody will ever pay any attention to you from now on. Because you admitted you didn't know something. Now that's something you must never do. You must always have the answer.' 'Well,' I said, 'the answer you gave is ridiculous. It had nothing to do with the question, it was certainly not in any sense a correct answer.' 'Well,' he said, 'you know that, and I know that, but they didn't know that. So, they highly regard me. And they think contentiously of you, you've just spoiled everything.' Well then, that very week, he was married and living in a college provided apartment, and he invited me to dinner. And his wife, we were seated at the table in the kitchen, and his wife, was putting the food on, and she put on a bowl of green beans and he took the back of his hand he swept this bowl of beans off the table on to the floor, and it crashed, and went in every direction. And his poor wife broke into tears. And that was a profound lesson to me. He had done this utterly stupid thing at the class, and then he had damaged his wife incredibly.

I just knew that couldn't be, that could not be true Christianity. Well now, the interesting thing, and this is just an aside almost, but it's not. Years and years and years went by I never heard that fellow. Then I got a letter from what used to be the largest church in London, the Whitefield Tabernacle in London. Inviting me to lead an eight-day series of special meetings at the Whitefield Tabernacle, signed by my college friend. And that was in connection with Reformation Sunday, so that would have been in the Fall sometime, I think October. But I had to be in Great Britain during the summer. There was a fellow here that used to have a radio program, David Mains was his name. I've forgotten at the moment, the name of the program, but he had never been to the United Kingdom and I was scheduled to speak at a conference at Oxford, England. A revival conference that was led by J. Edwin Orr for a very long time. And so, this fellow wanted

to go with me, so we went, and we had two or three days, he had never been to London. And so, I had arranged to stay this pastor's flat, and a very odd thing happened. Now, I don't know what your handwriting was like, but mine is terrible and if I write a note and don't transcribe that immediately with a typewriter, I can't read what I've written. And I had been making a number of notes, and so, I said to this pastor, 'I need to transcribe some notes that I made this morning. Do you have a typewriter?' 'Oh yes, in there.' So, I went into this room that he pointed out and sat down to use the typewriter, and you know how it is when you type something. We type a little and then we stop and think because we want to make sure of what your writing. And I glanced up and there was a picture of a very attractive woman. And I think, now that can't be his wife. Surely, he wouldn't have daughter that attractive. Well just tend your business, so I went on with my typing. And then, I went back out into the living room where the pastor and my friend were. But that was kind of, you know some things stick in your mind, and I thought, I'm going to have another look at that picture. So, I went back into that room. And to my astonishment the picture had disappeared. So, I just filed it away.

So then when I went back in the fall for the series meetings. When he picked me up at the airport at Heathrow he said, 'I don't really think it's a good idea for a visitor to start a series on Sunday morning. So, we'll start Sunday night instead, and then I'll preach on Sunday morning.' And I said, 'I don't have any idea what's going on Bob, but I know this, you're out of God's will.' 'Who do you think you are to tell me that?' I said, 'now Bob, you know I've been preaching a long time, and I've found over the years the Lord never gives me a sermon that's not going to be used. There are times when I have been unable to figure out what I supposed to preach on, and then as it turned out I didn't need to know because I wasn't preaching after all.' But I said, 'the Lord has never given me a sermon that I did not use. And he gave me a sermon for Sunday morning, so I know that you're out of God's will.'

Now it was on Saturday. He kept saying, 'well I better take you over to the church so you can get familiar with the arrangement, and so we can have a little time of prayer.' Well it was late Saturday night finally he said well, 'let's go over.' And so, we looked around a little and he said, 'now we should have a prayer.' And I realized that the prayer he prayed was to the unknown god. But he never reversed this business about my not preaching Sunday morning. But I knew I was going to because the Lord had given me a message. And so, we went on Sunday morning and he said, 'well now you just sit here in the pastor's office while I take care of some things around the building.' And in walks this very bold woman, puts something on the pastor's desk and introduces herself to me. And I think, that's the woman in the picture. So, I'm seated on the platform. He says he's just going to introduce me so the people will know whose preaching that night. But, instead he says, 'now Mr. Roberts will preach.' And so, I knew that was going to happen anyway, so I was as I said prepared. But after the service I'm told we have an invitation to this home for dinner. Now at that time the Whitefield Tabernacle had become the English-speaking church for London. It was made up principally of heads of various United States companies that had offices in London—Shell Oil Company, Mobile, and so on. Just basically business men, managers of big companies, plus ordinary people as well. I don't mean to say they were excluded, but principally that's what it was. Well we go to lunch and this woman is invited. And I don't say anything, but I know something is grievously out of order. So, we get back down in the late afternoon to the flat and I say, 'now pastor you put in a very tough spot. You invite me to eight days of meetings in commemoration of the ministry of George Whitefield. And the first thing I discover is that the pastor is living in adultery.' Well he denied it up and down, and got so agitated that he got in a rage and left. And I made my way to that meeting that night, it wasn't so far from where he lived to the church.

I didn't know what to expect, but when he got up, he had a little tiny slip of paper which was just a little bigger than a postage stamp, the commemorative size

stamps. And he read from this paper and it was something like this, your pastor has an adulterous heart, he must ask you for your forgiveness. Well the odd thing was, have you been in Europe at all? Most of the churches are constructed there with pulpits that are up higher than would be typical in this country. And it was very common to have one that's halfway between the floor and the balcony. So, there are usually several steps up into the pulpit. Now whereas here, once you're on the platform the pulpit is usually on the same level as the platform. But that's not the common case there. Anyway, I had several steps up to the pulpit. I think that you can picture this having done some preaching yourself. I took those steps as slowly as I could because I had a total blank. I could not remember what I was preaching on that night. I couldn't even remember whether it was Old Testament or New Testament. So, as I said I went as slowly as I could. When I got into the pulpit the only thing that I could think of was a text that popped in my mind out of the Gospel of John and not knowing what else to do, I gave out that text and immediately I had message that went with the text that the Lord clearly gave to me. I didn't go into any of the details, but I made it clear that the pastor has tried to head off the consequences of the evil by saying he has an adulterous heart. He has much more than an adulterous heart. He is a vile, wicked man, far from Christ, and you need to deal with that. And then I preceded with the message that I don't remembered at the moment was.

Well afterwards the leaders of the church asked me to meet with them after this service, and to outline a plan for dealing with this and essentially what I urged them to do was discover three of the most godly men in the city. Assign the pastor to these three men. Immediately suspended all ministry, completely for three months. Not one single thing, but for three months in which to meet regularly with these men and for them to supervise his repentance. And then you can decide after that what would be appropriate action to take. Then, we went back to his flat as I said, and he was just full of anger and he just raked me over the coals for exposing him to the congregation. And

dealing dreadfully wrong with him and so on. And that was the second Sunday that that all came out. There's a lot of details that don't matter, but anyway.

I mention all that to say this has been the thing that has been so clear to me. There are a lot of men in ministry whose personal lives defy the Gospel, and they believe in grace. And I want to share something with you that came very strongly to me last month. We had this Heart-Cry for Revival Conference at the Cove. And I was very grieved and upset because I could see the whole tone of the thing was moved in the totally wrong direction. But we sat, have you ever been to the Cove? It's a very attractive place and the buildings like you would find in a national park. These big stone timber buildings and it's quite beautiful. And we were seated in one of the parlors and there was a pastor from somewhere in the east, New Jersey I think, who was chatting with me. And out of the blue he quoted from the Book of Jude. And it struck me, now I'm quite familiar with Jude, I've preached a fair amount from Jude. But, as he quoted, it's like sometimes something jabs your heart, and you see something you didn't see before. And so, I said to him, 'would you please repeat that quotation?' And he gave it again just exactly as he had. And I understood something that I had never really quite got a hold of. It says that in verse four of Jude that these men will be called and marked out for this condemnation. 'Ungodly men, who turned the grace of God into lasciviousness. Men who deny our master and Lord Jesus Christ.' Well now, what struck me with incredible force was this statement, turning the grace of God into lasciviousness. And suddenly it was very clear to me this is what the bulk of the church is doing. There are assuring people that they are under grace not under the law, that they can surely live anyway they please and they'll be under grace. And they're using grace as a license for licentiousness. And then, of course, my thinking connects the dots. I am thinking that there are various men in various places that I've been to who are doing precisely that. Proclaiming the gospel, they say. Often people are wowed by them. They are considered the great giants of the faith and in our church circles. And yet, there are men who deny their own Master and Lord Jesus Christ

and they launch a life of lasciviousness either in themselves, or in themselves and others and credit it all to the grace of God. And that's what we're faced with.

So, now this is not part of your questioning, but I want to add a profound lesson that's come to me, and it's been in the works for over a period of many months but it's beginning to crystalize very clearly. Now as you have discerned, and have determined to do a thesis on this, I have a doctrine of revival that doesn't quite fit the pattern of the church. But here's a very critical issue—in urging people to pray for revival, what we have been doing is urging them to pray for an increase of what's going on. And I've come to the realization that's not what I want at all. I don't want to see the church revived. I want to see the church reformed. I want to get back to the Scripture. I want to ask fundamental questions like, what does God want? Is he concerned about these vast numbers of converts that we're making? Or rather than a thousand, would he rather have one single person that radiated the life and the holiness of Jesus Christ.

And I know I've always been aimed in that general direction, I am only saying that it is becoming clearer to me than it ever was before that we just don't want any more of what we've got. We want to get back to the Scripture. I was telling someone who had called me earlier today about the biblical issue of the Jews being provoked to jealousy, which is what I spoke of mostly at this Cove conference. But if the real purpose of the Gentile Church is to provoke the Jews to jealousy, and has never happened, we don't have a single record of that ever having occurred. That means that you and I are standing on the threshold, either on the destruction of this nation, as Israel was destroyed, or the beginning of a genuine work of grace greater than anything that has ever happened. And my heart craves that it will be that second, the beginning of a fresh movement of God. And this is why the team that you said you felt strongly to focus your dissertation on, concerning this connection with repentance and revival. Because what we've essentially had is no repentance for anything at all. Now, I'm kind of assuming on your time here, but I trust that you will find it of some benefit. The Heart-Cry Conference is, as I

suggested already, has been on its way down. Now I don't know how you think about this personally, but over the years I have come to the conviction that it is complete without sense to suppose that the guy that has lead the church in the wrong direction will be the guy that lead the church in the right direction. That can only happen if there is true repentance on his part. And, I first began to think this way, and I don't know the time frame, but I am going to guess, say thirty years ago. Do you know the Elliff brothers? Is that a familiar name to you? Tom, I think is the older brother, and Bill is a little off, and Jim is living in Kansas City. Well the two younger brothers Bill and Jim and I were sharing supper one night together. And somehow in the conversation it came up, what about a special conference on revival. And so, we prayed together and thought about it and we came up with a plan for a conference on revival at First Baptist in Little Rock. And it was called the North American Convocation on Revival. And it was determined from the start that it would be by invitation only, and that there would be an attempt to get, to some extent, to whatever extent possible, the leadership in this conference. And as it was about to take place, we had fair success in this, as I recall we about five or six hundred that came. And not exclusively, but largely pastors and denominational leaders. But Bill Bright, I would assume that's a familiar name to you, he was present, though I don't recall his having been invited, but once it was understood that he was there some were saying, well he is so important to the church we better have him speak. Well, I was not in favor of that at all, but nonetheless, the others won, and he spoke. And he spoke on fasting. Now you may be too young to been deeply involved, but then again you haven't told me your age. Well, he wrote a book on revival, and he did a lot of talking about fasting and he made the claim that the Lord had shown him if he could get a million people to fast and pray for forty days, revival would happen. That was taken by some of us as a perfectly stupid thing, because we don't honestly believe that's how God works. And also, I had high suspicions of Bill because, to me fasting means abstinence, whereas for him fasting meant you took all your food, put it in a blender and ground it up and

drank it. I don't think that's fasting personally. But anyway, that's what he was proposing. So, when he was urging for forty days of fasting, which most of us recognize as not humanly possible, nobody can fast literally for forty days and survive. It can't be done. Moses, obviously, did it, but it was a divine thing. And there are a couple other instances in Scripture, but obviously the Lord was in it. And saying a million, doesn't mean the Lord's in it. Anyway, I would be highly suspicious of that and now I'm coming to the point I was wishing to make. What I came to was, it is utterly ridiculous to think that those who have lead the nation downhill, away from God, can lead the nation uphill towards God. And that unless Bill Bright comes to thorough repentance, he's not going to be an instrument in revival. And so, that I had held. And then going back to the Heart-Cry, you know the name Sammy Tippit?

**DRC:** Just from the website.

**ROR:** Well, Sammy's been a major, typical Southern Baptist evangelist, getting all kinds of people saved who came no closer to heaven than the devil himself. And then telling them now you're converted and you've accepted Christ. Well he started to get involved in Heart-Cry some years back, and he has been the dominant voice and in all that time it has gone downhill. So, I'm expressing a very strong conviction that I do not believe it is possible to talk about revival and not talk about repentance. And instead of talking about repentance of acts of extortion or of adultery, etc., etc. Let's talk about the realities of true repentance. What are you doing wrong that God will not bless that you must repent of? Now there are not an awful lot of the guys in ministry who are involved in robbing with the collection plate or that are involved in adultery, there are some, tragically, but the bigger sin is promoting stuff that is completely contrary to Scripture.

And so, as I said, the conviction has been growing, but it's upon very strong now, that we're not going to see anything—it can be called revival, and a lot of people can be happy with it, but it's not going to amount to anything unless there is a repentance

of those things that are so abhorrent to the Lord, which includes what I said about Hosea, a sagacity, a failure to see what's on the mind and heart of God.

Let me excuse myself a moment.

Session 2:

**DRC:** You talked about seminary a little bit and I was going to ask you to share the events from deciding to leave Fuller – because I had heard bits and pieces of that in other places, but you've done that already – so we'll bypass those. Just try and summarize your education, and connect it with your preparation for ministry. Obviously, the Lord taught you a lot, informally, but is there some significant aspect of your education that the Lord has used in preparation for your ministry?

**ROR:** Well if there is, I'm not, myself, cognizant of it. I don't think it would be correct to say that I'm stupid, nor would it be correct to say that I'm disinterested. But I don't think that by and large what is taught in school is what is so desperately needed. And I hope it's not this way at Louisville, I know what it was like at Louisville years ago because when – do you know Phil Roberts, not a relative of mine, but he taught at the seminary. He went to Oxford and did a Ph.D. and his Ph.D. was rejected by, from Oxford. His thesis that is. And principally because he had overlooked – I don't know how these things always work technically, so maybe I'm misstating something – but the readers said he had excluded one who had written the only thing ever written on the subject of the thesis. And he never mentioned it in the thesis, and so it was turned down flat. And then, he finished the thesis at the Free University of Amsterdam, and was for years president, and is now one of your Louisville men is president in Kansas City.

**DRC:** Jason Allen?

**ROR:** Yes, Jason Allen. Well this fella had been president at the seminary and just had huge problems. And Jason seems to have managed it – by God's grace – wisely. But Kansas City school has been a quandary. But going way back, when Phil was teaching at Louisville and Lewis Drummond was head of, I don't know what it was called, the

Department of Evangelism or whatever the correct language. I was there, I think maybe three times, and deeply troubled because I would sit, say, in the faculty lounge in between assignments. And most, for the most part the faculty didn't know who I was or care. But they would talk about the absurdity of signing these statements when they didn't believe a word about it, make a mockery of the whole thing. So, I knew what was going on at the time, though there were some very good men there, but there were some fellas that were far removed from what they ought to have been. And then of course, when your current president stepped in, there was a huge upheaval. I remember being at a conference in Dallas where I was speaking, some of the people were fuming over what had happened at Louisville and faculty that were removed and so on. But, thank God for the changes that have come, and I don't know to what extent you thought of this, and this is quite an aside from what's on your question list. But do you realize that the only time in the history of the church that a seminary has returned to its roots is what has happened at Louisville. Now, there was something that happened at the Lutheran seminary in Kansas City, a bit of a resurgence of Evangelicalism, but not at all the same, or equivalent, to what's happened at Louisville. So, some of us on the outside just stand in wonder, and awe, and thanksgiving, to the Lord for what's happened in some of the seminaries. But my own sense is, I just don't think that's the answer. I think men trained under men in ministry would be way ahead of those trained in theological seminaries. And this is not happening, I don't suppose to any great degree, but I know that Paul Washer in Virginia, and John Snyder in Mississippi, and Jordan Thomas in Memphis area, they're all training men under them for ministry. And I'm sure there are weaknesses in that, but at the same time I would have much more confidence in that. And I hope this is not true at Louisville, but by and large, men teaching in seminaries are so removed from the day-by-day action of the church that they don't really know what they're doing. But having said all that, I still believe in wisdom, and some gain wisdom in going to school, and some gain wisdom as I have done – or I hope I have done – in gathering great books and reading the finest.

**DRC:** I think that points to the diversity that God uses different paths to get us to the places He needs us to be.

**ROR:** And you know, as an old man coming toward the end of things, it's very, very hard for me to realize how little serious study is taking place among men in ministry. And you go into a typical pastor's library, look around and it's mostly what he's got on his shelves are how to do it stuff, copycat kind of stuff that doesn't matter. And very little that will really help a man to think through the true biblical issues and come to grips with the mind and heart of God and then you tie that in with the dread and the hatred and the fear of God that's so characteristic of today's church. And then when you begin with the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom and the churches despise the concept of the fear of God no wonder said stupidity remains.

**DRC:** I guess a change from education then, to just a little about your marriage. What are some words that you would use to describe your wife and your relationship in your marriage?

**ROR:** Well, again, I don't think that, I don't think what applies to one applies to all. But I had been pastoring in Portland as a single man, and it was very weird to have all the mothers with marriage-aged daughters and trying to get me interested, I just thought it was a dreadful thing. And I don't think most young men have been given any gift of abstinence from the Lord, and have been designed by God himself to be single, but that most of us are made with qualities that make marriage very, very, important. And I was cognizant through the years that I needed a wife, but I was also cognizant of my incredible stupidity, and of how easily I could make a dreadful mistake and so I didn't really do anything to pursue the matter except through prayer. Well then, as I mentioned, I had left the church in Portland and was in Europe for a season and then had these invitations that came by of the Old-Fashioned Revival Hour. And when I returned from Europe, I spent a little time with my parents in Schenectady, and my mother, who was not as I said already, a pushy kind of a woman at all, but she said, 'I think you should go

to the young people's meeting at the church.' 'Oh no mom, I don't know anybody there, I don't think I'll go, I've been pastoring for years.' But anyway, I didn't want to hurt my mother either, so I said, 'well ok, I'll go.' Well, I go to this university aged group that was meeting prior to the evening service on Sunday, and I walk in where they're meeting and they're standing around the piano singing out of an Intervarsity hymnbook, and I know some of the songs, but most of them I don't know. So, I stand there like a dummy, which I was, and this girl slips over and says, 'here, share my book.' So I glance out of the side of my eye and I say, 'wow, I wonder who she is, that's the one for me right there.' I mean, it was settled, and she knew the same approach that I knew, pray about it and let the Lord guide you. And so, in almost no time we were engaged and we have been married fifty-four years I think. And I don't suppose that this is typical, but after we had gotten acquainted, and I was travelling then, of course, and was gone a lot, she was just finishing up university, and so when time came to propose I told her that I had prepared a list of reasons why she would be very wise to say no to my proposal and asked her to go over that list before she considered my proposition. And so, she did, and she said, 'I think to some extent I've understood all of that beforehand – I know that you're much older than I am, I know that you're an itinerate and will be gone a lot, I can see that I would have to raise the children, if we're blessed with any, that I accept.' Well, then the odd thing was the Fuller Foundation, which I have mentioned had been alerted to the fact that I was interested in someone, and they arranged a honeymoon trip to Bermuda. But they had arranged for a hotel, and then a place where I was to preach as well. And so that was in June, and so when I told Maggie that this arrangement had been made she said, 'oh well I've committed myself to serve as summer nurse in a camp and I can't. I can't change now.' 'You're right.' So, we were married in September after that. But anyway. She's proved to be everything that one would hope for. I could foresee what was coming in terms of being away, children not knowing their father and so on, and so she's handled everything, she looks after all of them, natural household expenses. She keeps things in

order and I don't pay any attention to them. And in fact, I've been quite surprised at how effective and successful she's been in looking after the responsibilities a father normally looks after.

**DRC:** Was that sixty-three or nineteen-sixty-four?

**ROR:** We were married in sixty...yes, sixty-three.

**DRC:** Sixty-three, ok.

**ROR:** Sixty-two, I guess.

**DRC:** Sixty-two.

**ROR:** I've kind of forgot... I was just under thirty. I was thirty and a day. Next day I'd be thirty-one, so that would be the determining at sixty-two. September of sixty-two.

**DRC:** I was going to ask about the list you gave her, because you've mentioned it other times, but you addressed that already. From your memory any difficult memories from the beginning of your marriage that you look back on as learning experiences?

**ROR:** Well, I would say marriage in itself is beset with difficulties and the thing that we had both come to grips with – now Maggie came from a divided home, her father had left the family and so she had some horrible experiences really in a fatherless home and a mother who has never recovered from the long of the whole thing. So, when we married it was with the understanding this is for life – and no matter what comes, it doesn't matter, this is for life. I said there's no escape, and I think that a marriage approach from that standpoint is totally different. When I was in the pastorate in Fresno, I would have young couples that wanted me to preside at their wedding and they would say, 'we're gonna give it a try, and if it works out, fine, and if not, we'll get a divorce.' And I wouldn't be, I just refuse to have anything to do with a marriage like that. So, in essence, all I'm saying is you know trouble is going to come and when it comes you know what the answer is, and so you just still to the commitment that you've made. And does it stand, things disappear and things that look insurmountable become very small hills when you're determined to see them through.

**DRC:** So, on the other side of that, describe one of your favorite memories from your fifty some years of being married.

**ROR:** Oh well, we've had just all kinds of intriguing things, but one, I think, that would be representative of our lives; I came home one day and I found that my wife was on the telephone telling somebody that I was out of state and I'd be home for x number of days, and there I am standing right there, and I mean it was so much travel that, neither of us could really keep track of the comings and goings. But always anticipation and faithful wife, and taking care of everything that had to be taken care of. You know, the bookstore as businesses go, is not huge, but as book businesses go, it's really quite substantial and she's looked after it for years. Been responsible, she doesn't have the brains – if I can use that statement with caution – I mean, I'm the brains, God gave me a sense of how to do this, and I've taught her, so she's followed directions, but still, she's done so faithfully and wonderfully through the years.

**DRC:** You mentioned the traveling in your marriage. What are some things you've done to keep your marriage strong as you do travel so much?

**ROR:** Well, I would consider myself not very good at any of that, but I have tried to retain the impression at all times that I was responsible for her well-being and the well-being of the children and that what would be the most responsible was not to have ample funds on hand, but to have such consistency that she wouldn't have any grounds for fear. I overheard her telling somebody once, they were pressing her, don't you find it a terribly lonely life, that sort of typical questions, and I remember her stating, 'if my husband were a salesman, and he was off trying to push this, or push that, I don't know that I could handle it. But knowing what he's doing, I don't have any real problem.' Which I think has been typical for her, she's trusted me, she knew what my call was. I trusted her, and I knew what her call was. And so, nothing insurmountable has happened - lots of typical difficulties. I mean, everybody in ministry soon finds that you can make a business arrangement with a non-Christian firm that is much more apt to hold than with a

Christian firm. Trusting churches, trusting so-called Christians people, that's dangerous, and you don't go very far in that boat to have some grievous disappointment. But the greatest thing I believe that's needed at all times is example, and although I don't think I've been particularly successful, I have longed at, all times, to be a reliable example of Christ to others. And sometimes the impact of our lives is quite different from what we intended or would expect. I remember one time, we have two kids – as I think you know – and one is with Intervarsity in Maryville, Tennessee, and very unhappy because Intervarsity is anything but Christian in many ways. But anyways. When he was young, living at home, he went off somewhere sometime to help somebody, some Christian conference I think, where he went to do some physical work, to build things. I didn't have any idea when he was coming home, and he came home in the middle of the night and I was in the living room at that time praying. I don't know, it might have been two o'clock in the morning or something like that, and when he came in and he found me on my knees he was really quite upset. And I was upset to think that he found me there, because I never considered that anything for public display. But then it was very heartening to me because he was involved in the College Church at that time, and one of the leaders said to me, your son is deeply impressed with his father. He says his father is the real thing. Well I hope that's true, I mean that's what we set our hearts to be, the real thing. And no matter who injures us, we don't want to be responsible for injuring anybody else. And what greater intrigue is there than betraying somebody who thinks that you're a wonderful Christian, and then they discover you're just flesh like everybody else.

**DRC:** So, you've mentioned your children then. You have son and a daughter. Is your son older, or is your daughter older?

**ROR:** Son is the older.

**DRC:** And how far apart are they?

**ROR:** About two years, I think.

**DRC:** And did, your son's name is Robert Roberts?

**ROR:** He's had a real heart for the Lord. And that's part of what's disturbing him at the Intervarsity, because there are such gross inconsistency between the leadership. Some truly earnest godly people, and some on the line.

**DRC:** I guess just on family then, describe a little bit of your family life when the children were young, and maybe now that they've grown and what that's looked like for you in ministry.

**ROR:** Well, it was never really any formal plan. I was more likely away than at home, at the most difficult seasons of their life. But my personal aspiration was to always be to them, what the public thought I was. And I think by God's grace, I've had a good reputation in public. But I think it's very easy to betray what you are publicly, and I've desired to be what I seem to be and always felt that if I had any inputs for good on the children, it would be in what I am, not in what other's think I am.

**DRC:** Do you have any grandchildren?

**ROR:** Well, this is an important subject and a subject of great pain for the ladies, especially. But you know, you would like to think that not only are your children effected by your example, but your grandchildren, and that that somehow will govern their course of life, but it's not always true. So, we have a granddaughter – our older son has six kids – and the oldest of those has an illegitimate child and is a greatly grief to her parents. And that hurts us, as it does them, because we, as I've said, you hope that somehow the influence might be there, but it's not. And every generation has to find the Lord on their own, and nobody inherits their grandfather's religion. So, she has a child, and she's had a second child that was out of wedlock and put up for adoption and she's living with some guy now. And this creates some pain for us, but a whole lot more pain for her parents because they live in the same area. We don't see them very often.

**DRC:** On a positive note then, can you discuss one of your favorite memories of just your family life?

**ROR:** Well, I suppose, when we were in Fresno, I told you I was just a little while in and the deacons put me out, and then we started another church where we were. I think for about eight years. But a favorite memory; we did the normal things, Sunday services, Wednesday evening prayer meeting, bible study, and so on, but we also had a choir and Maggie would sing in the choir. So, Maggie would stay at the church for choir practice and, on Wednesday nights the children would go home with me, and it was an amusing experience, and yet I think it was soundly beneficial experience. And I was always telling them stories, and you know, to switch from a serious prayer meeting to a children's story, it's not the easiest thing necessarily to do. And the stories were generally preposterous, but things kid's love and relate to and you can include great moral lessons in these stories, and I remember so well, the kids getting in the car with me and right away they were pressing me for the story, and I can't switch that fast. So, I would say to the kids, now you review last week. And their review of last week would give me a little time then to get into the brain for continuing the story. That was a lovely memory, really. And so, that time that we served in church was a beneficial time in many ways, and it was an instructive time. And this is an aside, quite aside from your question, but I think it's significant thing. Very few churches continue generation after generation of preachers that think in the same direction. This guy builds it up, and this guy knocks it down, this guy builds it up, this guy knocks it down; the dreadful changes that churches are in for. But we had a steady, strong ministry of building, and then the next guy just smashed it to pieces in no time. And that's a dreadful thing, and you know, we don't have the final answer here, but you can't help but wonder, did the Lord ever call anybody to knock to pieces what He called somebody else to build up? Is it because they weren't called at all? Or is it because they don't know what they are doing? But you get people say, a high percentage of the congregation involved in the prayer meeting and in the prayer life of the church, and the next guy can smash that to pieces in a week – discourage everybody from participating. Or he can hold to some view, oh, in the few years we were in Fresno

perhaps it could be correctly said, I had already set my heart in a pattern. I don't think incidentals matter, I really don't. But I think true Christianity is ever the same, whether it's Baptist or Presbyterian or Lutheran, what difference does it make? The critical issues are always the critical issues, so I determined in the pastorate to focus on the critical issues and to pay no attention to the inconsequential. But the nature of people is, they love the incidentals. So, I had this open policy; I'll teach what I know to be the truth, but I'll not prevent somebody else from teaching what they think is the truth. But I'll not prevent somebody else from preaching what they think is the truth. So personally, I don't think eschatological concepts mean a thing. It amazes me that there are some men who seem to think they know more about last day's events than Christ himself knows. But I would teach what I thought to be the case, and then I would say, now, so-and-so thinks that otherwise, so he's going to have three weeks now to present his reply. And that's the way we operated, and for most people that would be good. 'We love Pastor Roberts, we think he know what he's talking about, we're going to decide to see his side, but we're glad to have heard the other side, but we don't think it's right.' But then you get somebody who comes along and they think, well, this is critical, I mean, what a person thinks about the rapture is about the most important event in the church. So, then they don't hesitate to smash your church to pieces to get some viewpoint across that's by us considered inconsequential.

**DRC:** This is not a surprise to you, but you preach longer than most do in churches today. And so, what would you say, what influences have led you to preaching at a greater length than what most churches would say?

**ROR:** Well, I don't believe today's church even slightly resembles New Testament Christianity. To me it's an insult to God to talk about the Lord's day, when what you mean is the Lord's hour. And the Lord even being cheated even that hour because the churches with multiple services have in many instances gone to 55 minutes, you know, to get one group out and the next group in. So, I'm of the conviction that the Lord's Day, is

the Lord's Day, and that people may think they are in a hurry, but if they are not thinking correctly about the things of eternity they are not Christians anyway. I'm very much moved by the passage in Hebrews 11:1 'faith gives substance to the things that are hoped for, it provides the evidence of things not seen'. Now, a true Christian has vastly greater interest in eternity than he does in the temporary. And while I am told in every direction, 'oh you can't preach long sermons, people just can't, they can't tolerate them, they can't listen that long.' I know perfectly well that men can go to the football game, spend seventy-five dollars for a ticket, and if the game is over in an hour he's just as mad as a hornet, and he's ready to change the whole world of football because he wants at least a three-hour event. And everything else, people have time, but in terms of the ministry of the Word, they don't. So, I just personal know that that's nonsense. And that hungry hearted people can't get too much. And although I have had some who complain about the length of the sermons, the biggest complaint I get is not that they were too long, but that they were too short. And people often say of me, we really want to hear the whole biblical perspective on this, not just a little piece. So, I am convinced that the bulk of the people who are involved in our churches are unconverted, that they have the mentality of this world, not the mentality of the world to come, and that I'm wrong to cater to those with the wrong mentality. And I am convinced that people can get used to longer sermons and treasure them. Now, we had this experience in Fresno, as I indicated, we were in the one church for a year and then approximately eight years in the church we started. Now, on the Sunday we left the second place to come here, I don't know how many, but any number of people said to me, 'we're facing the reality for the first time, we'll never have another preacher like you.' And I didn't take that in the sense, 'oh, I'm the greatest pastor they ever had.' I took that in the sense that I tried more earnestly to proclaim the word of God to them than anybody else ever did that they knew. And what they were going to be missing was the full statement of the Word of God. And I tried to cultivate a spirit of concern. Way back, when I was in Portland, and as I mentioned that was before I was

married. Now, it was an unusual situation in that, as I told you, I thought there might have been one believer – but it wasn't a church of any size, I think there were ninety-six members or something like that. So, it was a terribly small thing by today's standards. But when the Lord began to work and we had these, well jillions really, of new converts. I said eleven in one week, and then, just, week after week after week converts had...well the Sunday school had been running about thirty and it got up over two-hundred in regular attendees and I didn't have anybody to teach them. I was the only believer of any length at the time in the church, the rest were all brand-new believers, utterly sincere, but nonetheless, not with any adequate background. So, I applied first to Multnomah School of the Bible asking if they could send some young people over who could help in the Sunday school. And I didn't get a reply, except that somebody from their practical work department had shown up at a service and then I heard nothing more. Well then, I had a visitor friend from Spokane – the pastor of the church where I had attended as frequent as I could in Spokane – a very sweet-spirited, godly man, and he was doing a week of special meetings at Multnomah stadium, he and his wife were staying with me. So, I said to him one morning, 'see if you can find out why I never got any response from Multnomah.' So, he came back that night, he said, 'I'll tell you why you didn't get any response – you're a liberal. They won't send their students to a liberal church.' 'Well, what's the basis for that?' 'Well, a man was sent over and in the Sunday school you were teaching on the Sermon on the Mount and in the morning service you were teaching on the Commandments and that proves that you're a liberal.' Well then, I mean we still had all these kids coming and things happening by the grace of God. So, I thought, well, we've got to have somebody to help. And so, then there was another school, Cascade College in the area that had a spiritual background, so I applied there. Well I got three or four students sent from Cascade to help. But one morning one of these boys that was helping me said, 'oh, we had a wonderful class this morning.' So, I said, 'was so-and-so there?' 'Oh, I didn't notice, but we had this wonderful session on...' 'Was this person

there?’ ‘Oh, I didn’t notice,’ and finally I said to him, ‘are you teaching students or are you teaching lessons?’ ‘Oh, well,’ he said, ‘I’m teaching lessons.’ I said, ‘that’s not what we do here, we teach students here, that means we pay attention, we see how they’re responding, we watch their faces, we study them, we know who’s present, we know who’s absent because we’re burdened to help those that the Lord gives us.’ And that was a powerful lesson to me, and because I thought I could be careless there, I adopted the habit of taking attendance. So, after service I would go home, and I would go through my attendance sheet because I wanted to know who was present and who was absent. And I did that for all the years I was in the pastorate, and I never thought of myself as a very good pastor because I didn’t really like hospital visitation. I didn’t really care for sitting with the aged and so on. But, I think by the grace of God I did care about those that the Lord gave me, and that’s the main thing I see missing. We find here in Wheaton, let’s say at the College Church across the street, somebody could attend every service for seven years and then drop out and never go again, and nobody would know they dropped out because nobody knew they dropped in – nobody cares. And that, I think is a huge issue.

**DRC:** Thinking about your preaching, you started young - even I think, for your time period, that was still young. Do you remember your first sermon at the county home, I mean do you remember what the passage was or how it went, or just your feelings or anything?

**ROR:** Well, I just remember dad said, ‘you preach here,’ and I just took it as of God.

**DRC:** And then, so how regularly would you say you preached as a teenager up through going out to Washington?

**ROR:** For that long season, probably once or twice a week for years, and always with, well, I think, astonishment. I don’t even know now what my age was. I told you that my folks left the holiness church and became part of this Presbyterian church, and I don’t really know, but I suppose I was eighteen and the elders of this Presbyterian church approached me and they said, ‘pastor,’ excuse me, ‘the pastor has accepted a six-week

assignment by the US government to speak to the troops somewhere in Asia, and you've been appointed to take his place.' And I remember thinking, well, that's amazing, how could I possibly do that? And yet I did it, and did it with confidence that it was of God, even though it seemed like a remarkable thing to me, and that was a busy church; Sunday morning, Sunday night, Wednesday night, three or four bible classes during the week and I just took it in stride. But I have just one single memory from that, and there was a woman who really thought I was God's gift to the world - until one Wednesday night. I was dealing with the subject of carnal Christianity and I made it clear; to be carnally minded is death, to be spiritually minded is life. And so, this whole issue of a carnal Christian is make-believe that has no reality. It's completely wide of the biblical teaching, and I remember how angry that woman got. And she went everywhere denouncing me because I had slain her false prophet, I guess.

**DRC:** What did your sermon preparation look like when you were young, during busy times like that?

**ROR:** Well, I don't think my memory's perfect, so I wouldn't be able to give an adequate answer to that. But the one thing I do know is I would get down on my knees and say, 'Lord, I've been asked to speak here, and you know perfectly well I don't know what to do, so what should I do? And I would stay there until I knew what to do.'

**DRC:** Has that remained consistent then?

**ROR:** I would say that's been largely the pattern. Now I have at least slight familiarity with Scripture, and so I think I know what the Lord wants me to speak about, and then I go over that Scripture and I think, well, now I don't really have an adequate sense of the meaning of this odd phrase, and so then I do what study I can to make sure I have a hold of that correctly.

**DRC:** You mentioned earlier, just the use of an invitation, and just the impression Martyn Lloyd-Jones put on you. Did you ever use an invitation in the sense that many churches do today?

**ROR:** Yes, I think I have. Not with the regularity that would be typical because as I've tried to help you understand my background is anything but Southern Baptist. In a Presbyterian church – and perhaps it would be helpful if I said, I remained a Presbyterian while I was in college, but then when it was approaching time when I had to consider ordination to ministry, I had this friend, who I mentioned a moment ago saying he came with his family to stay with us while he was speaking at Multnomah. Well he was pastor of the Fourth Presbyterian Church of Spokane, Washington, which was the strongest Presbyterian church in that region, despite it being fourth. And it was a very, very marvelous church, with many, many blessings. But I remember talking with him and saying, 'I don't know what to do because I believe I have been called to the itineracy and I don't see how I could operate with freedom in the Presbyterian system.' And he and I had a significant discussion and he said, 'I think you should become a Congregationalist - it will not require any change in theology, but it will provide a range, and you're more suited to the range than a singular denomination.' So, then I became a member of the Congregational Church at that time and have remained since.

**DRC:** So, as you've grown older, in what ways would you say it's been easier to be an itinerate preacher, and how has it maybe become more difficult?

**ROR:** Well, as a result of facing that situation I just mentioned, can I function as I'm called in the Presbyterian, and realizing that within the Presbyterian denomination you have to serve the denomination, and you can only act with the approval of the denomination. Whereas that's not the case in Congregationalism. So, I became very, very clear that if I was going to effectively serve in various places I had to have at least a limited knowledge of what each group believed, because I could see that it would not be meritorious to violate the various groups by being stupid in terms of their essentials. And so, I adopted a policy as a youth. I was weighing this question, what would be the most divisive issues in the history of the church? Now I'm not saying I came to an adequate grip with that, but only as best I could under my circumstances – and so I'm asking

seriously, what has been divisive throughout the history of the church? But I came to the conclusion that there were three areas of great divisiveness; eschatology, which I've already spoken ever so briefly about, and the ordinances; baptism and the Lord's supper. And huge conflicts and splits have occurred, and we can almost account for the multitude of denominations, just on the basis of those three issues. So, I set my heart, not to violate in those three areas, and although I have personal convictions, I don't find it important to pay any attention to essential issue in the whole doctrine of eschatology to my way of thinking is be ready at all times. The essential in human baptism is not the amount of water that's involved, or the means in which that water is utilized, but that you have a transforming experience with Christ which you are giving public testimony to in baptism. And in the Lord's supper, that the Lord's table must not be open to anybody any everybody, but carefully fenced and involving only those who have truly sought the Lord and have repented of every known issue in their life where they are in conflict with him.

So, I've tried to hold to those three areas, and I don't know how successful I've been, but I don't think I've ever been responsible for splitting a church over any of those three issues. And I've just tried to hold to those all through the years, and obviously one doesn't know everything there is to know about a given group, but sometimes the Lord helps us along the way. For instance, I remember quite well a situation where I was preaching in a Lutheran church and I had some essential acquaintance with Lutheran viewpoints, and so, at some point in this series of meetings the senior pastor said to me, 'we've got a conflict brewing, stirred up by one of the younger men on the pastoral staff, but involving your preaching and we're going to meet in my office,' and he named the time and I think it would be helpful if you come. So, I was there, and he said – now, there were three men as I recall on the pastoral staff of this church – and so he pinpointed the younger fellow, he said, 'this man has been stirring up a mess, because in all the times you've preached you've never made any mention of absolution.' 'No,' I said, 'I haven't.' He said, 'now look, Mr. Roberts, we did not invite you to preach on absolution, we know

you're not a Lutheran. We asked you to speak on repentance and faith because we don't know anybody more qualified to speak on that subject than you are.' So, then he turned to the young fellow, and he said, 'now I want you to apologize to Mr. Roberts for the hornets' nest you've stirred up on absolution.' 'No! He's never said a word about absolution.' So, then he repeated himself, 'Mr. Roberts is not a Lutheran, we didn't ask him here to give us Lutheran viewpoints, he's been faithful in giving us the things we hoped he would give us. Now I want you to apologize.' 'No, I won't,' he said. 'I'm going to give you one more chance, you apologize to Mr. Roberts right now, or else you go to your desk, you pack your stuff and you leave here. You are done at this church as of right now if you will not apologize.' 'Well,' he said, 'I won't apologize.' 'Well then, you're out.' And he was, he was out, put right out. And I felt grateful to the Lord that I had at least understood what was meant, that I had no intention of involving myself in absolution, I personally think it's a mistake, but I don't find that the Lord's called on me to tell every Lutheran pastor that he ought to eliminate absolution. But I have tried over the years to fit in to the various groups – not to conform to their viewpoints – which when in error and they are part of the major parts - I don't hesitate to declare myself and the Word. But I don't see any point in stirring up a mess over nothing.

**DRC:** Talking about denominations; during your ministry, you've preached in many different denominations, and I think you've mentioned somewhere that that's changed from when you were younger to today...the different churches that are calling you to preach. Can you describe maybe what denominations you used to preach in, and how that's transitioned and changed, and why you might think that's happened.

**ROR:** Yes, well, in the early years because I was born in the north, and most of my acquaintances were in the northern tier, the bulk of my preaching was across the northern portion of the nation. And the churches that were functioning in those areas; so, Presbyterian, Methodist, Congregational, Episcopal, and so on. And the bulk of the invitations came from those directions, and as I've already said, I did seek to gain at least

an elementary education in terms of what those groups stood for so as not to unnecessarily violate them. And that remained the pattern for a fair length of time, and then, a pastor in Colorado, who was a Southern Baptist contacted me and asked me if I knew Bertha Smith. Well I did know her name and I knew something of the Shantung Revival and so on. And I said, 'no, I have met some of the ladies that she associated with, but I've not met her personally.' Well, we're having this conference, and we're wanting to invite her, and you, to speak. And so, we were able to agree on a date and pursue arrangements. Well, then Ms. Bertha died within a very short time of this engagement, so I never did get to meet her. But then, I don't know the timeframe, but maybe a year or two passed. Now this was called the Rocky Mountain Keswick Conference, wasn't really a Keswick conference but it was to that group of people's best understanding a Keswick conference. So maybe within year or two he again said now, 'we're having a man from the Southern Baptist denomination speak, and I'd like very much for you two to get acquainted.' And then, so we set the date with Henry Blackaby. Well then, a very odd thing happened, now I had been by that time maybe four or five times at this conference and with different speakers, there would always be at least two, sometimes three speakers. And so, then it was Henry and myself – I've forgot now who the third one was, but, as I was praying about what I was to speak on and I remember it was a Friday night, and we had been from Sunday through the week without any visible conflicts on my part. But, in trying to pray through the Friday night, I felt very strongly I needed to preach on Joel and the solemn assembly. And I was forced to remind the Lord that I had already spoken on that at that church, and it would be against my policy to knowingly speak on the same matter, and reminded him that he must have forgotten that I had. But it was very clear that no, he hadn't forgotten, but that's what he wished me to speak about. And I don't really think I was resisting the Lord, I think I was trying to be helpful, as if the Lord needs it. Anyway, it was very clear, I either spoke on Joel and the solemn assembly, or I refused to do what the Lord wanted. So, I thought, alright. So, I preached pretty much

a sermon very similar to at least to what I had preached on another occasion. Well immediately afterward, Henry came and he said, ‘now, we have a meeting at Glorietta tomorrow, and it has been upon me to give leadership to that meeting of denominational officials, and I hadn’t had any idea what to do, and now I know for sure what to do. So, I will be going and speaking about the solemn assembly.’ Well, that’s really when the change came, because after that, then Henry was at that time holding conferences throughout the nation, and of course Southern Baptist’s had begun to move north, and often not very effectively, but nonetheless doing so, and planting churches in a great variety of places. But because of that meeting in, well that was in Pagosa Springs, Colorado, then I began getting regular invitations connected with the Southern Baptist, and my chronology may not be accurate here, but the first one I recall was from Dallas. I don’t know if you’ve heard about the Cedars of Lebanon Conferences that were held at Dallas for well, twenty-some years. And there was a fellow who was the head Southern Baptist men of Texas, Bob Dixon, and he was the leader, and he invited me to speak at this conference – it was called the Cedars Conference – and so that then began this regular invitations from the Southern Baptists. And of course, I have never tried to pretend to be a Southern Baptist, but I’m not aware of any area in my life where I would disagree with true Southern Baptist doctrines as far as I know. I’m probably much more baptistic than anything else, though I don’t really think baptism by immersion is essential in any way to salvation. I’ve not been baptized by immersion, I’m not about to be. But I do think it’s the preferential way, and by all means it carries the greatest significance. But other than not being one, I’m probably about as close as you can get without being.

**DRC:** That’s good. Last thing on preaching; what ways do you think having your sermons available on the internet has impacted your ministry?

**ROR:** Well, that’s a question that I don’t think I’m in a position to respond to initially. And I think that you would probably find this would be generally true of the older generation. We didn’t put much stock in the digital. But I do remember being at

Louisville, and I don't even remember the librarian's name, but the librarian had lunch with me one day, awfully nice fella, wish I could remember his name. And this would have been thirty some years ago, but he said to me, 'Mr. Roberts, I think I'm somewhat acquainted with your work and I really feel I need to tell you that you're going about it very erroneously.' He said, 'let me explain the situation here,' and then he gave me a bit of a picture of the library at Louisville, and the percentage of books that were in disintegration because they could not afford a climate control system that affected the entire library, and that starting at this period up until that date, a significant percentage of books were printed on a high acid content paper, and those were in the state of disintegration. The only thing that would retard that would-be climate control where the humidity was kept at fifty degrees steady. And so, the thrust of what he said to me was, 'I think you ought to move into the digital, and begin to publish things digitally, and not put all your stress on the hardback, and you need to put out a premium publication and so on. I think your reputation is established there, but we think you should change.' Well, I didn't pay any attention, I thought he was wrong. I knew he was probably sincere, but I just thought he was mistaken. Turns out, I'm the one that was completely wrong. So, in regard to your question then, I, you see by the very nature of things, am kind of stuck in the old world of print and have never given adequate consideration to the digital. But something happened here a few months ago. I don't know if you've seen any of the filming on *Behold Your God* series, it's been produced by the Family Association in Tupelo. Anyway, a wonderful series that is gaining fairly wide circulation, and the spokesman for that, Paul Washer, myself, and several others are on those videos, but the main person is John Snyder. Well, John was here with a few of his folk, some months back, and the day before they were going to leave, the fella who does the bulk of the digital work for them said, 'what would you think of being on the' – I forgot what language he used, but – 'we're doing a program tonight...'

**DRC:** On the podcast?

**ROR:** Yeah. Well, it didn't mean anything to me, but I said, 'well, I'm not too engaged this evening, I'd be glad to do that.' So, we sat in the office over there, and he had a list of questions of things he wanted to discuss with me and people apparently were listening and calling in and asking questions. Well we went, I don't know how long, maybe an hour and a half to two hours, and then at the end he said to me, 'do you know how many people were listening?' Well, you had 6,800 or something like that, and I thought my word, I've just sat here in my office and answered some questions. I did so to the best of my ability, biblically, and we have an audience – it's not very often I speak in a church with an audience of 6,800. So, it dawned on me, well, you've been sort of turning your back away from a world of contact that could make a huge difference. So, I vowed then, that God helping me, if I have a few days left or a few years, I'll try to invest it more wisely. So, I'm just gaining a beginner's conscience on this and seeing that the impact could be great. And no, I had a phone call last night from a man somewhere in Virginia who said he had first contacted Henry Blackaby, and then came to a conference where Henry and I were speaking, and then concluded, I'm going to follow this man Roberts and not Blackaby. And he said he's been getting all these sermons on the Internet and he said it's been a phenomenal impact. So, I have a dawning cognizance of that. But we're completely dumb, neither Maggie nor I, now Maggie handles the emails – I don't even know how to do that – and what I would expect is we need some young person who understand all this, who has some time on his hands to do what we can't. Now, Paul Washer's group in Virginia created this website – I don't even know what they call it - trust is in the word, or in the title, but anyway, they have put up some stuff. And then, to my astonishment, another group – The Harvest Prayer Ministries Group approached me a couple years back and asked if I would give a series on revival here locally that they would film and put on the Internet, and I said, well, 'I don't think I could do that unless it was an audience.' So, then they rented a space at the college and got thirty-forty people to come.

**DRC:** Was that the College of Revival series?

**ROR:** Yeah, the College of Revival. So that was done. Well, then two weeks ago at the Heart Cry, Life Action had apparently turned a series of twelve, I think they said, into an album which they distributed for the first time, and to my astonishment people are grabbing them up. So, as I've said, I'm sort of getting an awakening in this area, but I'm so dumb in terms of how, that it would be way over my head.

**DRC:** I'm skipping a bunch of questions, because I feel you've answer them already. But, one on the bookstore. You're obviously right next to Wheaton, but who would primarily your customers here at the bookstore, who would you say they are?

**ROR:** Well, we were in California, as I've said, and I attended briefly, Fuller Seminary, and by and large, I did not appreciate the faculty at Fuller. But there were a few contacts that have remained through the years, and one of those was with Wilbur Smith. Wilbur was said to have the largest and best private library in the world. And in the conversation with him one time, he said to me, 'I'll tell you where you ought to locate your bookstore, and that's in Wheaton.' Well then later, when I received an invitation from the Graham Association to work with them on this project, and I already had this idea that Wheaton would be a great place, and so we came here, as I said, I think roughly forty years ago. And prior to that, we had been principally mail order. And when we came here, we opened a public establishment, and for years it was worth doing because we had ample help, I didn't myself ever get involved really in the detail work, but the business served its purpose for years. And, but what we found after moving to Wheaton, is that, Wheaton is a dying community, and the interest in a serious-minded bookstore, now I don't mean by that to say we have nothing but serious-minded books, we have lots of junk like everybody else. But we have had a vast array of the great books here. But Wheaton has never shown any serious interest. I know I would be hated for saying this, but Wheaton is not a well-educated – spiritually – community. When we moved here, it was a dry community and there were strong laws against alcoholism, but all that's a thing of the

past. This is now an intensely mobile community with rapid change occurring. There's still some large churches, but their impact is minimal. And this was, when we move here, called the holy city, or the evangelical Vatican. Well, now we've got a Muslim mosque right here in Wheaton. And so, the face of the town has changed very rapidly, and after moving here, we discovered that in actual fact, in moving from California to Wheaton we moved closer to hell. Because what really is hell, not that it's in total it, but I mean, hell on earth is religion without Christ, and that's what we've got here; huge amount of religious atmosphere but nothing really of anything essential. So then, going back to your question; it has proven to be a lousy place for a bookstore that handles serious material. And nowadays if we have any customers from the college they're kids who are on break, and they want something idle to read; some novel or a piece of fiction to read, perhaps well-known, but not any substance. So, it's been principally a mail order institution and our major customers have been institutions that are purchasing from us in lot. So, a school would say is going to open up an area of study like psychology, or Baptist history, or who knows what, they maybe get 6,000 or 8,000 books from us on a given subject. And for years that was the big element that kept this business hopping, that's all past now, because institutions are getting rid of their libraries, not building them. And, so who knows what the future will hold in that regard.

**DRC:** Do you have a favorite memory from being involved in the bookstore?

**ROR:** Well, you know, spread over, now, we started the store in nineteen-sixty so that gives a good many years of practical experience. And so, all kinds of things have happened, but some of them have been very instructive, and some of them have been, I think, just great kindnesses from the Lord. Almost anyone who has any interest in books is familiar with Spurgeon, and some at least have a familiarity with the Spurgeon library. And it was an incredible delight for me to be contacted by the seminary in Kansas City, and asked to prepare a bid for the Spurgeon library. And it was a really great treat for me to be able to go to the William Jewel College and spend a few days just appraising the

library, and then suggesting a bid to the seminary, which was just exactly the right number wanted. The arrangements – I have forgotten some of the details – but it was something like this, somebody bid within \$20,000 of somebody else and they would turn it into an oral auction, otherwise it would be a sealed bid auction. Well they offered at my suggestion; \$25,000 more than the next person, so they got just over this thing, and so Kansas City ended up with the Spurgeon library. And that was just a wonderful treat to sit for days and look over the books and read some of the inscriptions that Spurgeon made, and so on. So, I've had some incredible blessings, really. And that was fairly recent, within say three or four years. And my thinking has been, isn't that kind of the Lord to let me have as one of the great experiences of my time in the book world, handling the Spurgeon library and being successful. But then there have also been some very instructive experiences. I don't know if you are aware of the Hartford Divinity School, and I don't mean to be quizzing you on your church history, but it's a really revealing area and especially in what lies in your interest in revival. Probably the most useful of the American itinerates was Asahel Nettleton, and his controversy with Finney was I think of primary importance to the whole of the church. But Nettleton was involved with a group of men in Hartford in founding the Hartford Theological Seminary, and they had a glorious library, and they were not so much up-to-date on the latest publications, but they had a rich, rich heritage of things from the seventeen-hundreds and eighteen-hundreds. In fact, there were several hundred volumes of incunabula – is that a word you're familiar with?

**DRC:** What was the word?

**ROR:** Incunabula. It's kind of a book world term, not widely used outside of the book world. But anything published prior to fifteen-hundred falls under this category of incunabula. Well, Hartford Seminary had, I've forgotten the figure, but maybe six or eight hundred volumes of incunabula. Well, I think I could say that this way; one of my first tasks for the Graham Association was an appraisal of the Hartford Seminary Library

and help in the preparation of a bid because Wheaton College hoped to buy that library. So, I was there possibly we'll say two or three days, and then I met the librarian from Fuller Seminary. Now, we were not what you would call good friends, but you know, sometimes there are people that you know by name, who know you by name that you wouldn't dare to describe as a friend. And so, there he was, and he said to me, 'what are you doing here?' 'Oh,' I said, 'preparing a bid for one of the institutions.' 'Who?' I said, 'I'm not free to say, my commissions to be quiet on details like that.' 'Well, I can assure you, whoever you're doing this for you're going to lose, Fuller Seminary is going to buy this library.' 'No,' I said. His name was Calvin. I said, 'Calvin, I'll tell you what's going to buy this library, and that's money. Whoever has the highest bid will buy this library. And money, and bidding are connected with intelligence, so the guy who knows the most about books is the guy who will prepare the highest bid. And that will be the institution that gets it.' 'No, you're wrong, Fuller's going to buy this.' Well I said nothing to argue about. 'Well,' he said, 'the president of Fuller is coming in today and he's going to be with me, tomorrow we're going to look things over.' 'Well,' I said, 'I don't know him personally.' 'Well look, you stay in your hotel room tonight and as soon as he gets in we'll contact you and we'll work together.' He said, 'I believe you're right that the highest dollar is what will buy this, we can't perhaps produce the highest dollar ourselves. I don't know who you're working with, but between the two of us we ought to be able to produce the highest bid.' Well, I said, 'I'm sure the library could easily be divided and I'm willing to at least talk with the president about that.' Well, I waited and waited and waited, maybe about 11:30 that night, David Hubbard called – he's the president – 'David Hubbard here, what did you want?' 'Well,' I said, 'I didn't want anything, but Calvin had proposed that we work together to get this library.' 'Well, don't waste your time, you're not going to get it, we're going to get it.' And he hung up. Well, that was a treat to me. I had the feeling that Fuller Seminary suffered from an awful ego problem, and that confirmed it. And I've never changed my mind. I think of any school

that has a big ego is headed for trouble. And I think an ego for an institution is every bit as dangerous as an ego for an individual. Anyway, I went ahead, prepared my bid, and proposed to the Graham Association, and they submitted the highest bid, which I was sure they would because I knew who was working on it from other directions. And I knew the fella who was representing West Coast institutions was a book dealer who would call me to ask for advice about a given theological work, because he was not widely acquainted in the field of theology. So, you know I think that one - I'm going to break in here and tell you something just for your own sake – more than anything else. Here's a principle that I think every guy in Christian work needs to understand. Humility is not denying facts. Humility is keeping the facts in appropriate relationship with the greater facts. And I would like to suggest to you John the Baptist, remember his word in Luke 3, as for me, I baptize in water, and the Matthew version, for the remission of sin, but when He comes, He whose shoes I'm not fit to untie will baptize you in the Holy Spirit and fire. Now, let me press two incredibly important issues: number one; in that passage, we have a contrast drawn between the person of John and the person of Christ. And number two; we have a contrast drawn between the baptism of John and the baptism of Christ. Now, nobody in his right mind could think that John the Baptist was inconsequential. I mean, everything we know biblically, his father, that extraordinary visit from the angel, the words of his mother when Mary, do you remember these words? Elizabeth cried out, how does it happen that the mother of my Lord visits me? And we're told that the babe leapt in her womb when she spoke those words and she, and the babe, were filled with the Holy Spirit. So, nobody who understands the history could berate John or make him inconsequential. Humility is not denying facts. Humility is keeping those facts in right relationship to the greater facts. A man must be crazy to pretend he knows nothing about the Scripture, when by the grace of God, he knows a great deal. A man would be foolish to pretend his preaching has never amounted to anything when the Holy Spirit has used him in a broad fashion. But humility says, I keep that fact in

relationship to the greater fact; what am I in comparison with Christ? And then as I've said on baptism, here's where just seems to be some trouble – why should anyone make more of water baptism than a baptism of the Holy Spirit and fire. But almost every person I know avoids any thought at all about what that even means, let alone any experiential relationship with it. I mean, we're so afraid that someone will identify us with charismatics and some absurdity in the church that we act as if we don't have any interest in a baptism of the Holy Spirit and fire. Anyways, as I've been saying, just breaking in and giving a practical word for you and for your ministry in years to come. But what happened to me when I recognized that Fuller was so beset by pride that they could not even act practically. It had been announced in advance that only six institutions could bid on this library on a sealed bid arrangement, and they knew that, and they knew that they were included, but they didn't know who I represented, nor did they in any way even consider does Mr. Roberts know anything at all about theological books? They just wiped it out that doesn't matter, we're going to get it. Well in truth, when the bids were opened the highest bid came from here, from Graham Association of Wheaton College, but it was cast aside because they said, 'we're not willing to let some evangelical institution to get the library.' The library went to Emory University. Emory University had bid \$600,000 less for the library than Wheaton bid. So, what I told Fuller wasn't even correct, I said the highest dollar would get it, well it didn't. But then, by normal circumstances in an auction that's what does happen. But my point in mentioning that to you is the incredible array of experiences that the Lord was kind to give me – and that was a fabulous library – and so I've had the privilege of delving in that, delving in the Spurgeon library, buying countless numbers of pastors's libraries, buying up institutional libraries in great array. I mean, it's been an incredible experience, and at the same time all the while I'm only a part-time bookman with a real interest in the kingdom of God, but knowing deeply that I can't proclaim to preach the truth if I have to ask for money.

**DRC:** That's great. I guess on the other side of your book business, you've also been publishing and re-publishing some things. Specifically, I wanted to highlight in my dissertation your connection with J. Edwin Orr, and the fact that you've published or re-published four of his books.

**ROR:** Yes, that's correct.

**DRC:** How do you go about selecting books you're going to publish, or re-publish?

**ROR:** Well, perhaps a little background, just to help you to understand how all this came about. As I told you a few moments ago, the great success of this business was not selling a book here, and a book there, but putting together collections for institutions. And institutions – generally speaking – are not very honest if they're Christian, and one can expect far less of a so-called Christian institution than a secular business and part of what you experience is timeliness in payment is myth when so-called Christians get into the picture. So, sometimes the payment for these major collections would come very, very late, and sometimes at an awkward time. And I don't wish to swell this out of proportion, but I think you have adequate understanding to know that businesses are often run from the perspective of taxes. You do things because of taxes that you might not do under other circumstances. Well, in receiving an untimely payment for a library collection sold, at an inappropriate time, when approaching the end of the tax year we would be liable for a greater amount of money than made good sense. In facing that reality at one point, I thought, now, it doesn't make sense to cough out this amount of money on taxes that are unnecessary, and that could be wisely avoided had they paid on time I wouldn't have had to face this, but due to the payment is late, I'm faced with this, now what can I do to salvage this situation? Well then it occurred to me, we could publish, and what was invested then in the publishing would not be taxed on a lump sum basis but as the material sold. So that's what launched us into the publishing field. I think, if I'm recalling correctly, the first thing we published was the works of Thomas Boston as a twelve-volume set. And so that used up all of the surplus – surplus only in the sense that I tried

to explain to you. So then, I had to make some decision, will we try to become general publishers or will we regulate our activity on some sound basis. Well, because I was of the conviction that the puritan period came as close to New Testament Christianity as you could find, that we would designate that our publishing activity would be solely in the area of revival as it was blended in with strong periods of church history. And so, the puritan period of course being part of that. So, it was really a statement; our focus is revival and where the introduction of a great work can add considerably to the notion of revival, and that will be the guideline. So that's the guideline that we pursued. And then in terms of the Edwin Orr material, I had been friends – I think I can safely say - with Edwin Orr over a long period of time. In fact, he had taken an unusual interest in me, and he was always apparently regretful that I didn't have any earned degree. Now, he himself thought more highly of degrees than I ever thought. And I think he had maybe three, possibly four earned doctorates, and I'm not depreciating them at all. But in my early contacts with him, it was his trying to get a degree from me. For instance, my book on revival literature he thought that in itself was worthy of a doctor's degree and so he tried to get some institution, I think in South Africa, to grant a doctorate on it. But that never really interested me. But anyway, we had this contact and we were associated for years in these Oxford conferences. Well, at the time he passed away, his small ministry was passed on to me, and I was asked to serve as the president of his ministry, which I did for some time until we were able to – you know – I'm going to back up again just to make a statement. It takes more grace to close something than it does to open something. And a lot of institutions that have long been dead, should have been closed years ago are still functioning because they don't have the grace of closing. And so, I'm a strong believer in eliminating something when its usefulness has passed. And so, the Orr Association had served a glorious purpose and Edwin had a wonderful ministry, but there was nothing to keep going after his passing because it was his ministry. And so, I then worked with his family and the board in terminating that, and then the assets came to us, that is to

International Awakening Ministries, not to me personally. And so, it was natural then to pick up on the publishing of things that he had prepared that had not yet appeared in print. And because they fit the guideline I already mentioned, then it was appropriate action.

**DRC:** So, looking at the books you've been involved with publishing, or editing even, which one do you personally think is the most significant? That if you could recommend one of those books to someone.

**ROR:** Well that would be quite difficult because each one has its own purpose, and I would have to respond to your question in that regard. I believe that there's an incredible injury done to the whole subject of revival by the nonsense associated with the term. I didn't intend that the book that came out under the title *Revival* should be my last word on the subject, but my first word, and I think it has served well in that regard. I think I have correctly stated the biblical foundational issues in true revival, and the dangers even that revival ministries face and be drawn off track. So, I think in terms of its purpose, that served appropriately. It was not an easy experience. I told you that early on, when I was a youth I had thought to write a book on evangelism of Jesus, and realized the foolishness of that and abandoned it fortunately. And I had toyed with the notion of writing over the years, but never felt very clear about it, but then the president of Tyndale House Publishers approached me, and I had been teaching a Sunday school class at the church across the street for a season that this, the president, Taylor, Ken Taylor attended. And he asked me to produce a book on the twenty-third Psalm because I had been giving a series on Psalm 23. And I never got that finished, so nothing was ever done. But then, because of that contact he had the editor at Tyndale contact me at a time when I had just completed the book on revival, and he asked me for a manuscript and I said, 'well, I'm not really into that, but I do have this that I have been working on and you can see the manuscript if you'd like.' Well, he liked it and he said, 'we're going to make this the book of the year.' But then he turned it over to a sub-editor, and the sub-editor was a girl

who was, I think not very smart, and so then in a little while it comes back to me, the manuscript, with the corrections that they had made. Well, I'm not so silly as to think that the way I say something is the only way to say it, or necessarily even the best way, but just the best I can do under the circumstances. But anyway, I get back this manuscript where quotations are edited, and there were not many quotations in the book, but that was the first thing that caught my eye. So, I called the editor, I said, 'since when do you edit quotation?' 'Oh, we never do that.' 'Well, here it is right here.' Anyway, we entered into a period of several days of back and forth, and they finally said, 'well, we don't like your book, it's too direct, it's too plain, and we don't want to publish something like that.' 'Well,' I said, 'look, it's not going to bother me at all if you just say, contract cancelled, we're not going to publish the book. But it would bother me greatly if you publish a book under my name and my friends read it and they said, that's not Mr. Roberts, he wouldn't have said that.' So, I said, 'here it is, if you want to publish my book, you publish my book, not your book. You publish it the way I've written, if I've created an unwieldy sentence and you can straighten it, fine. But if you make any alterations whatsoever in the content of the book then I refuse to let you go ahead with it.' So, finally they ended up saying, 'well, we'll publish it just like you've written it, which is what happened.' But then, instead of making it the book of the year, it disappeared somewhere in their catalog and they were quite ashamed of it. But nonetheless, it sold something like 40,000 copies, which for publishing is above average. And so, then, I want to be careful here – but that encouraged me to think that maybe I could have some greater impact in writing, and so then I proceeded to do the best I could with the things that I felt the Lord was convicting me about. So, *Revival* from that singular perspective, and then, then I got quite burdened about the focus on salvation and I'll just give you a little more than you've asked for, if you don't mind. A dear friend, who, at one time ran a huge typesetting company in Chicago – but they lived out here – he was an older man, and retired, and he called me one day and he said, the pastor of Moody church is bringing his family and we're going

to have supper together, and I just thought it would be real fine if you and your family could come, and we have dinner together. Well, Erwin Lutzer is a lovely man, a very serious-minded, faithful Christian man. So, we went to this restaurant, and Erwin and the man's name was Harry, and I sat on one end, the children sat in the middle, and the wives on the other end of the table. And Erwin said to me right off, 'I understand that you tie repentance and faith together.' 'Yes,' I said. 'Don't you understand that the word faith is mentioned, and he gave a figure, jillions of times without any mention of repentance?' And as we discussed that a little then I said to him, 'now let me see if I understand what you're saying, that we decide biblical issues by a vote. And if there's a greater frequency of this than that, then this is the more consequential, and we elevate this above that?' 'Well, no, I wouldn't really say that...' Well, we discussed it as two men on a very friendly basis mind you, not any antagonism at all. So, in the course of things I said, 'look, I don't really know you, I only know you by reputation, I have had the impression that you're a well education man with at least one, and maybe multiple earned doctorates. Am I mistaken in that?' 'No.' 'Well then, look, I've been following our conversation as closely as I can, it seems to me that you're using terms as synonyms that are not synonyms at all.' 'Well, what do you mean,' he said. 'Well,' I said, 'you speak about salvation, about regeneration, about repentance, about faith, about conversion as if they're synonyms. I don't believe that's accurate. In fact, I said, if I may put it bluntly, I think that's treating the Holy Spirit as if he were dumber than I am. I find that very objectionable. I may not understand what the Holy Spirit says, but I do give him credit for incredible intelligence – vastly greater than my own. But I hear you using synonyms as if the Holy Spirit didn't know what he was doing.' So, then he said, well, he got out a pad and a pen, he said, 'alright, now you tell me what these terms mean and how they're used.' So, I did the best I could in the conversation of, you know, I see salvation as sort of the umbrella term and then underneath that, all these parts of salvation. And I said to him, 'surely you know the ordo salutis.' Well that was a term totally unfamiliar to him,

and I find to most of the church today. So anyway, that conversation, which led to a very friendly relationship, I don't mean in any way anything other than that – and then, not long after, somebody said to me, 'do you know Erwin Lutzer?' 'Oh,' I said, 'in a way, but not really very well. But why do you ask?' 'Well, he was quoting you on the radio.' 'Oh, well,' I said, 'we did have a serious conversation.' But anyway, thinking about that then led me to a book that I think is of, is of real consequence, *Salvation in Full Color*, and I had intended to do two books and the initial title was *The Gospel Umbrella* because as I said a moment ago, I see salvation as an umbrella term. But in talking with some friends from Europe – especially the Banner of Truth fellas – they thought that that was a poor title, that it would never sell in Britain, and so we changed then, the title to *Salvation in Full Color*. But my intent as I said, was to do two books; one, a book of sermons from great American revivalists, and then a book of my own on it, and I only got as far as the first. But that has been I think, very helpful to some because there is this general tendency to mix up what the Holy Spirit say. And to me, it's a very clear picture biblically, and those terms need to be carefully sorted. And so, that was issued by us with the knowledge that it would never sell well because we don't have any kind of a good distribution system. And it has not sold but a few thousand copies. And then, the other one was, I think *Repentance* has a place, and again, it was similar to the revival; someone came here and asked if I could give a manuscript to a publisher. I had been working on *Repentance* and I said, I doubt that it's anything your publishing firm would be interested in, but this is a book that I'm working on and I think it's nearly ready. And so, then that was turned over to Crossway. And the circulation of that has been terrible. And I think I can share this with you wisely, because I think our intent is the same – even though our backgrounds are quite different– I didn't write that in a hope of gaining acclaim, or recognition, but only because it seems to me the church has made a dreadful error in relegating repentance to a position of inconsequence, and I don't believe that's the case at all biblically, and I had no trouble with the publisher, now I told you the problem with

Tyndale House and how they wanted to change everything, and pretty much negate what I said. But on the other hand, Crossway was quite the opposite, they said this book is ready for publication just as it stands, it doesn't need any doctoring at all...

*(Interruption to discussion)*

**ROR:** I was going to add, the *Repentance* book has been, I don't know quite how to say this, it's troubled me greatly because I think it is a theme of incredible importance, but it's been treated by the church as ridiculous, and it's sold very few copies. And it's had some reviews that are just, well, not devastating, but, I mean, when somebody says it's a ridiculous book not worth being read, it hurts. When you're deep down knowing this is an immensely vital issue for the church. And I don't think it's sold more than 10,000 or 12,000 copies, which is a fraction of what it ought to experience. But I can say, and I can say this to you with great candor, I have learned an awful lot since writing each of those three books that I've made comment on, but I've not learned one thing that made me feel I had made a mistake in what I wrote. Now, they're inadequate – obviously – something better could be done by somebody else, but I stand by what I have written. And I think that the issue of repentance, is a far greater issue – the reason your first letter appealed to me was it seemed to me there was a possibility of a young fella that saw the significance of this. And I don't think the bulk of the church does.

**DRC:** Like I said, I read your *Revival* book first, but when I was convinced that I wanted to research your life further, was when I read *Repentance*. Because I agree – I mean, this has nothing to do with it – but just too much of even my life I feel like I've been involved in a church that plays church, but doesn't get to the heart of the issue, and I think that issue is because we neglect repentance, and we neglect what God's called us to everyday, because we need to everyday before him.

**ROR:** I don't know where this will go in the long run, but I have been, I've been thinking seriously and aiming toward writing a book on, I've varied in thinking in terms of title that I don't know how consequential that is in actual fact, but the basis would be what

church is Christ building? That's the intended theme and I've toyed with, *Is Your Church, Christ's Church?* which I think for the most part, people would have to honestly say, no. But what has gripped me greatly, and you've heard now my message at the Heart Cry apparently on this in part, but from the New Testament it is crystal clear what the real purpose of bringing the Gentiles into the picture is. That is almost totally overlooked. I mentioned to you, I think in almost a passing way, the statement about the church being made up of living stones - Christ the chief cornerstone - almost every church I know has more unconverted people in it than converted. There's the passage in 2 Peter on being born of the same imperishable seed. Anyway, I've outlined seven issues of that sort in the New Testament that constitutes the church Christ is building. And honestly, the picture says what's going on today has nothing in common with what Christ is about. And I thought well, I'll do a little message on this at the Heart Cry as sort of an opening edge, and last night I was reading the comments that Sammy Tippit made on the conference, I guess he was boasting about what a great conference it was, and he managed not to say a word at all about anything that I said. And I thought, well that's about what you expect these days. We play church, we pretend we're doing what Christ is doing, but we're long, long ways from it.

**DRC:** I'm just down to my last several questions, and the more, just random assortment, but you regularly talked about Word-centered and experience-centered revivals, and in your opinion, can you have a Word-centered revival that does not have a strong element of preaching? Or does a Word-centered revival necessitate that there is preaching?

**ROR:** I would say definitely that it necessitates strong biblical teaching, and what I've been speaking about in the decline of the Heart Cry conferences is a decline in true biblical preaching. I don't know to what extent when I use that phraseology people are thinking along the lines that I'm thinking. Surely, I'm not in any way discrediting experience. I don't know if you've seen the book *Scotland Saw His Glory*, I tried to present this in the introductory portion, that where there is a focus on experience, then the

fall away rate is much greater and using revivals in Scotland as illustrations, I tried to demonstrate that, but where the danger of that was immediately seen, and experiences were relegated to their appropriate place, and the Word was appropriated to, or raised to its proper place, and the movements had a much greater level of endurance. And I think that just in tracing the history of revivals, even though our knowledge of it is very limited still, the little that we know, demonstrates the validity of this, that a movement that focuses upon the Word will have a vastly greater impact, will last much longer, will have a miniscule percentage of fall away rates in comparison. So, I don't see that there's any argument, nobody's ever tried to prove me wrong in that. Though I have the notion that many don't play the slightest attention to it.

**DRC:** I feel like I know how you would answer this, but what would you say is the most neglected doctrine in the church today?

**ROR:** Well, without question the doctrine of God, and I have been feeling very wounded by the approach that the bulk of the church takes. In almost pretending that the God of the Bible is out of date, and that Christ is the focus and love is the grand issue. And you know, historically trying to trace this, though I don't think we ever do an adequate job, but at least we do the best job we know how under the circumstances. But it seems to me that Moody introduced this thinking about the love of God, and tried to make it clear that in his estimation focusing on the love of God is vastly more consequential than anything else. Well I think that's a grievous mistake, and being nothing but a very limited human being, and not having preached all that much when everything is said and done, I certainly wouldn't want to pose as an expert, but in the churches, I've been in, it just seems to me, that the focus is completely distorted. And that nobody can give any real significance to Christ who has not first felt very profoundly the conviction of their own sin. And the possibility of somebody feeling the conviction of sin and leaving God out of the picture all together just seems like an absurdity. You know, we talk with some who have at least a measure of understanding, and they have an interest with say, missions, so

alright, now you get sent out as a missionary. ‘Do you intend to start with Christ, and with grace, oh no? What would you start with?’ ‘Well, I’ll start with Genesis, and the fact that God created everything out of nothing, that God is Lord, that God has the right to speak, that He’s in control.’ So, when you back somebody down, they come out it seems, with the right answer, but is that what their church is doing? It’s a generally admitted fact that we’re living in one of the most pagan nations on earth, but the church always seems to start with grace, and never with God. And therefore, there’s no concept of evil, therefore no need of repentance, because I haven’t done anything worthy of repentance, and all that seems like such a fallacy. That’s why I asked you at one point have you seen the videos on *Behold Your God* and I’ll go beyond now what I did, I’ll make a strong recommend to you that you find those. And it’s a case – and I’ll just give you just a tiny history – the American Family Association, are you at all familiar with them?

**DRC:** No.

**ROR:** It’s a movement that has not gotten much in its favor. It began really with an anti-pornography emphasis, and for several years they were travelling the country urging people to take a stance against pornography. So, the movement itself has been principally an anti-this, anti-that, they’re anti-abortion now to a great extent. But that doesn’t, you don’t build anything strong by being against something. Strength comes from being for, obviously, what matters. So anyway, this little church in New Albany, Mississippi where I have known the pastor for a long time, and he’s been sort of under my counsel if I can use wording like that. And he has an earned doctorate from the University of London, but I had urged him to go to Wales and study revival history there and he followed my advice. Anyway, he’s at Albany Christ Church, his name is John Snyder. Because he and I have been good friends for a long time, I have gone to that church normally at least once a year, occasionally twice to preach a series. And because a fair number of people from the Family Association have actually attended the church in New Albany there’s been a bit of a tie to there. Well, three or four years ago, John

approached me and said the Family Association was wanting to produce a series on the doctrine of God, and would I be willing to do that. Well he and I mapped out a series of a dozen messages on the doctrine of God, and then as I prayed about it I thought, now this doesn't make good sense, I'm an old man and if God should use this it would be so much better if a younger man were at the forefront so there could be some follow through and some real application. And so, I contacted John, and I said, 'I don't really think the Lord wants me to do this, I think you should do this and I'll help you in any way I can, but I think this is a position you need to take.' Well the Family Association went all out with that, and they invested considerable amount of money for them – something like \$120,000 to produce this series and they travelled in a great many places, took original pictures, the best they could do with Mueller and so on, different ministries...Amy Carmichael, people like that. So, the way it's set up is essentially a brief historical review of some person who God used greatly and their focus upon the doctrine of God, and a development of the theme of the week - so to speak – that aspect of the doctrine of God, and then a very practical application. Then at the tail end of each video, a series of a half a dozen fellas including myself and Anthony Mathenia, and Paul Washer, Jordan Thomas, fellas who had been sort of under John's influence, therefore in a sense under my influence, would then respond to questions. And so, they sent photographers, a whole team of guys up here to film my responses to these several questions, and it's turned out to be quite an effective tool, and it's been very widely circulated. But the problem with it has been right from the start, it's not Family Association, Family Association is anti, not pro. And so, the fear all along was that they'd cancel out, but then eventually the thinking of the guys that were doing the work was, well they've invested so money in it now, they won't back out until they get their money back. Which is exactly what happened, when they had recovered their investment, then they sold the whole thing to John Snyder's little group of fellas. And so, they're circulating now through a new group called Media Gratiae. But anyway, so it's a wonderfully productive thing, and it seems to be arresting

people in a great many places, so we get very frequent calls, and emails, from people saying they have seen this video and been greatly impacted and in consequence have then resorted the Internet – which you were mentioning earlier – and have discovered resources they didn't know existed. And so, it's very useful and a second series is in the works right now, more on the attributes of God. But that's a very long answer to a very brief question, but at the heart of things, I don't think we're going to get the doctrine of grace right until we have the doctrine of God right.

**DRC:** As I've been writing, I have quoted in several ways you've restated that, that if we get the doctrine of God wrong, we'll have the doctrine of man and sin and salvation wrong...

**ROR:** Yeah, because everything follows as a sequence it is inevitable.

*(Interruption to discussion)*

**DRC:** Well knowing that lunch is coming, I think I can boil my last section of questions into just one question. And just kind of thinking about legacy, and how...if you could determine how the church moving forward would look back on your ministry and what God has done through you, what would you want them to see?

**ROR:** Well I don't really think I've ever given any consideration in that direction. When one deals with books like I have, one gains the sense that authors are only useful in their day, and when they're gone, they're gone. And the impact of their writings is minimal – almost non-existent until maybe the space of a goodly length of time, and then they may come back into some measure of usefulness for the more serious. I'm thinking of someone say, like Andrew Murray who had relatively little impact in his day, and now is having some. More close to home, Tozer. Tozer was pastor of an incidental little church of the same group where my parents were converted, holiness group. He had some impact, but *The Alliance Witness*, I mean how many people read *The Alliance Witness* on a regular basis? But now today he's having probably more impact than he did in his lifetime. And being rather close, we've had a little more personal contact with people

who've sat under his ministry and were blessed to – I mentioned the older man who ran the typesetting firm, he was a member of Tozer's church for years. And at one time I taught a fairly sizable group at the Wheaton Bible Church that were former church members of Tozer's. But honestly, it's not an area that I've given any consideration, and so when Paul Washer's group approached me about the website, I wasn't against it, but I never really have given much thought to that. Or when Life Action decided to put these College Revival disks together, I can see that they have some usefulness right now, and so I'm grateful. But I don't really have any thoughts, and I don't know to what extent you have thought along these lines, but I have observed over the years what a dreadful mistake some fathers make with their sons – you perhaps are aware that Spurgeon had a son, Thomas, whom he hoped would carry on the ministry, and it didn't work out. But every case that I know of where a father has gotten his son in to carry on, has been a grievous failure. And so, although I have a son whom I deeply love and respect, I think he's made a very wise choice in saying I'm not my father and I'm not called to be what he's called to be. And my prayer for my son has been for years and years that God would make him immensely holy and fruitful, more so than his father. But I don't think I have any business trying to designate a successor of any kind. And I think these matters are in the Lord's hands; if something useful occurs in a man's lifetime, he writes something that is of help to some and later on is rediscovered, helps some people – well, praise the Lord. But I don't think we can determine that in advance. I would like to know that I hadn't wasted people's time when they've come to hear. I would like to know that something of true biblical significance was drawn to their attention, and honestly, from my exposure to the past, and obviously in the book business, you do get fair exposure. I don't have any confidence at all in the novelty doctrines that are being introduced regularly. For instance, I think the whole idea of the dispensationalist is so utterly stupid. I can't imagine why anybody could be drawn into that nonsense. But the fact that you can pick

up a book that's four-hundred years old, or six-hundred years old and it's got exactly the same truth the Lord has shown you that morning, I think that's very meaningful.

**DRC:** Well, thank you, again. This has been helpful for my project and just helpful for me personally in my spiritual walk, and I do – I feel like sitting here with you is the same man I've seen preaching up front...

**ROR:** Well I would certainly hope so.

**DRC:** You've been consistent in that.

**ROR:** The catch is, I've told you about how being in the easy chair there at the Cove, and the fellow quoting from Jude, and how the Lord just really socked me with that incredible truth, and I've preached through Jude, I think one time I gave a series of sixteen sermons on Jude, and so it's not as if it's something I'm unacquainted with, but what strikes me is how incredibly the whole Scripture weaves together and you don't find this part contradicting that part. Although we've got some pundits who insist that the Bible is full of errors – they're jerks really – they don't know what they're talking about, they're men who have never read it. But to be able to say at eighty-five years of age, it's amazing to me how it fits together, how it is so clearly the Word of the Lord and how vital these issues are. Even though they're lost sight of by the present age, that, I find immensely important.

THE END

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I, R. O. Roberts, verify that the provided transcript is accurate to the best of my knowledge and recollection. I affirm that it is an accurate representation of my life and ministry in the areas discussed. By signing below, I also give permission to David Rocky Coleman to use the provided transcript as an official document as part of his dissertation research. By signing my name below, I am giving informed consent for the use of my responses in this research.

Name Richard O. Roberts  
Signature Richard O. Roberts  
Date 9/18/17

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## ABSTRACT

### AN EXAMINATION OF RICHARD OWEN ROBERTS'S THEOLOGY OF REVIVAL

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This dissertation examines Richard Owen Roberts's (1931-) life and ministry to present his theology of revival. Chapter 1 examines the need for clarity in the topic of revival for the church today. It discusses my background in the topic area, and the process which guided the study. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the research questions explored during the research and writing process of this dissertation.

Chapter 2 contains a biography of the significant points of Roberts's life and ministry. It presents some background of the time period in which he grew up, his early childhood, conversion, call to ministry, family life, preaching and bookstore ministries, and his legacy. A personal interview provides the content and support for the chapter.

Chapter 3 surveys Roberts's published works and sermons to develop a complete theology of revival. In particular it examines his teachings on the following topics as the topic relates to revival: definitions, God, man, conversion, the church, the community, results, hindrances, and true revival. Through the study of these areas the reader is presented with a thorough examination of Roberts's theology of revival.

Chapter 4 focuses on two significant connection points that Roberts has made in his ministry in revival—repentance and history. The chapter explores how and why Roberts has made these two connections. It examines his publications and teachings on the topics to demonstrate that from Roberts's perspective one cannot have revival without

repentance. Additionally, his ministry demonstrates that the church is best equipped for revival by examining the ways in which God has moved among his people in the past.

Chapter 5 demonstrates the need for Roberts's theology of revival in the church today. It examines the shift that the church underwent in its understanding and practices of revival over the last century and a half, and it discusses how Roberts's understanding of revival can bring helpful changes in this area. The chapter concludes with some critique of Roberts's theology and practice of ministry.

Chapter 6 concludes the dissertation with final thoughts on Roberts's theology of revival and its impact on the church. It also includes with several areas in which further study of Roberts and revival could be undertaken by other researchers.

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