

THE LATER MINISTRY of Dr. J. EDWIN ORR

By Robert Evans.

Introduction.

During the Twentieth Century, Dr. J. Edwin Orr contributed more than anyone else to the practice of, understanding of, and knowledge of the history of evangelical awakening and evangelical revival movements.

In particular, he has done more than anyone else to carry out the Scriptural injunction that these great works of God should not be forgotten, as was happening on a grand scale when he began his work. His early ministry has already been studied and described well, but not his later ministry. So a study of his later ministry is, in my opinion, eminently worthwhile, and of great interest to anyone who shares an interest in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the evangelization of the world.

Over many years I have gained an extensive knowledge of the literature about evangelical revivals, and the history of the Great Awakenings, and I possess a large library on the subject.¹ So I have a good knowledge of books by and about Dr. Edwin Orr. I spent two nights at the Orr's home in 1974 and in 1983, and saw some of his work there. He stayed in our home for a couple of nights in 1979, when I was a minister in a country parish on the North Coast of New South Wales, and I traveled with him for about a week. I had a small amount of correspondence with him.

As will be described in this paper, I had a certain degree of access to his personal papers when I visited his home, but, despite that, it would be possible to make a great improvement to this essay if his personal papers were more fully available for examination. The archives at Fuller Theological Seminary have almost no materials about Dr. Orr or his work. Consequently this paper has been written in a certain way, by force of circumstances, and by the availability of resources.

Dividing up the ministry of Dr. J. Edwin Orr into earlier and later periods is artificial, as it is with many other people. He lived a long life of service to God, and certain main themes continued throughout his life, so, in that sense, making a division can be quite misleading. But there is a deep disparity between the two periods in the following way. Interesting literature, both written by himself, and also written by others, exists about Dr. Edwin Orr's earlier life and ministry, but nothing of similar value has been written about his later ministry. Despite the extent of the information that can be found on the internet, not all that much can be found there about Dr. Orr describing the last 25 years of his life – a time when strategic work was accomplished.

For the purposes of this essay, therefore, a dividing line will be made at the year 1964, thus creating the years before that as the earlier period of his ministry, and the years after that date as his later ministry. He died "still in harness" in 1987. All of his publications during this later period will be considered, as well as several posthumous publications.

¹ See my website at - www.revivals.arkangles.com

Edwin Orr's Earlier Ministry, in outline.

Although this is a very brief outline, his early ministry will be described here in terms of the published literature which arose from it, and which describes it, whether written by him, or by others.

James Edwin Orr was born on 15th January, 1912, in Northern Ireland, having a parentage which eventually allowed him to hold both British and American citizenship. He had a normal school education, but he had to leave school in his mid-teens to be the family breadwinner. In 1933, in an attempt to obey God's calling upon his life, he left his widowed mother and remaining siblings at home, and embarked upon a long hitch-hiking expedition around England, and then through many parts of the world, until at a very young age he became one of the most widely traveled persons alive. At all stages he trusted in God to supply all of his needs and to give him a ministry, and also to supply his needs in such a way that he could also send enough money home to support his mother.

The literature describing these early travels and spiritual experiences consists of a series of books he wrote himself, and published through the London publisher, Marshall, Morgan and Scott. These books provided a strong inspiration to many Christians, encouraging them to trust in God, as their author had to do. They made him very widely known around the world in evangelical circles, and opened many doors for lecturing and preaching. Some of these opportunities were more geographical in emphasis, but they also provided a strong spiritual content. Some of these opportunities were evangelistic in nature, while others allowed him to make an emphasis upon revival, and upon the deepening of the spiritual life. This series of books continued until the beginning of the Second World War, and with one other being published at the end of the War. There were eleven autobiographical books in this series, with the last one appearing in 1948.²

In this period, two other books of his were also published, one being a biography of Dr. Oswald J. Smith, Pastor of the Peoples Church in Toronto, Canada, with whom Orr was associated for a short time. The other was a book about ways in which Christians can hinder revival in the churches, despite often having good intentions. It was called *The Church Must First Repent*.

He visited Australia in 1936, and made an extended visit with a team of preachers in 1938. The National Library of Australia's "Trove" website reveals many references to this visit which appeared in secular newspapers. And the evangelical paper *New Life*, which began publication in 1938, during this tour, is also a helpful source.

During much of the Second World War, Orr was able to prosecute several academic programs, so that he attained basic degrees, and then a doctorate at Northern

² J. Edwin Orr. *Can God- ?* 10,000 Miles of Miracle in Britain. M.M. & S. 1934.

Prove Me Now. (saith the Lord.) 10,000 Miles of Miracle to Moscow. M.M. & S. 1935.

The Promise is to You. 10,000 Miles of Miracle to Palestine. M.M. & S. 1935.

Times of Refreshing. 10,000 Miles of Miracle through Canada. M.M. & S. 1935.

This is the Victory. 10,000 Miles of Miracle in America. M.M. & S. 1936.

All Your Need. 10,000 Miles of Miracle in Australia and New Zealand. M.M. & S. 1936.

If Ye Abide. 10,000 Miles of Miracle in South Africa. M.M. & S. 1936.

Such Things Happen. 100,000 Miles Around the Globe. (a reduced combination.) 1937.

Telling Australia. Adventures in Experimental Evangelism. M.M. & S. 1939.

Through Blood and Fire in China. M.M. & S. 1939.

I Saw No Tears. (New Guinea to Tokyo.) M.M. & S. 1948.

Baptist Theological Seminary. His studies up to 1943 also included shorter courses from many other institutions with differing denominational affiliations. Some of these degrees or courses were achieved in only half the time that was normally supposed to be taken in completing them. The highest degree he obtained at this stage was the Th.D. degree from Northern Baptist. The thesis he wrote for this degree was about the 1857 Revival in the United States. This thesis was not published. It was improved upon during his two years at Oxford, and the combined results were published in 1953.

By the time he graduated a doctor he was also a chaplain in the U.S. Air Force, and towards the end of the War with Japan, he served in several front line locations in the western Pacific.

1947 and 1948 were spent by the Orr family in Oxford, England, where he completed a Doctor of Philosophy degree, writing a thesis on the nature and scope of the great revival in 1859 in Great Britain. It was this degree more than the earlier ones which established his reputation in academic circles, and provided a solid basis for the extensive academic work and historical research he did in later years. Orr wrote several books as a result of this research. The most valuable one was the book which flowed from his Oxford thesis. His book on the 1857 Revival in the United States of America was published also in 1953, and subsequently extensively revised twice, with the third and best revision being published two years after his death.

After 1948, the Orr family established their home in Brentwood, a suburb of Los Angeles, California, and here he pursued his calling in the promotion of interest in revivals. What became known as the Mid-Century Revival movement took place in the five years or more that followed, which included working with leaders such as Armin Gesswein and Dr. Henrietta Mears. This revival also included work amongst members of a Christian fellowship of Hollywood identities, and the launch of Billy Graham as an international evangelist. He wrote three books about aspects of these movements, and his role in them, which, while not autobiographical in the way his early books had been, were nevertheless important sources of information about his life, work and thought. One of these was perhaps his most useful book, *Full Surrender*, published in 1951, which provides an excellent outline of his theology, and his teaching on revival.³

Much of 1952 was spent by Dr. Orr preaching in Brazil, and a profound revival movement occurred during that time. Sadly, no adequate book in the English language has been published describing this revival.

Dr Orr toured Australia and New Zealand extensively with a team of preachers in 1957 and 1958, with a message on revival.

Towards the end of the 1950s, his chaplaincy experiences had produced a greater maturity in his ability to stand as a rational defender of the Faith, in confrontation with people who might have been atheists or agnostics, or people who could not believe the doctrines of the Christian Faith. Christian Apologetics became a deeper interest, and one which he used very extensively in addressing students at various Colleges that he visited. He had done this previously before the War, but his chaplaincy experiences sharpened

³ J. Edwin Orr. *Good News in Bad Times*. Signs of Revival. Zondervan. 1953.
The Inside Story of the Hollywood Christian Group. Zondervan. 1955.
Full Surrender. M.M. & S. 1951

this whole area in his mind. Around 1960 his first book appeared in this area of missionary and evangelistic outreach.⁴

Biographical Publications.

In 1947, the first biography appeared outlining Orr's life and ministry so far. This was *Edwin Orr – The Ubiquitous Ulsterman*, by Newman Watts, which was published in England. This was an interesting work, which contained a good deal of information about a man who had become a well-known preacher by that time. In 1954, this book was revised, and made a little smaller, by Newman Watts's brother, Lincoln Watts. It was published in India, and so far as I can see, did not gain a great deal of circulation in other countries. I have never seen a copy of this second edition.

The second substantial biographical work about Dr. Orr's life and ministry up to that time appeared in 1959. This was first written as a thesis for a Master's degree by Charles Murray Albertyn, for what was then called Pasadena College, a College in Los Angeles, under the aegis of the Church of the Nazarene. The College has now moved to San Diego, and changed to be the Point Loma Nazarene University. Albertyn was a student who baby-sat the Orr's home in Brentwood during 1957 and 1958 while Orr was making an extensive tour of Australia and New Zealand with a team of preachers, and his family. It was arranged that, with allowances for privacy, Albertyn would be able to write his thesis on Orr's ministry, having access to Orr's private papers, correspondence and library, as they then existed. At first there was an agreement that the thesis would not be published, no doubt to protect any living person who might be mentioned in the thesis. However, after its completion in 1959, the thesis was modified, and was published in 1960 by William Carey Press, although I have found it extremely difficult even to cast my eyes upon a copy of the book, let alone to obtain a copy and read it. About seven years ago when I was in London, I was at last able to see a copy of Albertyn's book - in the British Library, and I had them photocopy the chapter on Brazil, about which I was especially keen to get some more information. Only a few pages, but the British Library knew how to make photocopying very expensive. So I did not copy the whole book. In Richard Owen Roberts's *Annotated Bibliography of Revival Literature*, he says simply that a copy existed in the Library of Congress. This was most unusual, because Roberts had built over many years a great library of books on revivals, as part of his second-hand books business. This emphasized that he did not have a copy himself, proving how scarce the book really was.⁵

As I began to cast about in preparation, seeing if I could somehow get enough information to make an attempt upon writing this essay, I had a very generous response from the Ryan Library at the Point Loma Nazarene University. They loaned me their copy of Albertyn's thesis, through the international inter-library loan system, despite my living in Australia. No Australian university library would have done that, I am sure, even if I lived in the street next to the library. So, I was able to make a copy of the thesis for myself, and to discover to what extent the published version differs from the original. The title of the thesis – *The Contribution of J. Edwin Orr to Evangelical Christianity in the Mid-Twentieth Century*.

⁴ J. Edwin Orr. *Faith That Makes Sense*. London. Marshall, Morgan and Scott. 1960.

⁵ Richard Owen Roberts. *An Annotated Bibliography of Revival Literature*. Wheaton, Ill. Richard Owen Roberts Publishers. 1987. page 7.

The third biographical book appeared in 1964. It was written by Bishop A. J. Appasamy, who not only had a great academic record of his own, but was a former leader in the Church of South India, having direct experience of Orr's work in the sub-continent, and more obviously knew Orr personally. It was called *Write the Vision: - A Biography of J. Edwin Orr*. It is an excellent book, covering much the same territory as Albertyn's thesis. It does not say anything about the five years that came between the appearance of Albertyn's thesis and book, and the publication of Appasamy's own book.

Appasamy does say, however, that a list of other books had appeared by then which included either information or sections about aspects of Orr's life and work, and he provides a list of these books.⁶

It seems clear to me that Albertyn's thesis is the best of these biographical statements, and that Bishop Appasamy's book gains many of its qualities from the way it has depended upon the thesis for the information it contains. Naturally, Appasamy has his own contribution to make, especially because of his personal knowledge of Dr. Orr, and for his insights into Orr's work and influence in India.

After 1964, a New Academic Role.

About this time, a new and major academic venture was embarked upon in the northern suburbs of Los Angeles, not far from where the Orr family lived in Brentwood.

Charles E. Fuller had for many years maintained a widespread and international radio evangelistic ministry, and as he neared the end of his career, it was determined that a new Theological Seminary would be established in his name. This became the Fuller Theological Seminary in the suburb of Pasadena. In due course it developed specialized Schools within the overall structure, to teach evangelical theology, world mission, and pastoral work. It was a graduate school, that is, it did not teach undergraduate courses, or offer undergraduate degrees. Naturally, in order to make this project succeed, academic staff had to be obtained, who not only agreed with the aim and theology of the Seminary, but who also had outstanding academic records and qualifications.

In pursuit of this aim, in 1965, Dr. Donald A. McGavran, and the Australian Methodist missionary, Dr. Alan R. Tippett, were asked to leave the Northwest Christian College in Oregon, where they were conducting a school on church growth, to form the Institute of Church Growth in the School of World Mission at Fuller Theological Seminary.

Tippett was never more than a part-time Professor at Fuller, but McGavran became Dean of the School. In 1966, Orr was asked to join the staff also as a part time Professor, which he accepted. Orr was also a part-time professor, and at other times he went off on preaching trips or pursued work of other kinds. McGavran became an outstanding world leader and "expert" in his area of "Church Growth." It was a grand theme that he had been developing for many years.

This was a subject which seemed at first to be closely akin to Orr's area of "Revival and Evangelical Awakenings." As time passed, and as "Church Growth"

⁶ A. J. Appasamy. *Write the Vision. A Biography of J. Edwin Orr*. London. Marshall, Morgan and Scott, plus other publishers. 1964. pages 243 – 244.

became such a popular subject with many, Orr struggled to make a stronger differentiation between these two areas. We will note these efforts later.

Two New Books.

There were, however, two areas in which Orr developed his strengths, leading to the publishing of important books, during the later parts of the 1960s.

The first of these areas concerned the history of evangelical awakenings in India. Orr had been in India several times, and had preached in many parts of the country. He also delved into the story of evangelism in India, and identified the main periods of revivals which had occurred there. When he lectured at Christian seminaries in India, he had included lectures on the stories of revival, which thrilled and fascinated many of the theological students. Bishop Appasamy knew of this, and encouraged Orr to take the time to prepare a book on the subject. This led in due course to the publication in India of a book entitled *Evangelical Awakenings in India*.⁷ There were already a modest number of books about Indian missionary work, which included descriptions of revivals, but these were fragmentary, and the need which Appasamy recognized at this time was to provide a coordinated account from the beginning of missionary work in the sub-continent. The most notable of these earlier books was Helen Dyer's book *Revival in India, 1905 – 1906*, but this had been published originally in New York and in London in 1907. An Indian edition of Dyer's book, printed in India, was not published until 1987.⁸

The other area of new publication arose from the fact that Orr's Master's degree at Northern Baptist, some years before, had been about education. In the 1960s he was able to develop the main areas of this historical research, and he enrolled for a doctorate at the University of California in Los Angeles, the campus of which was not far from where he lived. His book, *Campus Aflame*, first appeared in 1971, and described the story of revival movements in Colleges from 1800 up to 1970, including some of his own work preaching in American Colleges. The thesis from U.C.L.A. was called *Evangelical Awakenings in Collegiate Communities*. A revised version of *Campus Aflame* was published posthumously in 1994. The main difference between this later edition and the original edition is the provision of a substantial index and a better bibliography. It still ends at 1970.⁹

His Work at the School of World Mission.

His work at the School of World Mission at Fuller Seminary allowed Orr to develop further his own researches, and by various means he was able to use his students to further this cause, as well as providing a good research exercise for the students. In some instances, students came from parts of the world where there had been revivals, which had not been well documented. They were set the task of writing a proper account of these movements. Other students prepared papers on aspects of revivals which were better known. His students made their own researches in these matters. Orr supervised their work, and then printed the papers that some of these students wrote.

⁷ J. Edwin Orr. *Evangelical Awakenings in India*. New Delhi, Masihi Sahitya Sanstha. 1970.

⁸ Helen S. Dyer (compiled by), *Revival in India*. A Report of the 1905 – 1906 Revival. Akola, Maharashtra. Alliance Publications. 1987.

⁹ J. Edwin Orr. *Campus Aflame. A History of Evangelical Awakenings in Collegiate Communities*. (edited by Richard Owen Roberts.) Wheaton, Ill. International Awakening Press. 1994.

There were two occasions when I had the privilege to spend a night under the Orr's roof in Brentwood, one in 1974, and the other in 1983. By the time the second occasion occurred in 1983, I knew at least that he had some papers of this kind in his personal files, and some from the Oxford Reading and Research gatherings. I wanted to get copies of several of them, so I asked if I could see them. A large box was produced. I was given permission to take a copy of any papers for which there were multiple copies. Also I could photocopy a few others at Fuller the next day. I carefully copied also what seemed to be an index of the class papers and Oxford addresses, and papers from other sources, which he had in his files. He also had some as cassette audiotapes.

Regarding those papers listed which were actually class papers, and the result of student research, a statement would appear on the front cover of the paper to say which course the class work was prepared for, who did the research, and that it was presented to Dr. J. Edwin Orr – Professor. These papers were printed on quarto sized sheets of paper and with double-spaced lines in the text.

Other titles in the index had come from papers presented at the Oxford Reading and Research events. In some cases the text included a comment to the effect that it was being presented at Oxford. Many of these papers were printed in octavo size and had been printed by using Dr. Orr's own machine. In 1974 I had seen his machine linked to a typewriter, which punched holes in a ribbon, thus producing a permanent record and allowing extra copies to be printed – an early form of computerization which he operated.

The index filled, more or less, eighteen quarto pages of listings, divided according to the general area of the world, and country, which was involved. Each had an index number identifying which country it belonged to, the title of the paper, the years it referred to, the name of the author, the year the research was done, and then a number showing how many copies of the paper Dr. Orr possessed (usually one copy, or just a few). The list included not only papers written by his students, but also papers he wrote himself on various subjects, and papers that he had culled from other authors. For example, I recognized one of the papers as something I had arranged for him myself when he had visited my church in country New South Wales in 1979. It was a small thesis written by another minister of my denomination about the Revival in West Timor, following the fact that this minister had lived in Timor for several years while the revival was in progress.

The Index also included a small number of typed-out sections from authoritative books relating to revivals in different places. For example, I brought two of these back home with me. One contained sections from Theodore Muller-Kruger's history of Protestantism in Indonesia. Muller-Kruger lived and worked in Indonesia for many years, and he belonged to the Rhenish Mission. The book was written in German and had been published in Stuttgart in 1968. This typed paper was a translation into English. The other example, also by Muller-Kruger, contained a translation of a chapter from another of his books about the history of the church on the island of Nias. One of the class papers had been about "the Great Repentance on the Island of Nias." – a strange and wonderful movement of the Holy Spirit. Quite possibly the preparation of this class paper by one of his students had provided Orr with the opportunity to become possessed of the Muller-Kruger material as well. Or, perhaps he simply knew Muller-Kruger already?

The range of subjects relating to revivals which is covered by papers in this Index is enormous.

The Index.

Overall, the index is divided into six main sections. In the “Africa” section, for example, the list is one and a half pages long. It lists eight papers about countries in Central Africa, 17 papers on East Africa, 21 papers on southern Africa, and 14 papers on West Africa.

The section on North, Central and South America lists five and a half pages of papers, five are about Canada, one is about Greenland, 184 titles are on the United States, 17 titles about Brazil, five on Central America, 14 on Equatorial America, 7 on Latin America generally, two on Mexico, six papers were on Chile and Argentina, and nine papers were on the West Indies. A small number of these names had been crossed out.

The section about European countries filled three and a half pages. Two papers referred to Bohemia, 41 referred to England, 3 to Finland, one to Latvia, seven to Norway, two to Romania, six to Russia, fourteen to Scotland, one to Spain, five to Sweden, three to France, twenty to Germany, three to Greece, two to Holland, two to Hungary, eleven to Ireland, two to Italy, three to Scandinavia generally, one to Switzerland, and 21 to Wales. An add-on list is also referred to, which I do not have.

The “South Seas” section fills two pages. Eleven refer to Australia, 34 to Indonesia, Singapore and Madagascar, 36 refer to Melanesia. One refers to New Zealand, two to the Philippines, four to Polynesia, and one contains a general bibliography.

The “Orient” section contains 21 papers on China, 19 on Japan, thirty on Korea, one on Bangladesh, one on Pakistan, five on Sri Lanka, 36 on India, plus a reference to the add-on list.

There was also a kind of “Miscellaneous” page which listed five papers on Biblical subjects, nine papers on the methodology of revivals, seven papers on social reform linked to revivals, and fourteen papers on theological issues, plus, again, a reference to the add-on list. Total – six hundred and sixty two papers altogether, with a small number crossed out, but reference to an unknown extra number on an add-on list.

No doubt these research efforts and experiences were good for the students, as well as providing good resources for other later researchers, along with the resources of the Fuller Library. But Orr himself was able to make even better use of these resources than the students could do.

They provided a great foundation, expanding the enormous resources that he already possessed as a result of many years of travel, and of research, for the major publications which Orr produced in the first half of the next decade – the early and mid 1970s, as we shall see.

Apart from the “add-on” list, this index was probably fairly complete. Although Dr. Orr did still go to Fuller from time to time, in 1981 he had retired from the professorship, and from teaching responsibilities there. He was seventy years of age, or just over, and he died four years later. So there was not a lot of time to add very much to this index.

There were some other pages as well which should perhaps have been included in the index. These were lists of cassette tapes containing some of Dr. Edwin Orr's lectures. There were twelve revival lectures, the majority of which were about the revivals in the periods around 1905, 1922 and 1948. But one was the sound track from a motion picture which Campus Crusade had made of Orr's short lecture on *The Role of Prayer in Spiritual Awakening*, referring to the prayer movements from 1800 to 1904.

There were 16 lectures on theological subjects, seven lectures on church history, and five lectures on more devotional subjects related to revivals.

There was also a list of cassettes which flowed from the Oxford Reading and Research lectures, mainly from 1981 and 1982. There was also a letter, on the official letterhead, from the 1983 Oxford gathering, advertising the cassettes from this series. I bought a number of these cassettes.

These lists, and the index as a whole, give us a good bird's eye view of what Dr. Orr was able to achieve through being a professor in this area at Fuller Theological Seminary's School of World Mission from 1966 to 1981, and even after that.

Dr. J. Edwin Orr's Definition of "Revival," and "Spiritual Awakening."

This definition will be discussed here in a slightly different manner from what appears in many of his writings. This has been done so that differences of "world-view" can be highlighted between Orr's approach, and the world-views of others who deal with this subject matter.

Dr. Orr's definition assumes the world-view, thought-forms, theology and experiences of the New Testament in setting out his definition. In particular, his definition is based in the words of Saint Peter, in chapters one and two of the Acts of the Apostles, especially where he quotes from the prophet Joel, and where a description is given of the various events of that day.

"This is what the prophet spoke of: 'God says, "This will happen in the last days: I will pour out upon everyone a portion of my spirit; and your sons and daughters shall prophesy; your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. Yes, I will endue even my slaves, both men and women, with a portion of my spirit, and they shall prophesy.'"" (verses 16 – 18.)

"When they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the apostles, 'Friends, what are we to do.'" (verse 37).

"They met constantly to hear the apostles preach, and to share the common life, to break bread, and to pray. A sense of awe was everywhere, and many marvels and signs were brought about through the apostles." (verses 42 – 43.)

As a result – by definition – a revival is an outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon Christians in answer to prayer, which leads to empowered preaching, deep conviction of sin, and the conversion of numbers of people, which can be recognized in terms of a re-appearance of events on the Day of Pentecost.

This definition is very clear and simple. For any evangelical Christian, this definition is perfectly obvious and understandable. Yet, the philosophical implications

are that this definition cannot be transferred without compromise into any other prevailing world-view.

Therefore, revivals which occur in modern history have to be defined in these same terms, and described on the basis of this same New Testament world-view, or else they cannot be discussed with full meaning in terms of Edwin Orr's historical work.

Furthermore, the modern revivals have to be viewed and described in terms of the prayers of the saints, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on saints and sinners, and the Spirit's convicting, converting, justifying, and sanctifying office work.

Here we see the basis of the fact that most other modern historians did not take proper notice of Dr. Orr's work, and did not engage with him intellectually. Their work operated on the basis of some other world-view, in which revivals could be described in other and different terms - sometimes, so different, indeed, that one could wonder whether it was the same thing which was being talked about.

Therefore, as we shall see, Dr. Orr's main work in his later years, was in trying to call historians back to a new study of what really happened in these great modern revivals. In this way he hoped that the historians would be able to recognize that the great awakenings were indeed, great movements of the Holy Spirit.

This hope, this expectation, however, would have involved Orr's opponents in changing their world-view, and adopting the New Testament world-view. It would have involved the conversion of the secular historians to New Testament Christianity. Sadly, most of them were already so engrossed in some other secular, sociological, self-oriented or psychological world-view, that such a conversion experience was not likely to occur.

The secular historians were also bogged down in unsatisfactory ideas about the nature of history itself. The secular view assumed that it is never satisfactory to use the idea of "God" as the cause of anything in human history. Everything has to be able to be explained without reference to "God." It is clearly impossible to write any adequate account of Christian history on this basis.

On the other hand, the New Testament world-view does include God as a real cause of many things. Without this possibility, there is no Incarnation, no Gospel, no Christian Hope, no resurrection, no Judgment Day, and therefore no love of God, and no ultimate justice.

What to Look for in a Description of a Revival.

The definition provided by Dr. Orr has a direct implication for anyone who writes about a revival, or anyone trying to find out what went on during a revival.

The definition tells us what the key factors are, and what to look for.

Firstly, we must look for signs of Christians thirsting after God, and praying for growth in our experience of Jesus Christ, and of the fullness of the Holy Spirit. We pray also for those events and characteristics which make up the revival.

Then, when the revival starts to take shape, and signs of the Spirit's work start to appear, we must look for evidences of the Office Work of the Spirit, especially as described by Jesus in John's Gospel, and by events linked to the revivals in the Acts of the Apostles.

In particular, we need to look for the way the Spirit guides the Lord's people, the way he empowers their serving, the depth of conviction of sin that occurs in believers, and also in unconverted sinners, and the matters about which they are convicted.

We need to take notice especially of conversion stories; of the depth and satisfactory nature of these conversions, of growth in Christian holiness and maturity. We need also to be more aware and alert about matters over which spiritual deceptions might have taken place.

Transformed lives will follow, as well as new methods of service being offered to God, and signs that society is being changed and enriched. The social impacts are not a part of the revival, but can reveal very significant details about the work of God.

Sadly, many descriptions which have been written and published of revivals do not describe or reveal these details. Often, far too much attention is paid to superficial and spectacular parts of the story, especially if there are some very noticeable psychological phenomena taking place.

Even quite mature Christians can write stories about revivals which emphasize the superficial, and do not mention the spiritual aspects which are so fundamental.

When Dr. Orr called for the great revivals to be re-studied, he was calling for students and historians to take notice of the work of the Holy Spirit, as demanded by his definition. But the secular historians were generally not interested in the work of the Spirit, because they did not understand that aspect of things, or have any sympathy for the real work of God. They were much more interested in many superficial details which were much less important, and they told the story of the revival in terms of those factors. Thus they drew false pictures, and created serious misunderstandings about what actually went on.

“Revival and Revivalism.”

This subheading was used extensively by Dr. Orr to refer to the most serious, major campaign that he conducted right through the years of his later ministry. It involved defending his definition of revival, and of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, against the secular humanism of professional historians, against the humanist world-view, and against the way that Christians of every shade in the United States of America constantly misused the word “revival,” making the word apply to many other things. It was the most persistent battle that he waged from his office in the School of World Mission.

Around the 1960s and 1970s, in the United States of America, the word “revival” was used very widely by many Christians to refer to an organized evangelistic campaign. The word “revivalism” was used to apply to the overall practices of mass evangelism.

Also, individual churches, and entire denominations, with Pentecostal leanings, used the word “Revival” in their names in order to boast about their brand of religion.

Orr declared repeatedly that this use of the word “revivalism” to apply to “mass evangelism” was unscriptural, unhistorical, ambiguous, inadequate, pejorative and illogical, and therefore un scholarly. However, this mistake was continually made by professional historians, and in many churches.

Orr claimed that professional historians who adopted the humanistic views about the nature of spiritual revival and awakening had in fact re-written the history of revivals so that revivals were simply human things, organized efforts, emotionalisms, and of questionable value. Orr trumpeted loudly that the great need amongst historians was to re-study the revivals, and the history of revivalist activities, and to view them as the

results of the workings of the Holy Spirit, as things which forwarded the Kingdom of Christ, and hastened Christ's coming. They should not be seen as merely "organized attempts to change the culture."¹⁰

The main vehicle for his campaign on this subject was the production of a 64 page booklet entitled *A Call to a Re-study of Revival and Revivalism*. This booklet was published in a number of forms over the period, and copies can be found which were issued from Dr. Orr's own home, others came under the aegis of the School of World Mission, and others again were issued in the name of the Oxford Reading and Research on Revival and Evangelical Awakenings. Some issues were called simply *The Re-study of Revival and Revivalism*.

The professional historian who was used by Orr as his first target was Dr. William G. McLoughlin, who published a book called *Modern Revivalism* in 1959, in which the words "revival" and "revivalism" were used in the ways that Orr considered to be wrong. McLoughlin had used the word similarly in an earlier book, which was a well prepared biography of the evangelist Billy Sunday. McLoughlin was certainly not the first historian to do this, but he was a good, obvious and well-known example of the problem, which Orr could use as a first target for his campaign.

He was Often Ignored by Other Historians.

Edwin Orr was often concerned that other historians did not take as much notice of his published works as he thought they should. In fact, he was widely ignored, especially by secular historians and university professors, even by those who wrote and published books on the same subjects as were covered by Orr's books.

There were several reasons for this, two of which will be discussed in this paper. One reason was – as referred to above – that Orr used a different definition of the nature of a revival from that which was used by many of these other historians. Orr drew his definition from the New Testament, and from the nature of the Christian's spiritual life. On the other hand, secular historians often knew nothing about the spiritual factors involved in this definition from the New Testament. Some of them may not have been converted people at all, and therefore were not on the same wavelength as a spiritual Christian. Others viewed revivals as mainly explainable in terms of sociology or psychology, or as best viewed from the standpoint of some social theory that appealed to them.

Another reason why he was often ignored was that professional historians often thought that Orr did not analyse these revival movements in the way they thought he should have done. Thus he was merely reciting a list of events, and not providing information which would distinguish between them sufficiently.

This leads us to ponder another aspect of the nature of historical thinking.

Historians All Have Their Own Agenda

No matter who the historian is, or how "objective" or how "balanced" the historian may think he or she is being, every historian has an agenda. Every historian is

¹⁰ J. Edwin Orr. *A Call for the Re-study of Revival and Revivalism*. Pasadena. School of World Mission. 1981.

trying to write a certain kind of history, is trying to look at the events of the past from a certain stance, and is looking at the past in a certain light. Apart from that, the history which every historian succeeds in writing betrays the world-view or basic outlook on the meaning of life which the historian had adopted.

The problem that Orr had with William McLoughlin, and with many others like him, was that university history departments in the mid-Twentieth Century operated on the basis of a secular understanding of life, that God did not matter in the attempt to understand life, and that theology ought to be avoided. As a result, McLoughlin explained all events in terms of sociology and psychology, even if the person he was writing about believed that God had an important role in every event.

Now it is obvious, when you think about it, that no historian can present a good account of a person's life who believed strongly in God, without referring to God and what God was believed to be doing. But secular historians account for everything without reference to God. So, obviously, secular historians cannot provide accurate or sympathetic accounts of the lives of dedicated Christians.

Similarly, each historian uses particular definitions of key words when writing historical accounts of things or of events. McLoughlin used "revivalism" to refer generally to "mass evangelism," or to efforts organized by humans to achieve certain human or cultural and social effects. Orr was convinced that this was a totally inadequate definition of a real revival, such as he had studied in the accounts of the great revival in 1857, in the U.S.A., or in 1859 in Ireland.

So, here we see his determined effort to fight for, and to set out clearly, a much more spiritual understanding of what happened in a revival, and that it could not be properly understood without reference to the workings of the Holy Spirit. Orr knew from long experience that God was real, and that God could play a very active part in His dealings with His people. So, the secular world-view was totally inadequate in trying to understand and write about revivals. The spiritual understanding of the work of God was therefore a completely proper stance from which to view the events of history, and to understand the evidence found in human events.

Another aspect of the historians' agenda which affected Edwin Orr, about which he was criticized, even by other evangelical historians, is this. He asked me once why it was that extremely few university-based Christian historians took any notice of his writings about revival. Most professional historians took no notice of what he wrote. At that time, in 1979, I did not understand clearly enough the issues involved to give him a good reply. The roots of this problem go right down into the nature of human knowledge itself, and the nature of historical writing.

When asked the same question, Richard Owen Roberts ventured the reply that Orr's accounts of revivals lacked the analysis found in the work of other historians. Orr's comments to me suggested that lack of analysis was often unavoidable, because there was very little information available about some of these revivals, and as a result, good analysis was not possible.¹¹

Every historian has his own agenda. At the end of the Twentieth Century, most Christian professional historians try to write social history, and consider that writing the

¹¹ J. Edwin Orr. *The Event of the Century*. (edited by Richard Owen Roberts) Wheaton. International Awakening Press. 1989. pages viii – ix.

history of a church or of a religious movement like a revival would be inadequate if it was not told within a careful context of the social and cultural background in which the events occurred, and showing the links which this movement had with other movements in other parts of the world. Now this is all very worthy and good. It is an excellent approach to take, and can produce some very informative and balanced history writing. But it is not the only way to write history. There are many other ways to do it – many other stances to take, many other reasons for writing something, many other agendas to pursue and goals to achieve.

The honest thing for any historian is to be very up-front and clear with a reader about what agenda the historian has adopted, what his assumptions about the meaning of life are, what definitions he is using, and what he is aiming at in writing history.

For example, this whole question is discussed at length in a very recent book, written by Professor David Bebbington, of the University of Stirling, Scotland.¹²

Bebbington has contributed famously to evangelical history. This book discusses revivals in seven different locations in Nineteenth Century Cornwall, Yorkshire, Scotland, Texas, Nova Scotia, South Australia, and South Carolina.

In the early pages of his book Bebbington discusses the stances from which the history of revivals has often been written, and pays special attention to Dr. Edwin Orr.

Bebbington writes about several kinds of history, one of which he calls “Providential History,” which, he said, appeared extensively in the Nineteenth Century. It was history in which God is used as a cause of historical events, and also written in order to encourage more of the same thing. “The sense that God was at work made this a providential school of interpretation.”

“That approach to the history of revival continued in the twentieth century. Its greatest exponent was J. Edwin Orr, himself a successful evangelist in the 1930s... [About the 1859 revival, Orr] wrote, ‘The evangelical explanation of the Awakening is the most satisfying and complete. It was engineered by the Holy Spirit...’ He went on to produce a long series of books recounting the story of revivals in a wide range of times and places, extending from the early nineteenth century to the later twentieth century and from the United States to the South Seas.”

Bebbington mentions others who followed the same path – namely Earle E. Cairns in 1986, and then my own book on Australian revivals up to 1880, from which he subsequently quoted.

“The weakness of this literature is not the appeal to the supernatural in itself, for after all that has been regarded as a legitimate understanding of Christian history since the time of Eusebius and earlier. Rather the problems arise from what the historians of this school typically failed to do. Although Orr researched local newspapers assiduously, he did not try to analyse the character of each revival, simply being content to register the existence, scale and impact of as many as possible. He made no effort to differentiate between types according to spontaneity or style of spirituality, let alone the age or gender of converts. His later histories sometimes became little more than a chronicle of the emergence of evangelicalism as a whole, as in Latin America. Orr primarily wanted to deploy accounts of the past in order to inspire mission in the present. ‘Are there common threads or characteristics of previous revivals’, asked Gerald Ira Gingrich, another mid-

¹² D. Bebbington. *Victorian Religious Revivals*. Culture and Piety in Local and Global Contexts. New York. Oxford University Press. 2011.

twentieth century student of the history of awakenings, ‘which can be pinpointed and applied to the religious phenomena of today?’ The shared features could be copied so that more could begin. The histories aimed to discover what revivals had in common, not what distinguished one from another. The thrust of study was generalizing, not particularizing. Even when, as in Evans’s book, there was a good deal of detail, it was not analysed so as to bring out its significance. The genre kept the phenomena of revival before the Christian public, but it rarely advanced understanding.”¹³

I could make a number of comments about this quotation from Professor Bebbington, one of which is to admit there is a good deal of truth in his observations. Certainly, Orr wanted revivals to be understood and promoted. He wanted to see more of them, for the glory of God.

In defense of Dr. Orr, we should also say that his thesis was submitted to the Faculty of Theology at Oxford, and not the History Department. Thus we might accept more readily a theological comment in his thesis, which might not have been so acceptable in a much more secular history department..

Edwin Orr’s Real Historical Agenda.

But I also know that there was a different, overwhelming and major factor behind Edwin Orr’s writings on the history of revivals, and my own work on Australian revivals, about which Bebbington says nothing, and he seems also to know nothing about it. It was this other overwhelming reason which drove Edwin Orr in his researches and writings, and which formed a large part of the agenda that determined his work.

Because he was an Irishman, he knew that the 1859 Revival in Ireland had an enormous impact on religion in his country at the time and ever since, and the 1921 revival involving W. P. Nicholson, was also very effective, stopping the “troubles” for a short period.

But when he went to Oxford in 1947 to start work on his D. Phil., he found that the professors of theology and of church history at Oxford knew nothing about any revival in the British Isles in 1859. They joked about it. They were so sure that no such revival had ever occurred that they said - if Orr could prove that one had happened, he ought to be given a D. Phil. for finding it. The professor in Belfast knew differently. He knew of the 1859 Irish Revival, and he supported Orr’s application.

In 1957 and 1958, when Edwin Orr and his team (and family) came to Australia and New Zealand on a tour to preach about revival, Australian evangelical leaders said repeatedly, **“Why has Australia never seen a revival?”** I heard them say it. I heard Edwin Orr mention it many times, and refute it repeatedly. But these evangelicals did not read or know their history. The work of Torrey, Chapman and Alexander, and of nineteenth century Methodist evangelists, had passed from the common evangelical consciousness in Australia and New Zealand. After the great men passed from the scene, nobody had ever talked or written about what they did, or about what God did through them. During this tour, and in his subsequent visits to Australia, Edwin Orr repeatedly emphasized the heritage which had occurred in Australia, but which was

¹³ Bebbington. Ibid, pages 21– 23.

commonly not known about, because evangelicals did not know their history from previous generations – even from only a short number of years beforehand. Gipsy Smith (1926) had been largely forgotten long before Billy Graham arrived (1959).

The ignorance of the history of revivals in Australia and New Zealand was not only due to the fact that keen evangelicals did not read or know their history. In many cases, it was also due to lack of interest in evangelism and revivals amongst historians - those who might have studied and written about this history. My 2001 book, which Professor Bebbington (correctly) criticized in his book, was the first book to be published wholly dedicated to recounting the early revivals and evangelism in Australia.¹⁴ Similarly, the book which Roy Mackenzie and I had published in 1999 about evangelism and revivals in New Zealand, was the first substantial book wholly dedicated to this subject since the Great Awakening amongst the Maoris 150 years before.¹⁵ I found that most of the church history books which mentioned either of these subjects were in fact written about some other area of church history, more social or cultural or institutional, and in which the evangelism or revivals appeared briefly, if at all, and only as a marginal interest. I also found that church historical societies in Australia and New Zealand, and commercial publishing houses, generally were not interested in publishing any articles or books about the revivals or the evangelists. Those who were interested in publishing about these areas of church history were quite exceptional. The Uniting Church Historical Society in New South Wales, of which I am currently President, is one of these exceptions. As a result of all this, I often found that, generally speaking, very little had been written about these revival movements or evangelistic efforts apart from the original reports published at the time, and that nothing of significance had been written about the subject since. No wonder such amnesia existed, and persisted.

The same kind of loss of knowledge was happening in many other places around the world. So it became Edwin Orr's agenda as an historian to find the forgotten revivals, as many as possible. So he published books which referred to as many as possible, briefly, and sometimes with modest or almost no detail, so that at least people could begin to know that these revivals had occurred, and then – perhaps - they could be further researched – if there was any more information about them to be found.

There was also a Scriptural basis to this concern. When Edwin Orr lectured on the history of revivals, perhaps at a Christian Convention for deepening the spiritual life, one of the Bible passages which could be read at the start was from Psalm 78. This passage describes what Orr was trying to do in writing his histories.

“Give ear, O my people, to my law: incline your ears to the words of my mouth.

I will open my mouth in a parable: I will utter dark sayings of old:

Which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us.

We will not hide them from their children, shewing to the generation to come the praises of the Lord, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done.

For he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children:

¹⁴ Robert Evans. *Early Evangelical Revivals in Australia*. Hazelbrook. by the Author. December, 2000.

¹⁵ R. Evans and R. Mackenzie. *Evangelical Revivals in New Zealand*. Paihia. Bay of Islands. Colcom Press and the Authors. 1999.

That the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children:

That they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments:

And might not be as their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation; a generation that set not their heart aright, and whose spirit was not steadfast with God.”¹⁶

When I published a biography of *Matthew Burnett, the Yorkshire Evangelist - Australia's Greatest Evangelist and Social Reformer*, - many very keen evangelicals who saw the title on the cover of the book reacted immediately - “Never heard of him.”

I know that this same kind of concern existed at least to some degree behind the work of Dr. Stuart Piggin in exploring Australian revivals, and in writing about them. Dr. Piggin's influence in promoting interest in the history of evangelism and revivals in Australia has been particularly notable in recent years.

Bebbington seemed not to know about the great need which existed in places like Australia to re-establish consciousness of what God had done in the past. He did not know the real reason why Edwin Orr's books on the history of revivals around the world took the form that they did. Because he did not understand the situation, he criticized Edwin Orr, and others, for writing a kind of history that did not please him as much as other kinds of history. Certainly Professor Bebbington had a view about what kind of history writing produced the best history, and he criticized others who did not practice it. But there are many possible reasons people can have for writing history. If someone writes history for a different special and legitimate purpose, then it also must have a real place, so long as one is open about it. No historian can tell the whole story from every angle. Edwin Orr was trying to supply an urgent need for the people of God.

Was the 1859 British Revival EVIDENCE for the work of the Holy Spirit?

But let us take one more look at Bebbington's quotation from Orr's conclusion about the 1859 Revival in Britain.

“The evangelical explanation of the Awakening is the most satisfying and complete. [The Revival] was engineered by the Holy Spirit....”

This comment by Edwin Orr means that – after looking at all of the possible explanations for the Awakening, it is clear that the most obvious and satisfactory explanation for it all is the one that the evangelicals made – that it was a work of the Holy Spirit, and that it therefore constituted some kind of historical evidence for the existence of God, and in favour of the Christian Gospel. The best way to explain it is that it was a work of the Holy Spirit.

If it was not a working of the Holy Spirit, if the Christian Gospel was not real, and if the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ does not exist, and is not the real God, then a different philosophical question arises. How can we explain these events, if they are based upon a grand delusion? How can we account for the wonderful success of the Gospel if everyone was deluded about the Gospel and its source? Obviously, any rational and sensible person would have a great problem at that point.

¹⁶ Psalm 78: 1 – 8. (Authorized Version.)

In one way it is an historical question, because it involves the interpretation of historical evidence. But in another way, it is a philosophical question about the basic realities of the universe and the meaning of life.

This question is not a new one. The following long quotation was published in 1832 in New England, following the transformation which took place in New England as a result of thirty years of repeated revivals which flowed back and forth in New England during the Second Great Awakening. It asks basically the same question that Orr faced after he had completed his Oxford thesis.

“What, then, are the fruits of revivals? Let their opposers answer the question, not with conjectures or confident assertions, but by an appeal to *facts*. Let them not reason from insulated cases, but examine their *general* influence for the past forty years, as exhibited in many hundreds of the towns and villages of New England and the middle States. Will any candid man say that they [revivals] have left a place more vain or vicious in its morals than they found it, or more averse to the institutions, doctrines and duties of religion? On the contrary, is it not the testimony of universal experience, that the ordinary effects of revivals are such as these?

They have diffused a general sobriety of manners, where levity had previously prevailed.

They have greatly increased the disposition to attend on public worship, so that churches which before were nearly vacant, - from the numbers of Sunday loungers and strollers, - have been crowded with reverent hearers of the word of God.

Many who were thoughtless, vain and worldly, have been affected by a seriousness of mind which appears to have resulted in their sincere conversion to Christ.

Numbers of openly profane and vicious persons have been permanently reformed, and from being nuisances to society, have come to be reckoned among its ornaments and blessings.

They have had a manifest effect to elevate the general mind in respect to intellectual and moral improvement. They have introduced, in many instances, a taste for reading, especially for moral and religious reading, putting in circulation a multitude of religious newspapers, magazines, tracts and books.

They have given an impulse to Sunday school and common school instruction.

They have been the means of originating and forming the religious character of many individuals who, by their talents and influence, have benefited society both in public and private stations. Particularly, they have supplied many churches with faithful pastors, a large proportion of whom, but for revivals, would probably either never have been educated, or would have gone into other professions.

The churches are indebted also for a large proportion of their members, many of them for their existence, to the same cause. The great majority of professed Christians of the various orthodox denominations, (at least in New England,) are the subjects of revivals. Read the records of all our churches, and you will find that by far the largest accessions to them have been made in those companies of converts which have come forward to profess Christ in these seasons of religious awakening.

Most of the philanthropic enterprises of the age owe their origin and continued efficiency, in a great degree, to the spirit of revivals.

The moral effect of revivals might be made to appear, by comparing those countries, and periods of time, in which they [revivals] have most prevailed, with others in which they have been infrequent or unknown. For example, Scotland and New England; in which revivals have more prevailed for the last two hundred years than in any other country; and the moral character of these two countries is proverbial.

From these general views of the influence of revivals on communities, we might descend to a more minute survey, and find their claims still more happily sustained in their effect on domesticity and private character. We should find, that in the case of a great variety of individuals who were living, some in spiritual apathy, some in “excess of riot,” and all “having no hope, and without God in the world,” they have been the occasion of awakening and recalling them from their levity, their worldliness, their indifference or opposition to religion, and caused them to become, in the judgment of common charity, consistent followers of Christ. We should find that households, which before lived in the most prayerless and thoughtless manner, now find delight in bowing together daily around the family altar; and that families which before were idle and improvident, and perhaps ill-natured and quarrelsome, are now diligent, thriving, and peaceful. We should find that parents, who before were negligent of the moral welfare of their children, or were educating them only for the present world, have now dedicated them to God and are training them up for his service here and his enjoyment hereafter.

The more minutely the survey is made, the more striking will the effects appear. And hence it is, that opposers of these seasons of religious interest always attack them in a general way. They do not go into an honest examination of particulars; they do not bring into view all the traces which revivals leave behind them – the transformations they have made, - the sins they have blotted out, - the hopes and sympathies they have awakened, - the purifications they have wrought in the moral atmosphere, - the churches they have gladdened, - and the souls they have saved.

No man can do this and then pronounce them an evil work. Nothing can be more defective, uncandid, or unphilosophical, than the judgments which some form respecting revivals. They seize upon some few things unfavourable, or which seem to them so, at the distance at which they keep, and overlook all the rest, - judging of them as one might be supposed to do of a summer shower, who should bring us account of the small streams which it had overswelled, or of the small furrows with which it had here and there marred a hillside, but should perceive nothing of the verdure of the reviving fields, nor of the healthful fragrance with which it had embalmed the atmosphere.

We are ready now for the inference. If such are the effects of revivals, (and that they are such no man is able to disprove;) and if you deny that the Holy Spirit has an agency in producing these effects, then you must adopt the extraordinary conclusion that communities are indebted for many of their most important blessings, and thousands of individuals for their precious and immortal hopes, to the prevalence of a gross delusion. You must admit the monstrous consequence, that multitudes of such, apparently, as shall be saved, are added to the church by means which God disowns and Satan favours. How then shall Satan’s kingdom stand? If he has any agency in producing these results, he is engaged in that which is making a constant inroad upon his kingdom; and which of all things his coadjutors are most stirred up to oppose.”¹⁷

¹⁷ *Quarterly Christian Spectator*. Volume 4. New Haven. Published by the Editors. 1832. pages 26-28.

Bebbington would want to avoid discussing the philosophical question as such, because he was writing a history book, and not a philosophy book. Also Bebbington is not writing “providential history.” He is not using God as a means of explaining events in human history. He is writing history from the point of view of “culture and piety,” as the title of the book indicates, and also because he is a friendly and sympathetic student of evangelical history. That is part of his agenda. His interests in history are swayed by the circumstances in which he worked. Chapter two of the book, where he refers to “providential history,” is actually a most interesting discussion of the particular slants taken by different historians towards the subject of revival, and which provides the context for him to introduce the slant that he wants to take himself. But he has to be careful, because he is writing history which has to fit into another context as well. It has to be seen as a part of the secular understanding of the nature of professional history in the modern world upon which his job at the university, and his reputation and agenda as an academic historian, were based.

There is no doubt that Orr placed special value on his Oxford doctorate in the overall picture of his life work, because of the stature of that University. But Orr did not view himself as a secular historian. Indeed, he fought against secular history, especially when secular historians pretended to describe a revival without reference to God as the main agent. He was unashamedly a Christian historian, like Eusebius, and so was not worried about asking the philosophical questions as well as historical ones. It was a part of his agenda as a historian, and it arose also from his work as an evangelist and as a Christian apologist.

The Debate with “Church Growth.”

One can speculate as to the reasons why “Church Growth” theory became so popular amongst active and intelligent Christians in the years that followed 1965. Perhaps one reason relates to the fact that “Church Growth” fits better into the overwhelming activist psychology of Americans, and of Western Civilization generally, compared to the lower degree of activism which seems appropriate for those interested in revival and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Where one has to deal with the sovereignty of God there seems to be less room for strong activism. Revival is something we are less able to produce ourselves than we feel when we are confronted with a new plan to run everywhere promoting a new activist plan of outreach and evangelism which has been announced by some expert or well-financed minister.

The activism implied by Church Growth appears at first to fit more easily into the prevailing psyche, spirit of the age and flavor of the modern world, than does the humility which is necessary when one prays for revival.

Another reason was probably the strength of character and charisma of Donald McGavran, the new Dean, his age and experience, and his forthright declaration of his message. Because Orr was only a part-time lecturer, inevitably he lived and worked under the shadow of McGavran, whose work was enormously popular, especially amongst people with missionary experience.

McGavran had published 60 books before 1973, many of which discussed aspects of Church Growth, especially in countries where missionaries worked. His main book on

church growth was published in 1970. It made a great impression and an important contribution.¹⁸

In view of McGavran's increasing age, in 1973 a book of essays on Church Growth was published by his professorial peers to mark his 75th birthday (born in India, 15th December, 1897), and in honour of McGavran's contribution to the whole subject. Orr contributed to this book with an essay.

McGavran was not only born in India, from parents and grandparents who were missionaries in India, but he served as a missionary in India for more than twenty years, until 1955, before he returned to the U.S.A. He spoke Hindi and Chattisgarhee, and translated the Gospels into the latter language. He was a minister in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), and he returned to America to conduct specialized research, and to become a professor at the denomination's College of Missions. He had gained his PhD in 1936.

Before 1955, he had published a number of books, and had become special friends with J. W. Pickett, author of *Christian Mass Movements in India*, published in 1933.

A Missiologist is someone who is an expert in the area of Missionary Policy. Alan Tippett said that the three main areas where McGavran made an outstanding contribution were (1.) the study of People Movements, (which Pickett had originally called "Mass Movements"), (2.) the area of evangelistic opportunity, so that he was particularly concerned when he could foresee that a people movement, for example, was likely to take place towards Christianity, but that missionary forces failed to take advantage of it, and (3.) marking the differences between bringing people to Christ, and helping them to grow in the faith and to serve Christ.¹⁹

McGavran's conception of revival has variables which make revival quite different from People Movements. Revivals also display variations in different parts of the world. He uses Edwin Orr's work as a basis for his discussions of the subject, and makes a range of comments about these variations.²⁰

Orr's main reactions to these variations were to argue and discuss details, which he thought were important.

For example, Orr's response to (the 1970 edition?) was that what McGavran had said about certain aspects of revival were not as balanced as they might have been. So eventually he published a modest 15-page booklet in response to it.²¹

Orr quoted from the 1970 edition of McGavran's book, where it is written that "Under certain conditions, revival may be said to cause growth. Under others... apparently revival occurs without growth and growth without revival. (page 163.)

Orr went on to argue that McGavran's statement was basically correct, but must be qualified. Revival causes church growth, and this is the norm. When some revivals fail to do so, it seems to be due to great persecution, caste antipathy, tribal antagonism, or

¹⁸ Donald A. McGavran. *Understanding Church Growth*. Grand Rapids. Eerdmans. 1970.

¹⁹ A. R. Tippett. (ed.) *God, Man and Church Growth*. A Festschrift in Honour of Donald Anderson McGavran. Grand Rapids. Eerdmans. 1973. to mark his 75th birthday. Pages 20 – 29.

²⁰ D. McGavran. *Understanding Church Growth*. Second edition, fully revised. Eerdmans. 1980. p.186 and many following pages.

²¹ J. Edwin Orr. *The Outpouring of the Spirit in Revival and Awakening and its Issue in Church Growth*. Pasadena. Published by the Author. 1984.

to deficiencies in revival leadership due to human prejudices, all regrettable handicaps which hinder the declared purposes of God. This is the exception.”

This was followed by a long explanation of the definitions that Orr used about revival, which he thought was much more important than the previous question, in understanding the nature of revival.

Despite these details, Orr’s views were substantially the same as those of McGavran. They rotated around three basic theological factors, and operated on the same foundation – identical views on Authority, Scripture, and Evangelical Theology.

Tippett said that McGavran’s work gained its authority from the authority of Jesus Christ, expressed in the Great Commission to teach all nations His Gospel message. This message was founded upon accepting that the Scriptures were God’s Word to the world, and that the message and theology that he preached was clearly Evangelical.

For McGavran, Church Growth meant bringing people to Jesus Christ – it was evangelism. Other important factors might follow from this, such as dedicated service to others in many ways, but this must not be confused with evangelism of bring people to Christ.

Edwin Orr contributed a chapter to Alan Tippett’s book. The chapter was entitled “Evangelical Dynamic and Social Action,” in Part Four of the book, called “God in Human History.” Orr’s paper consisted mainly of material from his recently completed thesis prepared for the degree of Doctor of Education at U.C.L.A. It emphasized the point above, that evangelism must not be confused with Social Concern, which follows conversion to Christ, and the outworking of that conversion. Social Concern is not a part of evangelism, but flows from it.²² It does not seem that Edwin Orr was present at the big gathering at Fuller, when papers were presented which later were published in Tippett’s book. There was a big group photo taken at the Conference, which was later published on the dust jacket of the book, and Edwin Orr does not appear in that photo.

1973 – 1978. His “Magnum Opus” is Published at Last.

Towards the end of his life, Edwin Orr realized that he needed to produce a greater degree of analysis in his descriptions of revivals. He hoped thereby to produce what he wistfully called his “Magnum Opus,” which would have been a history of evangelical revivals including an analysis of the nature, scope and power of these revivals, their link with culture and social features, such as Professor David Bebbington would have been more likely to approve.²³

This work never materialized. He did not live long enough to do it. He already had achieved so much, and of such value, that there is not time in mortal life to do everything that a talented man such as Orr would like to have done. What I have called here his “Magnum Opus” is the culmination of what he actually achieved and published, and not of what he would like to have achieved.

Edwin Orr’s “Magnum Opus” consisted of eight books in two series, published in the years between about 1973 and 1978.

²² Tippett. Op cit. page 273.

²³ J. Edwin Orr. *The Event of the Century*. (ed. Richard Owen Roberts.) Wheaton. 1989. page ix.

The first series of three books was published by Moody Press. *The Eager Feet* described the world-wide Great Awakening between the years 1792 and about 1830. *The Fervent Prayer* described the world-wide great revival in the years between 1857 and about 1865. *The Flaming Tongue* described the world-wide awakening revolving around the year 1904. They were all hard covered editions in large A5 size, except that a second edition of *The Flaming Tongue* was soft-covered and a little smaller..

The second series of five books were published eventually by Bethany Fellowship. They described the revivals which had occurred at various times in Africa, Eastern Asia, Southern Asia, Latin America and the South Seas. These five books were all soft-covered, and were roughly A5 in size.

Already mentioned is the fact that his work with post-graduate students at the School of World Mission provided a great platform for his own historical researches, and in this period we saw the culmination of this work.

He had been collecting material for it for many years as he traveled around the world. The evening in 1974 that I spent at the Orr home, I asked him how he had gathered and remembered accurately all the bits of information which appeared in his books about revivals in different places. He told me that there were two secrets to the success of this work. Firstly, he said that he had a photographic memory, and gave as an example the fact that he had once awoken during the night, and a new poem had come into his mind. He then went back to sleep, and when he woke in the morning he was able to write down the poem fully, from memory. When he came across information about revivals in various countries as he traveled, he could remember the information, and the sources from which the information came. But, secondly, there was a method to help him. He showed me a row of deep drawers loaded with scraps of paper of all kinds upon which he had written bits and pieces of information, along with the source from which the information had come. The bits of paper were whatever happened to be nearby, and the information had been written down quickly in all kinds of unceremonious circumstances in his quest to know about revivals as widely as possible.

In this 1974 visit I also got my hands upon three unpublished books of his, two of which eventually became part of his magnum opus within a year or so.

These three books had all been printed on his own production line – in his office, as I mentioned earlier. An electric typewriter was linked to a ribbon-punching machine. He typed the books, or his daughter came and helped. The ribbon could then be used on another machine to print copies of the books he had written. In later life he suffered from R.S.I., - fingers badly affected by arthritis, because of all the typing he had done, and as a result, he had a lot of pain when given a solid Australian hand-shake.

The first book was a series of lectures on European and British history from Wycliffe and the Reformation to the Second Great Awakening, under the general themes of “Reform” and “Mission,” ending around 1830. The book was octavo in size, 172 pages, unbound and unpublished, with no title or title page, no list of contents, footnotes, index or references. He gave me a handful of these, containing perhaps a dozen copies of this production. So far as I am aware, this book has never been published.

The second and third books, printed in the same manner, were *Evangelical Awakenings in Eastern Asia*, and *Evangelical Awakenings in Africa*. The Eastern Asia book was octavo in size with a thin yellow paper cover, and bound with poor quality glue. It had 179 pages counting from chapter one, was published by “Mission to the

Academic Community,” which had a street address the same as Fuller Seminary. The book about Africa was not bound at all, also octavo in size, and had no details about publication of any kind. Both were dated that same year, 1974. So these were both pre-publication versions of two of the books from the second series. Apparently the arrangement for Bethany Fellowship to publish these books had not yet been made. I was told that only 25 copies of each of these books existed.

Copies of all eight of these books in his Magnum Opus became available steadily over the next few years. They do not provide much of the extended analysis that Professor Bebbington wanted to see, but they were as thorough as Dr. Orr could produce, at least mentioning as many revivals as possible, so that further analysis could be done by others at a later time. Orr did not have the time to provide depth of analysis about all of these revivals. It would have taken far more time and effort than would fit into ten lives, let alone the ten, twelve or fourteen years that still remained to him. Knowledge of many of these revivals was saved from oblivion. And it did provide an almost encyclopedic panorama of revival movements around the world in modern times, which, in my opinion, is well worth having. If he had not done this, it would have been needed. He was much better qualified to do it than anyone else, so if he had not done it, it would have been done piecemeal and with much less qualification.

Oxford Reading and Research in Revival.

The letterhead for this association used the title “Oxford Association for Research in Revival or Evangelical Awakening.”

This effort was first organized in 1974, and was held at Regents Park College, Oxford, for a week during the northern summer break. Originally it had a list of founding sponsors which consisted of three Anglicans, and one each from the Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist and Brethren denominations, starting with the Archbishop of Canterbury.

Edwin Orr provided his own description of what happened.

“At the time of the Lausanne Congress on Evangelism, the subject of revival or spiritual awakening had a very low priority. There was much emphasis on church expansion techniques and social objectives, and very little upon dynamics.

Some of us who sought to correct this state of affairs planned a conference at Oxford that same year. Dr. F. Donald Coggan, Archbishop of Canterbury, Canon Max Warren of Westminster, and a number of other denominational leaders who had held the highest offices of their denomination sponsored the effort. Dr. Billy Graham provided the fares for many Third World leaders who lacked the funds to come to Europe again.

Since then, various leading church historians, professors of missions and evangelism, missionaries, evangelists, pastors and laymen have attended and made significant contributions to the general knowledge of the field...”²⁴

So, we can see here one of the results that flowed from the “Church Growth” philosophy becoming so popular in many places – people lost interest in revival. It is reminiscent of a saying of the old Methodist prayer specialist – E. M. Bounds – “Man

²⁴ Provided by Andrew Chapman from a Foreword written by Dr. Orr in a book by David Bryant.

looks for better techniques and ideas, but Gods wants better men.” Edwin Orr wanted the emphasis to be on the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and not so much on the latest fashion or ideas on “things to do.”

As mentioned, during my 1984 visit to Brentwood, I copied a list of cassettes from (mainly) the 1981 and 1982 Oxford gatherings, plus one from 1976. 23 tapes were listed. Apparently tapes from the other addresses had run out of stock, and a permanent supply was not kept. In addition there was a price list for cassette copies of 17 addresses from the 1983 event which were available. These lists showed that addresses were presented from a wide range of countries right around the world

Some Final Points.

Christian Apologetics.

Edwin Orr continued to make Apologetics one of his strong contributions. It was made into part of the title of his position at Fuller. We have noted that a book on apologetics had been published by him back in 1960. Actually it was the English edition which appeared in 1960, with an American edition appearing the following year.²⁵

In this same general area, another title was produced in 1966.²⁶

There is a great deal of information about his efforts at evangelism by this method in books like *I Saw No Tears*, with accounts of his work as an army chaplain.

But the main book in this area of apologetics published by Dr. Orr appeared in 1977, which presented the most polished version of this form of evangelism, and which marked him as a formidable opponent for any atheist or agnostic.. This was entitled *The Faith That Persuades*, published by Harper and Row.²⁷

When Edwin Orr toured parts of Australia in 1979, for example, visiting our home in the process, he used several occasions at which I was present to lecture about his ideas on apologetics, including at a lecture he gave at the Uniting Church Theological College at Enfield, in Sydney. I have cassette recordings of nearly all of his addresses given in the first 8 days of meetings at which he spoke, in Brisbane, Lismore, Maclean, and in Sydney.

The Culmination of His Academic Attainments.

Edwin Orr practiced the philosophy that – if you can just break the ice with attaining a PhD, it is much easier to get other ones later on. This was because the first PhD or similar kind of doctorate, takes a great deal of preliminary work, and accumulating degrees at a lower academic level. And then the thesis for the doctor’s degree itself, also takes a great deal of work, some of which may not be usable later on..

We have noted earlier the Th.D. degree that he got from Northern Baptist during the Second World War. When he got to Oxford in 1947, this degree was accepted as a preparatory degree for the Oxford D.Phil. That is, it was accepted by the Oxford

²⁵ J. Edwin Orr. *Faith That Makes Sense..* M.M. & S. 1960.

²⁶ J. Edwin Orr. *100 Questions About God.* Glendale, Cal. Regal Books. 1966.

²⁷ J. Edwin Orr. *The Faith That Persuades.* How Every Christian Has the Answer to Unbelief. New York. Harper and Row. 1977.

academics as the equivalent of their Masters degree. It is true that it had not been as demanding as the Oxford degree was considered to be.

As we noted also, some few years later he enrolled for a doctorate in education at the University of California in Los Angeles. From this he graduated as a Doctor of Education.

His researches into the history of revivals in India, and in Africa, were used to acquire doctor's degrees (Ph.D.'s) in an Indian university, and also in a South African university, as well as an honorary degree from the University of South Africa. So he finished his academic career with five earned doctorates. It is, of course, a little easier, but no mean task, nevertheless, to acquire several honorary doctorates given by universities when one is a world authority in a certain field of knowledge and enquiry. Universities can recognize and honor such people by giving them a doctor's degree. But it is not so easy actually to earn them all.

His Death.

J. Edwin Orr had developed some heart trouble in his later years. His death occurred suddenly on 22nd April, 1987, at the age of 75 years, on the morning after he had spoken at a Conference, and was therefore away from home and his wife when the end came.²⁸ The last address was entitled "Revival is Like Judgment Day." Three major books from his pen appeared posthumously.

The Event of the Century.

As mentioned, Dr. Edwin Orr published his first book on the 1857 Revival in the United States in 1953, which he titled *The Second Evangelical Awakening in America*. At the time when he wrote and published this volume, after he had studied the movement further at Oxford, he believed that the 1857 Revival was only the **second** revival to become world-wide. The first was the evangelical revival in the eighteenth century which included George Whitefield, John Wesley and Jonathan Edwards.

His Oxford thesis on the 1859 revival in Great Britain was based upon the same system of counting, and so had been titled *The Second Evangelical Awakening in Britain*. It had been published a few years before the book about America. A few years later again, an abridged edition of the American volume appeared in print.

It was not very long, however, before Orr changed his mind about this system of counting, and realized that the 1857 Revival was not the second, but was the third, and possibly even the fourth, world-wide evangelical awakening.

In his Magnum Opus, in the series of three volumes, Orr used the first volume to describe what by 1973 he would have described as the **second** great awakening, and which is now generally referred to by that name. This was *The Eager Feet*, which was a description of the world-wide awakening from 1792 to about 1840. Then there appeared a revision of the 1857 American revival, called *The Fervent Prayer*, which described the world-wide impact of the great awakening of 1858. It was not strictly a revision of the first book because it had a different purpose. It was trying to show the fact that the revival went all around the world. So it did not set out so much to provide more details about what happened in America as its main purpose. But Orr continued to work on this project. After his death, this book was edited and published by Richard Owen Roberts.

²⁸ See website www.jedwinorr.com

The title comes from a book written by Professor Perry Miller of Yale University. – *The Life of the Mind in America*.²⁹ Orr jumped at Perry Miller’s use of this term to apply to the great revival of 1857. It emphasized the value that both Miller and Orr thought that the revival possessed in the scheme of events in American history.

Soon after his retirement at the age of 70 years, Dr. Orr issued a six-page duplicated paper which declared that he had planned to use his retirement writing a “Magnum Opus” on revival and awakening. But another project had impressed him as a project which had a greater urgency about it. That was to write a definitive account of the 1857 Revival.

In this paper he started by criticizing again the definitions which McLoughlin had used about revival and awakening, and also those used by several other writers of similar attitude. He then explored other details about the beginning and progress of the revival which he had uncovered since his last book on the subject.

He concluded with a personal opinion. “Having studied all recorded revival-awakenings occurring in the past 250 years, reading the most critical as well as commendatory opinions, I have come to the conclusion that, in comparison with all other movements of the kind, the Awakening of 1857 – 58 was the most thorough and most wholesome movement ever known in the Christian Church.”³⁰

Orr’s ultimate revision of this work on the 1857 American revival was written but not published at the time of his death, and Richard Owen Roberts edited it, with Mrs. Orr’s permission, and published it himself. It is a vast improvement on what had been published beforehand.

There is undoubtedly a lot of new material in this posthumous book, and it certainly looks like his “definitive” telling of the story of this Awakening. Although it is clear that Orr was trying to be more analytical, yet the book’s main purpose is to tell a story and to portray all the historical evidence, new and old, that he had discovered about it. In particular, new material is introduced from nearly every one of the States of the U.S.A. to illustrate how widely the revival affected the nation. It includes also a more modest account of how the revival affected the Confederate armies in the Civil War, and also in the Union armies.³¹

My All – His All, and Campus Aflame.

Orr’s book *Full Surrender* had been published in 1951, and was translated and re-published a number of times in the years that followed. However, the rise of Pentecostalism, and the appearance of the Charismatic Movement, caused him to expand some parts of the book so that they were more useful in the new situation, and by the time of his death, Orr had completed a serious revision and an expansion of the book.

Again, it was Richard Owen Roberts who took hold of the opportunity to spread good teaching on the Christian life such as this book provides, and who gave the title, *My*

²⁹ Perry Miller. *The Life of the Mind in America* – from the Revolution to the Civil War. New York. Harcourt, Brace and Jovanovich. 1965. Book One. page 88.

³⁰ J Edwin Orr. *The Event of the Century*. The 1857-58 Awakening: A Startling Update. No date. Duplicated paper. Obtained from Dr. Orr in 1983. six pages.

³¹ J. Edwin Orr. *The Event of the Century*. Wheaton. International Awakening Press. 1989.

All – His All, to the book. It provides a good improvement on the older book, although the older one was greatly used and blessed by God.³²

Reference has already been made to the revised edition of *Campus Aflame*. Richard Owen Roberts again provided the avenue for it to be published.

Conclusion.

There is no doubt that more and deeper history needs to be written about the great awakenings and evangelical revival movements that have occurred in modern history. However, we have had among us in Dr. J. Edwin Orr, a researcher and story teller who has uncovered forgotten events and filled out a picture which was being widely neglected.

With Jonathan Edwards, and with the thinkers of the Second Great Awakening, I am convinced that more and better revivals is the only way to succeed in evangelizing the world any time soon, and to form the basis of healthy traditions of revivals in many countries, including Australia. It is as a result of healthy revivals that society can be made to exhibit higher standards of morality, and to fulfill God's desire that all men should be saved and come to know the truth as it is through the one and only Mediator, Jesus Christ. It is also by this means that a better standard of "peace on earth" can be attained, and that a better quality of justice might follow.

³² J. Edwin Orr. *My All – His All!* Wheaton. International Awakenings Press. 1989.