

Distinguishing Marks of the Spirit of God: Eighteenth-century revivals in Scotland and New England

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Mid eighteenth-century revivals in Cambuslang, Scotland, and Northampton, New England, played out in miniature violent distortions of religion that had reached crisis in the transatlantic world. Against the backdrop of literary controversy, conventional versions of events have focused on the central characters:- pastors, such as Jonathan Edwards, or itinerant charismatics, like George Whitefield. By tracing the connections of such people, an epistolary, praying, and fund-raising network aimed at universal revival-- the 'transatlantic community of saints'-- is revealed. Yet a proper understanding of the causes and nature of the revivals can only be got at through the motives of the ordinary people who attended them. The 'McCulloch Manuscripts' contain over 100 testimonial interviews with those 'under spiritual concern' at Cambuslang, describing their religious affections, in their own words. The weight of these documents, and their oral history character, makes them unique, and editorial excisions in the manuscripts reflect ministerial concerns that the revivals be presented with orthodoxy, and in an edifying way. Although the evangelical tradition was diverse, Calvinist devotional piety presents a distinct marker of religious heritage, and a mentality extraordinarily open to revivalism. Social conditions in Northampton and Cambuslang were widely different, but demographic and economic similarities raise new questions about the conditions in which revivals took place. Conversion narratives and the usage of biblical typography in everyday life reveal communities beset by millennial anxiety, and the insidious temptations of Satan. The final reckoning for the revivalists and their followers was eschatological, but the success and failure of the revivals can also be measured in the 'reformation of manners', as well as the relationship between the clergy and the converted.