This is lecture 9—Eighteenth-Century Renewal Movements. Greetings once again in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, and let me invite you to join me in prayer once again as we begin. Let us pray. Eternal God, we give you thanks for the privilege of studying together, and we ask that by your Spirit, you would guide us in our thought together today. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, we pray. Amen.

Today I want us to think together about the issue of church renewal, the possibility of spiritual revitalization among our local congregations, in fact, within our own lives, as well as within our denominations and larger church movements. There are a number of good sources for this kind of study. Those of you who are reading along with us in Latourette, volume 2, will want to look especially at pages 884 to 898 and again 1001 to 1059. An especially good source for the study of renewal in the life of the church is Richard Lovelace's *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, InterVarsity Christian Fellowship Press, 1979. Many of you will want also to read the work of Philipp Jakob Spener, about whom we’ll talk in just a few moments. His *Pia Desideria* is one of the classics of that period of time. It was translated by Tappert, Fortress Press, 1964. You’ll find that edition, as well as a number of others, available in your library.

Let’s begin our discussion with the matter of life cycle. All of us are familiar with the life cycle—birth, growth, maturity, decline, and finally death. We all understand that in terms of the plants and life that is around us. We understand it in terms of our own lives. We see that process going on again and again, and it’s a familiar one to us. What I’d like you to do with me today is to think about that life cycle in institutional terms, because churches—individual congregations as well as denominations—and in fact religious movements go through basically the same kind of life cycle—birth, growth and development, consolidation and maturity in their development, then often decline, and death.
This death can come through internal stagnation. It can come via an attack from the outside. But when it happens, three possible things result. The first is that the institution continues to struggle along, largely impotent, much like the valley of dry bones we have described for us in Ezekiel. A second possibility is that the institution dies, and we have many illustrations across church history of movements, of institutions that have come and gone. We know very little about them, since history is by and large the story of things that lived, that have tended to continue. The third option is that the institution is reborn or revitalized.

We've seen that process, I think most of us, in terms of our institutional relationships. Some of us, in fact, find ourselves within congregations or denominations which seem very much like that valley of dry bones. They’re still there. They still creak on, but the life is gone. There seems to be no flesh on those structures. The vitality of Christian faith and spirituality seems all too absent. The tendency of many of us confronted by that kind of reality has been to jump from our institution or our church or our structure to find something that’s livelier, so we look for another alternative, and some folk, in fact, make it a practice over their lives to go from one experience and expression of the faith to another, jumping here and there, always in search of something vital and alive. I would like to suggest a different possibility, particularly for those of you who are part of mainline American Christianity, a movement in its broad contours which has come upon hard times, and in fact virtually all of our so-called denominations are now in decline. With less money coming in, fewer missionaries going out, smaller congregations in city after city, the tendency has been for us to jump from those into something that looks fresher, more vital, and more alive. What I would like to suggest is that it’s possible for those very institutions, as dead as some of them may appear to be, to find new life and vitality, and in fact we can pray for and work for that kind of renewal in the life of the church. And, indeed, I think God calls us to do that. So let me encourage you by looking back to history to see where movements which had become somewhat formalized and stagnant, somewhat dead, have been brought back to life and vitality from within by people who have prayed and worked toward that end and by the grace of God have experienced the renewing touch of God’s Spirit upon them.

I want to use three examples that we are familiar with, because we’ve talked about these movements already, and then talk about how renewal came to them. The three that I’d like to focus
upon are German Lutheranism (remember that first great body that emerged out of the Reformation), English Anglicanism (the product of the great English Reformation), and American Puritanism (the growth and development of some of early colonial religious life here in the New World). All three of these show signs of decline, that life cycle moving to the other side of the hill, and yet all three of them had the joy of experiencing renewal from within: German Lutheranism through the great continental Pietist movement; English Anglicanism being renewed through the great Wesleyan revival and Methodism, and American Puritanism being reborn and revitalized through the great American revival tradition. Let’s look at those three patterns together, and out of them, I think you’re going to find some great encouragement not only to remain within those bodies that may seem very formal and routine right now but to work within those for renewal and genuine revitalization. It can come by the grace of God and through the power of the Spirit.

Let’s begin with German Lutherans. Lutheranism, which had been such a lively and vital new force in the European scene, over the first few centuries gradually drifted toward what is often called Protestant scholasticism. Jaroslav Pelikan describes this in his little book *From Luther to Kierkegaard*. The idea is that Lutheran thought, which was vital and fresh in the sixteenth century, increasingly came to emphasize right belief, a kind of assent to doctrine, and it came to rely upon formal structures to carry these principles through. In many ways it had lost its heart, the centrality of that experiential faith in the living Christ. It’s against that tendency that we see emerging, brought about through the power of the Holy Spirit, the movement that we know of as continental Pietism.

The origins of German Pietism were right within Lutheranism itself, and they focus around two major figures, Philipp Jakob Spener and August Francke. You can find these spelled out most clearly and powerfully in Spener’s little book *Pious Longings, Pia Desideria*. He published that in 1675. And in that book you have a kind of manifesto for continental Pietism. The stress there is upon personal conversion; the regeneration that goes on in an individual’s life as they confront the living Christ. It also stresses holiness in life, the hunger and thirst for righteousness, and what theme could be more powerfully needed in our day then that stress upon holiness.
It stressed Bible reading and prayer. It stressed reform of the church and its seminaries, its training institutions. The stress was also upon lay leadership, the priesthood of all believers. They didn’t forget social responsibility, and in fact, one of the major emphases of the early pietists was upon the living out of the faith among the needy, the poor, those who were oppressed, those who had special concerns. There was a kind of disinterest also in Pietism concerning theological speculation, theology for theology’s sake. They were concerned about theology; that is, they thought about God and His relationship to His creation, but they were disinterested in simply playing games and producing mental gymnastics relating to theological speculation. They stressed sanctification, perhaps even more in some ways than justification. They wanted to take sin seriously. They saw real evil as a part of the world, and they were concerned that Christians and the Christian community in general confront that with the power of the gospel and the living-changing life of the Holy Spirit.

They gathered together in little associations of piety, *collegia pietatis*. These are Bible-study groups, and you see emerging from those little studies some of the central elements of all renewal and reform in the church. Wherever you find it, in whatever century, in whatever kind of circumstance, there are certain elements that are always present. There are a variety of variables as well, but the elements which are always present are prayer, ardent prayer for renewal within the church, Bible study, and with rare exceptions lay involvement in small groups to pray and study the Bible.

We see the emergence of the movement around a university in Halle in Germany. Here is where Francke, Spener, and others began to teach and lead young people into pietistic emphases, which were to begin to renew the life of the church. Thousands of students came to the University of Halle. This was perhaps the largest of all of the divinity schools in Germany. Some six thousand plus were trained there, and their impact upon the church both in Europe and throughout the world was enormous. They also had strong social impact within their community. Formed around the school were orphanages, schools, and training centers for the poor who couldn’t afford education, a pharmacy for those who had medical needs, a Bible institute for those who wanted to study the Scriptures. All of these were part of that outliving of the gospel and the faith within Germany. Now you need to remember that these folk were Lutherans. They intended to remain within the church. Pietism is not itself a denomination. It’s a renewal movement initially within Lutheranism and then
reaching beyond. These were good church people. They were good Lutherans who felt that their church had become too formalized, too interested in theological speculation, and they found that the emphasis upon conversion, the vital living out of the faith was too much absent.

They came into conflict with, of all places, the University of Wittenberg. You have to think back to the earlier part of this course to remember that it is there in Wittenberg that the great Lutheran Reformation started, at least symbolically. And yet that very place had become the citadel of Protestant scholasticism. The stress there among the faculty members was upon the sufficiency of creedal orthodoxy. They stressed the authority of clergy over lay people. They stressed baptismal regeneration, more important in emphasis than any kind of new birth or conversion. There was a growing enjoyment of what was called worldly amusement, theaters, sports, and the like. And you can see with the emergence of Pietism that the faculty with those emphases would be very unhappy with what they saw happening at the University of Halle. In fact, the faculty at Wittenberg charged Spener with 264 separate errors or heresies. Nonetheless, the power of that Pietist movement brought new life and vitality within Lutheranism and began to turn to the church back to the Scriptures, back to vital faith, and the living out of the faith within the needs of the world.

Like all movements, however, even Pietism went through its own life cycle, and continental Pietism had itself to experience a period of decline and renewal from within. And that renewal came through Moravianism, a kind of second wave of Pietist renewal. The Moravians, the Unity of the Brethren, is a distinct denomination, however, arising from the Pietist movement. Its major figure is Count Zinzendorf, godson to Spener and a student of Francke. He permitted a group of refugees from Roman Catholic oppression in Moravia to settle on his estate in Herrnhut in 1722. He became increasingly interested in the constitution and life of the Bohemian Church and fused it with his own Lutheran Pietism to form a kind of society of friends, first within the Lutheran Church, much as the early Quakers had sought to bridge over denominations through a society.

This group emphasized somewhat sectarian tendencies, strong spiritual motives and emphases, and Zinzendorf’s own special form of passion mysticism, which was drawn heavily from the great medieval mystics. In fact, in the hymnody of the day, and Moravians were among those who wrote some of the most
powerful and beloved hymns, you find these emphases reasserted again and again. Let me give you an example of one of Zinzendorf’s own hymns, translated and made available for us, in fact, by the work of John Wesley. Some of you will know this hymn, “Jesus, Thy Blood and Righteousness,” and it reads “Jesus, thy blood and righteousness, my beauty are, my glorious dress; ‘midst flaming worlds, in these arrayed, with joy shall I lift up my head. Bold shall I stand in thy great day; for who ought to my charge shall lay? Fully absolved through these I am from sin and fear, from guilt and shame. Lord, I believe thy precious blood, which, at the mercy seat of God, forever doth for sinners plead, for me, e’en for my soul, was shed. Lord, I believe where sinners more than sands upon the ocean shore, thou hast for all a ransom paid, for all a full atonement made.”

Here you find all of the major emphases spelled out in hymn form—the strong stress upon Jesus, upon His life and ministry, upon His death on the cross, upon His passion. The imagery is often of the bride and the bridegroom. Many of the same themes that we saw in the great medieval mystics are drawn together and reasserted in musical form, and you’ll find a great tie between the work and hymnody of the Moravians and the writing of hymns by Bernard of Clairvaux and others we’ve talked about in earlier lectures.

The Moravians developed a rich liturgy in music with love feasts, foot washings, and the kiss of peace. They had their own dress, their own special languages, and their own words for one another. They were highly evangelistic, much like those early Quakers. They soon spread over Germany to the Low Countries, to Holland, to England, to Ireland, to Denmark, to Norway, to North America. In fact, the Moravians became the great missionaries of that era. Fully half of all Protestant missionary personnel during the eighteenth century came from Moravian ranks. We’ll talk about that a bit more when we talk about the great missionary movement of the modern era, but we need to also recognize the power of the Moravian renewal to spread the word of the gospel around the world.

It is true, unfortunately, that Pietism came to take on the features that we often today criticize, the division between the so-called secular and the sacred, the division between the visible church and the invisible church where Christians focused their attention on individualized, internalized religious experience through conversion, through personal devotion, prayer, and
Bible study, through a kind of ascetic discipline, focusing on a kind of apocalyptic hope as escape from the world all too often—subjectivism, practical holiness, and the like—and tend to overlook the importance of the faith and Christian involvement in culture and politics and economics and the organized church, in the visible structures of Christendom. It is true that that division came to take place within the broad continuing Pietist movement, but I think we need to also recognize that the early Pietists never divided those up and, in fact, all of life was to be integrated around the great themes of the Bible and around the great experiences of faith which they emphasized. So let's not be too hard on the Pietists or dismiss them because of the later developments of those kinds of divisions. I think we need to recognize that in classic form in their earliest years, some of their best years, it was a remarkable and healthy movement of biblical renewal which took place within German Lutheranism and then burst out to bless many other church bodies, denominations, and religious movements alike.

Another example of renewal comes in English Anglicanism. The Church of England was the great product of the Reformation that had taken place there, and yet, like all movements, it went through this process of the life cycle from birth in this enormous fresh growth, to consolidation to organizational structure, to hierarchies and the like until it began to decline into rationalism, deism in some ways, certainly the emphasis upon elitism, some neglect of the poor and the needy, and a real lack of vital piety. The church went on, the structures continued, but much of the life had gone from them. It was almost as if you could write over them “Ichabod, the spirit or the glory has departed.”

It's into that structure that we have introduced one of the most remarkable families in all of church history, the great Wesley family. The best known of the family are John and Charles. John's dates are 1703–1791 and Charles, the great hymn writer, brother of John, 1707–1788. He's the one who wrote more than five thousand hymns, and we sing many of these hymns in our church services today. They grew up in a pastor's home. In fact, in a high church, Tory parsonage. Their father was the Rev. Samuel Wesley, director of the church in Epworth. The mother was Susanna, one of the most remarkable people in all of church history. She bore nineteen children. John was the fifteenth; Charles was the eighteenth. She supervised their education. She ran the home. She involved herself in all kinds of ministries outside of the home and within the church. She is worth a study of her own, and some
of you may want to read about Susanna. I think you’ll be inspired by her marvelous example and for reason of her deep devotion to Christ.

All of the family lived together in the parsonage, the manse, outside of the Epworth Parish. Not everybody in that parish liked the political views of Samuel Wesley and, in fact, some disliked his views so much that they harassed the family and did acts of vandalism against the property. One of these, quite likely, was the lighting on fire of the family home, the manse at Epworth, and, in fact, it’s out of that experience that we come to understand most profoundly the impetus of John Wesley toward holiness. John was caught in the house at the time when this fire was raging. He was the only one left in the house, and he was on the second floor. Several neighbors got on each other’s shoulders and reached up to the window and took him down just in time as the building collapsed inward.

His mother, Susanna, interpreted this remarkable event for John throughout his life, and John writes of it in his journal. He calls himself the “brand plucked from the burning,” and he has this event, this specific occasion in mind. His mother interpreted this for him saying, “This is an evidence that God has preserved you to serve Him in holiness and righteous living throughout your life.” He not only took that seriously at the time, but to his very grave he carried that deep passion for righteousness and service of God.

As a bright student, John was sent to Oxford, along with his brother Charles to study, and it’s while there that he formed, along with others, what came to be called in derision somewhat, the Holy Club. It involved also the great preacher George Whitefield, who was then a student at the school as well. This group got together to read the Bible, to read devotional literature, and they were deeply interested in the old mystic tradition, and they read many of the old mystics. They also read the literature which was being produced by William Law, a writer and high churchman who lived near Oxford. His writings on Christian perfection, his emphasis upon a serious call to Christian perfection were formative not only for John, but for his colleagues there as they studied at Oxford, and they committed themselves to fasting, to lives of charity, to visiting people in prison, and carrying for those who had needs. It was nearly monastic in its self-denial and austerity. John often fasted so much that he could barely keep going and his body was wasting away. He was quite a small man anyway, short of stature and very thin, and he remained throughout his life in a position
where he struggled for good health, and he was often ill.

From 1735 to 1738, the brothers labored in Georgia here in the New World with almost complete lack of success. John was rigid in his churchmanship, in his attempts to enforce all of the laws of the church even out on the frontier, and it led to a virtual revolt of his parishioners. He left Georgia to come back to England, returning in 1738. It was there that he got involved with a group of people at Aldersgate Street at a little prayer meeting in 1738, and in that year, at that meeting, when he heard Luther’s preface to his commentary on the Romans read that he says, “I had my heart strangely warmed,” and he counts this to be his period of justification or conversion, new birth. Remember, he’s already gone through Oxford, he’s been ordained in the church, the Church of England, which he was part of right down to his own death. He had gone as a missionary. All of this prior to his heartwarming, his conversion. And if you want something wonderful to read, pick up the journals of John Wesley and read through those as he gives his account of his own spiritual development and reflections on life. I think you will be very surprised and encouraged.

From 1740 on, John Wesley preached three to four sermons every day for some forty years. Can you imagine that? He was in the center of fifty to one hundred riots, often instigated by the local parson who was unhappy with his preaching. Many of his assistants were badly hurt, even killed, and he himself was often badly hurt or battered, and you have accounts of this in his journal. It makes a very fascinating reading.

After his conversion, he went to visit Herrenhut, remember that Moravian community about which I just spoke, and he always appreciated what he had learned there, though he eventually broke with the Moravians because they did not emphasis good churchliness, worship, sacraments, and the like sufficiently. He also joined hands with his old friend from Oxford, George Whitefield. Whitefield was one of the great preachers of his time, and we’ll talk more about Whitefield in one of the later lectures. Whitefield had become involved in what was called “field preaching.” This began in 1739. The actual start of it was near Bristol in England. Whitefield had been preaching outdoors because there was not enough space inside for everyone to come and to hear. Thousands would gather outdoors. This was not looked upon with great favor by the Church of England establishment and, in fact, it was a real struggle for John Wesley when his friend, George Whitefield, asked him to come to help him at Bristol to know whether he should
break with that tradition of his church and preach outdoors. He decided he would do so and, in fact, traveled across from horseback from London to Bristol, and as he traveled, as was his custom, he read a book on top of the horse, and the book that he was reading as he was moving to Bristol for this great beginning of what came to be called the Wesleyan revival, he was reading Jonathan Edwards’s account, his narrative of the surprising work of God and the conversion of many hundreds of souls in Northampton, Massachusetts, an event about which we'll talk a little later.

Wesley's great gift was that of organization. He would gather converts together into bands of about ten members, each with a leader, each having regular meetings. Cards for membership were given, and every quarter the ranks were rigorously purged of the half-hearted. He raised up a new class of lay readers as helpers, those who would travel, who would help to minister, who would read sermons, who would talk with people and counsel with those who wanted to find faith. He ruled in a somewhat autocratic, personal way, but by the time he died in 1791, there were some 294 preachers, 19 missionaries, well over 70,000 members in Great Britain alone, and here in America 198 preachers, 43,000 members, and it was rapidly growing. In fact, by the middle of the nineteenth century, it had become the largest of all of the denominational groups here in America.

The figure who most helped the growth of Methodism here in America was Wesley’s associate Francis Asbury. If you want to read a very interesting account, let me suggest that you read Terry Bilhartz’s edition of Francis Asbury's America, put out by the Francis Asbury Press, a branch of Zondervan Publishing House, in 1984, and it contains many marvelous illustrations, as well as sections of the journal of Francis Asbury, who between 1771 and 1816 traveled on horseback over 270,000 miles here in the New World, preached 16,500 sermons, presided over 240 annual conferences, and ordained some 4,000 preachers. Methodism under his leadership here in America grew from the smallest to the largest of the American denominations. The growth, in fact, of Methodism has been incredible, and it often obscures the basic fact that we need to reemphasize here, that the Wesleyan revival and Methodism was never meant to be a separate denomination. John Wesley was a deeply committed Anglican, and his movement was meant primarily and fundamentally to bring renewal to what he felt had become a too formalized, too non-biblical Church of England practice. And Methodism did, in fact, bring enormous renewal within the Church of England ranks and, in fact, still
does down to this day. Another spinoff of this was the first great holiness denomination, Methodism, and we’ll pick that story up again later on when we look at the Methodist church and some of its growth.

What we have happening thus far then as I’ve been suggesting is that all movements no matter how good or when they emerge or what kind of leadership they have go through a life cycle. And we’ve seen the lifecycle affecting not only German Lutheranism, but Pietism which came as a renewal movement itself. And the cycle goes on and on and indeed must go on and on from generation to generation. We’ve seen it also in terms of English Anglicanism and the renewal which came through the great Wesleyan revival. Let me give you one final illustration, and I’ll only begin to touch on it here and we’ll pick it up more fully in our next lecture. This is the Puritan movement often called Puritan Congregationalism here in America, and the renewal which took place within Puritan Congregationalism through America’s revival tradition and particularly the Great Awakening which broke out in colonial American life.

There are wonderful studies available to us of the revival tradition about which I want to speak. You might want to read Bernard Weisberger’s little book They Gathered at the River, a very readable book by Little Brown, 1958, or William McLoughlin’s more scholarly study, Modern Revivalism, Ronald Press, 1959, or the classic, William Warren Sweet’s Revivalism in America, Abingdon Press, 1944. Or if you want a wonderful collection of materials, the Heimert and Miller edition called The Great Awakening, Bobbs-Merrill Press, 1966, is maybe the best place to look. One can also find help in specialized aspects of the Great Awaking through Joseph Tracy’s The Great Awakening, Tappert and Dennett, 1841, or Edward Scott Gaustad’s The Great Awakening in New England, Harper & Row, 1951, or Charles H. Maxson’s The Great Awakening in the Middle Colonies, University of Chicago Press, 1920, or Wesley Gewehr’s The Great Awakening in Virginia, Duke Press, 1930.

The great figure of the awakening, of course, was George Whitefield, that powerful preacher. In fact, William Garrick, one of the great English actors, said that George Whitefield’s preaching was so powerful, his ability to move an audience was so great that he felt he could make people laugh or cry merely by pronouncing the word Mesopotamia. That’s quite a commendation from one of the great actors of the day. Whitefield preached outdoors to enormous crowds, and here in America, where some of his
most powerful ministry took place, he traveled up and down throughout the thirteen colonies. George Whitefield preached to great masses of people and to small groups here and there. And, in fact, Whitefield himself died right here in the New World in Newburyport in Massachusetts, and you can find his grave in the basement of the Presbyterian Church in Newburyport. His last sermon was preached here the day he died.

Whitefield is really one of those really remarkable people, and the best place to read about Whitefield is Whitefield’s own journals, Banner of Truth has just come out with a wonderful new edition of these in 1989, and that has maps and other helps, along with miscellaneous journals which he wrote throughout his ministry. Or if you want to read about him, Stewart Henry’s *George Whitefield: Wayfaring Witness*, Abingdon Press, 1957, is one of the great places to look.

The Great Awakening itself comes as a result of that kind of dismal and dark passage through which Puritanism went in America following the decline of the dream. Remember, the Puritans had settled the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1630, and we talked a bit about the establishment of that community as a place that would be a city on a hill—a model, reforming Christian community, and it was only after a period of several generations that they not only recognized that that dream was badly fading, but they entered a period of enormous decline and the preachers preached sermons called jeremiads, calling people back to faith and life and vitality. And it’s against that backdrop over the first century of the Puritan Congregational experience here in America that we have the emergence of the first great religious awakening.

Now let me give you a little background on this before we talk about it in more specific terms. America has experienced revivals almost throughout its whole history. We have these in virtually every year of America’s life. A revival is essentially a renewal of spiritual vitality sent to the church by God’s Spirit and always producing in the life of the believer a deeper love for God and a more active concern for the neighbor. Revivals, you see, can come to individual Christians; they can come to individual congregations, cities, denominations, many denominations, even a whole nation. When there’s a general sweep of revival across all of these traditional boundaries, we speak of it as an awakening.

America has had thousands of revivals, but it has had only four major periods of awakening: the Great Awakening, which took
place 1720 to the early 1740s; the Second Great Awakening, 1796 to the mid-nineteenth century, to the 1850s or so; the Third Great Awakening, picking up on the great lay revivals of 1857 and continuing through the work of Dwight L. Moody to the ministry of Billy Sunday in the 1920s; and the Fourth Great Awakening starting in the late 1930s and continuing up until the early 1960s. And some would argue, though it’s difficult to tell because we’re so close to it, that it continues down to our day. We’ll have to get a little farther away from it before we can make that kind of a judgment, but certainly there was a great awakening that emerged in the 1940s and 1950s under the work of Torrey Johnson, the work of my own father, Merv Rosell, and most notably, of course, Billy Graham.

The first of those great awakenings was one that came against the darkness of a decline in old Puritan Congregationalism. It had become formal. It had become crusty. It had become a kind of valley of dry bones. And into that valley was breathed new life, new vitality, and it came through the great work of the First Awakening which started under Theodore Frelinghuysen, a kind of strange, old Dutch pastor down in the Raritan Valley of the Jerseys and then spread up into New England and spread south through the work of Edwards and Davies and . . . Whitefield, and we’ll have a chance to pick up that story in our next class as we begin together.

But let me simply conclude today by saying those of you who find yourself within churches, within denominations, within movements that seem like a valley of bones, don’t despair, don’t think your only option is to jump into something that looks more lively or vital. It may be that God is calling upon you to invest your time, your energy, your prayer, and your work toward renewal of that very body, that very movement. God has done it before hundreds of times, and He can do it again.