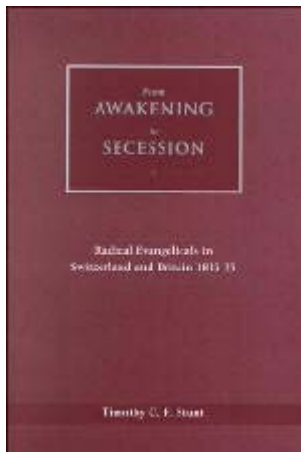


RBL 12/2002



Stunt, Timothy C. F.

From Awakening to Secession: Radical Evangelicals in Switzerland and Britain 1815-35

Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000. Pp. xiii + 402, Cloth, \$59.95, ISBN 0567087190.

George Conger
Merton College
Oxford OX1 4JD, United Kingdom

Timothy Stunt's *From Awakening to Secession* is a gem. Free of the cant and jargon that disfigures much academic writing, Stunt provides a balanced and thoughtful presentation of the Swiss *réveil* and its impact upon a small, but influential segment of religious life in early modern Britain. Stunt's book is a model of clear concise prose, detailed documentation, and lucid argument that avoids professorial posturing or doctrinaire special pleading. Stunt's publisher, T & T Clark, serves him well providing two appendixes, a bibliography, and a clear, accurate index to this well written presentation. All told, Stunt's book is a superior work of scholarship and a valuable contribution to the study of Nineteenth century ecclesiastical history.

Stunt's topic is the Swiss *réveil*, a religious re-awakening that began among a small group of theological students and pastors in Geneva following the close of the Napoleonic wars. The narrative begins in Geneva and through the eleven chapters of the book Stunt traces the influence of the *réveil* outward upon the religious life of Vaud and Berne, across the channel to England, Ireland and Scotland and then inward as it returns to the Continent. Stunt convincingly demonstrates the close relationship of Protestant enthusiasts in Britain and Switzerland in the years following the Napoleonic wars. He then takes the historical, political, ecclesiastical and biographical narrative forward in time showing how various communities responded differently to the seeds first planted by the Genevan *réveil*.

In his opening chapter Stunt looks back upon the Eighteenth century roots of the Swiss *réveil* tying three disparate strands together: religion, philosophy, and politics. He examines the various influences that Continental Pietists, Moravians, and other religious enthusiasts, including the burgeoning Methodist movement in Britain, had upon religious

life. He then postulates the influence of Rousseau upon the philosophical development of religious life in Geneva. Stunt finds a degree of common ground between Rousseau and Pietism and illustrates the influence of the Romantic Movement upon the intellectual development of the Genevan enthusiasts. Stunt closes his opening chapter by discussing the social and political dislocation caused by the Napoleonic wars and the part they played in creating a climate amenable to a *réveil*.

The second chapter introduces Stunt's core topic as he begins with the Genevan *réveil*. Stunt places the *réveil* that began in 1815 within the social and ecclesial framework of an Established Church whom contemporary critics saw as lacking in faith and vigor. The religious enthusiasts of early Nineteenth century Geneva unfavorably contrasted the flaccid State Church with the energy, piety and simple devotion of foreign groups such as the Moravians or the Society of Friends. The *réveil* itself was not a foreign transplant, Stunt argues, but a spontaneous reaction to the religious-social milieu of the day. When the influential Scottish evangelical, Robert Haldene came to Geneva in 1817 he found a *réveil* well underway. By 1817 the Genevan dissidents were confident enough of their position to secede from the State Church. Secession was not, Stunt suggests, the principal aim of the dissenters. Secession arose as a reaction to political and ecclesiastical oppression from the State Establishment to the *réveil*. Dissent grew into secession when the quest for reform and renewal met with heavy-handed opposition.

In chapters 3 and 4 Stunt describes the outward spread of the *réveil* into the Swiss Cantons of Vaud and Berne before turning to assess the impact of the Swiss *réveil* in Britain in Chapter 5. The energy, enthusiasm and apparent success of the Swiss *réveil* soon attracted the attention of British evangelicals. Cross-fertilization between Swiss and British evangelical churchmen arose through personal contacts and correspondence. British travelers began returning to Geneva following the establishment of a European peace while Swiss dissenters journeyed to England to visit their evangelical confreres. The initial British response to the Swiss *réveil* was mixed, Stunt argues. Many evangelicals agreed that the Established Churches were in need of reform and renewal, though not all found a way forward in model offered by the Swiss *réveil*.

In chapters 6 & 7 Stunt shifts his focus from the Continent to England and Ireland and describes a growing unease among some evangelical members of the established church; an unease that through the influence of the Swiss *réveil* eventually propelled a minority towards secession. An initial impetus for concern for many churchmen, Stunt observes, was disquiet over the lack of fervor displayed by the various missionary societies. Stunt masterfully weaves the lives of leading evangelicals such as Edward Irving and A.N. Groves into the narrative describing their theological development and highlighting the links and views they and others shared with the leaders of the Swiss *réveil*. In chapter 7 the Irish political and ecclesiastical context is described in detail with a finely crafted exposition of the religious development of Robert Daly and John Nelson Darby.

From Ireland Stunt turns first to Oxford in chapter 8 and then to Scotland in chapter 9. Stunt skillfully dispels the Tractarian fog some scholars sentimentally have draped across the Oxford of the 1820's and early 1830's. Stunt discusses the evangelical

phases of faith of Francis and John Newman and skillfully fleshes out the University evangelical scene. In Chapter 10 Stunt crosses the border and addresses contemporary Scottish parallels to the growing *réveil* in England, Ireland and Switzerland discussing Thomas Chalmers, Thomas Erskine, and the Swiss connection to the outbreaks of glossolalia upon the Clyde in 1830.

In chapter 11 Stunt regroups and discusses the growing tension among the British Bible societies and missionary groups over the effects of the *réveil*. Stunt identifies the years 1831-1832 as years of crisis and decision as the question of secession from the established Church order was debated across various geographic regions and intellectual/spiritual circles. A small note of criticism by way of digression ... the title of the book, *From Awakening to Secession*, may be faulted for being too narrow as Stunt demonstrates that some, but not all, of the those effected by the *réveil* eventually found themselves outside of the established Churches of Britain and Switzerland while many of those influenced by the *réveil* were outside the Establishment.

In his concluding chapter Stunt movies back across the evangelical landscape and examines the successes and failures of the religious movements influenced by the Swiss *réveil*. Stunt moves to the West Country and ties the *réveil* to the creation of Providence Chapel in Plymouth and the subsequent growth of a new ecclesial body, the Plymouth Brethren. Stunt convincingly argues that the style and ecclesiastical substance of the Genevan *réveil* of the 1820's found an outlet in the birth of the Brethren in the 1830's and through the theological development of other dissenting and radical evangelical groups in Britain. This new radical evangelicalism, in turn, moved back to Switzerland and transformed the dissenting and secessionist churches in Geneva and Vaud.

What has Stunt done? He has skillfully woven together a number of radical evangelical and dissenting churches and circles of the 1820's and 1830's, ranging from Dublin to Geneva to Glasgow to Plymouth, and formed them into a network influenced by a common charismatic evangelical fervor that first arose in Geneva in 1815. *From Awakening to Secession* amply demonstrates the international dimension of the evangelical awakening that followed the Napoleonic wars and has done so in a scholarly, rigorous, and eminently readable book that is a significant contribution to scholarship.