

THE GREAT AWAKENING

MODERN CHURCH HISTORY –SPRING 2024

AMERICAN REVIVAL

- By the early 1700s, American culture was extremely Protestant.
- By the 1730s, American preaching had become more energetic and passionate than European preaching – with an emphasis on personal conversion.
- Presbyterian ministers Jonathan Edwards, Gilbert Tennent, Theodore Frelinghuysen, and Jonathan Dickenson were all leaders of the Great Awakening, but the most famous preacher was an Anglican evangelist named George Whitfield.
- Whitfield travelled the colonies preaching at open-air revivals attended by large crowds.
- During this period, 20% of all colonists were African slaves. As many as half of all slaves were converted to Christianity and worshipped alongside white colonists during the Great Awakening!

WHITFIELD QUOTES

- “It is a poor sermon that gives no offense; that neither makes the hearer displeased with himself nor with the preacher.”
- “Works? Works? A man get to heaven by works? I would as soon think of climbing to the moon on a rope of sand!”
- “Though they have a Christ in their heads, they have no Christ in their hearts.”
- “Let a man go to the grammar school of faith and repentance before he goes to the university of election and predestination.”
- “Be content with no degree of sanctification. Be always crying out, ‘Lord, let me know more of myself and of thee.’”
- “We are immortal until our work on earth is done.”

EDWARDS QUOTES

- “You contribute nothing to your salvation except the sin that made it necessary.”
- “Resolution One: I will live for God. Resolution Two: If no one else does, I still will.”
- “He that has doctrinal knowledge and speculation only, without affection, never is engaged in the business of religion.”
- “A truly Christian love, either to God or men, is a humble broken-hearted love.”

DENOMINATIONS

- Nearly all Protestant denominations in America can trace their roots back to the Church of England.
- Presbyterian churches were established very early in American history by Puritans. The first confirmed Presbyterian church in America was found in 1644 by Richard Denton in Hempstead, New York. The first presbytery was established in 1706.
- The Baptist movement also began with the Puritans. Early Baptists agreed with Presbyterians on everything except baptism and church government. The first Baptist church in America was founded in 1638 by Roger Williams in Rhode Island.
- Methodist churches came later. In the mid-18th century, Irish Methodists fleeing persecution brought their faith to America, sparking early congregations, particularly in the South.

THE ENLIGHTENMENT

- During the 17th and 18th centuries, an intellectual and philosophical movement swept across Europe and the American colonies.
- This movement promoted several core ideas: human reason vs. faith and tradition, the importance of individual rights and liberties, a commitment to progress and human flourishing, a shift to a more secular understanding of the world, and the idea that universal moral principles can be derived from reason and nature (natural law).
- The Enlightenment sparked political revolutions, class warfare, new scientific discoveries, and challenged religious tradition.
- A new religion emerged from the Enlightenment: Deism. Deists believe there is a god who set the universe in motion but does not intervene in its ongoing operations.
- Many Americans embraced Deism as a “rational alternative to traditional religious beliefs.” Several founding fathers were deists, including Thomas Jefferson, Ben Franklin, and James Madison.

By the end of the 18th century, the vast majority of American colonists were active church members. Today, 63% of Americans self-identify as Christians, but sociologists claim that most Americans believe in something they describe as “Moralistic, Therapeutic Deism”:

There is a god... He wants me to be good... He wants me to be happy...