Theo 425 Session 7: First Great Awakening, pt 1
Rev. Jacquelyn E. Winston, Ph.D.

Reading assignment: Noll 83-84, 86-106m, 110m-113; Stark 49t, 51-54

I. The History of Evangelical Revivals in the 18\textsuperscript{th} & 19\textsuperscript{th} c.
   A. The Great Awakening – 1734-1737 in New England under leaders Jonathan Edwards, Gilbert Tennent (and in Great Britain), resurged c. 1738 with itinerant preaching ministry of George Whitefield and publication of conversion accounts.
   C. Holiness Movements of the post-Civil War period in the wake of the negative effects from the Industrial Revolution. (Salvation Army, Church of the Nazarene, religious societies including Sunday School Movement, YMCA & YWCA). Emphasized Wesley’s work among poor and his doctrine of entire sanctification.

II. The First Great Awakening (1734-37; 1738 ff)
   A. Historical and social setting:
      2. Early Great Awakening was not an anti-intellectual movement, in spite of its emotional component. Many of the supporters founded colleges to train for ministry which later became Ivy League colleges (Princeton, Brown, Rutgers, Columbia, Dartmouth).
      3. American setting – colonies still strongly aligned with British thought, pre-American Revolution.
         a) Hierarchical, paternalistic society, shaped by Anglicanism and its emphasis on formalism and Puritanism which had become religiously insensitive.
         b) Affected by conflicts between the Protestant English crowns of the Hanoverian dynasty (William & Mary) and attempts to restore the Stuart descendants of King James II (a Roman Catholic) with the support of France. (His son, Bonnie Prince Charlie was finally defeated in 1746). Great Awakening was in part reaction against threat of Roman Catholicism.
c) American colonists affected by battles between Indians, Britain, and France for control of American land.

4. Religious status of the three regions of the 13 colonies prior to the First Great Awakening (c. early 1730s) (Noll 90):
   a) New England – Puritan heritage, church influence began to decline;
   b) Middle Colonies – Protestant pluralism;
   c) South - Anglican church reinforced deferential culture which sponsored slavery.
   d) Reasons each region may have responded to revival:
      (1) New England ministers to shore up their flagging status.
      (2) Middle colony ministers – to expand their outreach and deepen spiritual life of their denominations.
      (3) Southern ministers hoped to augment piety of their followers while assimilating it into the stable establishment structure.

B. Characteristics of the Great Awakening:


2. Viewed by some scholars as a reaction against emphasis on rationalism of the Enlightenment deists. At same time, it emphasized another aspect of the Enlightenment – empiricism (experience).

3. Three influential strains that shaped the Great Awakening: the Calvinistic ideas of Puritanism; European Pietism and its emphasis on the individual conversion experience; and the organizational structure inherited from Anglicanism & later Methodism.

4. Changes in spiritual emphases precipitated by the Great Awakening (Noll, Evangelicalism 52):
   a) From correct doctrine to correct living
   b) From order to fellowship as the church’s primary goal
   c) From interpretation of scripture by recognized church authority to more democratic use of the Bible.
   d) From obedience to the expression of faith.
   e) From music by trained specialists to congregational hymnody
   f) From preaching as an intellectual exercise to an impassioned appeal to make a decision for God.

5. Precipitating event in Northampton, Mass (1734). Return to religious interest among youth. Jonathan Edwards began to preach sermon on justification by faith to offset Arminian tendencies and began age/gender focused small groups in
homes to promote godliness. Edwards' famous sermon: “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God” (1741) became model for individually focused revival sermon.


7. Jonathan Edwards - apologist for Great Awakening. Religion not revealed by emotions but by changed heart. Said will doesn't constitute a real entity but is strongest motive in a person’s character. Sinful nature can't desire to please God except for God's grace that changes sinner's character (Freedom of the Will c. 1754). Edwards' themes – glory of God, dependence of humanity on God for salvation, life of holiness (Noll 97).

C. Effects of the Great Awakening:

1. New England – splintered unity among churches:
   a) Libertarian themes of revival led towards separation of state-church establishment and gave rise to Baptists;
   b) New Light Congregationalists like Edwards promoted conversion with God shining light in soul. Maintained ties with church;
   c) Old Calvinists – traditionalists who kept ties to hierarchical structure;
   d) Rationalistic Congregationalists looked to Enlightenment to avoid emotionalism of the revivals. (98)
   e) Middle Colonies – common experiences among denominations – formal schisms among Presbyterians & Dutch Reformed which finally resolved into more egalitarian, pietistic religion across groups.

2. South – Baptists became alternative to Church of England with popularization of emotional personal faith & challenges to existing religious order (99) Baptists challenged existing religious authority and order of society by their appeal to lower classes.

3. Religious periodicals spread news of revival and incited its growth. Established Letter Days – periodic meetings in which accounts of revival were read; and Concerts of Prayer – believers across regions arranged to pray for revival.

4. Terms: New Lights & Old Lights (Congregational Church) – Old Lights (e.g. Charles Chauncey) opposed New Light supporters of revival like J. Edwards. New Side vs. Old Side (Scottish-Irish Presbyterians) – supporters of revival like Gilbert Tennent (New Side).

4. Rejection of church-state sponsored religion in New England and emphasis on individual conversion led to emphasis on baptism after conversion causing many believers to move from Congregational to Baptist churches (Noll 100)
D. Baptists and the Great Awakening

1. New England Baptists led by Isaac Backus (began as Separate Congregational church). New England Baptists agreed with Edwards except they only supported adult baptism and rejected gov’t support of church (100).

2. Southern Baptists shaped by Shubal Stearns & Daniel Marshall from Boston who moved to Carolinas (101). Baptist growth not appreciated in south since it undermined social order based on class deference with its emphasis on egalitarianism (Noll 102)

E. Changes in Religious Practices produced by Great Awakening:

1. First Great Awakening promoted more active, individualistic Protestantism (Noll 103)

2. Shift in sensibilities from Puritanism to evangelicalism leading to:
   a) Shift in views of authority – authority gained by popularity and influence of a minister (evangelicalism) vs. authority as the basis of popular control and influence (Puritanism) (Noll 104).
   b) With evangelicalism, salvation is mediated by spoken & written word, but Puritanism’s view of salvation shaped by covenant views of family, church, & nation.
   c) After Great Awakening, charismatic leaders sought (Noll 105) (more emphasis on religious emotion).

3. Christian message preached to downtrodden in society such as David Brainerd’s ministry to Native Americans (Noll 105) and Gilbert Tennent & Samuel Davies’ ministry to slaves (106).

4. Great Awakening was first national event (Noll 110)

5. Revivals brought different groups together (Noll 111).

6. GA increased sense of national identity as Americans with greater suspiciousness vs. Europe (Noll 111), especially tensions vs. Church of England (112).

7. GA increased dynamism of terms such as liberty, virtue, and tyranny.

8. GA encouraged laity to perform their own religious duties rather than rely on elite clergy (112).
F. Finke & Starke 49, 51-54 First Great Awakening as a Sectarian Revival

1. Explosive growth of Baptist and Methodist sects (F & S 49).

2. Emotional sermons replaced lectures on theology.

3. Results of Whitefield’s ministry during the First GA:
   a) Demonstrated market for more robust, less secular religion (F & S 53).
   b) He provided model for itinerant ministry.
   c) Converts of First GA ended up in sects like Baptists, not mainline churches. (Is this true? What about Edwards’ followers?)

For Further Reading:


