

## CH506: American Church History Lecture 4

## FOUR MAJOR CHRISTIAN RENEWAL MOVEMENTS

## I. Puritanism (Review Lectures 1 and 2)

- What is Puritanism?
- Who are some of the leaders and theologians of the movement?
- What are some of the beliefs of Puritanism?
- How did Puritans organize their churches and society?
- What were some of the reactions against Puritanism?

## II. Pietism

Pietism began in Germany in the late 1600s as a renewal movement that emphasized the necessity of good works and a holy life. Pietists believed that the Christian life should consist of more than dogmas, sacraments, and church ordinances. They argued that true Christianity touched the heart as well as the mind, producing a vigorous religious experience that would reach out in compassion. The early leader of Pietism was Philipp Jakob Spener (1635-1705), a Lutheran pastor who called for renewal in his influential book *Pia Desideria* (*Pious Desires*, 1675), which offered six proposals for reform:

- 1) A better knowledge of the Bible;
- 2) Increased lay activity;
- 3) Good works;
- 4) Avoidance of controversy;
- 5) Better educational and spiritual training for ministers; and
- 6) Fervent preaching.

A geographical center of the movement was Halle, where August Francke (1663-1727) labored as a teacher and model at the university. Perhaps the most famous Pietist of the early eighteenth century was Count Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf (1700-1760), who became leader of the Moravians. Pietism spread to England in the early 1700s influencing what would become the Evangelical Revival. Part of that movement spread to the American colonies and merged with indigenous awakenings leading to what would be called the First Great Awakening (c.1726-1776).

## III. The Evangelical Revival of the Eighteenth Century

The Anglican John Wesley (1703-1791) and his brother Charles Wesley (1707-1788) founded a religious society called “the Holy Club” by its detractors at Oxford University when they were students. Their friend George Whitefield (1714-1770), who also later became a minister of the Church of England, was a member of the society (joined in 1733).

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A revival broke out in Germany that would later influence John Wesley. The Moravians, led by Count Zinzendorf experienced a dramatic Pentecostal outpouring of “signs and wonders” in 1727. In 1735, the Moravians established a settlement in Georgia. The Wesley brothers, who had become Anglican missionaries, arrived in Georgia that same year. The spirituality of the Moravians greatly impressed them. Meanwhile in England, George Whitefield had a conversion experience in 1735. In 1738, the Wesley brothers returned to England and both had conversion experiences of their own through the ministry of the Moravians. Later that year, the Wesley brothers and Whitefield together began extensive preaching campaigns, sparking the first widely successful evangelical revival in the British Isles. For the next several decades, the Evangelical Revival would sweep across Europe with many reports of supernatural “signs and wonders.”

**Accounts of the Supernatural from Wesley’s Journal**

Physical Healing	Exorcism/ Emotional Healing	Prophecy	Falling/Laughing/Crying/ Shaking (2 columns)		Dreams/ Visions	Other
09-28-39	10-12-39	01-28-39	01-01-39	12-25-58	12-05-38	05-02-39
11-16-40	10-25-39	09-03-40	04-30-39	05-20-59	08-12-45	10-25-39
03-21-41	10-27-39	12-04-42	05-01-39	05-30-59	08-29-46	10-27-39
03-31-42	10-28-39	09-01-44	05-09-39	07-29-59	09-11-46	05-09-40
12-25-42	01-11-41	06-19-45	05-21-39	07-14-59	03-03-48	05-21-40
11-12-46	01-13-43	06-28-46	06-15-39	07-19-59	08-29-48	10-23-40
04-08-50	08-13-46	02-05-62	06-16-39	08-04-59	04-28-56	08-24-43
10-12-54	05-20-49	01-07-63	06-22-39	08-28-59	06-12-56	07-15-44
12-26-61	08-09-50	04-04-81	07-07-39	02-16-60	05-05-57	03-17-46
10-16-78	04-27-52		11-28-39	07-26-62	07-24-57	07-03-48
05-31-85	06-05-53		02-20-42	04-04-64	07-28-57	12-14-48
	10-01-63		03-12-42	06-17-70	07-29-59	07-23-50
	06-01-64		06-11-42	09-18-70	08-06-59	06-09-52
	06-29-66		06-12-42	09-26-70	06-23-61	06-05-53
	05-25-68		11-23-42	06-04-72	03-26-64	07-18-59
			01-25-44	06-05-72	08-03-67	10-01-63
			05-08-44	03-27-80	05-02-68	05-05-69
			07-10-45	04-05-82	10-31-72	06-15-69
			03-12-46	05-29-87	11-17-72	06-20-74
			07-05-47		07-31-74	11-13-74
			03-04-48		08-19-75	09-02-81
			06-17-49		04-12-84	04-15-82
			02-17-50		04-19-84	05-23-83
			06-04-50			
			09-14-55			
			01-29-58			
			07-30-58			
			09-01-58			
			11-09-58			

George Whitefield traveled to the American colonies (1738 and 1739) and preached to large numbers of people in cities such as Philadelphia. The Wesleys remained in England.

## THE FIRST GREAT AWAKENING

### I. Broad Contours of the Great Awakening: 1726-1776

The Great Awakening was the first example in American life of revivalism on a large scale. It occurred in the same era as Pietism (Netherlands and Germany), the Wesleyan Revival (England), and the period of intellectual development in Europe and America called the Enlightenment.

#### A. Local, 1720-1740: Middle Colonies, Dutch Reformed and Presbyterian

Historians usually date the start of the Great Awakening with the coming in 1720 of Theodore J. Frelinghuysen (1691-1748) to the pastorate of four Dutch Reformed churches in and around New Brunswick, NJ. Beginning in 1720 Frelinghuysen preached passionately to his congregations in an effort to awaken them from what he viewed as dangerous spiritual lethargy.

Frelinghuysen's fervent preaching won a wide following but also provoked criticism from other ministers of Dutch Reformed churches. The work of Frelinghuysen spread through much of the middle colonies, especially in the Calvinistic churches.

The early revival reached a peak in 1726 when Gilbert Tennent (1703-1764), a Presbyterian pastor in New Brunswick, was influenced by Frelinghuysen to preach for "conversion" in his own congregation. Within a short time several Presbyterian churches around New Brunswick were experiencing conversions and fresh excitement. The chief leaders of the revival in the region were all "log college" men, so-named because they had all been trained by William Tennent (1673-1746) (Gilbert's father) in an unsightly building in Neshaminy, Pennsylvania.

Some clerics criticized those trained at the Log College for their excessive emotionalism. Gilbert Tennent created a great controversy within his denomination by preaching a sermon in 1740 entitled "The Danger of an Unconverted Ministry" in which he lashed out at ministers who did not support the revival, calling them blind leaders of the blind. His famous sermon tended to harden the lines of division between supporters and critics of revival.

In 1734, more than ten years after the beginnings of revival under Frelinghuysen in New Jersey, similar events occurred under the preaching of Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) at Northampton, Massachusetts. That year, Edwards' congregation began to experience an "awakening" with people crying out during the minister's sermons and sometimes falling to the ground speechless in sorrow for their sins and fear of hell. Many were profoundly converted and, according to Edwards, the spiritual atmosphere of the entire town was uplifted. Edwards is famous for his sermon, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" (first preached in Northampton and later in Enfield, CT on July 8, 1741) which affirmed the reality of divine punishment (including vivid imagery of hell) and the necessity for repentance and conversion.

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### B. Colony Wide, 1740-1743: Anglican and Congregational

Soon Jonathan Edwards would join forces with fellow Calvinist George Whitefield (1714-1770). In 1739-1741 Whitefield had his first preaching tour of the American colonies. His friends John and Charles Wesley remained in England. With the arrival of Whitefield, the Awakening became general (i.e., colony-wide), covering all of the Eastern Seaboard as well (see Noll, 94). Many other preachers also itinerated.

The Congregationalist Charles Chauncy (1705-1787), of Boston's First Church, gradually emerged as the spokesman of the critics of the revival. In 1742 he preached a sermon entitled "Enthusiasm Described and Cautioned Against." In 1744 Harvard and Yale colleges joined the critics. The majority of Boston's established clergy, however, favored the Awakening. In New England those who followed Edwards and other defenders of the Great Awakening were known as New Lights, and became proponents of the New England Theology; those who opposed it were known as Old Lights. The Presbyterians also split into New Side and Old Side groups between 1741 and 1758, and the Baptists into Separate and Regular Baptists.

### C. Local, shift south, 1743-1776: Presbyterian, Baptist, and Methodist

It has been customary to see a Presbyterian, a Baptist, and a Methodist phase of the Great Awakening in the South. The great organizer and propagator of Presbyterianism in Virginia was Samuel Davies (1723-1761). His popular preaching made heavy inroads into the established Anglicanism. The movement was continued among the Separate Baptists of Virginia and North Carolina by Shubal Stearns (1706-1771) and Daniel Marshall (1706-1784). Methodists obtained their first American foothold in the South, and this was largely under the auspices of the Anglican clergyman, Devereux Jarratt (1733-1801). The churches of the Middle Colonies and New England tended to be aroused by the Awakening only temporarily. In the South, however, the Awakening continued through the Revolutionary War in many parishes.

## II. The Revival and its Effects

### A. Renewal and Controversy

The Great Awakening brought numerous converts into the churches and made Christianity a religion of the people. It also stimulated humanitarian and philanthropic interests. The Awakening also produced numerous controversies, creating for a time internal divisions among the Dutch Reformed Churches, the Presbyterians, and the Congregationalists.

### B. Education

Princeton, Dartmouth, Brown, and Rutgers

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## C. Theology

Three theological parties emerged in *New England*: the “liberals,” led by Charles Chauncy and Jonathan Mayhew; the New Divinity men or “New Lights” or Edwardeans; and the Old Calvinists. (See Noll, 98)

## D. Social and Political Effects

The revival elevated the common individual. It also hastened the separation of church and state. It emphasized the individual Christian and his or her inner religious experience rather than church or theocracy. With the Great Awakening, the individualization of Christianity can be said to have begun.

## RELIGION AND THE ENGLISH ENLIGHTENMENT

## I. Introductory Comments

The Enlightenment, traditionally defined, is the period extending roughly from the late seventeenth century to the late eighteenth century during which occurred a significant development of the intellectual history of Europe and America. German philosopher Immanuel Kant defined the term “Enlightenment” as humanity’s emergence from immaturity to adulthood. According to Kant the ethos of Enlightenment thinking is captured in the phrase *Sapere aude!* (“Dare to know!”)—i.e., use one’s own understanding and reasoning. The period of Enlightenment is also sometimes called “The Age of Reason.”

In their religious thought, some prominent Enlightenment thinkers were hostile to traditional Christianity. The Deists abandoned the notion of a God personally concerned with creation and skeptics like David Hume posed serious philosophical challenges to religious belief. By the beginning of the nineteenth century in America, Unitarianism had emerged as a reworking of traditional Christianity.

Yet, we should not be too quick to see the Enlightenment as an anti-religious movement. Several scholars such as J.A.I. Champion, Henry May, J.G.A. Pocock, J.C.D. Clark, James Bradley, and others are revising the story. One could be both “enlightened” and religious. John Wesley, the great leader of the Pan-European Evangelical Awakening was also a product of Enlightenment thinking (e.g., in his views of religious toleration) and major scientific figures of the period such as Isaac Newton, Robert Boyle, and John Wilkins retained strong religious convictions.

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## II. Theology and the Enlightenment

In England, the scientist Sir Isaac Newton, and the philosopher John Locke made significant contributions that had a substantial impact upon the Church in England and in America. Newton's most significant work was his *Principia Mathematica* (1687), which provided a mechanistic interpretation of the universe. Locke's "Essay Concerning Human Understanding" (1690) systematized the doctrine of empiricism. It soon became clear that people could bring a certain measure of control to their universe, and furthermore, could order their society through working together.

## III. The Reception of Enlightenment in America

Some embraced Enlightenment ideas wholesale. Others modified what they deemed to be useful. Cotton Mather and Jonathan Edwards embraced much Enlightenment thinking without discarding their supernaturalistic outlook. Charles Chauncy and Jonathan Mayhew fully embraced the "Enlightenment" and used it as a tool by which to exalt human reason and to demean the emotional side of religious experience.

The widely-touted skepticism of the period of Enlightenment never really took off in America in the latter part of the eighteenth century. The form of Enlightenment that prevailed in the United States was derived from the Scottish "common sense" philosophers. Most of the leading thinkers in America's most visible Protestant churches (and other religious groups) embraced some variety of common sense reasoning including: John Witherspoon (Princeton; Presbyterian), Timothy Dwight (Yale; Congregationalist), Henry Ware and Andrews Norton (Harvard; Unitarian) and Francis Wayland (Brown; Baptists). (See Noll, 156)