

CHURCH HISTORY III

WEEK 5: GREAT AWAKENING IN (COLONIAL) AMERICA¹

INTRODUCTION

Last week we considered a group of pastors and lay leaders who sought reform in the Church of England: The Puritans. During a period of great persecution some of Puritans fled to continental Europe but some migrated to the New World. The first settlers in North America were not just devout Puritans in MA.

There same decades saw enterprising English settlers founding new colonies in VA, MD, CT, RI, GA. Virginians, those religious established church folks, did not have the same vision for “covenant communities” like the NE Puritans.

Through the remainder of the 18th century these groups would experience a series of religious revivals, known as the Great Awakening. The Great Awakening spawned a more common American religious identity and profoundly shape modern evangelicalism.

THE ENLIGHTENMENT OR AGE OF REASON (≈1650 - ≈1800)²

- 1) While the church was getting back to her roots and coming out of the control of the RCC, the world was begging to lose faith...in the church and in all the church held dear.
- 2) The Enlightenment represents the loosening of the state and society from ecclesiastical control and the emergence of a culture largely secular in character.
- 3) The theories and sanctions of modern social and political life are no longer derived from biblical revelation or Church authority but independently arrived at by natural reason and social experience.
- 4) An essential feature of the Enlightenment and of our modern culture since the eighteenth century is the growing separation of Western civilization from the authority of Church and theological dogma.³
- 5) Enlightenment scholar Ernest Cassirer noted: *If we were to look for a general characteristic of the age of enlightenment, the traditional answer would be that its fundamental feature is obviously a critical and skeptical attitude toward religions.*
- 6) Religion was an oft-discussed topic of the Enlightenment. It is important to view this period in light of the Protestant Reformation that preceded it.

¹ <https://www.capitolhillbaptist.org/resources/core-seminars/series/church-history/>

² <https://www.gotquestions.org/Enlightenment-Christianity.html>

³ James C. Livingston, *Modern Christian Thought From the Enlightenment to Vatican II*

- 7) The monolithic nature of the church had come to an end, and Enlightenment thinkers had already been freed, to a large degree, by the dialogue and writings that came out of the Reformation.
- a) It should be noted that many prominent thinkers of the Enlightenment were Christians, although some were unorthodox in their beliefs. Primary themes of Enlightenment thought on religion center on the notions of anti-supernaturalism, deism, and, as it relates to Christianity, biblical criticism.⁴
- 8) **These three themes:** 1) anti-supernaturalism, 2) deism and 3) biblical criticism came out of The Enlightenment and influenced Christianity to this day.
- a) Because their battle-cry was *rationalism*, things which are known before experience, and *experimentation*, things which can be known by the senses, the supernatural was heavily questioned during this time. anything contrary to the normal operation of the Laws of Nature were to be held at a distance and one was to be skeptical about it.
- b) The things against normal reason in Scripture (heaven, hell, angels, Satan, etc.) were archaic and relics from past traditions.
- 9) Deism taught that whatever supreme intelligence was out there, did not get involved in creation.
- 10) This is when the analogy of the watchmaker came to be, he makes the watch, but it works on its own.
- 11) The Bible became a good moral guide and having a personal relationship with God was not only nonsensical but also unneeded.
- 12) ***Arguably the heaviest hit that Christianity took was with regards to the Bible.***
- a) Up until this point, the Bible was often misused and withheld from the local people, but it was rarely questioned in its authenticity.⁵
- b) Because biblical criticism did not really come about until this time, it was viewed through The Enlightenment lens.
- c) The main points of thought were **textual, source, redaction, canon and form criticism.**
- i) Though these have all been since refuted throughout the years by careful and conservative scholarship, many still have fallen prey to its thought process.
- 13) This is the beginning of what is known as the Modern Age and will have, not only profound effects upon the new colonies, but Christianity indefinitely.

⁴ <https://www.gotquestions.org/Enlightenment-Christianity.html>

⁵ This is to mean its source, power, Apostolic authorship, inspiration and sufficiency.

THE NEW COLONIES START TO TAKE SHAPE

Education

- 1) As we talked about last week the universities of Oxford and Cambridge were important to the Puritan movement in England; this idea transplanted itself in New England.
- 2) The Protestant Reformation and Puritanism had unleashed historically high levels of literacy because people now wanted to read the Bible.
- 3) Harvard is founded in 1636 as a place to train ministers, Yale in 1701 in response to perception that Harvard had slid in its teaching of the Bible faithfully.
- 4) The student rules adopted for Yale College give some idea of the early character of this noble institution:
All Scholars Shall Live Religious, Godly, and Blameless Lives according to the Rules of God's Word, diligently Reading the holy Scriptures the Fountain of Light and Truth and Constantly attend upon all the duties of Religion both in Publick and Secret...Every student of this College Shall in Words and Behavior Shew all Due Honor, Respect, and Reverence towards all their Superiors...and Shall in no case use any Reproachful, reviling, Disrespectful, or contumacious Language...

Quakers⁶

- 1) The Quakers, or the Religious Society of Friends, began when people within the Church of England saw corruption and false doctrine rise in that body in the 1650s. With Puritanism also came a type of Phariseeism driven by personal pride and doctrinal divisiveness. A non-conformist movement was started by those who sought to distance themselves from Puritanism.
 - a) The earliest dissenters went about seeking others of like mind and practice and were thus called "Seekers." When they met together, it was not to formally pray or preach, but simply to wait together for God to speak to them.
- 2) The Quakers viewed the traditional Christian as "conceited of himself, and strong in his own will and righteousness, overcome with blind zeal and passion." George Fox, the founder of Quakerism, said the name "Quaker" was first used as a derogatory term in court, "because we bid them tremble at the Word of God." Quakers were persecuted widely in England and the American Colonies and were often imprisoned or put to death for their beliefs.
 - a) Because of this widespread persecution, William Penn founded the Pennsylvania Colony (1681) to provide a safe haven for Quakers.

⁶ <https://www.gotquestions.org/Quakers-Friends.html>

Moravians⁷

- 1) The Moravian Church has long been associated with missionary activity. In 1732 missionaries from Herrnhut went to St. Thomas Island.
- 2) Missions' efforts expanded to the rest of the Caribbean (largely to the African slave population there), Greenland, Labrador (to the Inuit people), Surinam, Guyana, South Africa and North American Indians.
- 3) The pioneering efforts of the Moravians in spreading the gospel were responsible for untold thousands of people coming to faith in Christ. It was through the testimony of the Moravians that John Wesley experienced conversion.
- 4) Moravian missionaries came to the United States during the colonial period.
 - a) The Moravians gained a permanent presence in Pennsylvania by 1741.
- 5) The Moravian Church now has about one million members, mostly in eastern Africa, but also in the Caribbean basin; South Africa; Winston-Salem, North Carolina; and Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.

JONATHAN EDWARDS (1703-1758)

- 1) One of Yale's earliest students was a brilliantly talented young man named Jonathan Edwards, one of the greatest minds America has ever produced.
- 2) In 1908, a professor did a study of his lineage, and found 1 U.S. Vice-President, 3 U.S. Senators, 3 governors, 3 mayors, 13 college presidents, 30 judges, 65 professors, 80 public office holders, 100 lawyers and 100 missionaries. He was the genetic headwaters of much talent.
- 3) Edwards certainly reigns as America's premier theologian, one of our most innovative philosophers, and stunningly advanced psychologist and natural scientist, and his life and thought well illustrate much of the character of 18th century American Christianity.

Early Years

- 1) Born in East Windsor, CT on October 5, 1703, to Rev. Timothy and Esther Stoddard Edwards.
- 2) A thoughtful young man who spent much time wandering the fields and thinking about God and creation. A renaissance man – at 11 spends time recording in his notebook the behavior of some spiders.
- 3) In 1716 (13 years old) enters Yale college, graduates 4 years later at the top of his class, later takes a master's degree.
- 4) His Yale years were intellectually fruitful, both intellectually and spiritually...Christian theology and scripture, classic languages, Enlightenment sciences and philosophies of Newton and Locke.
 - a) He understood the challenges of Enlightenment philosophy and endeavored to answer these challenges and adapt positive things of their belief (like natural law) to Christian orthodoxy.

⁷ *Who's Who in Christianity*

Conversion

- 1) Struggled with doubts over God's grace and sovereignty.
- 2) **1721**—at the age of 18, God impressed on Edwards emotionally, intellectually and spiritually the assurance that he could have salvation, and how God himself had worked this in Edwards.
 - a) Meditating on 1 Tim. 1:17: Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever, Amen.
 - b) This led Edwards to a profound new comprehension. After reading this passage, he wrote, *there came into my soul, as was as it were diffused through it, as sense of the glory of the divine being; a new sense, quite different from anything I ever experienced before.*
- 3) In some ways, Edwards would spend the rest of his life meditating, reflecting and expanding on this sweet sense of the majesty, supremacy and glory of God.

Ministry – North Hampton

- 1) Edwards first becomes the pastor of a church at age 19 in Manhattan. After a brief pastorate in Manhattan and one in Bolton, CT in 1726, He was invited to be associate pastor to Solomon Stoddard, the aging pastor and grandfather of Edwards, at his church in Northampton, MA.
 - a) Stoddard was the unquestioned authority and most revered pastor of the CT River Valley.
- 2) In 1727, he marries his wife Sarah, 17, who he had admired since she was 13 for her love of God. She was the great great great granddaughter of Thomas Hooker, the famous Puritan founder of CT. They had 11 kids.
- 3) West of Boston the church at North Hampton was the most prestigious in NE. Edwards served 3 years until Stoddard died in 1729 then he assumed the pastorate.

The First Awakenings

- 1) Edwards immersed himself in pastoral duties.
 - a) Beginning at 4 or 5AM for 13 hours in study reading, writing numerous letters and essays and above all preparing his sermons, for he regarded the preaching of the Word his most important duty to his congregation.
 - b) **Resolutions:** Worth reading – one of them is to never depart from the Bible if he finds something difficult in it until he has it totally satisfactorily resolved in his mind.
- 2) As a result of his writings, his message and fame spread. In 1731 things pick up, and in 1734, there's a full-on fiery hunger in New England for the things of God. Edwards comments on this and writes,

a great and earnest concern about the great things of religion and the eternal world became universal in all parts of the town, and among persons of all degrees and all ages; the noise amongst the dry bones waxed louder and louder. All other talk about spiritual and eternal things was soon thrown by; all the conversation in all companies and upon all occasions, was upon these things only, unless so much as was necessary for people, carrying on their ordinary secular business. Other discourse than of the things of religion would scarcely be

tolerated in any company. The minds of people were wonderfully taken off from the world; it was treated amongst us as a thing of very little consequence.

A Divine and Supernatural Light

- 1) Edwards preached and published one of his most important sermons: “A Divine and Supernatural Light.”
 - a) **Primary concerns:** to distill the essence of true Christian experience and distinguish it from either mere knowledge or mere emotionalism. (Notice how it was against the enlightenment thought).
- 2) Here Edwards explained that God communicates to people in an immediate way, beyond the reach of reason alone. The truly converted are given an entirely new sense to apprehend the things of God, a power to appreciate the beauty and excellency of Christ.
 - a) ***This sense is not available to the unregenerate.*** In Edwards’ famous illustration, it is the *difference between having a rational judgment that honey is sweet and having a sense of its sweetness.* Likewise, the “spiritually enlightened” person does not *merely rationally believe that God is glorious, but he has a sense of the gloriousness of God in his heart.*
- 3) **Under the faithful preaching of the Word**, this new sense seemed to overtake many of the residents of North Hampton and the surrounding towns, and many either came to faith for the first time, or else had their stagnant faith renewed.

The North Hampton Revival Dies Down

- 1) Edwards believed in the ultimate supremacy of Christ, but knew that Satan worked to stop his Gospel work.
- 2) **June 1735:** Joseph Hawley, Edwards’ uncle and prominent town member became so distressed by his own sin and driven to despair with doubts of his salvation that he cut his own throat and died.
 - a) This had a stifling effect on the community. *The news of this extraordinarily affected the minds of the people here*, Edwards wrote.
 - b) It stunned and troubled Edwards, who struggled to comprehend, describing it as *awful providence.*
- 3) While Hawley’s suicide effectively ended the revival, Edwards kept on faithfully in his pastoral labors.
- 4) Yet this tragic death always served as a reminder—and a warning—of the danger of godly revivals veering into ungodly excess and hysteria.

THE GREAT AWAKENINGS

- 1) The revivals at North Hampton and in the CT River Valley anticipated revivals all over the English-speaking world.
- 2) **What characterized the Great Awakening?**
 - a) Itinerant preachers with simple messages based on the basic Gospel
 - b) Appeals to emotion and reason (produced wild shouting’s, convulsions, fainting’s, speaking in tongues).

- 3) Edwards: *Sinners in the Hands of An Angry God*. Not delivered in a violent tone, but logically, showing people that eternal judgment awaits outside of Christ.
- 4) Increase in membership of churches (e.g. in 1733-1734, 300 new members in Edwards church)
- 5) Individualism – undid a lot of the old Puritan constraints of community, helped shaped American democracy in important ways...An antecedent to the American Revolution.

GEORGE WHITFIELD (1714-1770)

- 1) By 1740, a new preacher eclipses all preachers (even Edwards) in international prominence.
- 2) George Whitfield, the young Anglican evangelist, had been stirring vast multitudes in his native England to repent of their sins and trust in Christ for salvation.
- 3) **Early life:** Mother owned a bar, very lonely, rough existence. Educated at Oxford (good friend of the Wesley's), it is there he is converted, cries out while praying on his bed, "I thirst, I thirst!"
- 4) Whitfield had an exceptional voice, a stunningly effective gift for dramatic presentation and tireless passion for proclaiming the Gospel to lost sinners.
- 5) His first love was the theater, so this helped him. Whitefield, one contemporary said, could *make men weep or tremble by his varied utterances of the word Mesopotamia*.

England

- 1) Controversy: attacked the establishment of Anglican ministers for being unconverted.
- 2) Preaching to vast multitudes not in churches, but in the fields, public squares and open markets all over England. Not his physical force that attracted people, he was somewhat overweight and cross-eyed.
- 3) He preached from a portable, folding stand that he would set up wherever he preached.
- 4) Literally Thousands of people at a time would flock to Whitfield's sermons—on some occasions, as many as twenty or thirty thousand people at once gathered to hear him.
- 5) His great voice carried well in an era before amplification.
- 6) While some came for curiosity and most came out of spiritual hunger, at least a few came to cause trouble. One time when he preached to a great multitude at a park in England, hecklers bombarded Whitefield with stones, rotten eggs, and pieces of dead cat. Undaunted, he finished his sermon and saw many come to faith. Another time had his head bashed in by a rock, left him blind in one eye for a few days.

To The New World

- 1) **1738:** Founded an orphanage in GA., the oldest present charity in North America. The Bethesda Orphanage.
- 2) **1739:** Returned to preach in PA and southern colonies. He becomes America's first celebrity, and many traveled for miles to hear him.

- a) Newspapers reported his comings and goings; and carried regular journal entries. Whitfield made astute use of this publicity, desperate as he was to see as many people as possible hear the Gospel.

George Whitefield and Benjamin Franklin⁸

- 1) They are good friends and keep up correspondence for decades, Whitefield begs Franklin to taste of the new birth in Christ, Franklin thinks he's genuinely converted.
- 2) Benjamin Franklin, in his Autobiography, wrote, *I happened ... to attend one of his [George Whitefield's] sermons, in the course of which I perceived he intended to finish with a collection, and I silently resolved he should get nothing from me.*
- 3) At this sermon, though, Franklin said, *I had in my pocket a handful of copper money, three or four silver dollars, and five pistoles in gold. As he proceeded I began to soften, and concluded to give the coppers. Another stroke of his oratory made me ashamed of that, and determined me to give the silver; and he finished so admirably that I emptied my pocket wholly into the collector's dish, gold and all.*
- 4) The experience convinced Franklin that Whitefield was an orator who could attract and sway huge crowds. It also was a memorable moment in what was to become a lifelong friendship between two men who were a religious odd couple.
- 5) **Franklin notes regarding the New England area:**
...change soon made in the manners of our inhabitants. From being thoughtless or indifferent about religion, it seem'd as if all the world were growing religious, so that one could not walk thro' the town in an evening without hearing psalms sung in different families of every street."

Edwards and Whitfield

- 1) Edwards had read of the excitement surrounding the young Whitfield.
- 2) **1740:** Edwards wrote to Whitfield and invited him to preach in North Hampton during a tour of NE. Whitfield had read Edwards work *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God in the Conversion of Many Hundred Souls in Northampton* (1737) and agreed to come.
- 3) **October 17-19, 1740:** Whitfield arrives in North Hampton and stays with the Edwards family.
- 4) **Sarah Edwards:** was a singular woman in her own right – a model of learning, piety, and devotion to family, she reared eleven children and served as a treasured companion to her husband throughout his ministry.
- 5) Whitfield, unmarried at the time, was struck *A sweeter couple I have not seen. Mrs. Edwards is adorned with a meek and quiet spirit; she talked solidly of the things of God and seemed to be such a helpmeet for*

⁸ <https://www.christianitytoday.com/history/issues/issue-38/religious-odd-couple.html>

her husband, that she caused me to renew those prayers, which for some months, I have put up to God, that He would be pleased to send me a daughter of Abraham to be my wife.

- 6) Whitfield's tour through NE in 1740 and 1741 marked the height of the Great Awakening revivals. Thousands gather to hear his message; great numbers responded with deep emotion.
- 7) Convicted of sin, they would wail and cry out to God for salvation; many turned to Christ, and church membership swelled in towns swept by the revival.

Differences between Edwards and Whitfield:

- 1) Edwards only occasionally preached outside of his church...Whitfield spent his entire life in itinerancy, usually preaching in public spaces rather than church buildings
- 2) Edwards was a pastor whose sermons and writings covered an array of subjects...Whitfield stuck to the basic Gospel message.

Whitefield's End

- 1) He dies sometimes took the pulpit four or five times a day, and by the end of this life, we see a man who vomited according to one source "a vast discharge from the stomach, usually with a considerable quantity of blood." Most likely gout.

EDWARDS, POST-AWAKENING

- 1) If Whitfield was the heart of the Great Awakening, Edwards was the mind.
- 2) In many places throughout New England, the revivals burned out of control--Screaming, laughing, trances, visions, and convulsions were common, and some ministers deliberately manipulated these responses.
- 3) Some of the ministers of the more established churches in Boston began sounding off against these excesses and against the revivals in general.
- 4) Against these attacks, Edwards proved to be the revivals' greatest theological defender. He was also their most penetrating critic.
- 5) In 1741, he delivered a commencement address at Yale entitled *Distinguishing Marks of the Work of the Spirit of God*.
 - a) The sermon was later expanded to his Treatise on Religious Affections. In that treatise, Edwards discusses 12 things that one cannot hold to be evidence of a work of the Spirit – such as supernatural manifestations, excessive talking about religion, even the impression of Scriptures upon the mind.
 - b) In the second half of the book, he gives 12 signs that can in fact be taken as evidence of a work of the Spirit of God – a love for God, honor for Christ, and above all, a righteous life.

Trouble in North Hampton

- 1) A theological dispute in Edwards's church finalized what had been growing rift between Edwards and the Northampton congregation.
- 2) Previous pastor Stoddard taught that communion was a converting ordinance; the bread and wine themselves could communicate the truth of the Gospel and should be given to the unconverted.
- 3) Edwards believed that communion is reserved for those who made a credible profession of faith in Christ.
- 4) When he tried to change this many in the Congregation rebelled, and after lengthy disputations, on June 22, 1750 the congregation voted overwhelmingly to dismiss their pastor.

Missionary to Native Americans (1751-1757)

- 1) He becomes a pastor to a mission church in Stockbridge, MA and preached to them via interpreter.
- 2) He wrote treatises on Original Sin, Freedom of the Will, The End for Which God Created the World and The Nature of True Virtue and continued work on his magisterial yet never finished *A History of the Work of Redemption*.

Princeton and to his Savior

- 1) February 16, 1758 –Edwards is installed as the 3rd president at the College of New Jersey (Princeton). Somewhat impossible imagining an evangelical pastor becoming President of Princeton today.
- 2) Always interested in scientific inquiry, Edwards allowed himself to be inoculated with a new smallpox vaccine on February 23, 1758. The experiment failed, and Edwards dies on March 22, 1758.
- 3) We conclude with Edwards' greatest concern, and most persistent theme. In a letter to Deborah Hatheway, a teenage girl who had been converted during the revivals, Edwards encouraged her that:

Though we are exceeding sinful, yet we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, the preciousness of whose blood, and the merit of whose righteousness and the greatness of whose love and faithfulness does infinitely overtop the highest mountains of our sins.