

APOSTOLIC SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

THE GREAT AWAKENING

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INTRODUCTION

The Great Awakening term is found from the term revival, which in and of itself can be a bit of a misnomer. For how can one be revived from something they have never experienced before? On an individual basis, the term “revive”, then, would seem to have no implication. But, on a corporate, institutional level of the holy Church of God, it can be relegated to having great significance and meaning. For the Church of God, which was alive, then became stagnant, then became alive again, gives the term “revival” a much sounder rendering of the word.

The Great Awakening needs to have the use of its term designated, from an historical bent. For it is found to be an event that took place on more than one occasion, in the 1700’s as well as in the 1800’s, and even once or twice since then. That being qualified, this paper will take a brief look at the history books, examine and identify; what led up to the revivals, key players, and congruent elements that were integral to facilitating them. What is to be gleaned from this study, is twofold: 1.) The modern day Apostolic Church can be encouraged that what happened before, can happen again, and 2.) The church can learn from others who have gone before, in helping to be instrumental toward bringing in the next Great Awakening. “If then, why not now?” and “If them, why not us?” are two questions the Church needs to ask itself.

The Great Awakening was considered to be an evangelical movement that began to bring light on the world in the sixteenth and seventeenth century, thereby giving the preceding years of

the medieval Catholic time period, the title of the “Dark Ages”. Once reformation began, the “light began to dawn once again” (Kidd, 2007, xiii). What was certain, the Great Awakening was a “powerful, unprecedented series of revivals from 1740-1743 that touched many of the colonies and contemporaries remembered for decades as a special visitation of the Holy Spirit” (Kidd, 2007, xix). There appears to be a certain amount of controversy regarding dates and such, for historical purposes. But historian and writer, Thomas Kidd gives an analysis and a recapitulation of the movement:

Calling this event “the” Great Awakening does present historical problems. Chief among them is that the standard framework of the “First” and “Second” Great Awakenings may obscure the fact that the evangelical movement continued to develop after 1743 and before 1800. There were important, widespread revivals that happened before the First, and between the First and Second, Great Awakenings. The controversial emergence of the religion of the new birth demarcated the long First Great Awakening and the first generation of American Christianity. (Kidd, 2007, xix).

It was this initial “Great Awakening” that in turn, gave birth to numerous proceeding revivals which spanned the Atlantic from Europe to America and from the state of Georgia, on up through New England.

POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUS UPHEAVAL

Called to question, is an historical documentation piece as recorded by Justo Gonzalez in his book *The Story of Christianity*. What may seem to be a random piece of factual history, is a significant example which portrays the type of hypocrisy and contradiction between the church and the royalty of the day, who in this case was Queen Isabella. The contradiction lies in her feeble attempts to reform the church. Along with her confessor, the “pressure on Jews and Judaizing Christians became increasingly severe. Finally, in 1492, it was decreed that all Jews must either accept baptism or leave all territories under Isabella and Ferdinand” (Gonzalez, 2010, loc. 297). In seeking to follow the reformation evolution in regards to the role Queen Isabella

played in the Spanish Inquisition, one seeks to understand the remark she said about the Roman Catholics: “The dissolution is such, that the souls entrusted to the clergy receive great damage, for we are told that the majority of the clergy are living in open concubinage, and that if our justice intervenes in order to punish them, they revolt and create a scandal, and that they despise our justice to the point that they arm themselves against it.” (Gonzalez, 2010, loc 218). In one instance she was criticizing the R.C. Church, but in the next, she royally condoned it. When we separate the church from the actual reign of the queen, it may be apparent, that there was little influence of the monarchy over the church, by her original statement and procession to then let them take matters into their own hands. What followed was the Inquisition that killed and persecuted Jews who refused to be baptized and converted to Catholicism. The approximate figures of Spaniards of the Jewish faith as given by Gonzalez, is two hundred thousand. What is most disturbing as well as hypocritical, is that this was done under the reign of Isabella and Ferdinand. The Inquisition was a “royal decree against Jews”, but shortly before it happened, the Muslim/Moorish stronghold fought a bloody war for freedom of practicing religion. The lasting memories regarding the Spanish Inquisition would forever leave a fear in the hearts of the people of what would and could happen to those who rebelled against the Catholic Church. The corruption, paired with the hypocrisy, political contrariness and punitive nature of the church, most certainly left its mark: “As the Middle Ages drew to a close, many advocates of reform were convinced that the greatest ill of the church was obscurantism of what soon would be called the Dark Ages.”. Fortunately, thanks to the efforts of “Byzantine scholars and the furthering of scholarly education, there was hope on the horizon for “reformation of the church” (Gonzalez, 2010, loc. 328-329).

What can be gleaned from pieces of history such as this, is the fact that the Church was a tool in the hands of the Monarchy to bring about religious changes in the spiritual landscape of Europe, over a span of hundreds of years. It is complicated to comprehend, but going back to the roots of Islam and the Jewish nation of Israel, one sees the beginning of the dissention. What then followed were other dimensions of conflict which arose with the different levels of the acceptance of Christianity. Biblically speaking, sin is the root of all of the issues at stake. And those who force others to believe are wrong, for God gives us free will to choose, and we are not to force our beliefs on others. Martin Luther, as well as many other key figures in what became known as the Protestant Reformation, held similar beliefs and became known as humanists: for they sought to restore the church, by the return to the use of the Scripture and “early Christian literature” (Gonzolaz, loc. 344). The history of political and religious upheaval, leading up to the Great awakening, was consequently instrumental in paving the way for hungry hearts to approach God, from a far different path than what was presently at hand. It is no wonder that the political unrest and religious dissidence which was prevalent all over Europe, and seeking to find a foothold in the New World, became the catalyst toward the Protestant Reformation, which in turn led to the first Great Awakening.

There were other factors which worked toward bringing instability to organized religion in the New Country, paving the way for the Awakening. Immigrants who had come over from Europe without their spiritual leaders, had hoped to improve their quality of life, as their poor economic status made it made it difficult to focus on things of faith. A covenant called the “Half-Way Covenant” was enacted, with the idea that it would allow Catholics an opportunity to maintain their Catholic status, but yet have more freedoms. It essentially failed because it ended up actually working as a stepping stone, out, of the Roman Catholic Church. Many came to

America, not just for religious freedom, but for economic reasons, so the Roman Catholic Church never really found footholds in the colonies.

Another factor in what led up to the Awakening, is the fact that the Revolutionary War caused many to fear the wrath of England and wanted to make the break to get England off their back for they saw America “as a religious refuge”(Sweet, 1942, p.12, 271-272). William Sweet in his book *Religion in Colonial America*, mentions another item that helped the stage to be set for revivalism in the colonies; sermons were “full of gloomy forebodings as to the future because of the low state of religion and public morals” (Sweet, 1942,p. 273). This sounds ever too familiar with sermons in the present century, at least in the Apostolic Church, where preaching is keeping up with the latest national and international news. It was this type of acknowledgement by many preachers of their time, that made conditions ripe for revival: many “feeble religious organizations found themselves unable to cope” with the crisis of the disarray caused by the immigration; new emphasis in religion as well as a new type of religious leadership to meet the peculiar situation which the American colonies presented” was needed (Sweet, 1942, p. 273). So many cultural and political changes made life uncertain and thereby unstable: “It is not incidental that the Great Awakening occurred during a period of extraordinary upheaval marked by economic, socio-cultural and political unrest” (Chacon & Scoggins, 2014, p.37). Here, once again, one sees very parallel and disconcerting, societal dilemmas, present in the world today: Germany is facing a mass immigration by the thousands, as well as America. Foreigners from all over the world are being forced to leave their home countries to start all over again, many times in a new country that was not of their choosing. The religious differences in these immigrants are causing a great deal of concern, especially because of the radical extremist’s acts of genocide that are taking place.

NEW BIRTH

From the *Contemporary American Religion* reference source, “Spirit” is given numerous definitions because so many different religions have given it their each individual meanings which have proliferated “across many boundaries: theological, psychological, and philosophical, as well as institutional, ethnic and gender”. (Bednarowski, 1999, p. 691-693). But for the purpose of this study, we will use the Christian perspective from the same source, which is the “Hebrew concept of *rauch*, “*breath of God*” and the Greek “*pneuma*”, or soul (Bednarowski, 1999, p. 691-693).

It is the function of the Holy Spirit in Christian theology to pervade, sustain, and sanctify the universe, to be the bridge between God and the world. The most versatile in form of the divine persons (wind, fire, dove, etc.), the Spirit is known to break forth in unpredictable and innovative fashion. The revivals that are so much a part of American religious history – the First and Second Great Awakenings of the mid-eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the holiness and Pentecostal movements of the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth century’s through charismatic renewals in Catholicism and Lutheranism in the 1960s and the political prominence of the religious right in the 1980s and 1990s – all of these are attributed by followers to the workings of the Spirit. This emergence is often accomplished by theological and political conservatism – back to the basics, back to the time of apostolic origins (Bednarowski, 1999, p. 691-693).

The basics are no surprise to the modern day Apostolic, regarding the definition of New Birth, and its relationship to salvation, but to the early church of the 1700’s, it was a mystery. This was due to the fact that God’s word had been hidden by the Catholic Church for centuries, spoken in Latin which was foreign to most, and chained to the pulpit. The development of the printing press, much to the for-boding of the Roman Catholic Church soon put an end to them having the monopoly on exactly what was said in the Word, regarding salvation. To quote a “Catholic historian and former Jesuit, Peter de Rosa”; “Popes had mistresses of fifteen years of age, were guilty of incest and sexual perversions of every sort, had innumerable children, were murdered in

the very act of adultery (by jealous husbands who found them in bed with their wives)... In the old Catholic phrase, why be holier than the pope?”. And such was the reputation gained by the clergy, “some of the most degenerate and unconscionable ogres in all of history” (Hunt, 1994, p. 78). They had made the subject of New Birth a matter of avoidance, and spoke only enough to appear pious and righteous. Because of the corruption inherent in the organization, they were caught in the act of hypocrisy, on numerous occasions. It is still curious as to why so many have continued to follow blind leaders when history has proven along, with the true application of the Word, that they are serving up false doctrine. As Professor Jeremy Painter said as well, it is alarming to see that this day in age has brought about such changes in most all religions, that now the Roman Catholic Church appears to be more righteous than them all. His statement “for the most part, the movements initiated by the great reforming, Luther, Calvin, Wesley, are all far more liberal and secular than the Roman Church from which these reformers separated” is quite profound and sobering. (Painter, thread, 2015)

What is seen over and over again in history books regarding the Awakening, is that what was at the heart of it, was indeed the new birth experience (Bushman, 1970, p.66). It was this term “new birth” that was used interchangeably with revival, conversion, “New Light” and “Awakening”. A “desire for spiritual renewal in the Church”, was exactly what the revivalism churches were seeking, and would typically include; “conversion, repentance and a commitment to holiness”. Admittedly, evangelical pastors toiled for years “with no sign of revival”, but it continued to be “one of their chief passions” (Bushman, 1970, p.66). This is typical of our Apostolic preachers of today, staying faithful to labor in the field, even though results may be little to none. When the Great Awakening of the 1700’s came about, it took them by surprise, because it was an “unplanned work of God”. The Arminian view was such that “God was still

responsible for revivals”, but He expected the church to do their part in planning and facilitating them. (Kidd et al, 2011, pp 447-448). Numerous journals which document sermons during the time of the first Great Awakening prove to the fact that it was this conversion experience that was at the center of the “hub-bub” and contagious excitement that was generated through the colonies and into other states. Thomas Prince, a revivalist preacher sought to generate enthusiasm for the “New Light” with his published newspaper “The Christian History”. It’s hard to say if the paper had much effect in the way of the revival’s momentum, for the naysayers used it as another opportunity to throw stones at the movement (Gloege, 2013, 125-165). Traveling ministers helped to spread the revival spirit, moving hundreds and sometimes thousands of miles a year, by horseback. Typical preached messages contained encouragement from the ministers to the congregants to “acknowledge his guilt”, and encouragement to find solace from others who also felt anguish from their state of guilt. What was found to be valuable in the community’s social structure was the confession of sorts, which was part of the conversion: “despair, the humiliation, and the subsequent assurance” (Bushman, 1970, p. 67).

In Richard Bushman’s book, *The Great Awakening*, Johnathan Dickenson’s (1741) documented message on the methodical passage to a right relationship with God contained several points. These points were the general rule of thumb for most radical preachers who jumped on board with the Awakening movement of the 1700’s.

1. The sinner needs to come to the realization of “his own miserable condition”.
2. The sinner recognizes “his spiritual impotency” and his “inability to help himself”.
Humility allows them to see their helpless state and need of God.
3. The sinner begins looking to God, as he is now more interested and concerned about the things of Christ, than anything else. Their guilt “stares them in the face”. They

- “know that their eternal welfare depends on it”, and thereby asks the question “What must I do to be saved?”. This is necessary in order to have the “eyes of our understanding to be enlightened”. God disperses the darkness in order for the sinner to have a “right view of redeeming mercy” (Eph. 1:18, 2 Cor. 4:6).
4. The sinner is converted by God’s spirit of grace coming in and illuminating our minds, “giving us a right exercise of our understandings”. God, in His mercy illuminates, and opens the sinner’s eyes.
 5. The poignant question is asked “In what manner is the will changed?”. It is in the illumination of oneself, that the Spirit gives a “just view of things as they are, by bringing them to act out reasonably, worthy of the intellectual powers they have been endowed with”. The Spirit: helps to “conquer enmity with God”; brings from “power of lusts, of Satan and of the world, into the fear and favor of God”; turns “from darkness to light” and “from power of Satan unto God”, that they “might have an inheritance among those that are sanctified (Bushman, 1970, pp 78-83).

Another book which encapsulates much of what took place in the first Great Awakening was *The Great Awakening, Documents Illustrating the Crisis and Its Consequences*, edited by Heimert and Miller. In it were some interesting descriptions of individual responses to conversions, as they ran the gambit of physical and emotional expressions as the “work of the Spirit”: demons might be leaving a body; the sinner might be “overcome with conviction and distress”, their “bodily strength taken away”. They might be in a state of “abhorrence of themselves” in their present sinful state; to a condition of having a “flood of tears” once they have had their “love and joy attended”. This is in their response to “contrition and humiliation” (Heimert and Miller, 1967, pp.208-209).

Common to these methods of spreading the gospel was the clergy's role, which was that they; "directed, prodded and comforted" (Bushman, 1970, p. 67). This cycle was one that needed to continue in order to sustain growth. Proselytizing was the method used in the "early stages of European colonization of the Americas". According to the *Contemporary American Religion* resource, "proselytizing" is "associated with fervent evangelization and has played a prominent", and even "controversial, role in American religious life" (McMullen, 1999, p. 559-560). Proselytizing, which today has a negative connotation, was how new converts were made and the reformation had geared toward it to continue, "filling up the universal church" until the day of the Lord's return (Kidd, 2007, xiii).

There are several ministers who have been attributed to the Awakening, for their contributions to setting the revival of the 1700's into motion, too many to mention here. But George Whitefield seemed to be the one who was the spark to get the fire of revival started in New England, when he came for a visit from England. It was his particular preaching that affected many, one of whom was Jonathan Edwards. Edwards' "now famous sermon titled "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" was able to challenge many with the teachings and caused a great many emotional reactions. These ministers began the controversial method of preaching "outside of their own pulpits", and found this was where they were able to achieve an enormous following (Stein, 2005, p. 2698-2701). Whitefield received attention from London's Bishop with several charges against him: "he preached extemporaneously in the open fields; he criticized the national clergy; and that he claimed to "propagate a new Gospel, as unknown to the generality of ministers and people"" (Gaustad, 2005, p. 9726-9727).

Even before Edwards and Whitefield were active in the Awakening, there were others who were laying the groundwork for spiritual renewal, like Samuel Torrey, for example.

He was actually given the notoriety of being the “first evangelical in New England”. Puritan leaders had been hungering and “calling for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit to revive their languishing churches”. Torrey’s sermons proclaimed “the need for revival among pastors and congregations” and felt that “if only New Englanders would mourn for their sins, God would revive pure religion”. He determined that “godly grieving would be a sign of the coming revival” (Kidd, 2007, pp 1-2). Jonathon Edward’s grandfather, Solomon Stoddard from MA, has also been acknowledged as having had an extraordinary ministry as he saw the “conversion of many souls” and was perhaps the “most successful New England preacher in his generation” (Kidd, 2007, p6). Another key figure was Timothy Edwards, who had married Stoddard’s daughter. He had become an expert on leading others to the conversion experience (Kidd, 2007, p. 9).

Many more have been used of God in bringing about the Great Awakening in America. And, as seen in the history books, have significant information dedicated to them on the subject. Many were determined to see continued growth, which gained power from the “interplay of personal and social forces within a commanding intellectual structure”, hence Colleges devoted to the advancement of the Awakening began to spring up (Bushman, 1970, p. 70).

CONCLUSION

To conclude this paper, a quote from Jeremy Painter sums up the span of religious history in the church’s conquest towards Truth: “It almost seems that for every victory won in history, we suffer an equally devastating defeat. May we, followers of the Apostles, sustain the reforms of the Reformers, and go even further: restore and sustain the revelations of the Apostles themselves.” We need to get back to the basics, the basics of what was the crux of the Great Awakenings, and that is, the “New Birth” as taught and exemplified in the Word and by our

Apostolic forefathers. David Bernard has listed Oneness Apostolic groups that have been documented since the beginning of the Church age, as an encouragement that we are on the right path (Bernard, 1996, loc. 4407). Many groups who have embraced the Holy Spirit Baptism and Doctrine of Holiness, could be added to that group, but they were not ready to consider the doctrine of the Trinity as a fallacy. Although many have fallen off the beaten path of Oneness and Holiness, we can take comfort in the fact that although our message is not popular, it is indeed Biblical and has significant merit. We have many preachers who have gone on before us to remind us, that no matter how difficult the persecution may get, we have a cause worth fighting for.

Are we, as Americans, also ripe for revival? It appears all of the pieces are in place for it to happen at any time. Could the fear that is encroaching on America, cause its citizens to seek God like never before? Could God surprise the Church with the next Great Awakening revival? As Jonathon Edwards claimed in his "Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God (1737)", God had done a work that had not been pre-planned by man. He had done it specifically as a surprise, so that He would receive the glory and to show his amazing power and grace. This is not to say that man should not plan for revivals, because He had "entrusted the means for them to the church" (Kidd et al, 2011, p. 447-448). So the church prepares to facilitate what influx of souls God would draw into the Church during these last days. For yes, the Church is ripe for revival. We must watch and pray, and be ready laborers: "Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white; fro they are white already to harvest (Jo 4:35).

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