

The Great Awakening

The beginning rumblings of the First Great Awakening began about 1730 and continued for over twenty years.

There is a phenomenon that has shaped America in the past more than any other event; they were called The First and Second Great Awakenings. Between them was a massive decline in the Christian faith. This was the waning. The return of the strength of Christianity is made evident by a study of both of these awakenings.

An awakening is another word for a massive Christian revival. However, an awakening is a deeply felt and far reaching phenomenon. To call an awakening merely a revival falls far short of the mark. A revival usually affects those who are already believers. Generally, the progression is revival, movement, awakening. The revival affects the believers. The movement spreads the revival to many churches. An awakening affects entire communities and even an entire nation. An awakening increases interest in matters of faith. An awakening touches people deep inside and causes them to realize that they have a desperate need for God which leads them to experience God in ways that they had not known. Out of an awakening comes whole new religious movements and groups or denominations.

In the First Great Awakening many cried out, some fell down, or fainted, some seemed to have fits. There was a great concern for the individual's soul. The concern for one's soul seemed to spread from one person to another almost by contact. Just the reports of what was shared in the public meetings brought to the listeners a great concern for their own souls. Sometimes, the Holy Spirit seemed to work in a calmer way but the personal awareness of the need for salvation was just as deep and long lasting.

One pastor reported that when Whitefield held a series of meetings, they had not seen such emotions since the earthquake. Apparently, there had been an earthquake in the region earlier which had frightened and upset everyone. The effect of the revival with its conviction of sin was more powerful than the earthquake. The pastor went on to write that the request for God's help in prayer during the earthquake, strong as it had been, was for protection but did not include requests to be saved. But the revival made many people anxious to be sure that their souls were firmly in the hand of God. There was greater fervency during the revival than during the earthquake. After accepting Jesus

the people felt a calmness in their souls. This was because the people admitted their sins instead of arguing with God about them.

The First Great Awakening is credited for preparing the convictions of the people which led to the American Revolution itself. Out of a deep respect for the Golden Rule, citizen Christians became democratic and pressed for a free exchange of ideas including a free press. The movement of the 1740s played a key role in the development of democracy just before the American Revolution by preaching that the Bible taught that all men are equal, that the value of a man lies in his moral behavior and not his social class. By 1773 when battles over taxation without representation erupted, Americans were prepared to defy the British.

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