

The Second Great Awakening

Introduction

a. objectives

1. subject – The theological and political realities that stem from the Second Great Awakening
2. aim – To cause us to understand the heritage of the Second Great Awakening in the modern church

b. outline

1. The Details of the Second Great Awakening
2. The Theology of the Second Great Awakening
3. The Politics of the Second Great Awakening

c. overview

1. the **Post-Reformation** Church – the history of the W church *in the stream of Protestantism*
 - a. we continue in the movement of Christianity within the “stream” of Protestantism leading us *out of Europe* into America, and **out of the medieval period into modernity**
 - b. **IOW**: the “church” that straddles the Reformation of the 16-17th C. and what will arise in the *modern era* (**i.e.** starting about the mid-1800’s [mid-19th C.] and continuing into the 20th C.)
 - c. **first**: a discussion of the movement of Christianity into N America – **i.e.** a *geographical* movement of the Protestant Church out of England into the original thirteen colonies
 - d. **then**: a discussion of a *first* great “awakening” that occurred *before* the time of the establishment of the United States; specifically, in the American colonies
 1. the advent of **evangelicalism** – the pietistic movement beginning in the mid-1730s in which an entirely different *religious focus* came into being, a focus on the *personal experience of the individual* as the “center” of the gospel proclamation (**i.e.** evangelical = from the “gospel”); a *gospel-centeredness* to every aspect of both *communal* and *personal* religious activity
 2. led by men such as John and Charles Wesley, George Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards, etc.
 3. **i.e.** a great spiritual revival of the 1730-40s that spawned the *conversionism*, *activism*, *biblicism*, and *crucicentricism* that came to characterize much of W Protestantism
 - e. **now**: a discussion of a *second* great “awakening” that occurred *after* the Revolutionary War
 1. an “awakening” that would have significantly **greater** effect upon evangelicalism (**IMO**), resulting in many characteristics that are evident in American Christianity *even to today* ...

I. The Details of the Second Great Awakening

Content

a. the beginnings of the awakening

1. stirrings of a new revival began toward the end of the 18th C in small towns in New England
 - a. not characterized (initially) by great emotional outbursts
 - b. rather, it seemed to be marked by a sudden earnestness in Christian devotion and living
 1. **e.g.** attendance in worship increased, many spoke of having conversion experiences, etc.
 - c. and (at first), the anti-intellectual overtones of previous movements were not present
 1. **i.e.** it was embraced by some of the greatest intellectual minds in NE at the time
 2. **e.g.** Timothy Dwight (grandson of Jonathan Edwards), president of Yale University, was one of its leading advocates (**see below**)
2. the first phase resulted in the founding of several *societies* – organizations founded on the principle of *activism* (see above) designed to advance the gospel through direct evangelism and missions
 - a. **e.g.** the American Bible Society (1816), the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (1810)
 - b. **e.g.** Adoniram Judson (1788-1850), one of the first missionaries sent by ABCFM, became a Baptist on his journey to India and was baptized by William Carey in Calcutta – he later laid the plans for a Baptist mission society in the United States
 1. **note**: as a result of Judson’s activities, many Baptist congregations joined together to form a General Convention, to support Baptist missions worldwide (**i.e.** the early form of the SBC)
 - c. **e.g.** women’s missionary societies, some eventually morphing into feminist organizations
3. later phases of the awakening produced societies were founded to take up *social causes* (**see below**)

b. the movement of the awakening

1. by the early 19th C, the awakening had moved *beyond* NE and of the educated elite

2. the “driving” force of the awakening beyond NE was the opening of the W frontier
 - a. **i.e.** the movement of the original colonies W to the Mississippi river – many of those who “moved out” carried the “fire” of this great awakening with them in their zeal to open new lands
 - b. but ... conditions on the frontier were very difficult, and the result was that the religious zeal of those who moved in it “turned” the awakening to a more *emotional* rather than *theological* (or *intellectual*) pursuit within the faith (**i.e.** an *anti-intellectualism*)
 1. **e.g.** as noted by Mark Dever in “Nine Marks”: the movement of Christianity W established very *quickly* many new churches; the lack of educated men to serve as elders resulted in the office “waning” in significance over time, replaced by the “easier” role of deacon
3. the **Cane Ridge Revival** (b. August 6, 1801) – a small town in C Kentucky
 - a. originally organized by a local Presbyterian pastor – a great assembly (or Camp Meeting)
 - b. on the appointed date *thousands gathered* (10-25,000) – some for true religious purposes, others simply to use the gathering as an “opportunity” for gambling, prostitution, and carousing
 1. the crowd was mainly hardened frontier farmers: tobacco-chewing, tough-spoken, and profane, along with their wives and large broods of children
 2. a rough clearing was filled with wagons and improvised tents, with horses staked out behind
 - c. the original pastor was joined by several Baptist and Methodist preachers
 1. they preached rousing and emotional messages appealing for repentance and life-change
 - d. the response to the calls of repentance were surprising and overwhelming (a *spasm*)
 1. **i.e.** weeping, laughing uncontrollably, trembling, some ran about, barking, yelping incantations, having the “jerks” (scream and fall down as though dead), etc.
 - e. the meeting lasted a week – the effect was that *many* now came to see such meetings as the *best way* to proclaim the gospel (**i.e.** evangelism and revival now became synonymous with this)
 - f. Presbyterians reacted *against* the emotional responses now becoming a part of the movement
 1. but ... Methodists and Baptists took up the idea of camp meetings and revivals, and they became an important part of social life on the frontier
 2. thus ... Methodists and Baptists achieved rapid growth as the country moved W
 3. additionally (as implied above) ... Methodists and Baptists were willing to use whomever felt called by the Lord to preach
 - a. for Methodists (with *episcopal* form of church government), lay preachers were commissioned under a *circuit* bishop, and traveled amongst churches in that *circuit*
 - b. for Baptists (congregational), any local farmer or tradesman served as preachers/pastors
 - c. by mid-19th C, Baptists and Methodists became the largest Protestant denominations
 - g. **LOW:** the enthusiastic reports from Cane Ridge produced an extraordinary growth of evangelicals
 1. **i.e.** the “separation” between the *mainline* churches and the *evangelical* ones

II. The Theology of the Second Great Awakening

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a. millennialism

1. a renewed focus on the *Parousia* rose, with an emphasis on the return of Christ *near at hand*
2. because democracy and material progress were spreading, many began to think that “history was moving in the right direction”, and that *America* had a unique role to play in the spread of Christianity ushering in the millennium (**i.e.** U.S. as “God’s New Israel”)
 - a. the *goal* was to make America “the world’s greatest example” of a truly *Christian* nation
 - b. the *political* ramifications of this thinking was an attempt to usher in a *national morality* (**see below**)
3. **e.g.** it was during this period that *postmillennialism* dominated = the belief that Christ would return after a literal 1000-year or “long term” period of peace and prosperity
 - a. Christians were, then, to purify society in preparation for that return (**see below**)
 - b. **IMO:** the rise of dispensationalism was a *reaction* to this position, especially after the failure of this period to actually *bring about* the return of Christ ...

b. Charles Grandison Finney (1792-1875)

1. Finney was “born again” in 1821, and saw himself as restoring Christianity from “corruptions”
 - a. after his conversion, he studied and was licensed as a Presbyterian minister – in 1832 he moved to New York City to become the pastor of Chatham Street Chapel
2. he was an active revivalist from 1825 to 1835; in 1830-1, he led a revival in Rochester, NY
3. Finney’s preaching was *extremely effective* in causing the breakout of revivals, and many *other* revivals credited his initial work as being their genesis
4. but ... he was also an *innovator* in his conducting of worship services

- a. **e.g.** he would refuse communion to slave holders (being a staunch abolitionist), he would grant women opportunities in worship services, he would censure individuals *by name* from his sermons and prayers, and he would preach (often) *extemporaneously* (off-script)
- b. **e.g.** he developed the **anxious bench** – he would seek out potential (and likely) converts before his services and seat them at the front, where they would be called upon to make public professions of faith (**i.e.** the precursor to the *altar call* prevalent in modern Baptist churches)
- 5. Finney was *primarily* concerned with a *moralistic impulse* in the church = an agency of personal and social reform rather than an institution carrying the means of grace *through* its members to the world
 - a. his “*Systematic Theology*” defines his theological thinking, which revolved *entirely* around human morality: he *jettisoned* the idea of justification on the basis of *Christ’s* perfect righteousness, replacing it with “full present obedience [as] a condition of justification”
 - b. he rejected *original sin*, becoming fully Pelagian in denying that human beings possess a sinful nature, and he rejected a *substitutionary atonement*, denying the idea that the death of Christ actually saved anyone *other than Christ himself*
 - 1. **i.e.** he preached that we are responsible for our “salvation” through the proper application of the means given to us by God, thus his “revivals” were attempts to “improve” people by bringing them to a *proper morality*
 - 2. **note:** his legacy is the modern idea of moralistic, therapeutic, deism rampant in evangelicalism
 - c. **IOW:** Finney believed that the gospel was a message of *self-improvement*, and that (by extension) the work of the church was to advance social causes and reforms in the world

“A revival is not a miracle, nor dependent on a miracle, in any sense. It is a purely philosophical result of the right use of the constituted means—as much so as any other effect produced by the application of means.”
 - d. this is a **key characteristic** of the Second Great Awakening ... (**Finney was a man of his time**)

III. The Politics of the Second Great Awakening

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a. the political movements from the Second Great Awakening

- a. the abolition of slavery – a truly *noble* movement that found some of its staunchest proponents amongst the clergy of the Second Great Awakening (**i.e.** as a great *societal evil*)
 - 1. however, this movement *failed* to capture the majority of the church (**i.e.** in the S), and the issue was fiercely debated into the Civil War amongst evangelical believers *on both sides*
- b. the temperance movement – the first truly *national* crusade of the Second Great Awakening
 - 1. in the early 19th C, most consumed alcohol with little thought as to its *morality*
 - 2. until 1812, there was no organized call for temperance, until Timothy Dwight (see above) characterized it as sinful and called for total abstinence
 - 3. in 1826, Lyman Beecher (Dwight’s student) described it as “the sin of our land” and pushed for *prohibition over abstinence*
 - 4. in 1836, the American Temperance Movement was formed, under the *evangelical* banner that the nation needed to be “reformed” from its sin (as a shining example), and achieved its (short-lived) victory in 1919 with the 18th Amendment
- c. first-wave feminism – a movement to advance women’s rights *politically*, especially re: voting
 - 1. *most* of the converts during the Second Great Awakening were women (no one really knows *why*)
 - 2. thus, from the great numbers of women converted in it, the push for “equality” for them was born

b. the reality of the Second Great Awakening

- 1. although the awakening *started* with a profound sense of the desire to see *real* conversion, it *morphed* into a “social movement” using Christianity as the basis for a set of “transformational” activisms
- 2. **IOW:** the Second Great Awakening was much more of a *political* movement than a *spiritual* one
 - a. combining the *emotional elements* of religious worship with a focus on 1) personal morality, and 2) the transformation of society, particularly in a *democracy*, through social activism
 - b. the effects on the church: 1) simplistic gospel preaching (**i.e.** avoiding theological teaching), 2) emotional appeal as fundamental (**i.e.** in both music and preaching), 3) the call to morality as the goal of preaching, and 4) the “intertwining” of the sacred with the political (**e.g.** American flags in the church, patriotic services, preaching towards specific political issues *outside* of the framework of a biblical worldview, sometimes in *direct contradiction* to biblical instruction)
- 3. **bottom line:** the legacy of Charles Finney et. al. still haunts the Baptist church today
 - a. the rampant rejection of Reformation theology, the embrace of emotionalism and easy-believism, the inordinate focus on morality as the foundation of the faith, and the substitution of personal activism for true discipleship and holiness, etc.