

STUDY PACK 10

THE GREAT AWAKENING

“What historians call ‘the first Great Awakening’ can best be described as a revitalization of religious piety that swept through the American colonies between the 1730’s and 1770’s. That revival was part of a much broader movement, an evangelical upsurge taking place simultaneously on the other side of the Atlantic, most notably in England, Scotland, and Germany. In all of these Protestant cultures during the middle decades of the eighteenth century, a _____ rose to counter the currents of the age of Enlightenment...”

~~ Christine Leigh Heyrman, *The First Great Awakening* ~~

I. A SURVEY OF THE GREAT AWAKENING

The religious revival known as the Great Awakening (1720-1770) would greatly change life within the western world. The influence of the Christian religion, church attendance and membership, and literacy were at a low ebb. In England, the ministries of John Wesley (fresh from an unsuccessful stint as a missionary to the colony of Georgia), Charles Wesley, and George Whitefield called people back to _____, _____, and _____. Large numbers of people professed salvation, and the Church of England became uncomfortable with the new movement.

Many people converted during the Great Awakening left the Church of England and formed new churches called Methodist churches. Other non-conformist groups in England also gained in attendance and influence. This revival movement soon spread to the colonies. In the colonies, Dutch Reformed preacher Theodore Frelinghuysen, and Presbyterian preachers William and Gilbert Tennant greatly influenced a new call to personal salvation and church attendance in the colonies. In 1741, Jonathan Edwards preached one of the most famous sermons in American history, “*Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*.” A great revival movement sprang from the preaching of this one sermon. Soon churches were reacting to the new movement. In every group “The Great Awakening” had _____ and _____.

George Whitefield also preached in the colonies (he sponsored an orphanage in Georgia). It was said that he was able to preach to open – air crowds of 20,000 at one time. The Great Awakening included a missionary emphasis to the Indians. Jonathan Edwards went to minister to the Indians. David Brainerd became one of the most famous missionaries of all time, winning hundreds of Indians to Christ though he only lived to be 29.

Benjamin Franklin described the incredible influence of the Great Awakening, “It seemed as if all the world were growing religious. One _____ in an evening without hearing psalms sung by different families on every street.”

In the colonies, the Great Awakening led to a new respect for the Scriptures and evangelicalism. New religious organizations and denominations were formed. There were tens of thousands of conversions and a great increase in church attendance. _____ was almost swept away from the American religious landscape.

II. JONATHAN EDWARDS DESCRIPTION OF THE IMPACT OF THE GREAT AWAKENING IN HIS TOWN

“Ever since the great work of God that was wrought here about nine years ago, there has been a great abiding alteration in this town in many respects. There has been vastly more religion kept up in town, among all sorts of persons, in religious exercises and in common conversation than used to be before. There has remained a more general seriousness and decency in attending the public worship. There has been a very great alteration among the youth of the town with respect to reveling, frolicking, profane and unclean conversation, and lewd songs. Instances of fornication have been very rare. There has also been a great alteration among both old and young with respect to tavern haunting. I suppose the town has been in no measure so free of vice in these respects for any long time together for this sixty years as it has been this nine years past.”

III. THE IMPACT OF THE GREAT AWAKENING IN ENGLAND

Famed French historian Merle d’ Aubingé described the development of a Christian culture in England.

“I have been in England; I have seen in her great manufacturing cities, the miracles of that activity which covers the whole world with _____ . In the ports of London, of Liverpool, and other places, I have gazed upon those floating isles, those thousands of masts which bear afar over every sea the riches and power of the nation. I have admired in Scotland a simple, energetic, and active people, ready to sacrifice everything rather than abandon Christ and His Word. I have been present at the debates of the Parliament of the three kingdoms, and I have admired that eloquence which, not content with words, goes right to the heart of the matter, and impels the nation onwards in its great destinies. I have found everywhere, from the lower classes of the people to the exalted stations of nobles and princes, an enthusiastic love of liberty. I have wandered through those halls from which are conveyed to the four quarters of the world _____ . I have prayed in the churches, and at the religious meetings have been transported by the powerful eloquence of the speakers and the acclamations of the audience. I have found in the families a morality comparatively greater than in other countries; and pious customs, both private and public, more generally prevalent. I have been struck with admiration at beholding the people of those islands, encompassing the globe, bearing everywhere _____ , commanding in the most distant seas, and filling the earth with the power and the Word of God.”

IV. WILLIAM WILBERFORCE AND THE END OF SLAVERY IN ENGLAND

A reluctant politician, Wilberforce had been considering entering the clergy when his friend, William Pitt (Britain’s youngest prime minister at age 24) urged him to run for office (at age 21). Wilberforce sought advice from his childhood pastor, John Newton, the former slave ship captain who wrote the lyrics to the hymn “Amazing Grace.”

Suffering his own demons from having participated in the slave trade, Newton convinced Wilberforce that he could best serve his God _____ .

He met with a great deal of opposition. The Earl of Abington declared, “Christianity is a private feeling not a public principle to act upon.” Lord Melbourne stated, “Things have come to a pretty pass when religion is allowed to invade public life.”

Wilberforce's campaign continued for nineteen years but was finally successful _____
_____. This created temporary economic problems but England was spared
the horror of the Civil War of the United States.

V. LATER GREAT AWAKENINGS

It is generally thought that the United States experienced two more Great Awakenings. The second Great Awakening refers to the national revival that took place in the 1820's and 1830's. The third Great Awakening refers to a national revival that took place in the 1880's and 1890's. No similar spiritual awakening took place in Europe during these periods.