

# The Great Awakening and American Presbyterianism

Thomas S. Kidd, *The Great Awakening* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007)

## I. Great Awakening

### A. Nature of the Revival

1. Definition: Ordinary work of the Holy Spirit in extraordinary measure
2. Parallel movement to Evangelical Awakening in Britain (Wesleys, Whitefield, etc.)
3. Approaches
  - a. Narrow: Whitefield's campaign of 1739-40 as the real Great Awakening
  - b. "Long Great Awakening": Earliest to last expressions (1720s-80s)
4. Roots (Kidd)
  - a. English Puritanism
  - b. Scots-Irish Presbyterianism
  - c. Continental Pietism

### B. Basic Overview

1. Beginnings of awakening with Theodore Frelinghuysen (same year as Adopting Act)
  - a. Dutch Reformed minister of German extraction in NJ
  - b. Pietist influence—especially a living faith (experimental religion)
2. Jonathan Edwards and New England
  - a. Theology of revival
    - 1) Restored the place of emotion ("affections") to religion
      - a) Rom. 10:9 → reason (belief in the resurrection), emotion (trust), and will
      - b) Elevated emotions from "animal/bestial" level
    - 2) Distinguished true from false revival
  - b. Promoted evangelism & missions (cf. David Brainerd among Indians)
3. George Whitefield (1739-40)—united the revivals across the colonies
4. South
  - a. Samuel Davies (Virginia)
  - b. Baptists in Sandy Creek, NC (south of modern Greensboro)
5. New Light Stir: New England & Nova Scotia (1770s-80s)
  - a. Benefited Baptists particularly
  - b. Henry Alline
    - 1) Baptist itinerant evangelist: "Apostle of Nova Scotia"
    - 2) Anti-Calvinist: Forerunner of Freewill Baptists

### C. Divisions over the Revival

1. Traditional: Old Light vs. New Light
2. Kidd: Antirevivalists / Moderates / Radicals

### D. General Charges by Critics

1. "Enthusiasm"
2. Violation of church order & decorum
3. Presumptuous criticism

## II. Presbyterianism and the Awakening

### A. Middle Colonies: Tennent Family

1. William Tennent (an Ulsterman) moved to Bucks County, Pa., and eventually founded Log College to educate sons & others (part of heritage of Princeton)
2. Gilbert Tennent

- a. Influenced by Frelinghuysen, began itinerant preaching in 1730s
  - b. Preached w/o respect to “parish boundaries” which local ministers saw as a rebuke
  - c. Opposition → Tennent preached “Danger of an Unconverted Ministry”
    - 1) Controversial sermon—declared many opponents unconverted and called on members to flee such churches
    - 2) Tennent did later apologize for going too far
  - d. Not only preached but also published
  - e. Created deep divisions—contributed to Old Light–New Light schism
  - f. Reflects emphasis on New Birth
- B. The South: Samuel Davies in Virginia
- 1. Character of Ministry
    - a. Eloquent preacher
    - b. Saw some of the first widespread conversion of slaves
    - c. Helped raise money for Princeton & served briefly as president
  - 2. Oversaw Hanover Presbytery (originally virtually the whole colony)
    - a. Established Presbyterianism in the South
    - b. Introduced the Awakening to the region
- C. Old Side-New Side Split
- 1. In 1741, the Presbyterians split into the “Old Side” and pro-revival “New Side” when the Old Side forced out New Side presbyteries
  - 2. Issues
    - a. Itinerancy
      - 1) Old Side wanted church order upheld as fitting to the church of God—bring charges before presbytery, don’t simply denounce
      - 2) New Side focused on reaching unregenerate by all means (urgency)
    - b. Theological education
      - 1) Old Side: regular university education
      - 2) New Side: “log colleges” or other urgent means
    - c. Ordination
      - 1) Old Side wanted stricter subscription
      - 2) New Side wanted a testimony of personal conversion
  - 3. Many see the Puritan-Scotsman division in New Side-Old Side
  - 4. Reunion—Two sides reunited in 1758
    - a. New Side had grown to triple the size of Old Side (relatively equal before)
    - b. Terms addressed Old Side concerns about subscription and legitimate authority of the church
    - c. However, the terms of union approved of the Great Awakening and demanded “experimental acquaintance” with the gospel
  - 5. Interpretations
    - a. Hart & Muether treat the resolution of union as unfortunate, making American Presbyterianism an unstable mixture of “pietism” and confessionalism (reliance on regular church ministry of Word and sacrament)
    - b. Committed the church to a necessary evangelical element—the experience with Christ which rote and routine endanger
    - c. One *can* draw on *both* Old Side and New Side heritage