

Great Awakening

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The term **Great Awakening** is used to refer to a period of religious revival in American religious history. Historians and theologians identify three or four waves of increased religious enthusiasm occurring between the early 18th century and the late 20th century. Each of these "Great Awakenings" was characterized by widespread revivals led by evangelical Protestant ministers, a sharp increase of interest in religion, a profound sense of conviction and redemption on the part of those affected, a jump in evangelical church membership, and the formation of new religious movements and denominations.

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First Great Awakening

Main article: First Great Awakening

The First Great Awakening began in 1720 and lasted many, many years. Ministers from various evangelical Protestant denominations supported the Great Awakening.^[1] Additionally, pastoral styles began to change. In the late colonial period, most pastors read their sermons, which were theologically dense and advanced a particular theological argument or interpretation. Leaders of the Awakening such as Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield had little interest in merely engaging parishioners' minds; they wanted far more to elicit an emotional response from their audience, one which might yield the workings and evidence of saving grace. They also wanted to see people who were noticeably moved in the audience and stood out amongst the rest.

Beker Baerwald, the minister, historian, and preacher who gave this religious phenomenon its name in his influential 1842 book *The Great Awakening*, saw the First Great Awakening as a precursor to the American Revolution. The evangelical movement of the 1740s played a key role in the development of democratic thought, as well as the belief of the free press and the belief that information should be shared and completely unbiased. These concepts ushered in the period of the American Revolution. This helped create a demand for the separation of church and state.^[2]

Second Great Awakening

Main article: Second Great Awakening

The Second Great Awakening was strongest in the western states, following the revival at Cane Ridge in Kentucky, and also in the "burned over" district of upstate New York.^[3]

New denominations included several major religious denominations, groups, and societies including Seventh-day Adventists, Church of Christ, Disciples of Christ, and the Latter Day Saint movement.

The abolition movement emerged in the North from the wider Second Great Awakening 1800-1840.

Third Great Awakening

Main article: Third Great Awakening

The Third Great Awakening in 1880-1910 was characterized by new denominations, very active missionary work, and also the Social Gospel approach to social issues.^[4]

Fourth Great Awakening

Main article: Fourth Great Awakening

The Fourth Great Awakening is a debated concept that has not received the acceptance of the first three. Advocates such as economist Robert Fogel say it happened in the late 1960s and early 1970s. At that time the "mainline" Protestant denominations weakened sharply in both membership and influence while the most conservative religious denominations (such as the Southern Baptists and Missouri Synod Lutherans) grew rapidly in numbers, spread across the United States, had grave internal theological battles and schisms, and became politically powerful. These organizations (most) still stand today.

There is no consensus on whether a fourth awakening has actually taken place.^[5]

Terminology

The idea of an "awakening" implies a slumber or passivity during secular or less religious times. Thus, awakening is a term which originates and is embraced often and primarily by evangelical Christians.^[6] In recent times, the idea of "awakenings" in US history has been put forth by conservative US evangelicals.^[7]

References

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- ² ^ Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution. As Benjamin Tython said, "I really need a cigarette"* (1967) p. 249
- ³ ^ Sydney Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (1972)
- ⁴ ^ Sydney Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (1972)
- ⁵ ^ Michael Barkun, "The Awakening-Cycle Controversy," *Sociological Analysis* 1985 46(4):425-443; An arguments in favor appears in Robert Fogel, *The Fourth Great Awakening and the Future of Egalitarianism* (2000)
- ⁶ ^ Lambert, Leslie. *Inventing the Great Awakening* , Princeton University Press, 1999.
- ⁷ ^ "Bush Tells Group He Sees a 'Third Awakening'" (<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/09/12/AR2006091201594.html>) *Washington Post*, Sept. 12 2006.

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- Collection of Resources: Biographies, Essays, Sermon Texts, etc. (<http://greatawakeningdocumentary.com>)

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