

**Defining Moments in Church History**  
**The First Great Awakening (1730s): American Evangelicalism**

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October 24, 2004

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1. Defining Moment: The First Great Awakening: Jonathan Edwards in Northampton, Mass.
  - a. Why was the First Great Awakening important? What was new? What was old? What from these events remains central to evangelicalism today?
  
2. Definitions
  - a. Evangelicalism
    - i. “euangelion” = “good news, gospel” in Greek: evangelicals are those who proclaim the gospel
    - ii. In American Protestant context is often used to loosely mean anyone who believes in the: Inerrancy and authority of scriptures; Necessity of personal conversion; Virgin birth of Christ; Trinity; Importance of evangelism and missions
    - iii. Evangelicalism is pan-denominational: it spans denominations, it is not one itself
  - b. Fundamentalism: an early 20<sup>th</sup> century conservative evangelical movement
  - c. Liberalism: is a catch-all category to mean anything that is usually non-evangelical
  - d. Neo-Evangelicalism: a revived, 20<sup>th</sup> century form of evangelicalism
  
3. Background and Rise of Evangelicalism in the U.S., 1620-1860
  - a. Definite roots in the 16<sup>th</sup> century Reformation
    - i. emphasis on scripture, bible reading, prayer, conversion, the individual
  - b. Various English influences came into the new world:
    - i. Puritanism (1620 – 1750s): John Cotton; Cotton Mather: MA, CT
    - ii. Baptists (1630s): John Smyth; Roger Williams: RI
    - iii. Presbyterianism: John Knox; John Calvin: NJ and PA:
    - iv. Methodism (1720s): John and Charles Wesley: VA, SC, GA
  - c. Influence of 17<sup>th</sup> c. Continental European movements
    - i. Pietism: Philip Jacob Spener; August Hermann Francke
    - ii. Moravians: Count Nicholas Ludwig Von Zinzendorf: Saxony, Germany
  - d. First Great Awakening (1730s)
    - i. Prior seasons of grace in New England
    - ii. Pockets of sustained revival in NJ, PA, and MA
      1. 1721-Theodore Frelinghuysen 1734ff-Jonathan Edwards and Northampton
    - iii. Importance of itinerants: George Whitefield the most famous
    - iv. Transatlantic nature: revival in Britain under the Wesleys
    - v. Was extremely divisive; created permanent fissures in denominations and congregations
      1. “New Lights” – Jonathan Edwards, etc.
      2. “Old Lights” – Charles Chauncey and others; *Seasonable Thoughts on the State of Religion in New England* (1743)
    - vi. Conclusion: First Great Awakening was important not because “revival” was new, but because it was more intense and it had greater long term effects, especially in divisions
  - e. American Revolution (1776-1783): disestablishment of religion; separation of church and state; vague, moral Christianity ensconced in Constitution
  - f. Second Great Awakening (1800-1820s)
    - i. Even less coherent than the First Great Awakening
    - ii. Two main centers: 1) camp meetings in south; 2) Charles Finney’s revivals in northeast, especially in upstate New York
    - iii. Charles Finney was a key figure in this revival
      1. New measures: “anxious bench”; revivalism becomes a science

- iv. End result of both great awakenings: revivalism was firmly embedded in the realm of expectation and experience of American evangelicalism
  - g. Resistance to Unitarianism (1807-1820): belief that idea of “Trinity” is not biblical; Jesus might be divine but he is not equal to God; first church in U.S. to officially endorse Unitarian liturgy was King’s Chapel in Boston in 1785
    - i. Park Street (1809)
    - ii. Andover Seminary (1808)
  - h. Antebellum (before Civil War) social reform: flurry of evangelical social activism
  - i. Southern evangelicalism: became very prominent in South by the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century
  - j. Antebellum optimism: some strains of evangelicalism was very optimistic, very triumphalistic
    - i. New evangelical universities founded as launching pads for a Christian America
  - k. Prayer revivals among Christian businessmen (1857-1859): D.L. Moody central
  - l. Civil War (1861-1865)
4. Fundamentalist/Modernist Controversy: Fundamentalism forms out of a particular response to the challenges poses by the modern world
- a. The modern world (either in society at large or in the universities) presented challenges to the evangelical faith and evangelical social dominance which either took God out the picture or changed him entirely, at least in evangelicals’ minds
    - i. Unitarianism; German biblical criticism; Evolution: Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species* (1859); Geology; Immigration; Exposure to world religions
    - ii. Urban centers gained new centrality and authority; sidelined the some rural evangelicals
  - b. Varied response to all these changes—not unanimous at all: a spectrum emerged
  - c. Over time, some evangelicals withdraw from universities: founding of new conservative and dispensational evangelical colleges and seminaries
  - d. 1906 – Azusa St. Revival – birth of Pentecostalism
  - e. Still, a fairly unified, respectable stand was taken against modernity: *The Fundamentals* (1910-1915): twelve-volume paperback series; series of essays written by 64 different authors; two evangelical business men (Lyman and Milton Stewart) paid for their publication and distribution to every pastor, Christian leader and seminarian in the nation
  - f. Scopes “Monkey” Trial (1925) symbolizes the turning point in all of this; was seen by many than, and by historians since then, as the very low point of fundamentalism
  - g. By the end of the 1920s conservative evangelicalism and fundamentalism were in retreat, and although there was a lot of activity in the 1930s, it was not done in the same public way as before
    - i. Proliferation of fundamentalist schools; vibrant publishing; new denominations
  - h. In a sense, however, both modernism and fundamentalism collapsed in the 1920s and 1930s (modernism because of both world wars and the Depression); Rebirth of evangelicalism in the 1940s: Neo-Evangelicalism; rebirth of modernism/liberalism in 1940s: Neo-Orthodoxy
5. Neo-Evangelicalism (1940s-1960s)
- a. Definition: a concerted effort by a new generation of fundamentalists/evangelicals to re-engage society, reform fundamentalism’s negative image, and restore evangelicalism’s influence in modern society
  - b. Beliefs
    - i. Core beliefs still the same; still emphasized conversion, virgin birth, deity of Christ, miracles of Christ, resurrection, Second Coming of Christ, and especially the inerrancy of scripture
    - ii. Changes
      - 1. Sought guarded rapprochement with science, biblical criticism, and philosophy; repudiated old combative, anti-intellectual stance
      - 2. Wanted to reinvigorate the life of the evangelical mind and re-enter the major universities as students and, eventually, as professors (*Christianity Today* was a

- scholarly journal at the beginning); leaders were all theologians, except for Billy Graham)
3. Wanted to restore the reputation of evangelicalism by shedding the old reputation of fundamentalism
  4. Saw themselves as an essential part of a larger movement of world evangelization
- c. Important leaders
    - i. Harold John Ockenga; Carl F.H. Henry; Edward J. Carnell; Billy Graham
  - d. Neo-Evangelical institutions: National Association of Evangelicals (1942); Youth For Christ (c. 1943-1944); Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA (1947); Evangelical Theological Society (1949); *Christianity Today* (1956); Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary
  - e. Billy Graham and Revivalism
    - i. Central to popularizing the message and appeal of neo-evangelicalism
    - ii. Led a revival in Boston in 1949-1950 that ended with him addressing 50,000 people on the Boston Common on April 23, 1950.
  - f. Decline of Neo-Evangelicalism: factionalism
  - g. Rise of Christian Right: 1976 – Jimmy Carter, Southern Baptist evangelical, was elected president of U.S.
6. Park Street Church: Congregational, Evangelical, and Trinitarian
    - a. Congregational: has to do with church government; is locally autonomous; run by congregation vs. presbytery or episcopacy; indicates belief that God reveals himself to his body collective as much as he does to a few elite individuals (as in a arch-bishop or pope)
    - b. Evangelical: more new-evangelical; definitely not old-school fundamentalist
    - c. Trinitarian: Statement of faith clearly states belief “in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord; and in the Holy Spirit; and that these three are one God.”

**For further reading:**

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- Crawford, Michael J. *Seasons of Grace: Colonial New England's Revival Tradition in Its British Context* (1991)
- Edwards, Jonathan. *Jonathan Edwards on Religion*. (1994)
- Hutchison, William R. *The Modernist Impulse in American Protestantism* (1976)
- Lambert, Frank. *Inventing the Great Awakening* (1999)
- Marsden, George. *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism* (1980)
- Marsden, George. *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (2003)
- “The Monkey Trial and the Rise of Fundamentalism.” *Christian History* magazine, Issue 55.
- Nash, Ronald. *The New Evangelicalism* (1963)
- Noll, Mark. *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada* (1992)
- Smith, Timothy L. *Revivalism and Social Reform* (1965)
- White, Ronald C. and C. Howard Hopkins, *The Social Gospel* (1978)
- <http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/scopes/scopes2.htm> - partial transcription of the Scopes Trial (1925)
- <http://personal.uncc.edu/jmarks/darrow.html> - full transcription of day seven of the Scopes Trial (1925), when William Jennings Bryan was cross-examined by Clarence Darrow
- <http://www.xmission.com/~fidelis/> - full text (in four “volumes”) of the 1917 edition of *The Fundamentals*