

The Story of Christ's Church

The story of Christ's Church – Part 5

1650-1789 AD : The Great Awakening



Aim: to explore what it is that stirs people to reach out after God.

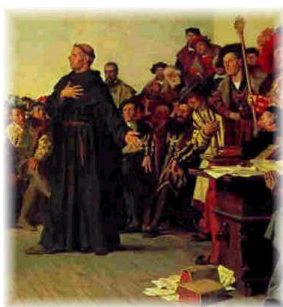
Intro: The Peace of Westphalia brings to an end the religiously inspired Thirty Years' War. Western Europe enters a time of peace, economic recovery and growth in toleration. But it is a deeply divided continent. Protestantism becomes established in north-western Europe, Catholicism remains strong in southern and central Europe while Orthodoxy is overwhelmed by Islam in the east.



Peace of Westphalia (1648)



European States (1648)



**Martin Luther
Diet of Worms (1521)**



**Council of Trent
(1545 – 1563)**



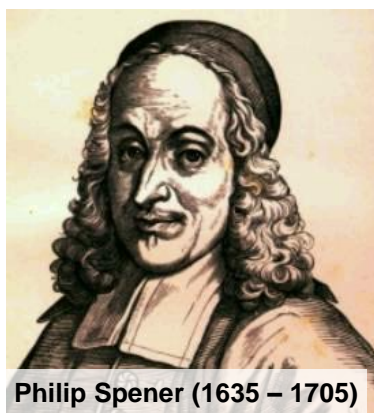
**Thirty Years' War
(1618 – 1648)**

The Story of Christ's Church

The trigger for a century of conflict was Pope Leo X's excommunication of Luther from the Catholic Church in 1520. In 1521 Luther defended himself at the Diet of Worms before the Emperor Charles V, but is declared a heretic and outlawed. Without protection from some German Princes he would have been killed and the Reformation in Germany crushed. Tensions spread throughout Europe. The Counter-Reformation is introduced to reclaim people and land lost to the Reformation. Torture is used by the Inquisition of 1542 to enforce belief. Eventually the Council of Trent is convened to reform the Catholic Church, clarify its beliefs and anathematise the Protestant churches. Attitudes harden. Communities are polarised and it is no surprise when all-out war erupts in 1618. In Germany 4 million people died during the Thirty Years' War; agriculture, industry and trade are ruined. When the Treaty of Westphalia is signed in 1648 there is a sigh of relief, normality is restored and slowly tolerance begins to spread. Surprisingly, out of Germany's devastation come the first stirrings of a great 'Spiritual Awakening'.

The Great Awakening: 1650 – 1789

Germany and other areas of Europe were exhausted by the Thirty Years' War. The established Lutheran State Churches were spiritually cold, formal in attitude and worship, rational and correct in doctrine. But worshippers were hungry for God.



Philip Spener (1635 – 1705)

Within this situation Philip Spener emerges and the movement for spiritual renewal within the Lutheran Church. Spener had completed his doctorate at the University of Strasbourg and was preparing to be a theological teacher. But instead he chose to become a Pastor in the Lutheran Church in Frankfurt. He prized Luther's spiritually vibrant theology and critiqued his Church for codifying the life out of it and neglecting the Christian life. He felt that his Church was asleep and out of touch with the people's spiritual needs. Moral laxity among the clergy worried him. This situation propelled him into offering a five-step programme of Spiritual Renewal in his book *Pia Desideria*, 'Pious Desires' or 'Spiritual Longings'. The way into Faith-Renewal was through 1) regular engagement with Scripture; 2) deeper participation in the Church's life through small groups for prayer and Bible study; 3) a greater balance between serving and believing in the Christian life; 4) training all pastors in spirituality as well as academics; 5) offering sermons which foster an active faith. The Pietistic movement that developed prized the conversion experience, and encouraged holy living, active compassion and Christian witness.

The Story of Christ's Church

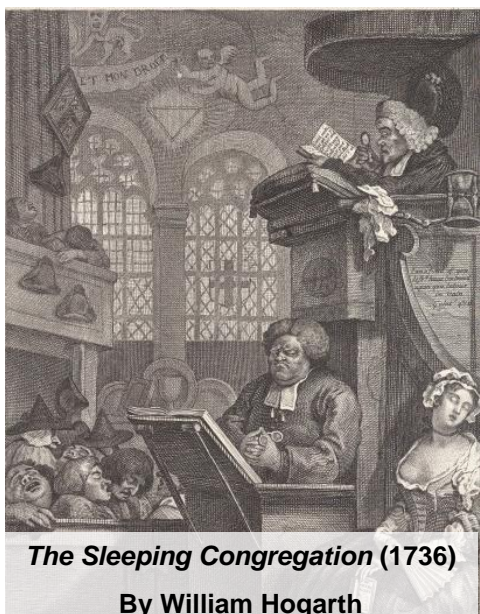


**Rev. August Francke
(1663-1727)**

The newly founded University of Halle (1694) became a training ground for Pietist leaders. There August Francke (1663-1727) developed an orphanage, a school for poor children, and a Bible Institute educating men and women together - long before it was socially acceptable to educate women. Francke's goals were:

*"a life changed, a church revived, a nation reformed,
and a world evangelized."*

From Halle, missionaries were sent out all over the world. Pietist clergy were often in conflict with state churches and in some places were banned from preaching and holding small group meetings. Related movements sprang up among Reformed, Moravian and Radical Protestants. Among those influenced by Spener was John Wesley of England (1703-1791).



The Sleeping Congregation (1736)

By William Hogarth

The satirist William Hogarth captures the decay of the Church of England of his day in this cartoon. It shows a lifeless sermon being read, through a magnifying glass, to a crowded country congregation fast asleep: "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest". The Church of England was in decline because it feared the extremes of Puritanism and Catholicism. Moderation was suspicious of religious passion and forceful preaching. Sermons were moral essays. Hence personal faith was waning while moral standards were being abandoned. The Monarchy under King George 1 was indifferent to faith, while the Prime Minister Sir Robert Walpole was openly hostile to Christianity. A universal cynicism pervaded society and fuelled the rumour that a Bill was coming to parliament which would take the 'not' out of the Ten Commandments and put it into the Creed! Bishop Berkeley commented:

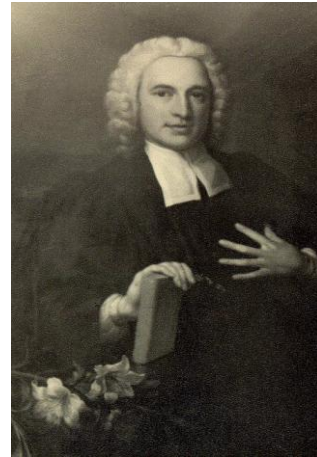
*"Morality and religion in Britain has collapsed to a degree that
was never known in any Christian country."*

However, two or three Anglican ministers calling people to real faith in Jesus Christ that involved them turning away from sin and living a new life. Large numbers came to hear them and show a concern for faith that was unparalleled. This 'Awakening' came between 1738 and 1742. Similar awakenings began happening in Wales in 1735 and Scotland in 1742.

The Story of Christ's Church



John Wesley (1703 – 1791)



Charles Wesley (1707 – 1788)

The Wesley brothers were graduates of Oxford University and became priests in the Church of England. They were appointed as missionaries to Anglican Church in Savannah, Georgia in the American Colonies. But in 1737 they returned to England feeling that they had failed. They had got to know some Moravians on one of the trips across the Atlantic and were impressed by the quality of their spiritual lives.

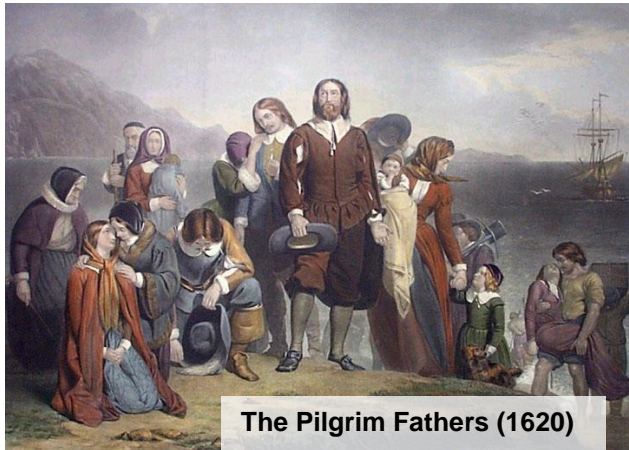


On 24th May 1738, while John was at a meeting in Aldersgate Street, London, a passage from Luther's 'Preface to Romans' was read. During the reading, John, who was 35, tells us that his heart was strangely warmed. Remarkably, his brother Charles, who was 31, had had a similar experience three days earlier. They now knew that the Moravian pietists were talking about on the ship. These 'personal awakenings' were to turn John Wesley into 'the apostle of England'

and his brother Charles into England's greatest ever hymn writer. He wrote over 7000 hymns and poems. Such energy and vision were released into these two brothers by the holy Spirit that they became convinced that they could not confine their preaching to their parishes, so they travelled all over England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland preaching to huge crowds. Where they were welcomed, they preached in churches, but often they preached in the open air, at markets and on village greens. The working classes in particular were drawn to faith in Jesus Christ just as the Industrial Revolution began to impact Britain. Charles Wesley realized that new converts needed regular fellowship, opportunities for prayer, bible Study and discussion. So 'societies' were formed for this purpose. These societies grew into the Methodist Church which today numbers 75 million worldwide.

The Story of Christ's Church

A similar 'awakening' took place in the American Colonies. The earliest American Protestants were Anglicans in 1607. But later Presbyterians from Holland, Scotland and Ireland came. The Pilgrim Fathers of 1620 were Independents, fired with missionary zeal, a desire for freedom of worship and a passion for business. But within 80 years the American Churches were overtaken with a creeping paralysis, for the zeal of the early pioneers had waned as commerce grew and wealth increased.



The Pilgrim Fathers (1620)

Standards for Church membership declined: previously a personal had to give testimony to personal faith, but now children of non-attenders could be baptized if they were not 'scandalous in life'. People began to feel the need for spiritual awakening.

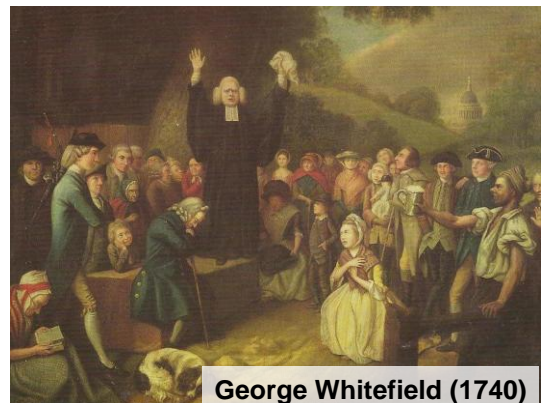


Jonathon Edwards
(1703 – 1758)

It is considered to have begun in 1734 in Northampton Congregational Church in Massachusetts, under Jonathan Edwards. In 1727 he became associate Pastor of the church at the age of 24. He had an experience of the sovereignty of God that profoundly affected him, and impassioned his preaching. At first he found the people "very unmoved by the things of religion", but noticed a slow change in them over the next six years. In 1734 he preached a series of sermon on 'Justification by faith' and towards Christmas "the Spirit of God began extraordinarily to set in" and "souls came by floods to Jesus

Christso that the town was never so full of love, nor so full of joy, nor yet so full of distress as it was then."

The Awakening peaked in 1740 when Rev George Whitefield came to New England and over 6 weeks saw 'the most general awakening ever experienced up to them in the American colonies". In Boston the crowds flocking to hear him could not get into the churches, so he preached outside. His final sermon in Boston was preached to 20,000 people. The Awakening continued in Boston for another 18 months and 30 'societies' were formed. Within 3 years, 150 churches were affected by the awakening not only in New England but also in New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maryland and Virginia.



George Whitefield (1740)

The Story of Christ's Church

What, finally, are the effects of spiritual awakening in the Church?



1. A new love for God: zeal for God within church leaders
2. A living faith: nominal church members move to a deeper level
3. A stronger concern for unity: a stronger love of other Christians
4. A desire to grow: hungry to learn and mature in faith eg societies
5. A concern for mission and evangelization:
 - Baptist Missionary Society (1792);
 - London Missionary Society (1795)
 - Church Missionary Society (1799);
 - British and Foreign Missionary Society (1804)
6. The development of the Christian mind: Edwards (senior tutor at Yale; Charles and John Wesley were Oxford Scholars; Francke Professor of Hebrew at Leipzig University. The awakening encouraged higher education such as Princetown University and in England Christian Education with the Introduction of Sunday Schools by Methodist Hannah Bell in 1769 and popularized by the Anglican layman Robert Raikes in 1786. "The Sunday School Movement in Britain marked a step towards free education for all".
7. A sensitive social conscience: American desire for political freedom; prison reform; dispensaries for the sick; Methodist churches turned into workshops for carding and spinning cotton to create jobs for unemployed; anti-slavery work: John Wesley in 1791, four days before his death wrote to William Wilberforce:

***"Go on, in the name of God and in the power of his might,
until even American slavery, the vilest that ever saw the sun,
shall vanish away before it".***