



THE SPIRITUAL ROOTS OF THE REVOLUTION: THE GREAT AWAKENING AND THE UNITED STATES

Rosamaria Vitetta

Università degli Studi di Salerno, Italia

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ABSTRACT

The article deals with the impact of the Great Awakening on the Colonial America of the XVIII century. The American Revolution is undoubtedly the greatest legacy of this period. Awakening and Revolution seem to be linked by an oxymoronic relationship based on a particular dialogue between faith and Enlightenment rationality. In this way, it is possible to emphasize the existence of an important religious component underlying American identity. This work explains the influence of the Great Awakening on the colonial society. Through the work of the preachers, it acquires new awarenesses and it abandons the typical hierarchy in the name of new perspectives of self-determination. The idea of Revolution grows in the man that finds in God a legitimizing force that drives him to the constant pursuit of happiness.

KEY WORDS: Great Awakening; revival; preachers; new lights; American revolution; American identity.

LAS RAÍCES ESPIRITUALES DE LA REVOLUCIÓN: EL GRAN DESPERTAR Y LOS ESTADOS UNIDOS

RESUMEN

El artículo aborda el impacto del Gran Despertar en la América colonial del siglo XVIII. La Revolución Americana es, sin duda, el mayor legado de este periodo. El Despertar y la Revolución parecen estar unidos por una relación oximorónica basada en un particular diálogo entre la fe y la racionalidad de la Ilustración. De este modo, es posible destacar la existencia de un importante componente religioso subyacente de la identidad estadounidense. Esta obra explica la influencia del Gran Despertar en la sociedad colonial. A través de la labor de los predicadores, ésta, adquiere nuevas conciencias y abandona la jerarquía típica en nombre de nuevas perspectivas de autodeterminación. La

idea de Revolución crece en el hombre que encuentra en Dios una fuerza legitimadora que le impulsa a la búsqueda constante de la felicidad.

PALABRAS CLAVE: El gran despertar; revival; predicadores; nuevas luces; Revolución Americana; Identidad americana.

Rosamaria Vitetta. PHD student in Historical Studies at the University of Salerno with a research project named “*Con Dio e con il re. Il processo di beatificazione di Thomas More*”. Writer of the first critical edition of *Raccolta di Memorie Storiche per Maiori città nel Principato Citra, Volume I, di Luigi Staibano* (Edizioni Paguro, 2021) and of *Between local and general history. On the writings of Luigi Staibano (1822-1877)*, an article published in the *Journal of Mediterranean Knowledge*, 6(1). Expert on the subject M-STO/02 – Modern History in the department of humanities, political and communication sciences at the University of Salerno. In 2013 she spent a short time abroad to study at the University of California San Diego. In 2020 she obtains a degree in Modern Philology with an experimental thesis in Modern History.

Correo electrónico: rvitetta@unisa.it

ID ORCID: 0000-0002-5604-3945

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Objective and method

The 18th century represents a turning point for the history of the new continent. Events occurring in this period prepared the ground for revolution. Usually, the study of the independence process focuses on the role of its political leaders. Washington, Jefferson, Adams, remain the first actors in this theater. To them we owe the construction of American democracy, a product of high philosophical speculation. However, to concretise its effects, the patriots needed the masses and their support (PALMER, 1959-64; GODECHOT, 1983; JOURDAN, 2007: 129; ARENDT, 2006; ACKERMAN, 2015: 238). For this reason, here, we will focus on the characteristics of this other subject, privileged by a more recent historiography working on the perspectives of history from below. This is because what happens with the American Revolution is a public affair. Its consequences affected all sectors of society. For their part, the latter welcomed the change, dreaming of the transformation of their lives and an improvement in their condition. Many came "from the middle and lower ranks of American society, and many of them were not fair-skinned" (NASH, 2006: II).

Specifically, this article aims to analyze the religiosity of the popular classes in pre-Revolutionary America, closely connected to the First Great Awakening. The hypothesis is that the religious movement, which spread across the continent in the first half of the 18th century, generated a significant change in the colonial culture, fostering the development of a sense of community among members of a same social group¹. According to some, the fact that evangelism was behind the American Revolution "has more the flavor of fantasy than history" (MORGAN, 1967: 454-459). But marginalising

¹ On the other hand, the link between independence and Awakening has a strong oxymoronic value. Revolution is led by men who sing the praises of reason and overtake the need of God (ISRAEL, 2018: XX; BONAZZI, 2018: 8; SPADOLINI, 1992: 494-5). Wood manages to untie this knot: the minds of the Revolution were tied to the Enlightenment, but their arms were not. Ordinary people kept relying on God. Thus, the combination takes root in the spiritual scenario generated by the Age of Awakening (WOOD, 1993).

the religious factor so much can distance us from the real perception of the facts. In 1966, Heimert was the first to theorise this relationship and summarised it in 3 consequential steps: evangelical Protestantism, liberal individualism and revolution (HEIMERT, 1966). By exalting the individual and his potential, this new religiosity involved the lower classes of American society in the nation-building process, bridging the gap between the positions of the elite and the needs of the humble.

The confrontation between classes was facilitated by the mediation of religious figures: preachers, often educated men with a certain family background that allowed to master and transmit 18TH century philosophical conclusions to the masses, using pamphlets and sermons with clear language and concrete examples. Thereby, the preachers set in motion a pattern of cultural circularity that starts at the top, reaches the bottom, and returns again to the upper levels in the form of adherence to the revolutionary cause. America had found in spirituality the glue of its inhabitants (HASELBY, 2015: 22; WILSON & DRAKEMAN, 1987: 80-82). Through the sermon, less educated audiences were introduced to a specific worldview. For this reason, Hankins and McLoughin agree in defining sermons as tools in the service of revolution (GREENE, J. P. & McLOUGHLIN, 1977). Therefore, in order to carry out this research, we will proceed to examine the related sources and study the historical context in which they were produced. The revolutionary season, in fact, is characterized by a «great ferment over the persuasive uses of language, both oral and written» (KULIKOFF, 1992: 69). This trend interests the speeches of patriot leaders as much as those of the Great Awakening. Bailyn and Sandoz's primary source collections and those of the digital archive The Great Awakening Spiritual Revival in Colonial America were instrumental in isolating the documents.

The religiosity of elites in pre-revolutionary America

The British colonies of the new continent arose from the political and confessional contrast produced by the English Revolution. Here the legacy of the conflict between the Anglican and Calvinist models poured in (ISRAEL, 2018: VII; SPADOLINI, 1992: 498; JOURDAN, 2007: 130; POCOCK, 1984; SCHWOERER, 1984). So, religion has been present in America since its foundation, but its evolution has a very jagged history. The British crown and the Anglican system were established there in 1607. However, as

early as 1620, with the landing of the Mayflower, this confessional unity was broken by the entry of puritanism. In the new continent, the fate of the Anglican church was marked by the negligence of the British crown which lasted until the 18th century causing the structural weakness of Anglicanism. Because of this spiritual lethargy, in the mid 17th century, Virginia appeared as one of the least religious countries in the colonial landscape: “Christianity's starving time here stemmed from failed leadership” (BUTLER, 1990: 40-42). This also explains the vast religious creativity and influence of itinerant preachers. The religious awakening produced a greater sacralization of the colonial landscape. During this period many churches were erected and the relationship between the colonial aristocracy and the King's Church was consolidated (BUTLER, 1990: 100-107). However, “their capacity to erect buildings was never matched by success at building authoritative institutions. Worship, churches, ministers and books did not make a church” (BUTLER, 1990: 127).

This weakness left people free to experiment. So, while the popular classes were drawn to the Great Awakening, the elites were fascinated by deism and to natural theology, a very niche phenomenon (MANUEL, 1983: 34-35). “They rejected Christianity and looked for an entirely different way of thinking about God” (WALIGORE, 2023). In the early 18th century, Whitfield appears concerned that the deists were converting all ‘moral men’. Among preachers, Edwards stands out for his harsh criticism of Enlightenment religion (McDERMOTT, 2000; 18, 75-77). According to the deists, God had created the universe based on natural and rational laws. Therefore, to grasp the truth, man had only to use reason (WALIGORE, 2023). Instead, natural theology was based on the belief that the order and harmony present in nature were a sign of the existence of a higher intelligence. To understand it, one had to observe the laws that govern the natural world.

The essence of these two beliefs was not irreligious but anticlerical. Both challenged the authority of the Church itself and pushed man to a rational interpretation of the world. Deist thought along with the latest developments in science, consolidated the hope that man could self-dominate and self-manage (McDERMOTT, 2000: 22). These ideas significantly impacted the mindset of the revolutionary elites, who were driven to greater autonomy and responsibility. In fact, many of the Founding Fathers of revolutionary America were deists or sympathizers (WALTERS, 2011; WALIGORE,

2023). By formation, a deist does not wait for divine revelation to become acquainted with God, but acts immediately based on reason and experience. This develops a *formamentis* and the rejection of religious authority also extends to political authority, both perceived as an insult to one's potential. Therefore, deists begin to look at the British government as an oppressive and limiting force on individual freedom. This is the starting point for the national independence building (WALTERS, 2011; COOPER, DYER; 2022). After this *excursus* on the religiosity of the revolutionary elites, which has been deepened by previous historiography, we will now focus on that of the popular classes, the subject of this paper.

The formation of American identity and the role of preaching

National construction passes through the affirmation of a common identity. The American one was formed in relation and in opposition to the British one. Initially, the settlers continued to feel proudly part of the motherland (BONAZZI, 2018: 13; TAYLOR, 2017; GREENE, 1994: 86-88). The British trade administration strengthened this link by protecting the colonial market. Boston gathering of 1760, organized for the proclamation of the new king, confirmed this. On that occasion, a Bostonian said: “I have been here for 16 years and I have never seen a single man willing to risk his life and possessions to serve George III” “God save the king!” (TAYLOR, 2017: 13-15; GOULD, 2005: 24). Still in 1764, Thacher praised the fact that a British American “is not ashamed to avow a love to the country that give him birth” (THACHER in BAILYN, 1965: 497). Afterall, settlers felt protected by the monarchy. Whitefield himself, during the Seven Years' War, enjoyed the idea that Britain was the nation elected and blessed by God with many mercies (WHITEFIELD in SANDOZ, 1998: 119-136). Plumb observes that the crown enjoyed a monolithic stability during this period (PLUMB, 1977: 188; JACOB, 1984: 243)². The breaking of this peace coincided with the gradual development of the First Great Awakening, triggered by a series of imbalances and growing concern: the decrease in available land, the increase in

² During these years, the rate of migration to these lands was very high. In many popular ballads, such as *America Triumphant*, the colonial territory appears as an extension of the old homeland. Thus: 'Why stay in an England worn down,/ and worn to death,/ where/ overwhelmed by debt and taxes,/ no one can rewrite faith?/ Then we'll go to America,/ where we are blessed;/ with no taxes to pay,/ as reasonable men know' (TAYLOR, 2017: 100).

population per square kilometer and crowd near urban areas, so the fear of smallpox and recurring earthquakes. Moreover, we have to consider the difficulties caused by the Seven Years' War. Between 1730 and 1750, America lived a period of expansion. But in 1765, a setback was recorded. The situation improved in 1770 but recovery was immediately stopped by taxation (NASH, 1984: 172-173). Soon, America realised that Great Britain ruled it imperialistically (PLUMB, 1977: 187). The lack of commercial autonomy generated a 'mimetic-antagonistic' relationship with the motherland (BONAZZI, 2018: 23), absorbed and enhanced by religious preaching. Thus, a split matured between "we, the American people" and they, the British people. In 1773, Allen protested,

"Does His Majesty have two kinds of laws, one for England and the other for America? A power to reign as king and guardian of the rights of his people at home, and a power to destroy the rights of the colonies abroad" (ALLEN in SANDOZ, 1998: 308).

America had inherited a very important lesson from English history:

“For violating the people's rights, Charles Stewart [...] lost his head, and If another king [...] was should tread in the same steps, what can he expect; [...] I distinguish greatly between a king and a tyrant, a king IS the guardian and trustee of the fights and laws of the people. But a tyrant destroys them” (ALLEN in SANDOZ, 1998: 307).

Even before, in 1750, Mayhew observed: a power that rules tyrannically is a power that undermines the liberties of its citizens, and therefore deserves to be overthrown (MAYHNEW in BAILY, 1965: 222-241). In 1756, Davies agreed with these positions: the power of all the kings of the earth is uncertain and transitory. “Jesus reigns [...] over the kings of the earth, [...] and controls them as he thinks proper; he disposes all the revolutions, the rises and falls of kingdoms and empires” (DAVIES in SANDOZ, 1998: 192).

As had happened in revolutionary England, something new was being built here (NASH, 2006: II) and the sermons encouraged the process. In 1750, in Boston, Mayhew reflected on Rom. XIII: 1-8 and, from his pulpit, observes that subjection to power is just and honorable when it is ordained by God. But “if kings injure and oppress their subjects instead of defending their rights [...] even dethroning them is not a crime, but a way to reclaim their freedoms and their just rights”. In such cases, “resistance is necessary in order to preserve the nation from slavery, misery and ruin” (MAYHNEW

in BAILYN, 1965; 217-241; SPITZ & ROTA, 1995; TARANTO, 2017). A very common structure in revival discourses involved the existence of a premise and a development. With accommodating words about the crown, the premise tried to mask the harsh content of the subsequent development, which pointed the finger at its mistakes. Speaking of the Mayhew-Apthorp controversy, Aplin said: “one hundred and seventy-six pages are spent in abuse upon His Majesty’s religion and administration, and three lines of compliment upon his person are put in to make atonement” (APLIN in BAILYN, 1965; 286).

The Great Awakening of the potential

Many people were tempted by the idea that America could break away from the motherland. About that, the questions Thomas Paine asks reflect the climate of the time: “Can America be happy under a government of her own?”; “As happy as she please; she hath a blank sheet to write upon” (CONWAY, 1894: 154; PAINE, 1776), probably a suggestive anticipation of what will happen with the Declaration of Independence. So, various organizations, such as the Sons of Liberty, defenders of people's rights, were created to combat the restrictions imposed. Traders and merchants led the movement (MAIER, 1992: 77-91; 240-242; ISRAEL, 2018: 6-7). They intercepted the discontent of the poorest classes affected by depression and they directed their anger against a small number of gentlemen, accused of having unclear business with the empire (TAYLOR, 2017: 105). Patriots resorted to newspapers, pamphlets and public representations to in order to obtain consent. The first revolutionary act was to involve every social class in their events, achieving greater participation. It was an attitude not much in line with traditions. Before then, the “rabble” had always been excluded from meetings with “respectable” (TAYLOR, 2017: 111). This involvement allowed for more direct control of the masses. In short, people became a political tool in the hands of patriots (MAIER, 1992: 73-74; BREEN, 2004: 253-263)³. Therefore, the myth that represents the settlers united against the British rule is unfounded (PURCELL, 2002: 1-10). Reality is that

³ During the period of the boycott of goods, those who disobeyed the Patriots' rules were publicly pilloried. To avoid exclusion, those who had contravened the rule had to reveal themselves publicly and ask the citizens for forgiveness. The immovable were abducted, stripped, tarred and feathered. Then, forced to parade through the streets. Subjecting themselves to humiliation (TAYLOR, 2017: 114).

“the revolution created fractures between families and between residents of the same neighborhood. Franklin came to hate his son because of his loyalty to the crown. In New York, Morris was an important patriot, while his brother served in the British army” (TAYLOR, 2017: 217).

Besides, choosing the faction was not so immediate for everyone (ALLEN, 2011: 188-192). “In a North Carolina county. People with different opinions decided a common destiny trusting in the result of a fist fight between loyalists and patriots” (TAYLOR, 2017: 219). The peasant population was more confused because it was little involved in the reading of pamphlets or in the city fights. Revolution was not a priority for the rural world.

Where politics could not reach, religion could. Everyone felt like a child of God, but not everyone was equally involved in the relationship with the ruler. In the suburbs God was more present than the king. Here the preachers involved those people who remained indifferent to the call of the patriots (BONOMI, 1984: 243; BERCOVITHC, 1978). The key was enthusiastic and direct preaching. The rhetoric of some preachers moved between two temporal extremes: present and future, the first exposed the current reality and the second opened a perspective on the evolution of the facts (HARTOG, 2007; CLARK & SCAFFEI, 2022). In short, those who were on God's side in the present would be saved in the future, otherwise they would face their own destruction. For example, the preacher Edwards gives the Enfield audience a mathematical hope: the wicked will be punished. Their defeat is certain, there is no need to intervene: “the reason why they have not already fallen [...] is only that God's appointed time has not come”. But “the sword of divine justice is every moment brandished over their heads [...] and the simple will of God, that holds it back” (EDWARDS, 1741). Similarly, the evangelist Emmons told his listeners: the immoral and the brutish have short lives, their souls will not be saved on the day of apocalypse. The righteous, on the other hand, will be able to live forever in the glory of God (EMMONS in SANDOZ; 1998: 888-889).

The preaching of the Great Awakening not only gave hope but was also able to put “the power in the people”, making them architects of their own fortune (HOFSTADTER, 2021: 20). Radicalism spread throughout the awakened, instilling in them wonderful ideas of equality. Fortier reflects on this concept and observes: “The culture of equality [...] is not limited to law, but is [...] equally important in religion, politics, poetry and revolution” (FORTIER, 2016). It is precisely to it that the efforts of

the revolution and those of the Great Awakening tend. Undoubtedly, it is a complex concept with shifting boundaries in time and space (CLARK & SCAFFELI, 2022: 20-69). In the colonies, the notion of equity received cultural conditioning from Aristotle's Ethics and Rhetoric, the New Testament, the Hebrew Bible and the Roman notion of *aequitas*, predominantly taking on a political and social connotation (FORTIER, 2016).

During the Great Awakening, everyone realizes that they were equally placed on the same level in God's eyes, beyond their status. Heimert explains that the development of that “liberal individualism” led as much to the support of the revolution as to the success of independence (HASELBY, 2015: 127; HEIMERT, 2006). Not surprisingly, the movement borrowed its name from its main purpose: ‘awaken’ men from the sleep of centuries, enlightening them on their ability to achieve salvation. From the pulpits, self-determination was praised, and men rejoiced in having this potential. Through preaching, they destroyed the indefinite mass to address the individual directly, urging them to take responsibility for their own choices. Man began to believe in himself because God believed in him and offered him the chance to win a better place in the world.

The spiritual inclusion of the subaltern classes

Beard and many others show us that it was the intellectual and political elites who defined the "We the People" concept that opens the Constitution (ACKERMAN, 1991: 203; 247). This expression circumscribed an authority. In that *incipit*, there was no space for women, for blacks, or for any other minority, forced to fight for those same rights guaranteed to the others (ACKERMAN, 1991: 199; ASHWORTH, 1995: 21). “The total exclusion of the people in their collective capacity is the hallmark of the U.S. Constitution”. “We must consistently reject the idea that Congress [...] speaks with the authentic voice of the American People” (ACKERMAN, 1991: 216). The outsiders were only inhabitants and not true citizens (ARENDDT, 1963; ACKERMAN, 1991: 240). For this reason, the Revolution appears as the product of a struggle "between imperial and colonial ruling classes" (POST, 2011: 185). "A bourgeois revolution" based on an equally bourgeois individualism (KULIKOFF, 1992: 8-102, 112-113).

The Revival entered the scene as an inclusive movement, overcoming these divisions and involving the faithful beyond differences. Distancing themselves from the

members of the Old side, they were perceived by the audience as social levelers. Their desires appeared as close to those of the common people, as those of the old lights were close to those of the powerful and aristocrats. The awakened ones, convinced that material excesses burdened the spirit, rejected the use of luxurious clothing and adornments, embracing the poverty in order to be closer to the audience (NASH, 2005: 8). Edwards reminded that who lives in the magnificence of God is the poor man, not the rich one. He was not bequeathed “vast treasures of silver and gold, and sometimes an earthly kingdom.” But, despite his social status, God elected him as dignitary of his gift: “the peace which himself enjoys” (EDWARDS, 1750). Much later, Winchester would say: “The love of money is the root of the devil” (WINCHESTER in SANDOZ, 1998: 992). However, in sermons, preachers still tried to respect the established social order. For example, Chauncy opens his sermon by reflecting on the world and noting that “there is a certain order among mankind, according to which some are entrusted with power to rule over others”, for “their mutual defense and safety”, but “those who rule over others must be just ruling in the fear of God” (CHAUNCY, 1998: 142-143).

According to Thompson, the difference in interests, needs and desires between one group and another creates the concept of class on which conflicts and alliances are based (KULIKOFF, 1992: 2-4). Marxist historiography has extensively studied the social landscape of colonial America. Here, it has identified early signs of the fierce capitalism that characterized the US (POST, 2011: 1). Observing the social structure of pre-revolutionary territory, historians and sociologists identify three main subjects: at the top was the landed aristocracy, which exploited slaves and cheap labor for the accumulation of wealth and power; next was the middle class of smallholders, developing capitalists; and finally, the underpaid working class (POST, 2011: 156-185). To these was added a fourth category, the subaltern classes: poor, white women and slaves, who at the time made up the majority of the adult population in the colonies (KULIKOFF, 1992: 115). They often found relief in the idea that God was always on the side of his faithful. Dunbar reassured the audiences: God will preserve his people from the “greatest sufferings & dangers” (DUNBAR in SANDOZ, 1998: 215-218).

The use of the word rather than the written verb attracted the subordinate classes. Many converted to evangelization, attracted by that spiritual experience of prayers (BONAZZI, 2018: 25). From their side, slaves chose Christianity persuaded by the

Bible because conversion would set them free (NASH, 2005: 7; WALSH, 1997: 153-155). Many of them turned into preachers during the Great Awakening. For their part, masters exhorted them in practice convinced that the relationship with God would make them more servile. Many, in fact, are the slaves who "prayed and read some part of their Bibles in the field and in their quarters in the hearing of those who could not read" (KLINGBERG, 1956: 120; 174). Samuel Davies left information on the fact that hundreds of them attended their meetings "whenever they could get an hour's leisure from their masters" (BONOMI, 2003: 125-126). Probably, the religious practice of the movement found important points of contact with the exuberant African religiousness (BONOMI, 2003: IX).

Last but not the least, women: cornerstone of the economic system (TAYLOR, 2017: 29-30). They could pray but not preach. The situation changed with the Awakening, when women gained spaces and possibilities hitherto precluded. Sarah Osborn is an important example, a religion teacher who opened a house of prayer to catechize, to read the Bible, sing and pray. According to Nash, she was the first women who broke "the male monopoly on dispensing God's grace" (NASH, 2005: 68). Generally, female preachers were such because married to male preachers or because, without a husband (single or widows), they were exempted from housework. The Great Awakening represented a period of feminization of the religious world that exacerbated the judgments of the anti-revivalist faction. The minister Charles Chauncy shivered in front of the "female exhorters" which "encouraging women, yea, girls to speak in the assemblies for religious worship" (BONOMI, 2003: 124). So, in order to discredit this kind of preaching, the used barren commonplaces: "The aptness of Children and Women to weep [...] in greater Abundance than grown Persons and Men is a plain proof [...] that their Fluids are more numerous in Proportion to their Solids, and their Nerves are weak" (HEIMERT & MILLER, 1967: 241). However, the time of change was just around the corner. A century earlier, in the middle of the English civil war, Mary Cary observed: "the time is coming when not only men but women shall prophesy; not only aged men but young men, not only superiors but inferiors; not only those who have university learning but those who have it not, even servants and handmaids" (REYNOLDS, 1986: 165-66).

Marginalized by the individualism of egalitarian elites (ASHWORTH, 1995: 21), outsiders found their dimension in God's word, expropriating it to the clergy. The realization that they enjoyed a "freedom that God has granted equally to all men" gave rise to uprisings and revolts such as the one in Massachusetts in 1777. Here, a group of slaves pressed their masters for freedom and emancipation (KULIKOFF, 1992: 119-120). The parameters of the Great Awakening clashed with the traditional order. Therefore, in their eyes, the followers of the Awakening became "a set of incendiaries, enemies not only of the established church but also common disturbers of the peace" (NASH, 2005: 9).

Preachers and preaching

Among the best known preachers there was George Whitefield, charismatic leader of the movement and, according to Barry Hankins, first real American star (HANKINS, 2009: 7). In over eleven days of touring, he preached almost nineteen times in different churches and outdoor places. Nobody wanted to miss out on the show. In this period “Whitefield would have been adored if he wore a nightcap and preached from a tree” (BONOMI, 2003: 149). The time spent in theatrical study and practice was instrumental in building his dramatic style of preaching. Grew up in an Anglican family, Whitefield received an Oxfordian education. Whitefield’s epiphany took place in Gloucester, during a volunteer period. The preacher defined it as a “new birth”. From that moment, his doubts on his salvation stopped and his conversion began⁴.

This began a *leitmotiv* of the evangelical revivalism, with a specific symptomatology and case study. Tracy studied the ecstatic phenomenology as well as on fainting cases, often related to divine epiphanies. His point of reference was Jonathan Edwards. In some notes of 1737, Edwards described a vision that he had during a contemplative experience. For about an hour, he was filled with the grace of God. This contact threw him “in a flood of tears”. Edward described his experience as a newborn who, coming to light, cries and screams: "I felt an ardency of soul to be [...] emptied and annihilated; to lie in the dust, and to be full of Christ alone; to love him [...] and to be perfectly sanctified and made pure, with a divine and heavenly purity” (TRACY,

⁴ Later, John Wesley lived a similar experience. Wesley was already an Anglican minister before his meeting with God, but he immediately had doubts on his salvation (HANKINS, 2009: 7-8; TRACY, 2019).

2019: 214). According to the Old side members, who belonged to Presbyterian and Congregational churches and promoted an austere religiousness, this frenzy was indecent. Religion could not be described as a mere nervous excitement. Conservatives opposed “preferring a faith tempered by an enlightened Mind [...] not raised Affections” (BONOMI, 2003: 132). The new preaching was based on a mind-altering. In America many people looked for these epiphanies and they tried to auto-generate them. They thought that, through this state of trance, they could reach the truth and the divine grace. It all starts with the individual's desire to express their feelings and is combined with a certain amount of collective transport. Tracy considers the empathic nature of the phenomenon and the fact that similar events were sporadic in some groups more than in others⁵. For example, Edwards saw these events as happy occasions for contact with God and effective tools to promote his work (TRACY, 2019: 229). Many were infected by a kind of epidemic. In the *revival*, in fact, visions were moved from person to person throughout the touch of the hand or through other physical interactions, like glance. In this way, audiences were filled with ecstatic bodies. Crying, agonies, convulsions, screaming, violent muscle contractions, quick rotations of the head and states of trance were manifested.

This phenomenon reached its peak during the Second Great Awakening (1790-1861), ruled by a different kind of preachers (HANKINS, 2009: 12-15; ISRAEL, 2018: 120). Unlike the first half of the century, pulpits were rarely attended by educated people. Everyone could be a preacher: the divine power indiscriminately acted on souls. So, there was no restriction linked to social class or educational level. Knowing how to involve people, having charisma and being combative were the only requirements. In this way, even those who lived on the edges of society, could become a good preacher and a landmarks, climbing the social classes. The new preachers were mostly farmers and craftsmen, eager for equality and equal dignity and convinced that heaven was inhabited by humble and not by rich people⁶.

⁵ Mesmer suggested that (human or animal) bodies had a magnetic energy. So, there could be the loss of this energy or of its bad distribution between the organs. For this reason, the doctor could treat patients working on their magnetism and he could go into a trance because of this power. Everything was based on magnetically flux (DEL CASTELLO, 2011: 51-7).

⁶ In 1738, the Synod of Philadelphia imposed a veto: people could preach only if they had a degree awarded in a British university or in a college of New England: Harvard or Yale (they shaped their

Enthusiasm in the revival

The Awakening inspired people through the art of oratory⁷. In ancient Greece it denoted a man inspired by the gods, but from the 17th to the 19th century the word took on a derogatory meaning (LOVEJOY, 1984: 231). The enthusiastic people were those who could not and would not limit their rapture for God and, for this reason, went beyond the limits of morality. Those who were haunted by flashes of inspiration, claimed to have a more deep and direct relationship with God. This meant to challenge the religious authority and to deny its functionality.

The involvement of the faithful started from the open and inclusive rituals, based on the emphasis and on the emotional transport (KIDD, 2009; AHLSTROM, 2004). Unlike the old Churches, where the faithful laid down, in this case he had an active role in the worship. Preaching became impromptu. Words, gestures and facial expressions were used to communicate. Barren and simple settings were gathering places, far from the solemnity of the old Churches which intimidated the faithful. The shepherd talked from a makeshift stage and not in recognized churches. The audience responded to the preacher's stimuli through movements of the body, songs or trance states. The expression 'religious silence' had nothing to do with these preachings. The Great Awakening moved the authority "in the mass of common people" (NASH, 2005: 14). The result was the presence of institutions without a license. That's the case of the battle conducted by Tennent who, in 1730, in Neshaminy, founded the Log College⁸. With the introductions of 1738, Tennent and his fellows became "destroyers of good learning" and were accused of educating an indiscriminate audience (TRINTERUD, 1949: 141). These were enacting something politically new, systematized with the Declaration of Independence (1776) that, "more than other revolutionary act, claimed the principle [...] of the universality and equality of human rights" (ISRAEL, 2018: X; WILLIS, 2018:

curricula according to the British model) (DUNBAR, 1957: 249). Moreover, the future ministers had to pass Synodal exam to prove the solidity of the theological formation.

⁷ This ability captivated also politics. The conservative Patrick Henry, as a teenager, attended Samuel Davies' sermons and acquired his skills in this way (NASH, 2005: 8-9).

⁸ The college was built in a house of wood, log house, and it did not have the canonic austerity of other places of formation (COLLINS, 1914: 5-7). Whitefield himself admitted that it was not a glorious place (TRINTERUD, 1949: 74; 82; 143). Among the twenty-two preachers of the *New Side*, founders of the Synod of New York, only nine graduated in Yale and two in Harvard; ten of them attended the *Log College* and only a preacher came from a Scottish university (BONOMI, 2003: 146).

359-360). The missionary Samuel Williams explained that enthusiasm led to “a wanton abuse of liberty”, triggering destructive forces against “government, rulers, church, state [...] and morals” and subverting an arbitrary power in order to create a new one, based on different logics (BONOMI, 2003: 238; LAMBERT, 1999).

The clergy of the Old Side was worried about itinerant preachers (ISRAEL, 2018: 320). According to the ruling class, it was a problem which could not be underestimated. On the pulpits, they generated chaos and they created links between different communities. In this way, their behavioral echo was repeated from place to place (HALL, 1994: 2-7). According to the preachers, it was a legitimate practice: the Awakening had to spread hope through the word of God. In 1740, Gilbert Tennet talked about these topics. The sermon, *The Danger of an Unconverted Ministry*, accused clergy of the Old Side to be educated but to be blind to the truth of the Savior (TENNENT, 1742; BONOMI, 2003: 144). Conversion was desirable: “Let those who live under the Ministry of dead Men [...] repair to the Living, where they may be edified” (TENNENT, 1742; BONOMI, 2003: 144). In addition to disparity of class and education, also the significant age gap between the ministers of the New and Old side widened the gap (BONOMI, 2003: 146). On average, the ministers of the New Light were younger and therefore more capable of rethinking the world and considering man as a divine matter, meant to rejoin his Creator (ISRAEL, 2018: VII-VIII). Paine explained: “America’s independence would not have increased her happiness, if its government had been based on the old corrupt models” (KEANE, 2003: 510).

Awakening and Revolution. From Puritans to Yankee

In 1777, Keteltas encouraged the masses with his sermon:

“Our cause [...], IS not only good [...]; it IS a glorious cause, It IS the cause of truth, against error and falsehood; the cause of righteousness against Iniquity; the cause of the oppressed against the oppressor, the cause of pure and undefiled religion, against bigotry, superstition, & human inventions; It is the cause of the reformation, against popery, of liberty, against arbitrary power; [...] It is the cause of Justice and integrity” (KETELTAS in SANDOZ, 1998: 603).

Much later, Hitchcock will look upon the established independence as the triumph of the divine will (HITCHCOCK in SANDOZ, 1998: 1173). And, in 1795, in Madison's

eyes, America became the pilot experiment of a state living in the glory of God (MADISON in SANDOZ, 1998: 1312).

The Awakening was a decisive event in this process. For many it is even “a key word in American nationalism” (HASELBY, 2015: 23; BUTLER, 1982; ISRAEL, 2018: 65-66). Through the Great Awakening, Puritans of New England became Yankee (BUSHMAN, 1967; BUTLER, 1982: 306; SWEET, 1950: 138; 172). The search for “new sources of authority, new principles of action, new foundations of hope” promoted by the Awakening led to the exceptionalism of this society (McLOUGHLIN, 1971: 335; BONAZZI, 2018: 13). To talk about religion in the American world is to talk about the principles, values and points of view that animate this reality. Specifically, the Great Awakening produces a culture shock, giving people the opportunity to live in search of God and their own happiness. In a sermon delivered on the anniversary of independence in 1793, Miller identified Christianity as a secret source of political freedom, “by the doctrines which It teaches” true Christianity urges the defence of the

“unalienable rights of mankind”. “It teaches [...] a noble contempt for that abject submission to the encroachments of despotism, to which the Ignorant and the unprincipled readily yield. It forbids us to call, or to acknowledge, anyone master upon earth, knowing that we have a Master in heaven, to whom both rulers, and those whom they govern” (MILLER in SANDOZ, 1998: 1156-1157).

In conclusion, the emphasis with which the American people consider freedom and self-affirmation is an important example of their closeness to evangelical principles (SPADOLINI, 1992: 491-6; HANKINS, 2009: X). The words “In God we trust”, printed on the coin, leave no doubts. America is an indirect product of the Calvinist doctrine which, over time, changes and fits itself into a new context (BONAZZI, 2018: 9). It is clear the strong entrepreneurial vocation of this society (NOLL, 2002: 3-4). The current ‘American Dream’ has its roots in a charming history. This gene was born in the early sixteenth century, it crosses the Great Awakening and it establishes itself in the colonial territory. Here, on July 4, 1776, the United States was born and with it a model “for the definition of the democratic modernity” (ISRAEL, 2018: VII). In the United States today, one can still see the shadow of that *homo deus* that allowed America to establish itself on the global stage.

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