

POSTSCRIPT

Was the Great Awakening a Key to the American Revolution?

Even if Bonomi's thesis (that the revivals of the mid-eighteenth century were a "key" that helped to open the door to the War for Independence) is not valid, there is room to argue that the Revolution was not without its religious elements. In his book *Religion in America: Past and Present* (Prentice Hall, 1961), Clifton E. Olmstead argues for a broader application of religious causes to the origins of the American Revolution. First, and consistent with Bonomi, Olmstead contends that the Great Awakening did foster a sense of community among American colonists, thus providing the unit required for an organized assault on English control. Moreover, the Great Awakening further weakened existing ties between colonies and England by drawing adherents of the Church of England into the evangelical denominations that expanded as a result of revivalistic Protestantism. Second, tensions were generated by the demand that an Anglican bishop be established in the colonies. Many evangelicals found in this plan evidence that the British government wanted further control over the colonies. Third, the Quebec Act, enacted by Parliament in 1774, not only angered American colonists by nullifying their claims to western lands, but it also heightened religious prejudice in the colonies by granting tolerance to Roman Catholics. Fourth, ministers played a significant role in encouraging their parishioners to support the independence movement. Olmstead claims that this revolutionary movement in the colonies was defended overwhelmingly by Congregationalist, Presbyterian, Dutch Reformed, and Baptist ministers. Finally, many of the Revolutionaries, imbued with the American sense of mission, believed that God was ordaining their activities.

Further support for Bonomi's views can be found in Alan Heimert, *Religion and the American Mind from the Great Awakening to the Revolution* (Cambridge University Press, 1966); Cedric B. Cowing, *The Great Awakening and the American Revolution: Colonial Thought in the Eighteenth Century* (University of Chicago Press, 1971); Richard Hofstadter, *America at 1750: A Social Portrait* (Alfred A. Knopf, 1973); Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790* (University of North Carolina Press, 1982); Ruth H. Bloch, *Visionary Republic* (Cambridge University Press, 1985); and Harry S. Stout, *The New England Soul: Preaching and Religious Culture in Colonial New England* (Oxford University Press, 1986). Students interested in the Great Awakening should consult Edwin Scott Gaustad, *The Great Awakening in New England* (Peter Smith, 1957); David S. Lovejoy, *Religious Enthusiasm and the Great Awakening* (Prentice Hall, 1969); and Marilyn J. Westerkamp, *Triumph of the Laity: Scots-Irish Piety and the Great Awakening, 1625-1760* (Oxford University Press, 1987).