

Primary Source Reading 1-1 ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

The Great Awakening

▣ About the Selection

In the 1730s and 1740s, the Great Awakening swept through the colonies. The main beliefs of this religious revival were that people could not be saved by their good works. Instead, they must be born again in the spirit (known as the doctrine of regeneration), and they must experience this rebirth through the heart, not the mind. Many who heard the powerful preacher George Whitefield described how their hearts were changed by the experience. Many people, however, criticized the Great Awakening because it seemed to ignore the mind. In this excerpt from his "Two Sermons on Regeneration," the South Carolina minister Alexander Garden criticizes Whitefield's followers.

Reader's Dictionary



carnal: natural and physical
deism: the view that God created the universe but does not play a role in human history
dictates: beliefs and orders
infallibility: unable to be wrong
Mahometism: outdated word for Islam
maladies: diseases
Popery: Catholicism (often meant as a slur)
viz.: namely

GUIDED READING

As you read, note how Garden describes the basis of belief for those who follow Whitefield. Then answer the questions that follow.

Forsaking the *ordinary* ways and means of attaining the knowledge of our religious duty, *viz.* natural reason and the *written* word of God; and substituting in their place our own conceits of immediate revelations by certain *impulses, motions, or impressions* of the *Holy Spirit* on our minds, without any rational objective evidence, or clear and sufficient proof;—this is proper and direct *enthusiasm*, in the bad sense of the word to which it is now commonly restricted. And of all *religious* maladies, this is the most desperate and hardest to be subdued. If the case be *atheism, paganism, or deism*, it is still within the reach of all the arguments and conclusions of natural *reason*, and which have been often, in such case, practiced with success; or if the case be *Judaism, Mahometism, or Popery*, it is within the reach of all the arguments and conclusion of *reason* and *revelation* also;—but if it be *ENTHUSIASM*, it is out of the reach of *all these*, the alone means in human power, wherewith to attempt a *remedy*. For if once man be *settled* in this Way; when once they come to place *strong conceit or imagination* in the chair of *reason*, and to subject the *standing oracles* of God, to the fancied *immediate* revelations of his *Holy Spirit* to them; they straight assume the airs of *infallibility* upon you. If you'll hearken to *their* dictates, it is well; but if not, what have *they* to do with your *carnal* reasonings, or senses of scripture? For they have God

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himself speaking *inwardly* to their souls; *immediately* teaching, and *infallibly* leading them into all Truth;—and this they are as sure of, as of *seeing* the light, or *feeling* the heat of the sun at noonday.

Source: *The Great Awakening*. Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1967.

READER RESPONSE

Directions: Answer the following questions on the lines below.

1. According to Garden, what are the ordinary ways of attaining religious knowledge?

2. What examples does Garden give of religious issues within the reach of reason and revelation?

3. Which religious "malady" is the hardest to cure?

4. What does Garden mean by "enthusiasm"?

5. **Critical Thinking** According to Garden, what are the harmful effects of religious enthusiasm?
