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Frank Lambert. *Inventing the "Great Awakening"*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001. Pp. 320. \$18.95 (Paper); \$47.50 (Cloth).

[1] In recent years the phenomena of the first intercontinental evangelical revival, popularly known as the *Great Awakening*, has come under review. What was once considered an accurate depiction of an historical occurrence - a transatlantic evangelical revival - has, with this current volume, been shown to be as much an aspect of emerging popular cultural trends as an actual historical event.

[2] Several views regarding the *Great Awakening* currently exist. The first claims that contemporary historical narratives describe an actual event as it was occurring. The second suggests that the Great Awakening was actually pieced together from earlier narratives by 19th century evangelists and historians. Lambert offers a third alternative, finding a middle road between these two. He argues that, while conversions and revivals were occurring, they were not on the scale that the contemporary 18th or early 19th century evangelists made them out to be. Lambert does an admirable job reexamining the historical sources at his disposal. Much of his attention is given to dealing with the impact of the seminal figures Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield and their influence on evangelicalism in the 18th century.

[3] The opening chapters set the stage for what is to follow by focusing on the so-called *Northampton revival* and its role as the opening episode in the *Great Awakening*. The remainder of the work addresses the scope, breadth, nature and aftermath of the *Awakening*. The chronological layout of the book brings to light developmental stages, the problems associated with examining the revival, and the inadequacy of earlier interpretations of the event. On the one hand, we have arguments for a contiguous revival spanning North America and Europe. Proponents of this position point to the international scope of the revival as proof that it was a work of God. On the other hand, the detractors, mostly representatives of the established churches, present the case that no revival on the scale reported by the evangelicals ever occurred. They claim that the chaos and emotionalism of the evangelical conversions were short term reactions to a electrifying sermon or meeting. Moreover, the detractors maintained that the revivals, if they could be called that, were

isolated and made few converts. Claims of anti-rationalism, heresy, and emotionalism also are cited as proof that the revivals were human creations rather than a final pre-parousial outpouring of God's Spirit.

[4] In the portrayal of George Whitefield and his role in the shaping of revivalism, however, the work really shines. Lambert argues that Whitefield is the central figure of 18th century revivalism, and the *Great Awakening* is as much an extension of his personality as it is a genuine outpouring of God's Spirit. Through the use of newly emerging advertising methods, Whitefield was able to gather large crowds to his meetings and promulgate the notion that God was at work in the process. Lambert underscores how the architects or the *Awakening* used what was then "modern media technology" (i.e. advertising) to promote the message of the evangelist and the portrayal of religion as a commodity operating under the market law of supply and demand.

[5] Two main factors come into play in the promotion and success of 18th century revivalism. The first is the emergence of new print technology allowing for the inexpensive mass distribution of newspapers and leaflets announcing the "work of God" in other towns and cities around the globe. The second, of course, was the oratory skill of Whitefield and other itinerants. Having the luxury of preaching the same sermon to new crowds over time created a dramatic and theatrical presentation capable of striking at the emotions of its hearers. In the end, this led to a consumerist approach to religion as adherents came to have favorite preachers and a favorite message. Lambert explains the mass appeal of these itinerant preachers as a kind of proto-televangelism.

[6] The volume is well written and the thesis defensible. The stated goal - to relay how revivalists wove a web of meaning from isolated events is accomplished. The arguments are solid and the author reaches appropriate conclusions supported by the source material. While it may be classified as a revisionist history of long held views about the *Great Awakening*, I do believe that all future work in this area will have to take this volume into account.

[7] Although the volume is lengthy (over 300 page), it provides a wealth of information that should be welcome to researchers or students interested in religion in North America or in the rise of evangelicalism and the *Great Awakening*.

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