

## THE COMING GREAT AWAKENING?

By Marshall Foster

America is reeling. After twelve years of inconclusive war in the Middle East and a culture war at home—a war of cosmic proportions—Americans are discouraged. Many think that there can never be a spiritual and moral renewal of our way of life in our time.

America once teetered on the precipice of disaster just a few years after the birth of our nation—a spiritual and societal collapse every bit as serious as the one we face today.

In the 1780s America emerged victorious from the War of Independence with Great Britain. But the country was in shambles. The war debt was overwhelming and the unbacked currency, called the Continental, was nearly worthless. Hundreds of churches had been burned and looted by the British.

Church attendance had plummeted and the immorality of the French deists and revolutionaries was polluting America's youth. The French, once our allies, were now destroying our ships and imprisoning hundreds of our sailors. They threatened all-out war against us. President John Adams even enlisted the retired former president George Washington to once again become Commander of the American Army because it seemed war was imminent. The nation was on the brink.

Historian David McKenna writes: "Colonial colleges, in particular, took the brunt of moral corruption and philosophical despair. Harvard, Princeton and Yale, schools which were founded to prepare Christian leaders in religion, government and medicine, be-

came seedbeds of atheism and anarchy." He adds that a scholar of the time described the state of American higher education as "secret nurseries of every vice and cages of unclean birds."



The few professing Christians attending college could not express their faith without incurring the wrath of the masses. Christians were forced into secret meetings with secret codes and signs to hide their activities from the dominant pagan libertines.

Into the cauldron of unbelief of the 1790s, Timothy Dwight, grandson of Jonathan Edwards (a leader of the first Great Awakening), became the President of Yale University. In Dwight's first baccalaureate message to his students he challenged the entire skeptical

student body to an open forum on the merits of Christianity. Dwight defended Christ and the Bible as the ground of all the subjects of their curriculum and of America as a nation. Starting with only a handful of professing believers, Dwight saw one half of the student body come to robust faith in Christ before the end of the year. Those young Christian leaders began to share the Gospel intelligently and lovingly to other colleges. The revival soon spread.

Williams College in Massachusetts was slow to respond to the awakening and was filled with blasphemy and unbelief. But on a hot, stormy August day in 1806, five Christian students met secretly to pray in a field off campus. The world and America

*continued on back*

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would never be the same. The prayer meeting was led by Samuel Mills. He was convinced that the Good News must go across America and around the world, especially to Asia. Others in the group said it was too dangerous to reach ancient, hostile cultures. But suddenly a powerful storm arose and forced the young men to seek shelter by a large haystack. They continued to pray and God's Spirit touched all of them with the vision of the Gospel to the nations.

The Spirit of God swept over the campus. Hundreds of students turned to Christ and they began to take His truth from campus to campus, church to church and city to city. This revival, which became known as the Second Great Awakening, transformed America and lasted for at least three decades. Its impact was felt for a century.

Five college students, praying next to a haystack, launched the greatest century of missions in modern times. They all committed themselves to the Great Commission and their leader, Samuel Mills, inspired the first national mission societies. They and other young committed believers took the Gospel to the American frontier and beyond that to China, India, Korea and Hawaii. As a result, Christianity changed from a regional faith, largely locked up in Europe and America, to a worldwide religion with over two billion adherents today.

What impact did this Great Awakening have on the fledgling United States of America? It transformed the lives of millions of Americans, turning them away from the pagan philosophies of France and the tyranny and socialism that were growing in Europe. America was permeated with biblical truth regarding limited, constitutional government. They held off the forces of statism by implementing the biblical standard of a stable, hard currency with no income tax and no forced redistribution of wealth. The biblical work ethic and free enterprise system drove the engine of prosperity, raising the standard of living by 900% in the 19th century. Thousands of Christian charities provided the loving care and job training for the poor without a taxpayer-funded, all-powerful welfare state. Alexis de Touqueville, a French philosopher traveling in America in 1838, summed up the change in America. De Tocqueville said "America is a nation with the soul of a church." He said the greatness of America was to be found in the churches where "the pulpits were aflame with righteousness."

Spiritual awakenings have brought America back from the brink of disaster repeatedly through the centuries. Like the five young men of the so-called Haystack Revival, we too can believe God for an awakening in the church, in our nation and the world.



This summer and fall 250,000 church leaders will be receiving a copy of the 40-page *GPS30 World Prayer Atlas* encouraging them to join us in this 30-Day Global Prayer Strategy. As the national chairman of this campaign I am encouraging pastors and

believers to, in essence, begin their own "haystack prayer meetings" believing God for a worldwide spiritual awakening of true faith. Contact us for details on how you can be a catalyst for prayer in your area. Real hope for our future as a nation begins with fervent prayer!

Yours for renewal and revival,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Marshall Foster". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Marshall Foster



## JOURNAL

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Published monthly by:

The World History Institute  
P.O. Box 4673  
Thousand Oaks, CA 91359

Phone: (805) 523-0072

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