



## Jonathan Edwards (1703-58) and His Legacy<sup>1</sup>

Michael A.G. Haykin, Professor, Central Baptist Seminary and Bible College, Toronto, Ontario

When D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones gave his paper on 'Jonathan Edwards and the Crucial Importance of Revival' at the Westminster Conference in 1976, he confessed that the paper was 'one of the most difficult tasks I have ever attempted'.<sup>2</sup> Part of the reason for this, Lloyd-Jones admitted, was the immense influence Edwards had had upon him personally.<sup>3</sup> But there was also the fact that Edwards was a spiritual and theological giant. 'I am tempted,' Lloyd-Jones said, 'perhaps foolishly, to compare the Puritans to the Alps, Luther and Calvin to the Himalayas, and Jonathan Edwards to Mount Everest!' And as he faced 'this great peak pointing up to heaven,' Lloyd-Jones continued, he could but feel like a weak 'little climber'.<sup>4</sup> If Lloyd-Jones felt so daunted by Edwards, how much more does this writer! My only hope is similar to that of Lloyd-Jones: 'to give some glimpses of this man and his life, and what he did,' with the goal of persuading you to read Edwards for yourself.<sup>5</sup>

Edwards was born on October 5, 1703 in a town far from the centres of influence and power, East Windsor, Connecticut. His parents both came from well established New England Puritan families: his father, Timothy Edwards (1669-1758), the pastor of the Congregationalist church in East Windsor, was first cousin to the well-known Puritan theologian and historian Cotton Mather (1663-1728), while his mother, Esther (1672-1770), was the daughter of Solomon Stoddard (1643-1729), one of the most eminent Congregationalist pastors in New England. Stoddard was especially renowned for his fervent preaching and for the recurrent revivals which his congregation in Northampton, Connecticut had experienced.

Jonathan, the only son of eleven children, received his early education from his father and older sisters. At the age of 13 he entered the Collegiate School of Connecticut in New Haven, Connecticut, which would be later renamed Yale College. Although he had been raised in an extremely godly home, and graduated from the Collegiate School in 1720 at the head of his class academically, Edwards had neither inner peace nor saving faith. Writing later of his life at this time, Edwards said that it was characterized 'by great and violent inward struggles'.<sup>6</sup> Edwards stayed on at the College for a further two years after graduation in 1720, studying towards an M.A. It was during this period, probably around April or May of 1721, that Edwards experienced conversion.<sup>7</sup> In his *Personal Narrative*, which he wrote in 1739, he describes this experience:<sup>8</sup>

The first instance that I remember of that sort of inward sweet delight in God and divine things that I have lived much in since was on reading those words, 1 Tim. 1:17. "Now unto the king, eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever, Amen." As I read the words, there came into my soul, and was as it were diffused thro' it, a sense of the glory of the Divine Being; a new sense,

quite different from any thing I ever experienced before. Never any words of scripture seemed to me as these words did. I thought with myself, how excellent a being that was; and how happy I should be, if I might enjoy that God, and be wrapt up to God in Heaven, and be as it were swallowed up in Him. I kept saying, and as it were singing over these words of scripture to myself; and went to prayer, to pray to God that I might enjoy him; and prayed in a manner quite different from what I used to do; with a new sort of affection. But it never came into my thought, that there was anything spiritual, or of a saving nature in this.

From about that time, I began to have a new kind of apprehensions and ideas of Christ, and the work of redemption and the glorious way of salvation by Him. I had an inward, sweet sense of these things, that at times came into my heart; and my soul was led away in pleasant views and contemplations of them. And my mind was greatly engaged, to spend my time in reading and meditating on Christ; and the beauty and excellency of His person, and the lovely way of salvation, by free grace in Him.... The sense I had of divine things, would often of a sudden kindle up, as it were, a sweet burning in my heart; and ardour of soul, that I know not how to express.

---

**How excellent a being that was; and how happy I should be, if I might enjoy that God, and be wrapt up to God in Heaven, and be as it were swallowed up in Him**

---

After a relatively brief stint of pastoring a small Presbyterian work in New York, Edwards moved back to his hometown of East Windsor in April of 1723. That summer he finished his M.A. thesis and subsequently received his M.A. from Yale in the fall. The following year he was appointed tutor at Yale, in which capacity he served till August of 1726, when he was invited by the Congregationalist Church of Northampton, Massachusetts, to become assistant to its pastor, his grandfather, Solomon Stoddard. In the words of Iain H. Murray: "For the next twenty-three years he was to be 'Mr Edwards of Northampton'."<sup>9</sup>

Within a year of his arrival at Northampton Edwards had married. He had known his bride Sarah Pierrepont (1710-1758), since his student days at Yale. Samuel Miller, who wrote a biography of Edwards in the last century, comments thus on their marriage:<sup>10</sup>

Perhaps no event of Mr. Edwards' life had a more close connexion with his subsequent comfort and usefulness than this marriage.

Throughout their married lives Sarah and Jonathan were deeply devoted to one another; moreover, her godliness fully matched his.<sup>11</sup> Their first daughter, Sarah (1728-1805), was born the following year. She was the first of eleven children, all of whom survived infancy. In a day when infant mortality was extremely high (Cotton Mather, for instance, had fifteen children, of whom only two survived infancy), this is indeed an amazing fact. Moreover, it should be noted that the frequent portrayal of Edwards as a stern theologian is belied by his tenderness as both a husband and a father, 'whose children seemed genuinely fond of him.'<sup>12</sup>

Solomon Stoddard died in 1729, leaving to his grandson the ministerial charge of one of the richest congregations in Connecticut. Spiritually, though, things were far from good at the time of Stoddard's death. Edwards wrote of the congregation at that time<sup>13</sup>

The greater part seemed to be at that time very insensible of the things of religion, and engaged in other cares and pursuits. Just after my grandfather's death, it seemed to be a time of extraordinary dullness in religion. *Licentiousness* for some years prevailed among the *youth* of the town; they were many of them very much addicted to *night-walking*, and frequenting the *tavern*, and *lewd* practices, wherein some, by their example, exceedingly corrupted others. It was their manner very frequently to get together, in conventions of both *sexes* for mirth and jollity, which they called *frolics*; and they would often spend the greater part of the *night* in them, without regard to any *order* in the families they belonged to: and indeed *family government* did too much fail in the town. It was become very customary with many of our young people to be *indecent* in their carriage at *meeting*, which doubtless would not have prevailed in such a degree, had it not been that my *grandfather*, through his *great age* (though he retained his *powers* surprisingly to the last), was not so able to *observe* them. There had also long prevailed in the town a spirit of contention between *two parties*, into which they had for many years been divided; by which they maintained a *jealousy* one of the other, and were prepared to *oppose* one another in all public affairs.

Many of the adults of the congregation were taken up with the pursuit of wealth and property, not with that of God and his kingdom. Outwardly they appeared respectable and orthodox, but inwardly they lacked what would become a major theme in Edwards' writings, namely, heart-religion. It is not surprising that their children, seeing their parents' hypocrisy, were 'very much addicted to night walking, and frequenting the tavern, and lewd practises.' As Richard F. Lovelace has said, 'if they had had drugs, they would have used them.'<sup>14</sup>

**While there were other factors, Edwards' preaching of Scriptural truth, especially that relating to justification by faith alone, was central to the onset of revival in December of 1734**

However, under Edwards' powerful preaching during the course of the early 1730s there was aroused a growing sensitivity to sin and a willingness to listen to counsel from the Scriptures. While

there were other factors, Edwards' preaching of Scriptural truth, especially that relating to justification by faith alone, was central to the onset of revival in December of 1734.<sup>15</sup> For the next five months an intense concern to be at peace with God and to walk with him gripped the entire town. 'The town seemed to be full of the presence of God,' Edwards later wrote in his account of this revival.<sup>16</sup> Of the town's roughly one thousand inhabitants, there was hardly one who was not concerned 'about the great things of the eternal world.'<sup>17</sup> Those who knew Christ were 'wrapt up in delightful contemplation of the glory and wonderful grace of God, the excellency and dying love of Jesus Christ; and... in longing desires after God and Christ.'<sup>18</sup> On those who did not know Christ the initial effect was twofold:<sup>19</sup>

*One* was... immediately to quit their sinful practices.... When once the Spirit of God began to be so wonderfully poured out in a general way through the town, people had soon done with their old quarrels, backbitings, and intermeddling with other men's matters. The tavern was soon left empty, and persons kept very much at home; none went abroad unless on necessary business, or on some religious account, and every day seemed in many respects like a Sabbath-day. The *other* effect was, that it put them on earnest application to the means of salvation, reading, prayer, meditation, the ordinances of God's house, and private conference; their cry was, *What shall we do to be saved?*

The ways were varied in which the Spirit of God then brought many of these people to peace with God.

There is a very great *variety*, as to the *degree* of fear and trouble that persons are exercised with, before they attain any comfortable evidences of pardon and acceptance with God. Some are from the beginning carried on with abundantly more encouragement and hope than others. Some have had *ten* times less trouble of mind than others, in whom yet the issue seems to be the same. Some have had such a sense of the displeasure of God, and the great danger they were in of damnation, that they could not sleep at nights.... Some few instances there have been, of persons who have had such a sense of God's wrath for sin, that they have been overborne; and made to *cry out* under an astonishing sense of their guilt, wondering that God suffers such guilty wretches to live upon earth, and that he doth not immediately send them to hell.<sup>20</sup>

All in all, Edwards reckoned that 'more than 300 souls were savingly brought home to Christ' in Northampton during the six months of revival.<sup>21</sup> Nor was the revival confined to Northampton, as past revivals during Solomon Stoddard's ministry had been. From Northampton the revival spread swiftly to over thirty other towns in Massachusetts and Connecticut.

Edwards' account of this revival, entitled *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God, in the Conversion of Many Hundred Souls, in Northampton*, was first published in London in 1737.<sup>22</sup> Murray is of the opinion that it may well have been 'the most significant book to precede the great evangelical awakening on both sides of the Atlantic.'<sup>23</sup> It was certainly well received by those who would be leaders in that awakening. John Wesley (1703-91), for instance, read it in 1738, only a few months after his conversion. His comments on the book were drawn from Psalm 118:23: 'This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes.'<sup>24</sup> And when Howel Harris (1714-73), the future Welsh Calvinistic Methodist leader, read Edwards'

book, he felt his heart 'boiling with love to Christ,' and he prayed, 'O go on with Thy work there and here.'<sup>25</sup>

Howel Harris' prayer received an answer in 1740-42, when God again visited New England with revival, but this time on a much more extensive scale. Known as the Great Awakening, the revival deeply impacted not only New England, but also the other American colonies to the south. Estimates of those converted simply in New England, where the population was around 250,000 at the time, range from 25,000 to 50,000. It should be noted that these figures do not include conversions of those who were already church members.<sup>26</sup> In the midst of the revival William Cooper (1694-1743), a Congregationalist minister from Boston, declared that:<sup>27</sup>

The dispensation of grace we are now under, is certainly such as neither we nor our fathers have seen; and in some circumstances so wonderful, that I believe there has not been the like since the extraordinary pouring out of the Spirit immediately after our Lord's ascension. The apostolical times seem to have returned upon us: such a display has there been of the power and grace of the divine Spirit in the assemblies of his people, and such testimonies has he given to the word of the gospel....

### **The apostolical times seem to have returned upon us: such a display has there been of the power and grace of the divine Spirit in the assemblies of his people, and such testimonies has he given to the word of the gospel**

A number of *preachers* have appeared among us, to whom God has given such a large measure of his Spirit, that we are ready sometimes to apply to them the character given of Barnabas, that 'he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost, and of faith' [Acts 11:24]. They preach the gospel of the grace of God from place to place, with uncommon zeal and assiduity. The doctrines they insist on are the doctrines of the reformation, under the influence whereof the power of godliness so flourished in the last century. The points on which their preaching mainly turns are those important ones of man's guilt, corruption, and impotence; supernatural regeneration by the Spirit of God, and free justification by faith in the righteousness of Christ; and the marks of the new birth. The manner of their preaching is not with the enticing words of man's wisdom; howbeit, they speak wisdom among them that are perfect. An ardent love to Christ and souls warms their breasts and animates their labours. God has made those his ministers active spirits, a flame of fire in his service; and his word in their mouths has been, 'as a fire, and as a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces.'....

This work is truly extraordinary, in respect of its *extent*.... It has entered and spread in some of the most populous towns, the chief places of concourse and business.... It is extraordinary also with respect to the *numbers* that have been the subjects of this operation. Stupid sinners have been awakened by hundreds; and the inquiry has been general in some places, 'What must I do to be saved?' I verily believe that in this our metropolis, there were

the last winter some thousands under such religious impressions as they never felt before.

The work has been remarkable also for the *various sorts* of persons that have been under its influence. These have been of *all ages*. Some *elderly* persons have been snatched as brands out of the burning, made monuments of divine mercy, and born to God, though out of due time; as the apostle speaks in his own case [cf. 1 Cor. 15:8], but here, with us, it has lain mostly among the young. Sprightly youth have been made to bow like willows to the Redeemer's sceptre, and willingly to subscribe with their own hands to the Lord....

Some of the *greatest sinners* have appeared to be turned into real saints; drunkards have become temperate; fornicators and adulterers of a chaste conversation; swearers and profane persons have learned to fear that glorious and fearful Name, THE LORD THEIR GOD; and carnal worldlings have been made to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness....

The *virtuous* and civil have been convinced that morality is not to be relied on for life; and so excited to seek after the new birth, and a vital union to Jesus Christ by faith.... At the same time, many of the *children of God* have been greatly quickened and refreshed; have been awakened out of the sleeping frames they were fallen into, and excited to give diligence to make their calling and election sure; and have had precious, reviving, and sealing times. Thus extensive and general the divine influence has been at this glorious season.

Among the preachers whom Cooper likens to Barnabas were Edwards and the English Methodist George Whitefield (1714-70). Whitefield had arrived in America in October of 1739, and did not return to England until early 1741. He and Edwards met for the first time on Friday, October 17, 1740. Whitefield's memorable visit at the Edwards' home lasted until the Sunday evening, October 19. In his journal entry for October 19, Whitefield wrote:<sup>28</sup>

Felt great satisfaction in being at the house of Mr. Edwards. A sweeter couple I have not yet seen. Their children were not dressed in silks and satins, but plain, as become the children of those who, in all things, ought to be examples of Christian simplicity. Mrs. Edwards is adorned with a meek and quiet spirit; she talked solidly of the things of God, and seemed to be such a helpmeet for her husband, that she caused me to renew those prayers which, for some months, I have put up to God, that He would be pleased to send me a daughter of Abraham to be my wife.

There were, however, other leaders in the revival of quite a different stamp than either Edwards or Whitefield. James Davenport (1716-57), for instance, was a minister from Southold, Long Island, whose preaching in the early stages of the revival could not be faulted. But as the revival progressed, his words and deeds became increasingly tinged with fanaticism. He denounced ministers who refused to allow him the use of their pulpits as unconverted and urged their people to immediately separate from them. Those whom he considered regenerate he called 'brother' or 'sister', the rest 'neighbour'. Bodily tremors, outcries, and fainting experienced under his preaching he re-

garded as sure evidence of conversion. The most bizarre episode of his career took place in March, 1743 in the town of New London, Connecticut. There, at Davenport's instigation, his followers publicly dissociated themselves from heresy by burning in a bonfire a large quantity of books, including some by the well-known Puritans John Flavel (c.1630-91) and Increase Mather (1639-1723), the father of Cotton Mather! Davenport's followers then proceeded to dance around the bonfire praising God and shouting 'Hallelujah!'<sup>29</sup>

Although Davenport eventually came to his senses, admitted his errors and sought to make restitution, he had helped to unleash a 'wild-fire' spirit which in many places made havoc of the revival. Moreover, Davenport's antics provided anti-revival forces, known as the 'Old Lights', with a highly visible target for their attacks. The captain of these forces was Charles Chauncy (1705-87), the co-pastor of Boston's prestigious First Church. In an open letter published in Scotland in 1742 Chauncy declared that in his opinion:<sup>30</sup>

There never was such a *Spirit of Superstition and Enthusiasm* reigning in the land before; never such *gross Disorders and barefaced Affronts to common Decency*; never such *scandalous Reproaches on the Blessed Spirit*, making him the Author of the greatest *Irregularities and Confusions*.

Chauncy went on to express a hope that through the events of the revival 'a good Number... have settled into a truly *Christian Temper*'. Nevertheless, he was firmly persuaded that the revival:<sup>31</sup>

In general, is any other than the Effect of *enthusiastick Heat*. The Goodness that has been so much talked of, 'tis plain to me, is nothing more, in general, than a *Commotion in the Passions*. I can't see that Men have been made *better*, if hereby be Meant, their being formed to a nearer Resemblance to the *Divine Being in moral Holiness*. 'Tis not evident to me, that Persons, generally, have a better Understanding of Religion, a better Government of their Passions, a more Christian Love to their Neighbour, or that they are more decent and regular in their Devotions towards God. I am clearly of the Mind, they are worse in all these Regards. They place their Religion so much in the *Heat and Fervour* of their *Passions*, that they too much neglect their *Reason and Judgment*.

For Chauncy, the excesses of the revival revealed its true nature: it was not at all a work of God's Spirit, but merely an instance of uncontrolled emotionalism. Chauncy believed that the main work of the Spirit is to enlighten man's reason and understanding. Thus he could write:<sup>32</sup>

The plain Truth is, an *enlightened Mind*, and not *raised Affections*, ought always to be the Guide of those who call themselves Men; and this, in the Affairs of Religion, as well as other Things: And it will be so, where God really works on their Hearts, by his SPIRIT.

When Chauncy viewed the revival through the lens of the antics of Davenport and others like him, it is not surprising that he came to the conclusion that the revival was mostly heat with little light, and therefore to be rejected as spurious. In reality, Chauncy was defending a Christianity which required mental assent to right doctrine and the maintenance of proper morals. As the religious situation in New England began to polarize between those who took Chauncy's position and those who defended the

revival, excesses and all, a Presbyterian sympathetic to the revival named John Moorhead prayed: 'God direct us what to do, particularly with pious zealots and cold, diabolical opposers!'<sup>33</sup>

The answer to Moorhead's prayer came by way of a book, Jonathan Edwards' *A Treatise Concerning the Religious Affections*. Prior to the appearance of this book in 1746, Edwards had produced a couple of works which sought to find a middle ground between 'pious zealots', like Davenport and 'cold, diabolical opposers', like Chauncy: *The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God* (1741) and *Some Thoughts concerning the Present Revival of Religion in New England* (1742). But it is the *Religious Affections* which is his consummate work on revival. Murray has rightly described it as 'one of the most important books possessed by the Christian church on the nature of true religion'.<sup>34</sup> The book had its origin as a series of sermons which Edwards had preached in 1742 and 1743 on 1 Peter 1:8 'Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory'. The book wrestles with the key questions which had been raised in the controversy regarding the revival: What is the nature of true Christian experience? How does one differentiate between genuine devotion and false piety? What distinguishes true religious affections from religious fanaticism? What are the marks of a genuine revival?

---

**True religion affects the heart as well as the mind. When the Spirit acts upon a man or a woman, he does not simply shed light in the mind, but he moves upon the will, causing it to exercise, for instance, such affections as love for Christ and joy in him.**

---

*Religious Affections* is divided into three main sections.<sup>35</sup> In Part I Edwards makes a frontal attack upon the position of Chauncy, though he never refers to him explicitly. True religion, Edwards Asserts, affects the heart as well as the mind. When the Spirit acts upon a man or a woman, he does not simply shed light in the mind, but he moves upon the will, causing it to exercise, for instance, such affections as love for Christ and joy in him. Edwards writes:<sup>36</sup>

Although to true religion there must indeed be something else besides affection, yet true religion consists so much in the affections that there can be no true religion without them. He who has no religious affection is in a state of spiritual death, and is wholly destitute of the powerful, quickening, saving influences of the Spirit of God upon his heart.... As, on the one hand, there must be light in the understanding as well as an *affected* fervent heart; where there is heat without light, there can be nothing divine or heavenly in that heart; so, on the other hand, where there is a kind of light without heat, a head stored with notions and speculations, with a cold and unaffected heart, there can be nothing divine in that light.... If the great things of religion are rightly understood, they will affect the heart.

But it is to those at the other extreme, who emphasized 'heat without light', that Edwards directs the bulk of his book. Part II

outlines what are *not* necessarily genuine signs that a person is indwelt by the Spirit of God, such things as bodily effects, fluency in talking about the things of God, and spending much time in prayer and other religious duties. What then are true distinctive signs? In Part III, the largest section of the book, Edwards gives twelve such signs. It would take us too far afield to review them all here, but the following are particularly noteworthy.

### True religious affections 'begin with a delight in [God's] holiness', from which all of God's other attributes derive their beauty and attractiveness

True religious affections 'begin with a delight in [God's] holiness', from which all of God's other attributes derive their beauty and attractiveness.<sup>37</sup> For it is the sight of the beauty of God's holiness, 'and 'tis this sight only, that will melt and humble the hearts of men, and wean them from the world, and draw them to God'.<sup>38</sup> Then, 'holy affections are not heat without light'.<sup>39</sup> Edwards repeatedly criticized those extremists who wanted to jettison the mind in their pursuit of vital Christianity. In conversion and growth in Christ the mind is not left untouched; rather, it is enlightened by the Spirit, and given a desire for and delight in divine realities. Genuine religious affections also involve a profound awareness of one's utter inadequacy in the presence of God. In distinguishing this sign Edwards was taking aim at an ever-present danger for both preachers and avid hearers in a time of revival, namely, spiritual pride. Moreover, gracious affections produce a character consonant with what Edwards describes as 'the lamb-like, dove-like Spirit of Jesus Christ,' that is, a meek, forgiving and benevolent temper.<sup>40</sup> Finally, genuine religious affections cannot fail to have an impact on one's daily life. A godly lifestyle is, in the final analysis, the chief of all the evidences of sincere religious affections. If there is one binding theme of Edwards' *Religious Affections*, it is his emphasis that the genuine believer has, in his words, 'a holy breathing and panting after the Spirit of God to increase holiness'.<sup>41</sup>

One final work of Edwards' related to the issue of revival that should be taken note of is his *An Humble Attempt to Promote Explicit Agreement and Visible Union of God's People in Extraordinary Prayer, For the Revival of Religion and the Advancement of Christ's Kingdom on Earth*, which appeared in January, 1748. In this work Edwards made a stirring appeal for:<sup>42</sup>

Many people, in different parts of the world, by express *agreement* to come into a *visible union* in extraordinary,... fervent and constant *prayer*, for those great effusions of the *Holy Spirit*, which shall bring on [the] *advancement* of Christ's Church and kingdom.

Edwards was thoroughly convinced, and rightly so, on the basis of Scripture and the history of the church, that 'when God has something very great to accomplish for his church, it is his will that there should precede it the extraordinary prayers of his people'.<sup>43</sup> Unlike some of his other works, this book did not have a great impact in Edwards' own lifetime. But, as we shall see, it

certainly exercised a profound influence towards the end of the eighteenth century.

1748, the year that saw the publication of Edwards' *Humble Attempt*, is also significant in that it witnessed the beginnings of a controversy which engulfed Edwards' own congregation in Northampton.<sup>44</sup> The heart of the controversy involved a practice which Edwards' grandfather, Solomon Stoddard, had instituted at the beginning of the century. Stoddard was of the opinion that the reception of the Lord's Supper was not to be restricted to believers, since he vigorously maintained that God could and did use it as a means of conversion. He thus encouraged all in his congregation who had not professed conversion, but who were seeking to live respectable lives, to come to it. The conviction that this practice was thoroughly unscriptural had been deepening in Edwards' mind for quite some time before he declared in December of 1748 that a person must profess to be a Christian before he or she would be allowed to come to the Lord's Table. In taking this position Edwards found himself opposed by most of his congregation, and a painful controversy ensued, which ultimately issued in his dismissal as pastor in 1750. The atmosphere which the controversy created in Northampton is well displayed in the following portion of a letter which Edwards wrote to his good friend Joseph Bellamy (1719-90) at the end of 1749:<sup>45</sup>

'Tis a Time of great Trial with me, and ... I stand in Continual need of the divine Presence & merciful Conduct in such a state of things as this. I need Gods Counsel in every step I take & every word I speak; so all that I do & say is watched by the multitude around me with the utmost Strictness & with eyes of the greatest uncharitableness & severity and let me do or say what I will, my words & actions are represented in dark colours.

After his dismissal Edwards became pastor of the church in the frontier village of Stockbridge, Massachusetts and a missionary to the Mohawk and Housatonic Indians of the area.

There is little doubt that Edwards' removal from Northampton to Stockbridge in 1750 was providential, for it was during his seven years at Stockbridge that Edwards had the time to write the books which established him as the 'greatest Christian theologian of the eighteenth century'.<sup>46</sup> Among these works was his notable defence of Calvinism, *A Careful and Strict Enquiry into the Modern Prevailing Notions of that Freedom of Will, Which is Supposed to be Essential to Moral Agency* (1754). This period of literary fruitfulness at Stockbridge came to an end in 1757 when Edwards reluctantly accepted an invitation to become president of the College of New Jersey, now Princeton University. Edwards had been at the College only a few weeks when he was inoculated against smallpox, which was raging in Princeton and the vicinity. The vaccine initially appeared to be successful, but complications set in, and Edwards, never a strong man physically, died on March 22, 1758. Among his last words were some for his wife, who was still at Stockbridge with most of their children. To his one child who was present at his bedside, Lucy (1736-86), he said:<sup>47</sup>

Give my kindest love to my dear wife, and tell her, that the uncommon union, which has so long subsisted between us, has been of such a nature, as I trust is spiritual, and therefore will continue for ever.

Shortly after he had said this, those at his bedside, supposing he

was unconscious, were lamenting what his death would mean to the College and the church, when they were surprised by his last words: 'Trust in God, and ye need not fear'.<sup>48</sup>

What then can we learn from Jonathan Edwards? Well, first he can teach us about revival, for, as Lloyd-Jones has stressed, he is 'pre-eminently the theologian of Revival'.<sup>49</sup> He not only knew genuine revival at first-hand, but he also had the mind and the spiritual maturity to produce a rich and profound corpus of literature on revival. Here, we need to take our cue from some eighteenth century English Baptists who avidly read Edwards' writings on revival. Consider, for instance, John Sutcliff (1752-1814), pastor of Olney Baptist Church, Buckinghamshire, whose early ministry was at a time of spiritual decline and lethargy in many English Calvinistic Baptist churches. His reading of Edwards' *Humble Attempt* in 1784 led him to propose to his fellow pastors in the Northamptonshire Association that they set apart one hour on the first Monday evening of every month to pray that:<sup>50</sup>

The Holy Spirit may be poured down on our ministers and churches, that sinners may be converted, the saints edified, the interest of religion revived, and the name of God glorified.

Behind this call to prayer lay the conviction, derived from both the Scriptures and Edwards, that the reversal of spiritual decline could only be achieved by an outpouring of the Spirit of God, the true agent of revival. Five years after this call to prayer Sutcliff published an edition of Edwards' *Humble Attempt* to further encourage those who had heeded the call and were meeting for prayer. Indeed, so great was Edwards' influence on Sutcliff and his circle of friends, which included Andrew Fuller (1754-1815) and William Carey (1761-1834), that after Sutcliff's death in 1814, Fuller noted:<sup>51</sup>

We have some, who have been giving out of late, that 'If Sutcliff and some others had preached more of Christ, and less of Jonathan Edwards, they would have been more useful.'

To which Fuller rightly replied:<sup>52</sup>

If those who talk thus, preached Christ half as much as Jonathan Edwards did, and were half as useful as he was, their usefulness would be double what it is.

For Fuller and Sutcliff knew the important role that Edwards' writings had played in the revival that had come to the English Calvinistic Baptist denomination in the later 1700s and early 1800s.

## Edwards is indispensable for a Christian generation that is largely indifferent to the glory and beauty of God

Second, and most importantly, Edwards is indispensable for a Christian generation that is largely indifferent to the glory and beauty of God. For Edwards was blessed with a mind keenly aware of God's glory, permeated by the beauty of God, and devoted to the task of imparting that glory and beauty to his fellow men.<sup>53</sup> Place the following passage, so characteristic of the way that Edwards' mind thought about God, alongside much of modern Christianity's reflection on God and the poverty of

the latter will be clearly seen. It is from a sermon entitled *Ruth's Resolution*, which Edwards preached during the revival at Northampton in 1734 and 1735.

God is a glorious God. There is none like him, who is infinite in glory and excellency. He is the most high God, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders. His name is excellent in all the earth, and his glory is above the heavens. Among the gods there is none like unto him; there is none in heaven to be compared to him, nor are there any among the sons of the mighty that can be likened unto him.... God is the fountain of all good and an inexhaustible fountain; he is an all-sufficient God, able to protect and defend... and do all things.... He is the King of glory, the Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle: a strong rock, and a high tower. There is none like the God of Jeshurun, who rideth on the heaven... and in his excellency on the sky: the eternal God is a refuge, and underneath are everlasting arms. He is a God who hath all things in his hands, and does whatsoever he pleases: he killeth and maketh alive; he bringeth down to the grave and bringeth up; he maketh poor and maketh rich: the pillars of the earth are the Lord's....

## This is a God that delighteth in mercy; his grace is infinite, and endures for ever. He is love itself, an infinite fountain and ocean of it

God is an infinitely holy God; there is none holy as the Lord. And he is infinitely good and merciful. Many that others worship and serve as gods, are cruel beings, spirits that seek the ruin of souls; but this is a God that delighteth in mercy; his grace is infinite, and endures for ever. He is love itself, an infinite fountain and ocean of it.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This paper was originally given at the Canadian Carey Family Conference on August 29, 1990.

<sup>2</sup> *The Puritans: Their Origins and Successors. Addresses Delivered at the Puritan and Westminster Conferences, 1959-1978.* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987). p.354-355.

<sup>3</sup> For the account of Lloyd-Jones' discovery of Edwards, see Iain H. Murray, *David Martyn Lloyd-Jones. The First Forty Years 1899-1939* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1982), p.253-254.

<sup>4</sup> *Puritans*, p.355.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p.355.

<sup>6</sup> Sereno E. Dwight, *Memoirs of Jonathan Edwards, A.M. [The Works of Jonathan Edwards (1834 ed.; repr. Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987), 1:xii].*

<sup>7</sup> For the date, see Iain H. Murray, *Jonathan Edwards. A New Biography* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987), p.35.

<sup>8</sup> Cited Dwight, *Memoirs (Works, 1:xiii).*

<sup>9</sup> *Jonathan Edwards*, p.73.

<sup>10</sup> Cited *ibid.*, p.91. Italics added.

<sup>11</sup> See the account of Samuel Hopkins, *Memoirs of the Life, Experience and Character of the Late Rev. Jonathan Edwards A.M. [The Works of President Edwards (1817 ed.; repr. New York: Burt Franklin, 1968), I, 93-97].*

<sup>12</sup> Elisabeth D. Dodds, *Marriage to a Difficult Man* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1971), p.7.

<sup>13</sup> *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God (Works,*

1:347).

<sup>14</sup> *Dynamics of Spiritual Life* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 1979), p.38.

<sup>15</sup> *Faithful Narrative* (*Works*, 1:347-348).

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, (*Works*, 1:348).

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, (*Works*, 1:348).

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, (*Works*, 1:356).

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, (*Works*, 1:351).

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, (*Works*, 1:351).

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, (*Works*, 1:350).

<sup>22</sup> For the details surrounding its publication, see Murray, *Jonathan Edwards*, p.117-122.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p.122.

<sup>24</sup> Cited *ibid.*, p.122.

<sup>25</sup> Eifion Evans, *Daniel Rowland and the Great Evangelical Awakening in Wales* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1985), p.72.

<sup>26</sup> Graham D. Harrison, 'Ferment in New England: Reactions to the Great Awakening' in *Faith and Ferment* ([London]: The Westminster Conference, 1982), p.72.

<sup>27</sup> 'Preface' to Jonathan Edwards, *The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God* [*The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (1834 ed.; repr. Grand Rapids: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1986), 2:258-259, *passim*]. On William Cooper, see William B. Sprague, *Annals of the American Pulpit* (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1857), I, 288-291.

<sup>28</sup> *George Whitefield's Journals* (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1960), p.476-7. On Sarah Edwards' impressions of Whitefield, see Murray, *Jonathan Edwards*, p.162.

<sup>29</sup> Charles Chauncy, *Seasonable Thoughts on the State of Religion in New England* (1743 ed.; repr. Hicksville, New York: The Regina Press, 1975), p.220-223, footnote. For a detailed treatment of these aberrations of Davenport, see Clarke Garrett, *Spirit Possession and Popular Religion* (Baltimore/London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), p.119-125.

<sup>30</sup> *A Letter from a Gentleman in Boston, to Mr. George Wishart, One of the Ministers of Edinburgh. Concerning the State of Religion in New-England* [in Richard L. Bushman, ed., *The Great Awakening. Documents on the Revival of Religion, 1740-1745* (New York: Atheneum, 1970), p.120]. In this letter Chauncy said of Davenport: 'he is the wildest Enthusiast I ever saw, and acts in the wildest manner' (*ibid.*, p.121). In Edwards' opinion, Davenport did 'more towards giving Satan and other opposers an advantage against the work than any one person' (Murray, *Jonathan Edwards*, p.225).

<sup>31</sup> *Letter from a Gentleman in Boston* (Bushman, ed., *Great Awakening*, p.120).

<sup>32</sup> *Seasonable Thoughts*, p.326-7. For a good discussion of Chauncy's theological position, see Conrad Cherry, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards. A Reappraisal* (1966 ed.; repr. Bloomington/Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990), p.164-7.

<sup>33</sup> Cited G.C.Goen, 'Editor's Introduction' to his ed., *Jonathan Edwards: The Great Awakening* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1972), p.64.

<sup>34</sup> *Jonathan Edwards*, p.267.

<sup>35</sup> The following analysis of *Religious Affections* is particularly indebted to Cherry, *Theology*, p.167-176; Christopher Ehrat, 'Jonathan Edwards' *Treatise Concerning Religious Affections* and its Application to Prayer', *Crux*, 24, No.1 (March, 1988),

11-13; Murray, *Jonathan Edwards*, p.251-267.

<sup>36</sup> *Works*, 1:243.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:279.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:281.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:281.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:306.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:314.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:282.

<sup>43</sup> *Some Thoughts Concerning the Present Revival of Religion in New England* (*Works*, 1:426).

<sup>44</sup> For a good discussion of this controversy, see Murray, *Jonathan Edwards*, p.311-349.

<sup>45</sup> *Letter to Joseph Bellamy* (December 6, 1749) [ed. Stanley T. Williams, 'Six Letters of Jonathan Edwards to Joseph Bellamy', *The New England Quarterly*, 1 (1928), 239].

<sup>46</sup> Miklos Veto, 'Book Reviews: *America's Theologian: A Recommendation of Jonathan Edwards*. By Robert W. Jenson' *Church History*, 58 (1989), 522. See also John F. Wilson, 'Jonathan Edwards's Notebooks for "A History of the Work of Redemption"' in R. Buick Knox, ed., *Reformation, Conformity and Dissent* (London: Epworth Press, 1977), p.240.

<sup>47</sup> Cited Dwight, *Memoirs* (*Works*, 1:clxxviii).

<sup>48</sup> Cited *ibid.*, (*Works*, 1:clxxviii).

<sup>49</sup> *Puritans*, p.361.

<sup>50</sup> This call to prayer is known as The Prayer Call of 1784 and may be found in John Ryland Jr., *The Nature, Evidences, and Advantages of Humility* (Circular Letter of the Northamptonshire Association, 1784), p.12.

<sup>51</sup> Cited John Ryland, *The Indwelling and Righteousness of Christ no Security against Corporeal Death, but the Source of Spiritual and Eternal Life* (London: W. Button & Son, 1815), p.34.

<sup>52</sup> Cited *ibid.*, p.34.

<sup>53</sup> Joseph G. Haroutunian, 'Jonathan Edwards: Theologian of the Great Commandment', *Theology Today*, 1 (1944-45), 361-2.

<sup>54</sup> *Works*, 1:665.

•••••  
 • The Editor apologises for the absence of book  
 • reviews in this edition of the Journal. The ab-  
 • sence was occasioned by a wish to keep the ar-  
 • ticles published here together in one volume,  
 • because of their common theme.  
 •••••