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FACTORS WHICH INFLUENCED THE DEVELOPMENT
OF JONATHAN EDWARDS

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Historical Theology
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Divinity

by
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

"The real life of Jonathan Edwards was the life of his mind."¹ He is the perfect example of a writer who emerged out of the passions, the feuds, and the anxieties of his society. Thus, in dealing with Jonathan Edwards and the thought which influenced New England for nearly a century after his death, it is necessary to deal first of all with the passions, the feuds, and the anxieties from which he arose. Without these there can really be no true understanding of the man and his thought. It is legitimate to ask the question, "What are the factors that influenced the development of Jonathan Edwards?" This is the question which will be explored in the body of this paper.

Jonathan Edwards' life has many different aspects and influences, but only those that have a direct influence upon his thought will be considered here. The significance and the influence of his thought could well be a paper in itself and will not be considered in this presentation.

Also, in dealing with the period of the Great Awakening, only those aspects which directly influenced Edwards will be considered. In dealing with the hereditary influence of the

¹Perry Miller, Jonathan Edwards (New York: William Sloane Associates, 1949), p. XI.

Edwards' family, this writer in no way means it as proof of an hereditary theory, but is simply stating the facts and drawing conclusions.

The Distinguishing Features

The Ancestral Heritage

On October 3, 1703, a fifth child and only son was born to Timothy and Esther Edwards of East Windsor, Connecticut. There is no question that this son, whom they named Jonathan, was a genius. However, if an attempt is made to explain his genius in terms of heredity, there is no conclusive evidence on which to proceed. Old Windsor makes the statement, "In none of genius, Jonathan Edwards was the first of his race." Although his ancestral heritage offers an explanation of this intellectual giant, yet the facts indicate that from his ancestor Jonathan Edwards received certain character traits which conditioned him for the role he was destined to play in the development of New England.

The Edwards ancestry can be traced back through four generations to an English clergyman, Richard Edwards, who taught in the school of the Doctors' Company in London. His significance for the story of Jonathan Edwards begins and ends with the fact that he was a "minister." There was

CHAPTER II

THE CONDITIONING FACTORS WHICH INFLUENCED THE THOUGHT AND CHARACTER OF JONATHAN EDWARDS

The Conditioning Factors

The Ancestral Heritage

On October 5, 1703, a fifth child and only son was born to Timothy and Esther Edwards of East Windsor, Connecticut. There is no question that this son, whom they named Jonathan, was a genius. However, if an attempt is made to explain his genius in terms of heredity, there is no conclusive evidence on which to proceed. Ola Winslow makes the statement, "In terms of genius, Jonathan Edwards was the first of his race."¹ Although his ancestral heritage offers no explanation of this intellectual giant, yet the facts indicate that from his ancestors Jonathan Edwards received certain character traits which conditioned him for the role he was destined to play in the development of New England.

The Edwards ancestry can be traced back through four generations to an English clergyman, Richard Edwards, who taught in the school of the Coopers' Company in London. His significance for the story of Jonathan Edwards begins and ends with the fact that he was a "minister." There was

¹Ola E. Winslow, Jonathan Edwards (New York: Macmillan Co., 1940), p. 5.

something in him that led to an intellectual and a contemplative life.² He died of the plague in 1625, leaving a widow, named Anne, and a son, named William. Anne Edwards married James Cole, a cooper, and with him migrated to New England, settling in Hartford about 1640.

William Edwards continued the cooper's trade of his stepfather. He has little significance, even though he had his edges of individuality, was a citizen before whom his fellow townsmen walked carefully and a cooper whose mark was a guarantee.³ His son, Richard Edwards, was born in Hartford in 1647, and lived there for seventy-one years.

With Richard Edwards the ancestry of Jonathan makes its first important contribution, for he displays attitudes which later characterized his grand-son. Although he was essentially a man of business, he displayed a strong loyalty toward the meetinghouse and once suffered keen remorse at the fact that he had nodded during a sermon. Concerning the way his father dealt with other people about their faults, Timothy Edwards wrote, "In that thing I have hardly ever (if ever) known the like of him." However, he was unaware that men were to say the same about him and his son after him.⁴

However, it is in the divorce proceedings of the 1690's

²Ibid., p. 11.

³Ibid., p. 14.

⁴Ibid., p. 17.

that the traits of resolution in action and indifference to hostile criticism, traits characteristic of the Edwards' family, find expression. By sheer weight of his convictions, standing against the law, the ministry, and the social standards of his day, Richard Edwards forced a victory by obtaining a divorce in 1691 from his wife, Elizabeth Tuttle, on the grounds of insanity. Such action becomes all the more remarkable when one considers that it was almost without parallel in early America. Usually the letter of the law was kept, a compromise effected, or the woman removed from the house, but no divorce granted. However, Richard Edwards, in the face of all opposition and criticism, demanded that the letter of the law be broken so that the spirit could be kept. Ola Winslow points out, "he was generations ahead of his time."⁵

There are striking parallels between this divorce case and the dismissal proceedings of 1750 against Jonathan Edwards in Northampton. Both men showed a strong sense of justice and an ability to detach himself from that which was of great concern to him. The same unassailable dignity and the conscience-bound determination to walk alone in the face of heavy opposition, even though it might mean his own ruin, appears predominately in both cases. In these respects, Jonathan Edwards "seems more the son of Richard Edwards, his

⁵Ibid., p. 19.

grandfather, than of his own father."⁶

But this is not to say that the relationship of the father, Timothy Edwards, to his son was not important. On the contrary, this relationship was one of the most important of Jonathan Edwards' life. Timothy Edwards was regarded as an intelligent man, one of more than usual scholarship and learning.⁷ He became pastor of the East Windsor parish in 1694, and the fact that through him the Edwards family once again becomes identified with the Ministry is perhaps more important to the story of Jonathan Edwards' development than any other detail of his life.⁸ He was industrious, painstaking, versatile, and gifted with a tireless energy. "Timothy Edwards would undoubtedly have stood out among a group of men of similar interests in any age; but the fire of genius was not in him. He was a pedestrian."⁹

However, the fact that Jonathan Edwards and his father died less than two months apart, thus making their association life long, can not be over emphasized. It undoubtedly accounts for many of his ministerial attitudes and opinions; but, more fundamentally, it accounts for the set of values

⁶Ibid.

⁷Alexander V.G. Allen, Jonathan Edwards (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1899), p. 2.

⁸Ola E. Winslow, op. cit., p. 20.

⁹Ibid., p. 22.

which gave religion the first place in his life.¹⁰

Like his father and his son, Timothy Edwards could also show a sense of justice in what he considered right and stand against all criticism. A glimpse is given into this side of his character by an event which also closely parallels the dismissal of Jonathan Edwards, not only in character but also in time, occurring only four years before. The disagreement was concerning the limits of pastoral authority in a private matter. The culprit was Joseph Diggins, who had married without parental consent. Timothy Edwards refused to baptise the child of this marriage or permit Joseph Diggins to go to another parish until he publicly confessed his guilt. This he refused to do. Timothy Edwards maintained his position for three years, even though the congregation had declared the culprit innocent. Jonathan Edwards would have agreed with his father,¹¹ for they both considered their battles to be God's battles.

Both men centered their lives in religion. Both were incapable of compromise either in thought or action; this fact was to play a very large part in Jonathan Edwards' development. The difference between the two men might be called one of emphasis instead of kind. Jonathan Edwards, making orderliness his servant, subordinated everything to his main interests; Timothy Edwards let orderliness become his master

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 23.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 226.

and thus was defeated by the very details which he disliked.

None the less,

as life long monitor and guide, Timothy Edwards is the answer to much which concerns the framework of his son's life and thought; but as to the enigma of his genius he supplies scarcely a hint.¹²

Therefore, in a last effort to account for his genius, Esther Edwards, his mother, has been singled out as the one to whom he owed his intellectual prowess. But there is not sufficient evidence to warrant such a conclusion. However, that he owed much of his intellectual powers to the inheritance of his mother is a fair enough conclusion, considering her ancestral heritage. She was the daughter of the celebrated Solomon Stoddard of Northampton and Esther Warham Mather Stoddard, daughter of John Warham, first minister to Connecticut colony, and wife to Eleazar Mather, first minister of Northampton. She undoubtedly brought considerable to the Edwards family from such a heritage, although this would be difficult to prove. She is described as a "woman of remarkable judgment, prudence, and piety, and superior to her husband in native vigor of understanding."¹⁴ Another writer describes her as having "remarkable judgement . . . extensive information, thorough knowledge of the Scriptures and of theology,

¹²Ibid., p. 31.

¹³Ibid., p. 23.

¹⁴Adam Leroy Jones, Early American Philosophers: Columbia University's Contributions to Philosophy, Psychology and Education (New York: Macmillan Co., 1898), II, 46.

and singular conscientiousness and piety."¹⁵ If the unauthenticated tradition that she did not join the church until her son was twelve years old is true, it would point to an "intellectual independence which no amount of precedence or prestige could intimidate."¹⁶ It would also suggest that she had a capacity for religious emotions which might have made her sympathetic with her son's religious experiences. However, there is no evidence to suggest that Jonathan Edwards¹⁷ ever talked to her concerning these emotions.

Even though his ancestral heritage has much to say concerning his character, the fact remains that Jonathan Edwards stands alone in the records of the Edwards family and with him the family history moved into a new chapter.

The Religious Heritage

The fact that Jonathan Edwards was the only son of a Puritan minister suggests that the Puritan theology would be an indispensable part of his life. This theology, his religious heritage, played an important part in conditioning him for his work.

Puritans are usually designated by the term, "Calvinist," which means that they were followers of John Calvin. He

¹⁵Alexander Allen, op. cit., p. 3.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Ola E. Winslow, op. cit., p. 47.

attempted to set forth the Protestant teaching in a compact and coherent system, involving the complete abjurement of human merit in the process of salvation. He attributed the Atonement, the ground of forgiveness, and the process of victory over sin in the soul, to God and not to man's agency. He discarded the idea that anything could occur, either in the world without or in the mind within, independently of the will and purpose of the Ruler of the universe.¹⁸

But Puritans can be called "Calvinists," only if it is understood that they more or less agreed with the great theologian of Geneva.¹⁹ Perry Miller remarks that Puritanism was but another manifestation of a piety "to which some men are probably always inclined and which in certain conjunctions appeals irresistibly to large numbers of exceptionally vigorous spirits."²⁰ This theology he calls "Augustinian" and says that Puritan theology was but an effort to externalize and systematize the subjective mood of this piety.²¹ When trying to formulate this piety, theologians fell back on three basic conceptions: God, sin, and regeneration.

For the Puritans, God was completely incomprehensible to

¹⁸Jonathan Edwards, An Unpublished Essay on The Trinity, edited by George P. Fisher (New York: Scribners, 1903), p. 25.

¹⁹Perry Miller, "The Puritan Way of Life," in Puritanism In Early America, edited by George M. Waller (Boston: D.C. Heath and Co., 1950), p. 17.

²⁰Perry Miller, The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1954), p. 4.

²¹Ibid., p. 5.

man. The idea was fundamental to Puritanism that God was "the force, the power, the life of the universe," and He must remain to men "hidden, unknowable, and unpredictable . . . an incomprehensible, first and absolute Being."²² The only way in which man can conceive of God, since He is incomprehensible, is through His effects or through man's reason. Therefore, in man's ideas of God the attributes will become separated and one will be emphasized more than another. However, in Puritan theology, the attributes should be conceived of as "one with Essence, and one with another." The world is governed by "I am," a jealous God, "who insists upon men worshipping Him instead of idolizing His titles."²³

However, they themselves succumbed to the temptation and placed emphasis upon the attribute of Sovereignty. This is considered a natural development due to the fact that the visible world for the Puritans was neither the final nor the true world, but simply God-created and God-sustained. To them, "the world was a created fabric, held together by a continuous emanation of divine power, apt to be dissolved into nothing should the divine energy be withheld."²⁴

According to the Puritans, this sovereign God, who creates and sustains the earth, is completely arbitrary in His deal-

²²Ibid., p. 13.

²³Ibid.

²⁴Ibid., p. 14.

ings with men. This fact may be seen by both the outward lives and also the inward histories of men. Whether a man received a renewal of spirit obviously depended on something outside himself, since he could not achieve this by his own efforts.²⁵ This is regarded as merely a law of life. Some are born rich while others are born poor. There is no way to explain it; God simply ordained that it should be that way.

The Lord to shew the sovereign freedom of his pleasure, that he may do with his own what he wil, and yet do wrong to none, he denyes pardon and acceptance to those who seek it with some importunity and earnestness . . . and yet bestowes mercy and makes known himself unto some who never sought him.²⁶

This belief in predestination was for the Puritan a natural corollary to the sovereignty of God. It was not fatalism, but more of a direct penetration of God's sovereignty into a man's own personality.

Sin was a way of describing man's inability to live decently and was also used as a means of accounting for the accidents and sorrows which every day befell the good and the bad. Original sin was made vivid for them by an inward knowledge of man's self, and the sinfulness of the average man was a fact that could be observed in the actions of mankind.²⁷

Because of sin, man needs divine grace to be lifted

²⁵Ibid., p. 17.

²⁶Thomas Hooker, The Application of Redemption p. 229, quoted in Perry Miller, "The Puritan Way of Life," p. 17.

²⁷Perry Miller, The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century, p. 24.

above himself.

The moment of regeneration, in which God, out of His compassion, bestows grace upon man and in which man is enabled to reply with belief, was the single goal of the Augustinian piety.²⁸

The theory of regeneration began with the premise of an omnipotent God and an impotent man. It was something inward and spiritual, and left an impression of the soul. It was a renewal of man out of sin and a regeneration, not merely of his mind and his will, but of the whole man. It gave to him a new inclination, a new heart, and a completely new life.²⁹

The Puritan was always aware of the danger of natural convictions being mistaken for the supernatural impress of the Spirit, for Puritanism could exist only as this distinction was maintained. When this distinction began to grow
30
dim, piety began to dwindle.

Puritanism is more than just a theology. It is a philosophy of life which says that men must act by reason, abide by justice, and strive for an inward communication with the force that controls the world. However, they must not expect that "force" to be ruled by their conceptions of what is
31
reasonable and just.

This is Puritanism as it was practiced in England. It

²⁸Ibid., p. 25.

²⁹Ibid., p. 26.

³⁰Ibid., p. 31.

³¹Perry Miller, "The Puritan Way of Life," p. 17.

was brought to the American wilderness bound inseparably with an ideal of culture and learning, a culture that made no concessions to the forest. Schools and a college was established, a standard of scholarship upheld, and a class of men devoted entirely to the life of the mind and of the soul was continued, even among the hardships of the frontier.³²

The depth of the religious interest of these people is reflected in the fact that for them God was more important than business, pleasure, or any "goods" of life. He was the "be-all" and "end-all" of existence, and the establishment of a right relationship to Him was "the pearl of great price without which all else was but dross."³³

Although the Puritan was in the world, he tried desperately not to be of the world.

He followed his calling, plowed his land, laid away his shillings, and endeavored to keep his mind on the future life. He looked upon the physical world as the handiwork of God, and the charms of the universe as His creations, and yet he told himself, "Get thy heart more and more weaned from the Creature, the Creature is empty, its not able to satisfie thee fully, nor make thee happy."³⁴

It was to these people, strongly marked by this spiritual quality, that Jonathan Edwards belonged. Spirituality is what the logicians call the specific difference of Puritanism.

³²Ibid., p. 11.

³³Winthrop S. Hudson, "Puritanism and The Spirit of Capitalism," Church History, XVIII (March, 1949), 8.

³⁴Perry Miller and Thomas H. Johnson, The Puritans p. 289, quoted in Kenneth B. Murdock, "The Puritan Literary Attitude," Puritanism in Early America, p. 91.

The unshaken belief in the reality of the spiritual universe . . . the strong impulse to find motives to action in the unseen and eternal, to feed the intellect and the heart on spiritual objects, and in distinctively spiritual experiences . . . to discern the highest joys . . . these were the traits of the Puritans.³⁵

And these were the traits which were to appear first in the boy and which continued to characterize him through his life.

The Early Home Life

In 1703 East Windsor was still frontier, even though it was comparatively safe from the danger of Indian attack. Although the fact that he was a son of the frontier meant that he would miss much of what he might have gained in Boston or England, yet Jonathan Edwards was fortunate in what he gained from the isolation found on the frontier in those times. Surrounded in all four directions by the spacious wonder and beauty of nature, it is not surprising that nature was stamped unforgettably on his early thought. Nature to him was a spacious world of meadows, unending forests, and rivers; a world of everlasting beauty and above all, a world of God's making. In such a setting nature would have been the most important daily fact to a sensitive child.³⁶ And the fact that he spent long periods of time in the surrounding forests

³⁵John DeWitt, "Jonathan Edwards; A Study," Princeton Theological Seminary Biblical and Theological Studies, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1912), p. 117.

³⁶Ola E. Winslow, op. cit., p. 32.

shows that nature and its influence held a primary place in his early values. This he was never to lose.

One result of the observations noted from nature is the youthful essay on the habits and characteristics of spiders. Whether he wrote this essay when he was eleven or thirteen is not important. What is important is that the deductions from his observations reveal a remarkable quality of mind. The essay is a chapter in his mental development and a glimpse into his world, a world of speculative thought reached through objective fact.³⁷

Nearness of death was kept constantly before the eyes of the children. They were reminded that they had an immortal soul lodged in a frail, mortal body.³⁸ This fact undoubtedly helped to increase the dependence upon God and His providence.

Another important influence was the religious atmosphere of the home. Jonathan Edwards' parents were both devout Puritans. The convictions, traditions and spirit of this class were theirs. The simplicity, the sincerity, the spirituality of Puritanism at its best were incarnate in them.³⁹ Born and raised in such a household, where religion was the very atmosphere he breathed and the church the leading interest in life, he did not react from the severity of his train-

³⁷Ibid., p. 37.

³⁸Ibid., p. 43.

³⁹John DeWitt, op. cit., p. 118.

40 ing. Rather, from his first extant letter, written to his sister Mary when he was twelve years old, one can observe how well the training of his Puritan parents had conditioned him. He talks more like a deacon than a mere boy of twelve. His own early awakening was behind him and he was already on the side of the Pastor, yearning toward the unconverted. From this letter it is quite evident that already, at the early age of twelve, the meetinghouse had first place in all his boyhood conceptions of life. ⁴¹

That such should be the case is not at all surprising when one considers his home environment and the fact that he was an only son. The ministerial language of the hour was as familiar and as natural to him as the language of the schoolroom. ⁴²

His early piety and awakening are also indispensable to an understanding of his later development. He had lived in an atmosphere of respect for all things holy and a deep concern for the exercises of piety; until he rationalized and justified the attitudes taught by his parents, he accepted them as unquestioningly as he accepted the sunrise and the phenomena of nature around him. ⁴³

⁴⁰Alexander Allen, op. cit., p. 22.

⁴¹Oliver E. Winslow, op. cit., p. 49.

⁴²Ibid., p. 50.

⁴³Ibid., p. 44.

Following directly out of his early piety is his first awakening. No exact date is given to this important event, simply the words which he wrote at a later date, "some years before I went to college."⁴⁴ At the time, his father was holding a series of revivals. Jonathan Edwards and a number of young boys built themselves a booth in the forest and went there to pray. This fact alone could be interpreted as simply "playing at religion," and imitating elders during a revival season. It could also have been something of a practical necessity for Jonathan Edwards, since he lived in a household so numerous that privacy must have been something of an impossibility.⁴⁵ However, for Jonathan Edwards the important thing is that praying with his companions did not satisfy him. He felt that religion was too personal an experience to be shared, so he had his own private place of prayer further in the woods. This was years before his mind formally acknowledged the fact that religion must be a personal experience; but he felt it so, even as a child.⁴⁶

In his later years, as he looked back upon this first awakening, it did not seem to him such a profound experience, but rather only a quickened delight in the outward duties of religion.⁴⁷ However, even this was of significant importance

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 45, quoted from Jonathan Edwards' Personal Narrative.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 46.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 45.

⁴⁷Ibid.

in conditioning him for his role in life.

The Early Education

Since Timothy Edwards lived and worked on the frontier and was a man of considerable learning, he conducted a school for his own children and also for those who were preparing for College. He was a strong disciplinarian, and a strict teacher who demanded perfection on the part of his students, especially in their verbs. The fact that Jonathan Edwards was placed under this rigorous discipline when he was too young to question it, means that "there was laid substantial foundations for his ministerial career."⁴⁸ Although his father's teaching methods would hardly have brought joy or made discipline seem worthwhile, nevertheless, it was under Timothy Edwards' "tireless persistence, which brooked no indolence and no half-knowledge," that his son became fortified for life against textual errors and left home with⁴⁹ "thoroughness as one of the Ten Commandments."

The Influence of These Factors

For Jonathan Edwards, childhood ended just before his thirteenth birthday. He was now ready to leave home and go to college. What had been accomplished in those thirteen

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 38.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 39.

years in the frontier parish of East Windsor?

His predilection for religion, his capacity for self-discipline, and his single-minded endeavor were, one might say, given to him by his ancestors. He had lost nothing by the time his ancestors spent in the cooper shops, for they had written a record of hardy pioneering, of ability to endure hardships, of godliness, tenacity to principle, and fearlessness in actions which they believed to be right. All of these attitudes laid durable foundations upon which arose the achievements of Jonathan Edwards.⁵⁰ The fact that his father once again brought the ministry back into the family relieved him of almost any necessity to choose a profession, made the pulpit his stage, and theology his natural idiom of thought.⁵¹ That his reflective bent, bookish interests, and some of his intellectual capacity also came to him from his inheritance could be inferred, although perhaps not proven.

His early home life and religious heritage had determined his sober view of life. He had been given much opportunity to practice the art of self-discipline and strict accuracy in his father's school. He had learned to make his mind his servant and to think for himself. In addition, he had the good fortune of being able to enjoy the quiet solitude and beauty of the forests and nature which had surrounded him.⁵²

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 6.

⁵¹Ibid.

⁵²Ibid., p. 51.

To the end of his life he remained the child who studied with concentration the characteristics of flying spiders.⁵³ Although in his later life he would turn his observations to "conversion" and "religious experience," his technique of study remained the same and he was unable to rest until he had finished what he had begun.

A relationship of understanding and sympathy, founded on common interests, had been cemented between him and his father, "the man who was to mean more to him throughout his life than any other human being he was ever to know."⁵⁴

His pursuit of religion as the unquestioned goal of life came as a natural development from his heritage and his early life in the parsonage. There is no doubt that "belonging to this spiritual race, and sprung from this spiritual class . . . his dominant quality would be this spirituality."⁵⁵

It later received fresh impetus at College, and was always the guiding principle of Edwards' life. Joseph Haroutunian⁵⁶ has called him "God-intoxicated," and the beginning of this intoxication can be found in his heritage and early training.

Most of Jonathan Edwards' characteristics can be traced back to the soil and the society from which he came. "Among

⁵³Perry Miller, Jonathan Edwards (New York: William Sloane Associates, 1949), p. 51.

⁵⁴Ola E. Winslow, op. cit., p. 51.

⁵⁵John DeWitt, op. cit., p. 118.

⁵⁶Joseph G. Haroutunian, "Jonathan Edwards: A Study In Godliness," Journal of Religion, XI (July, 1931), 414.

great Americans, he is perhaps the best example of one whose mind was cast strictly in the New England mold.⁵⁷"

Thus, conditioned by the factors of his boyhood, he left for college with his calling a straight path before him.

The Influencing Factors

⁵⁷Ola E. Winslow, op. cit., p. 327.

The Fall of 1718 the Yale College, he exchanged the quietness of West Windsor for the strife and confusion into which the College now found itself, with four towns each vying to have the College established in its midst. Into Jonathan Edwards' ears he caught their his education. To reach a new outlook and philosophy of life, and that would help him to the land and the frontiers for his later thoughts. The Church, he had to be exposed to the old type of Calvinism which the Yale curriculum was based. The Old Calvinism.

The Old Calvinism, formulated in logic and ordered in the Wesley which formed his course of study at Yale was found in the theology. His was a balance of disintegrating and unifying both the scientific and religious of the arts, which is the spirit of God, and their purpose, whatever identical with the will of God. In back of this theology lay the logic of Peter Ligon, who discussed the Aristotelian categories and presented a system of logic based on what

Footnote: The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century. Harvard University Press, 1939, p. 327.

CHAPTER III

THE FACTORS WHICH INFLUENCED THE INSIGHT OF JONATHAN EDWARDS

The Influencing Factors

When Jonathan Edwards left home in the fall of 1716 for Yale College, he exchanged the quietness of East Windsor for the strife and confusion into which the College now found itself, with four towns each trying to have the College established on its ground. Here Jonathan Edwards came to further his education. He found a new outlook and philosophy of life, one that would help form the basis and the framework for his later thought. But first, he had to be exposed to the old type of reason upon which the Yale curriculum was based.

The Old Reason

The Old Reason, formulated in logic and encased in dialectic, which formed his course of study at Yale was found in the Technologia. This was a science of distinguishing and defining both the contents and relations of the arts, which is the wisdom of God, and their purpose, which was identical with the will of God.¹ In back of this technologia lay the logic of Peter Ramus, who disowned the Aristotelian categories and substituted a system of logic based on what

¹Perry Miller, The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1939), p. 162.

he termed "arguments," which for him meant "any word by which things are understood or represented in speech, any concept employed in thinking."² He conceived of the task of logic as providing an efficient means of classification. Therefore, his logic was simply "a schematic arrangement of logical terms," with an emphasis on "laying things out in series."³ It was attempting to reach conclusions by putting self-evidencing propositions in intelligent arrangements, rather than by extracting one proposition from another and snarling over deductions. It was a logic for dogmatists.⁴

Following the Ramist system of logic, "method" was a key word in all Puritan thinking, as important as the words "sin, God, or regeneration." This method was simply a suitable arrangement of the things under question, which proceeded from universals to singulars.⁵ The basic contention of the system was that logic, which was of utmost importance, was to be derived both from the natural processes of the mind and from the natural order of the universe.⁶ Logic does take hold of reality. The "arguments" stand for realities, and relationships between them are real relationships which are accessible to logic. Thus, the system of Ramus

²Ibid., p. 124.

³Ibid., p. 125.

⁴Ibid., p. 138.

⁵Ibid., pp. 139-40.

⁶Ibid., p. 144.

states that man has access to objective truth. Richardson put it simply, "truth lyes not in the speech, but in the thing."⁷ Therefore, the problem for the Ramist and the Puritan, was not patient inquiry, but rapid survey, for truth does not need proof, only assertion.

This system meant that because the mind is fundamentally commensurate with creation, a cultivated mind which was unexalted by divine influence, was able to gather accurate knowledge of things and to assign particular truths to their proper place in the system of the universe.⁸ The sole purpose of logic, therefore, was merely that of an aide to direct man to see the wisdom of God. Richardson's contribution was a philosophy of the liberal arts which he called "rule of Encyclopaedia." After Richardson, William Ames systematized the rule in the "Technologia" and it found expression also in his "Medulla," the text-book in metaphysics for the Yale students of Jonathan Edwards' day. The foundation of technologia was clearly the doctrine that in the mind of God there exists a coherent and rational scheme of ideas upon which He modeled the world. Technologia and theology were made to coincide, and Ames dwelt at length upon the doctrine of the preexistant pattern of ideas.⁹ Technologia proved

⁷Ibid., p. 151.

⁸Ibid., p. 167.

⁹Ibid., p. 166.

that intelligibles exist objectively, not in man's head but in the thing, and it was also remarkable in that it contained no new ideas, but was only an elaborate restatement of the dominant medieval theory of knowledge.¹⁰ Natural reason was celebrated to the extent that it was believed that man had not only native powers, but actual concepts, which were merely confirmed by the senses.¹¹

At the beginning of the seventeenth century, the divines accepted the peripatetic theory of the order of the universe. They spoke of the "four causes" and believed that facts must be arranged according to the general plan: "the exposition proceeding from the elements, through meteors, the vegetable and sensitive souls, to the constitution of man and the rational soul." Natural phenomena were viewed in the light of their ultimate purpose and creatures were considered as being composed of "form and matter."¹²

A basic Puritan conception of the physical order of the universe was the conception that what is necessary from the nature of things is also a command of God. This substantiated other ideas, such as that man while in the world must live by the laws of the world.¹³

¹⁰Ibid., p. 176.

¹¹Ibid., p. 177.

¹²Ibid., p. 218.

¹³Ibid., p. 214.

However, by the end of the century, the divines were generally agreed that the mathematical system of Newton gave the better account. The Puritans were willing to make use of new theories, only they had to illustrate the orthodox doctrines. Although God is arbitrary, yet they believed that they lived in a world of order and design. God was conceived of as the first cause of actions. The concept of secondary causes combined the ideas of order and of divine will. Cause was that which had its effect in the ordinary course of things, and yet the cause does not of itself generate the effect; "God concurs unto every operation of Second Causes, so as, immediately, and by himself, to influence upon every action of the Creature."¹⁴ They assumed that means was no more than the relation of cause and effect, which they conceived of as a regular sequence between two phenomena. This helped to serve the requirements of piety.¹⁵

However, at the end of their scientific thinking, when they came down to the practical question of causality, they were compelled to confess that the order and the law rested on no further guarantee than the condescending pleasure of a hidden and a ruthless Divinity.¹⁶

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 233.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 234.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 254.

The New Reason

When John Locke wrote An Essay Concerning Human Understanding in 1689, he helped to usher in a new era--an era of idealism which dealt with reality as found in the mind and in sense perception, not in the object itself.

In expounding his theory of knowledge, Locke said that all our knowledge "is founded upon and ultimately derived from EXPERIENCE."¹⁷ There is no mental content with which men are born; there are no innate ideas. Rather, the mind of man prior to experience is like a completely blank tablet of wax.¹⁸ The great source of most of the ideas that come to man is dependent wholly upon sense, and derived by it to the understanding. This he calls "Sensation."¹⁹ The perception of the operations of the mind, as it is employed about the ideas it has, is another fountain from which experience furnishes the understanding with ideas. This includes all the different actings of a man's mind. The source of ideas which every man has wholly in himself Locke calls "reflection." The external material things which are the objects of sensation, and with which our mind operates as

¹⁷John Locke, Essay Concerning Human Understanding (Chicago-London: The Open Court Publishing Co., 1933), p. 26.

¹⁸Joseph L. Blau, Men and Movements in American Philosophy (New York: Prentice Hall Inc., 1952), p. 10.

¹⁹John Locke, op. cit., p. 26.

the object of reflection, are the only originals from whence all our ideas take their beginnings. And a man begins to have ideas when he begins to perceive.²⁰

Perception is the inlet of all knowledge into the mind. Man's mind could contain no idea of anything in the external world unless it entered through the avenue of perception.²¹ The impressions thus received are "simple ideas," and are qualities of objects as perceived by human senses.²² However, sense perceptions of men can give erroneous impressions of some of the qualities: familiar optical illusions make this clear. Therefore, those qualities about which senses might err, he called "secondary qualities," while those with which the senses were reliable, he called "primary qualities." Thus, man's knowledge could not be relied on beyond the limits of the accuracy of the senses.²³

Whereas the Old Reason proceeded from the universal to the singular, Locke said that the knowledge of things is sensitive knowledge and, therefore, only of particulars. Natural philosophy goes far beyond particulars and claims generality. However, generality is never experienced, but remains an abstraction from the particulars of sense. Therefore,

²⁰ Ibid., p. 28.

²¹ Ibid., pp. 64-5.

²² Ibid., p. 22.

²³ Joseph L. Blau, op. cit., p. 10.

Locke's Idealism undermined the reason and logic of the textbooks which Jonathan Edwards had to learn.²⁴

Prior to Locke's Essay, Isaac Newton had published a work which was equally as startling, entitled, Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy. It is usually referred to as simply, The Principia.

Newton concerned himself with the working out of a consistent scheme of natural causes to explain what men experience. Beginning with the phenomenon of experience, he arrives at the general conclusion concerning the cause of these phenomena. One must, he says, assign to any natural event only its necessary natural causes, "for Nature is pleased with simplicity, and affects not the pomp of superfluous causes."²⁵

Superfluity must be avoided. One way to do this is to insist on consistency. This is an important assertion of Newton. The same natural cause must always be ascribed to the same natural event, and we are not at liberty to make a cause in one realm responsible for an effect in another. The same cause is always assigned to the same effect, even though it might be a human effect or a like effect among animals.²⁶

²⁴Mary Shaw Kuypers, Studies In The Eighteenth Century Background of Hume's Empiricism (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1930), p. 48.

²⁵Joseph L. Blau, op. cit., p. 11.

²⁶Ibid.

This system of causality which Newton developed was the lasting influence which he exerted upon Jonathan Edwards.

Newton stated his general method in the Principia:

"From the phenomena of motions to investigate the forces of nature, and then from these forces to demonstrate the other phenomena."²⁷ After the observed facts have been analysed and principles deduced, the relevant phenomena fitted into a mathematical system, and the physical reality of the conclusions verified by experiment, then there is a mathematical system or order of phenomena resting on experiment. However,²⁸ the cause of the laws have yet to be discovered.

Newton was convinced that the idea of nature as a rational and harmonious order must be discovered by his method in any subject matter, for the very goal of thinking was the search for this rational order. To be rational was to be natural.²⁹

He was also convinced that the subject matter of science can be given only in sensation; hence, the origin and justification of science and all its concepts must be sought in ideas received through the senses. For Newton as well as

²⁷ Isaac Newton, "Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy," in Great Books of The Western World, edited by Robert Maynard Hutchins (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica Inc., 1952), XXXIV, 1.

²⁸ John Herman Randall, Jr., "Newton's Natural Philosophy," in Philosophical Essays In Honor of Edgar Arthur Singer, Jr., edited by F.F. Clarke and M.C. Nahm (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1942), p. 339.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 366.

for Locke, the ultimate validity of science lies in its foundation in sense.³⁰

Newton spoke of "absolute, true and mathematical time," which from its own nature flows equally without regard to anything external, and of "absolute space, which in its own nature, without regard to anything external, remains always similar and immovable."³¹ This was his real world. It was endowed with an absolute force of inertia, and maybe of gravitation, but of this he was not certain. Inertia is clearly defined in the opening pages of the Principia,³² but he is at a loss to find the cause of gravitation.

The Result of These Factors

It is not surprising that Newton and Locke, who are recognized as coordinate authorities, influenced Jonathan Edwards, developing what is commonly called his "Idealism" and his "Naturalism."

Idealism

In 1718, the real drama of College life for Edwards was not the strife and contention connected with the College. Rather, his drama was being enacted on the pages of Locke's

³⁰Ibid., p. 348

³¹Isaac Newton, op. cit., p. 8.

³²Ibid., p. 5.

Essay Concerning Human Understanding. Here he found one who spoke the language for which he was looking, that of abstract speculation. Under the influence of this new teacher, "his thought took wider range, he discovered new powers and was free with a freedom never before experienced."³³ All of this was happening while the village quarrel was at its height. The picture is prophetic of his dismissal in 1750.

Only fifteen years old when he read the Essay, he read it with a delight greater "than the most greedy miser finds when gathering up handfuls of silver and gold from some newly discovered treasure."³⁴ Philosophy was perhaps the most fortunate area into which he could have entered at this time, for it opened a new world and the syllogistic reasoning of the Old Reason came alive for him. This was the shaping influence of his life, the central and decisive event in his intellectual development. This marks the beginning, and the influence of the Essay can be seen in every major work. Given the stimulus, he was prompted to move on in a path of his own and, using Locke as the starting point, proceeded to conclusions all his own.

When Edwards learned from Locke that men can acquire the materials of reason and knowledge solely from Experience,³⁵

³³Ola E. Winslow, Jonathan Edwards (New York: Macmillan Co., 1940), p. 60.

³⁴Jonathan Edwards, An Unpublished Essay on The Trinity, edited by George P. Fisher (New York: Scribner's, 1903), p. 7.

³⁵John Locke, op. cit., p. 26.

the elaborate structure of technologia collapsed in his mind. Locke had said that an idea "is the object of the understanding when a man thinks."³⁶ Thus, men deal with things as they are registered on the human brain. When a thing is perceived by the mind, it is no longer just a dead thing by itself, but it is the mind's idea of it. An elaborate scholastic definition is not needed to grasp the definition of ideas, because "every one is conscious of them in himself." This simple principle delivered Edwards from the maze of technologia a generation in advance of his fellows.³⁷ From this time forth, his fundamental premise was that of Locke, that what the mind knows is no more than its ideas, and it depends upon the senses for the source of these ideas.³⁸

His basic principle became the fact that God imparts ideas solely in sense experience. He does not break the order of nature or break the connection between experience and behavior. The universe is one piece, and in it God works upon man through the daily shock of sensation.

This helped Edwards to see the problem confronting New England. If New England remained linked to an antiquated metaphysic, then false philosophy would cause religion to sink lower than the present state which was being lamented by

³⁶Ibid., p. 25.

³⁷Perry Miller, Jonathan Edwards (New York: William Sloane Associates, 1949), p. 55.

³⁸John Locke, op. cit., p. 26.

the divines. But Locke also pointed to the solution.

As the bodies that surround us do diversely affect our organs, the mind is forced to receive the impressions; and cannot avoid the perception of those ideas that are annexed to them.³⁹

Impressions must be made upon the mind of man through the senses. Therefore, a Christian oratory, which, with the help of Locke would "break in upon the sanctuary of vanity and ignorance," and which would use words as God uses objects, to force sensations and the ideas attached to them into men's minds, would force upon New England the awakening that three generations of divines had called for in vain.⁴⁰

Locke had said that since the mind has no innate ideas of its own, it is passive in receiving impressions. Edwards was trained in the doctrine that man is wholly passive in receiving grace and is bound to sin if he tries to earn his salvation. Therefore, when he read Locke's statement that when simple ideas are offered to the mind they can not be refused, altered, nor blotted out, nor can new ones be made by the mind,⁴¹ it was for him a program of action and a directive for living.

Edwards wrote down his youthful observations in two papers, Notes on The Mind and Notes on Natural Bodies. The underlying motive in his Notes is theological, not philosoph-

³⁹Perry Miller, Jonathan Edwards, p. 55.

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹John Locke, op. cit., pp. 54-55.

ical. The God-consciousness was in the deepest substratum⁴² of his being and it colored every intellectual conviction.

The Notes may be viewed as a dual series of reflections, which are often intermingled, namely idealism and naturalism. Edwards would not compartmentalize his thinking. He was incapable of accepting Christianity and physics as separate premises. "His mind was so constituted . . . that he went directly to the issues of his age, defined them, and asserted the historic Protestant doctrine," fully aware of the latest disclosures in both psychology and natural science.⁴³

His idealism appeared in his early essay on "Being" and also in the Notes on The Mind. This belief, one fundamental to him, was that

the substance of all bodies is the infinitely exact and precise, and perfectly stable idea in God's mind, together with His stable will that the same shall be gradually communicated to us and to other minds, according to certain fixed and exact established methods and laws; or, in somewhat different language, the infinitely exact and precise Divine Idea, together with an answerable perfectly exact, precise and stable will, with respect to correspondent communications to created minds and effects on their mind.⁴⁴

Following Locke's sensational premise, Edwards says that corporeal bodies can have no existence other than mentally. An early statement in the Notes on The Mind is that "our per-

⁴²Alexander V.G. Allen, Jonathan Edwards (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1889), pp. 5-6.

⁴³Ferry Miller, Jonathan Edwards, p. 72.

⁴⁴Jonathan Edwards, op. cit., p. 17.

ceptions or ideas, that we passively receive by our bodies, are communicated to us immediately by God." ⁴⁵ Again, he emphatically confirms this idea when he says:

There never can be any idea, thought, or act of the mind unless the mind first received some ideas from sensation, or some other way equivalent wherein the mind is wholly passive in receiving them. ⁴⁶

Locke had not answered the question concerning the substance of material existence. However, Edwards said that the something which most men are content to say is, "is He in whom all things consist." Edwards combined his idea of God, as universal existence, with the principle derived from Locke that all ideas begin from external sensations. Sensations, therefore, produced by external objects are thus at once resolved into ideas coming directly to the mind from God. ⁴⁷ A recurrent theme in the Notes is that Bodies have no existence of their own but that all existence is mental or ideal. Thus, the universe exists only in the divine mind. ⁴⁸

Locke had argued against the objective reality of the secondary qualities. ⁴⁹ Edwards applied the same argument to primary qualities--those of figure, motion, extension, and solidity--which Locke left outside the mind as qualities of

⁴⁵Alexander Allen, op. cit., p. 12.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 13. Quoted from Dwight's Life, Appendix p. 666.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 14.

⁴⁸Ibid., pp. 13-4.

⁴⁹John Locke, op. cit., p. 54.

material substance. For Edwards, however, only by the ideas or impressions which the sensation implants in the mind, can man know anything. The world as man knows it can only be a world of ideas, which man can know, not of things which he cannot know. Those qualities which Locke left outside the mind as material substance, Edwards reduced to resistance or modes of resistance. ⁵⁰ To prove that resistance does not exist outside the mind, he pointed out that "there must be something resisted before there can be Resistance; but to say Resistance is resisted, is ridiculously to suppose Resistance before there is anything resisted." This is the absurdity which follows when resistance is outside the mind. However, if resistance is a mode of an idea or is in the mind, then "the world is . . . an ideal one, and the idea in some mind is the only substance." The mind in which this idea is present cannot be a fallible, inexact, mortal, finite, human mind. Therefore, he concludes that it exists only in the ⁵¹ stable Idea in God's mind. By this conclusion, he was able to establish his philosophic position of an immaterialism based upon a complete denial of our knowledge of matter.

From the sensational premise, he also reached his disjunction of the "good" and his conception of the inherent good, which, distinguished from the objective, consists either

⁵⁰Joseph L. Blau, op. cit., p. 12.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 13.

in pleasure or in excellency. In the section entitled "Excellency," the first subject on which he committed his views to writing, he deals with the problem of the inherent good. He came to the conviction that life in itself, simple existence, is the highest good, and, therefore, the foundation of moral excellence. Existence in itself must be the highest good, the greatest blessing. Similarity, proportion, and harmony partake of the nature of excellence since they are agreeable to that which has existence. Whatever contradicts harmony, or weakens or contradicts relationships, diminishes the fulness of existence, and approaches the state of nothingness which is the greatest evil. ⁵²

God is excellent, simply because He exists. The quality of excellence is in proportion to the dimensions of existence. Therefore, since God possesses an infinite amount of existence, He also has an infinite quality of excellence. "All excellence and beauty is derived from Him in the same manner as all being. And all other excellence is in strictness only a shadow of His." ⁵³ The supreme law of existence is the law of love. Therefore, love is the highest excellency. These conclusions look forward to his treatise on the Nature of True Virtue which he wrote in his later life. ⁵⁴

⁵²Alexander Allen, op. cit., p. 8.

⁵³Ibid., pp. 8-9.

⁵⁴Ibid., pp. 9-11.

Naturalism

That sense must be in agreement with the nature of things is an important principle in Edwards' philosophy. It must give accurate representations of concrete objects and a right understanding of things in general. Edwards was Puritan before he was Lockean, and, therefore, all his logic brings a condemnation of those who hold that the external world is not external and factual. For Jonathan Edwards the world was real.⁵⁵ "Things are where they seem to be;" his idealism was a stratagem, not to deny objective existence, but to help affirm its existence. He had no intention of flouting the science of the "Causes" or "Reason of corporeal changes."⁵⁶ Even though matter is dependent on idea, man may still talk as though bodies are where they appear to be, whether anyone perceives them or not, because man's problem as a sentient being is to find his way among them, truthfully and without sin.⁵⁷

When Edwards read the Principia, he realized that no theology would be able to survive unless it could be integrated with the principle that there was no intelligible order apart from the actual.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Perry Miller, Jonathan Edwards, p. 62.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 63.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 74.

He accepted from Newton the fundamental principle that nothing ever comes to pass without a cause, a principle which became fundamental for his thinking. Puritanism had made the mistake of believing that a cause in one realm can cause an effect in a totally other realm. However, Edwards drew upon the Newtonian concept of causality and simplicity of causes to counteract this belief. This played an important part in his sermons on "Justification By Faith."

He also found in Newton two primary concepts which would illustrate the truth of his words: atoms and gravity. He offered a significant definition for an atom: "a body which cannot be made less." Therefore, "a body, no matter what size, that cannot be lessened is all the scientists mean by an atom."⁵⁹ Edwards refused to pretend that the questions of the cohesion of atoms and the universality of gravity were unimportant or unsolvable. He ventured into nature, where Newton would not tread, to find the force that was the cause of both the cohesion of atoms and also of gravity. But his whole outlook was altered as soon as he realized that the atom is a concept. It was useful in physics simply because it played the role of providing a point at which resistance could be concentrated.⁶⁰ However, since resistance was found only in the mind, the whole question was altered.

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 92.

⁶⁰Ibid., pp. 88-90.

Therefore, as he set out to prove the statement that "the constant exercise of the Infinite power of God is necessary, to preserve bodies in being," he came to the same conclusion as before, the basic one for him, that "the true substance of all bodies is the infinitely exact, and precise, and perfectly stable Idea in God's mind, together with His stable Will. . . ."⁶¹

By such arguments, he meant no more than would confirm his doctrines, for, Puritan as he was,

the corporeal world is to no advantage but to the spiritual. We can talk of related ideas or we can talk of atoms; in either case it is a spiritual system which is our subject.⁶²

To think of God as the creator of the world, and then also the "stage-manager" of gravity, would, for Edwards, be dispensing with Him altogether. But with the universe as a system of stable ideas, then gravity could have the same proportions across space without any material medium.⁶³

Jonathan Edwards had undergone an experience that had completely reshaped his whole mind, with but one exception. His God-consciousness still remained foremost in his mind. And it was shortly after he discovered Locke, that his God-consciousness received a new impetus.

⁶¹Ibid., pp. 91-92.

⁶²Joseph L. Blau, op. cit., p. 14.

⁶³Perry Miller, Jonathan Edwards, p. 93.

CHAPTER IV

THE CONDITIONING FACTORS IN THE COLLEGE LIFE OF JONATHAN EDWARDS

Conversion

One might expect the intellectual experience received from Locke and Newton to have been the greatest event of Edwards' college life. However, ranking as an equal, if not greater, importance was his conversion. It was the central fact in his whole life and the key to his thought. By current criteria, one would view Jonathan Edwards, a boy of twelve, as already a dedicated spirit to religion. However, he made finer distinctions.¹

That he was susceptible to religious impressions is shown by his activities in his early awakening during boyhood. The early influences were not the type that might appeal to childish imaginations, such as colored windows, long aisles, big altars, and imposing architecture. This simply did not exist in the East Windsor parish and even the plain meetinghouse itself was unfinished in his boyhood.² Yet, he still considered his early awakenings as shallow and did not look upon himself as being truly converted.

¹Ola E. Winslow, Jonathan Edwards (New York: Macmillan Co., 1940), p. 74.

²Alexander V.G. Allen, Jonathan Edwards (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1889), p. 22.

His "conversion," as he called it, took place in the following manner:

He was reading one day the words of Scripture, "Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honor and glory forever, Amen," when there came to him for the first time a sort of inward, sweet delight in God and divine things. A sense of the divine glory was, as it were, diffused through him. He thought how happy he should be if he might be swallowed up in him forever. He began to have an inward, sweet sense of Christ and the work of redemption. . . . It seemed to him as if he were in a kind of vision, alone in the mountains or some solitary wilderness, conversing sweetly with Christ and wrapt and swallowed up in God.³

According to his own statement, this experience took place when he was seventeen years old. However, this was not a conversion in the usual sense. There was no revival, no conviction of sin, no sudden ecstasy of forgiveness, but just the immediate spiritual vision. He could not tell the exact moment at which the new life had begun; he was brought, as he said in his Personal Narrative, to "new Dispositions" and a "new Sense of Things." "For him the whole of life was altered; the divine glory was everywhere; and with a finality of assurance he knew that religion was henceforth to be the main business of his life."⁴

This experience exerted an influence that reached far beyond his own personal life. It became the cornerstone of his whole structure of thought, determining the basis, not only of his revival preaching, but also of his religious

³Ibid., p. 24.

⁴01a E. Winslow, op. cit., p. 74.

philosophy. He first tried to search out this experience and understand it himself; then he endeavored to put it into doctrine, which became a life-long task. One might almost say that "out of a personal emotional experience of his seventeenth year he built a theological system."⁵

It was natural that he was to speak of this experience only in the frame of mind in which he was raised, that of New England Puritanism. Whereas he once demanded to know by what right God chose or rejected men--

From my childhood up, my mind had been full of objections against the doctrine of God's sovereignty, in choosing whom He would to eternal life, and rejecting whom he pleased, leaving them eternally to perish and be everlastingly tormented in hell. It used to appear like a horrible doctrine to me--⁶

he now saw in the divine sovereignty the raison d' être for the new faith that was in him. He questioned no longer, but rejoiced in this sovereignty which became "exceeding pleasant, bright, and sweet."⁷ His own mind rested in the assurance of God's justice and reasonableness, and throughout his life he did not retreat from this position.

Thus, this dominant spiritual quality of Jonathan Edwards received a re-emphasis, and became a God-intoxication which expressed itself in a spirituality of mind, of feeling, of aim, and of action. Dr. Egbert Smyth calls this spiritual

⁵Ibid., p. 75.

⁶Alexander Allen, op. cit., p. 37.

⁷Ola E. Winslow, op. cit., p. 74.

element in Edwards, his "transcendent spiritual personality," and says that "the spiritual element in Edwards is not a mere factor in a great career, a strain in a noble character." Rather, he emphasizes the fact that "it is his calmest mood as well as his most impassioned warning or pleading, his profoundest reasoning, his clearest insight, his widest outlook. It is the solid earth on which he treads."⁸

The spiritual element had always played a large part in his life. While still in his youth, a sense of divine things sprang up, after which

the appearance of everything was altered; there seemed to be, as it were, a calm, sweet cast, or appearance of divine glory in almost everything I often used to sit and view the moon for a long time; and in the day, spent much time in viewing the clouds and sky, to behold the sweet glory of God in these things.⁹

After his conversion, his spiritual raptures continued as he spent year after year thinking of divine things, meditating and conversing with God in solitary places. He was almost in constant ejaculatory prayer, wherever he happened to be.

These experiences continued even up to the year 1737, when, walking in a retired place for prayer and divine contemplation,

⁸John DeWitt, "Jonathan Edwards; A Study," Princeton Theological Seminary Biblical and Theological Studies (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1912), p. 118.

⁹Jonathan Edwards, An Unpublished Essay on The Trinity, edited by George P. Fisher (New York: Scribners, 1905), p.22.

I had a view, that for me was extraordinary, of the glory of the Son of God, as mediator between God and man, and his wonderful, great, full, pure, and sweet grace . . . felt an ardency of soul to be, what I know not otherwise how to express, emptied and annihilated; to be in the dust, and to be full of Christ alone. . . .¹⁰

This spiritual universe, which Jonathan Edwards vividly and immediately apprehended as the reality of realities, became the interpreter to himself of all that he did and felt. No understanding of his insight, or of his life itself, can be complete without a realization of this supreme spiritual motive and basis for his life. His God-intoxication sought the vision of the divine glory and the assurance of his oneness in spirit with the holiness and majesty of God. This experience became the rule by which he judged and wrote of all other conversions. Although his raptures did decrease in his maturity, yet his personal experience of religion remained an emotional experience similar in kind to that of his student days.

That the conversion played such an important part in shaping his life, may be seen from the fact that a writer like Vernon L. Parrington laments the change that took place in his thinking, when he turned from philosophy, in which he had displayed creative thinking, to the so-called stilted

¹⁰R. E. Neighbor, "Shall We Read Jonathan Edwards," Review and Expositor, (April, 1918) XV, 151.

language of theology.¹¹ However, philosophy was always only a tool for Edwards, never an end in itself.

The "Resolutions," which he wrote between the years 1720-1726, also reflect the influence of his conversion.

On January 12, 1723, I made a solemn dedication of myself to God and wrote it down; giving up myself and all that I had to God, to be for the future in no respect my own; to act as one that had no right to himself in any respect; and solemnly vowed to take God for my whole portion and felicity¹²

Also,

44. Resolved, That no other end but religion, shall have any influence at all on any of my actions; and that no action shall be, in the least circumstance, any otherwise that the religious end will carry it. January 12, 1723.¹³

In all the Resolutions, he is resolved to do anything that will further God and his salvation, and to refrain from those things which will harm his soul. These may be regarded as formal acknowledgements of what had taken place at his conversion more than a year ago. Not devotional gestures, but immeasurable values were his concern.

The difficulties and trials of this period is recorded in his Diary, written during the period of the "Resolutions." The usual record of failure and success, depression and exaltation, appear on its pages. An ascetic tendency also finds

¹¹Vernon L. Parrington, "The Anachronism of Jonathan Edwards," in The Colonial Mind, (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1927) I, 153.

¹²Alexander Allen, op. cit., p. 27.

¹³Ola Winslow, op. cit., p. 90.

expression, for he thinks it "an advantage that the duties of religion are difficult, and that many difficulties are sometimes to be gone through in the way of duty."¹⁴ The final answer to his searching is never to allow any joy or sorrow except that which helps religion.

As something of a forecast into the future, several entries relate to the process which is called conversion. He is not clear as to what conversion requires and makes it a point for future investigation to look most diligently into the opinions of the old divines concerning conversion. This he accomplished, not from the old divines, but from first hand experience in the revivals soon to come.

The Yale Heresy

Another important factor which conditioned Jonathan Edwards was the results of the Yale heresy. Briefly, the so-called heresy at Yale is the fact that three members of the faculty and four clergymen were accused of heresy for their leanings to the cause of Episcopacy. John Hart, Samuel Whittelsey, Jared Eliot, and James Wetmore backed down in a debate on Oct. 16, 1722. However, Rector Timothy Cutler, and Tutors Johnson and Browne gave evidence of their change and were discharged.

The news rocked New England. Yale was immediately

¹⁴Alexander Allen, op. cit., p. 31.

suspected as a breeding bed of errors. The natural reaction from such a situation would be an immediate and extremely strong emphasis on the orthodox doctrine as a preventive of any such future happenings. Exactly this happened. Allegiance to the Saybrook Platform and the Congregational way was demanded of all.

On May 21, 1724, Jonathan Edwards was appointed tutor at Yale College. Here, two years after the falling away of Cutler, Johnson and Browne, he was subjected to the backwash. It is doubtful whether any event of his student years, aside from his conversion, was more determining in the history of his lifelong attitude toward orthodoxy than this early necessity to take a stand of the issues involved in the discharge of the former leaders. According to the action of the trustees, orthodoxy consisted in complete acceptance of the Saybrook Platform; heresy consisted in any variation from it, particularly in the direction of Arminian doctrine and church government as opposed to Congregationalism.¹⁵

Thus, for two years in his intellectual development he lived in an atmosphere extremely sensitive to the slightest breath of heresy. He walked an orthodox chalk-line in all his thinking, took the responsibility of buttressing younger minds against any heresies, and consciously strove to remove the blot from the college. Undoubtedly, this experience

¹⁵Ola Winslow, op. cit., p. 84.

played a large part in his developing a protective attitude toward orthodoxy with the results that he did not proclaim doctrine as much as defend it.¹⁶

New York Pastorate

Between his graduation and his tutorship, from August, 1722 until April, 1723, he served a congregation of Scotch Presbyterians in New York.

The activities of these eight months are recorded in his Personal Narrative. He "frequently used to retire into a solitary place on the banks of the Hudson River, at some distance from the city, for contemplation on divine things and secret converse with God and had many sweet hours there."¹⁷ He gave his days and nights to seeking after holiness with more diligence than he ever pursued anything in his life, even with more earnestness than he had sought grace before he had it.¹⁸ The secular interests of the city continued to be non-existent, even as they had been in East Windsor and New Haven.

This eight month sojourn had been for him a time of contemplation, a very important time in which he could clarify his thought and enrich his sense of personal religious

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 35.

¹⁷ George P. Fisher, op. cit., p. 17.

¹⁸ Ola Winslow, op. cit., p. 37.

truths and of divine things. That his decisions were reached here is evident from the fact that the Resolutions dedicating his life to God date from his stay in New York.

The Call to Northampton

On February 15, 1787, Jonathan Edwards was ordained in Northampton. Although much had already been determined concerning his life and thought, this act determined much more. The traditions he had learned at East Windsor and at Yale would never be successfully challenged by another pattern of life. The colleagues with whom he would meet and whose change ideas could be those of the Berkshire Association, a body of rural ministers from neighboring parishes that had originally been formed by his grandfather, Samuel Stoddard. Since he had taken his place among these reserved and change-resistant divines, he was destined to keep within the ministerial pattern as it had been followed since the day of John Wesley. For Northampton and for Jonathan Edwards, this was a life decision.¹

As he stopped into the church at Northampton, he stopped into a place the most prominent church east of Boston. It is not surprising that in doing so, he inherited a ministerial legacy.

¹ See E. Sinclair, *Jonathan Edwards* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1903), p. 90.

CHAPTER V

THE CONDITIONING FACTORS IN THE EARLY LIFE OF JONATHAN EDWARDS AT NORTHAMPTON

The Call to Northampton

On February 15, 1727, Jonathan Edwards was ordained in Northampton. Although much had already been determined concerning his life and thought, this act determined much more. The traditions he had learned at East Windsor and at Yale would never be successfully challenged by another pattern of life. The colleagues with whom he would meet and exchange ideas would be those of the Hampshire Association, a body of rural ministers from neighboring parishes that had originally been formed by his grandfather, Solomon Stoddard. Once he had taken his place among these seasoned and change-resistant divines, he was destined to keep within the ministerial pattern as it had been followed since the day of John Cotton. For Northampton and for Jonathan Edwards, this was a life decision.¹

As he stepped into the church at Northampton, he stepped into perhaps the most prominent church west of Boston. It is not surprising that in doing so, he inherited a ministerial legacy.

¹Ola E. Winslow, Jonathan Edwards (New York: Macmillan Co., 1940), p. 96.

Religion at the turn of the century was rapidly declining. The pastors were not keeping up with nor meeting the demands of the people in their day. However, in the Half-Way Covenant, the clergy made one notable concession to the changing American life, and retained at least a partial hold on the more worldly members. This plan was first proposed in the Synod of 1662 and eventually ratified by most of the New England churches. It provided for the Baptism of the children of church members who could give no evidence of their own conversion, and for the admission of these children to full membership upon their adult owning of the baptismal covenant. If they chose not to own it, one membership privilege was denied, that of partaking of the Lord's Supper. This privilege was reserved for those who could give evidence of personal conversion.

However, by 1700 the majority of members were but Half-Way participants, and communities consisted of three circles: the small body of professing members known as "the church," the larger body of Half-Way members known as the "congregation," and then the town, which paid for the church and was legally required to attend, though neither saints nor half-saints.²

In the Northampton Church, one of the first to ratify

²Perry Miller, Jonathan Edwards (New York: William Sloane Associates, 1949), p. 134.

the Half-Way Covenant, similar situations prevailed. And on Communion Sunday, a line was drawn through the Congregation showing a majority on the side of the underprivileged. Thus, Solomon Stoddard decided a new compromise was in order.

He had laid his plans well. When he came to Northampton in 1672, he married the widow of his predecessor and made himself greatly beloved by his flock. Then in 1700, he came out with his innovation. Much to the horror of the Mathers, who waited for lightening to strike him, he opened the church doors to everybody in town (except the openly scandalous). He allowed them to come to the communion, calling it a "converting ordinance," on the ground that "all ordinances are for the saving good of those that they are to be administered unto."⁵ Thus, the lines were drawn for battle and Increase Mather defended the old way, this time against his own brother-in-law. But Solomon Stoddard's innovation was destined to triumph over the Mathers, mainly because his arguments were practical while the Mathers were theological; they refused to admit the unregenerate but rather called them intruders.⁴

Jonathan Edwards was called to continue this tradition which Stoddard had established. There is no evidence that he disagreed with his grandfather's policy; rather one can

⁵Ibid., p. 10.

⁴Ola Winslow, op. cit., p. 105.

assume from his silence on this point, since silence on matters of faith is not an Edwards' characteristic, that when he took his ordination he had no thought of rewriting parish history. However, he was entering upon a legacy and traditions which would entail troublesome loyalties.

When the church had hired Edwards, they expected sermons of doctrine. They were not theologians, but they knew what they had heard all their life, and if the Sunday doctrines had swerved toward anything un-Stoddardean, they would have detected it at once. For them, sound doctrine and religion were one and the same, and Jonathan Edwards kept within the traditional orthodoxy.⁵ As a young preacher, he dwelt on the "Infinitely glorious Perfection of God," the raptures of the saints in heaven, and the mysteries of deep religious ecstasy. All of these topics show a strong similarity to his own religious experience, and his absorption in religious contemplation. As he grew older, he turned more to doctrine, a realistic view of human nature,⁶ and emphasis on the practical virtues of Christian living.

In his study his mind reached out into many fields, and yet books were investigated, not for their own merits, but only for their contributions to his thought. His six day week was lived on the level of the seventh day, and only ministerial duties were the functions which he fulfilled. Many

⁵Ibid., p. 150.

⁶Ibid., p. 139.

joys and pleasures were his, but even these had to do with religion, the one area of life.

His Marriage

Another important factor in the early life of Jonathan Edwards at Northampton is his marriage. In July of 1727, he was married to Sarah Pierrepont, daughter of James Pierrepont, first minister in New Haven and according to tradition, the original mover in the founding of Yale College. Her mother was the grand-daughter of Thomas Hooker, leader of the 1635 migration to the Connecticut valley. Jonathan Edwards could not have joined his name to two more illustrious ministerial names in New England than Pierrepont and Hooker. The prestige of both families appears to be far superior to his own.

Like Edwards, her main characteristic and the strongest attraction in the eyes of her future husband, was that of spirituality. He describes her in the following way:

They say there is a young lady in New Haven who is beloved of that great Being . . . and there are certain seasons in which this great Being, in some way or other invisible, comes to her and fills her mind with exceeding sweet delight, and that she hardly cares for anything except to meditate on Him. . . .⁷

This is distinctly spiritual. There is no idealization present in this account. He speaks of nothing concerning her dress or appearance, but rather dwells on her spiritual qual-

⁷Alexander V.G. Allen, Jonathan Edwards (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1899), p. 45.

ities and her relation to the spiritual universe.

Although she brought many gifts to her new station, the most important is that she regarded piety as the goal of life, and, like her husband, pursued the things of religion with a single-minded endeavour. In spirituality she was her husband's complement, and due mainly to this influence she is to be taken into account in her husband's development. Since they were of the same spiritual quality, theirs became a marriage founded not on the things of this earth, but on the things of the spirit. As religion awakened and satisfied the deepest desires of their natures, their absorption in it, instead of dwarfing their love for each other, increased and intensified it. Theirs was a deeply shared experience of spiritual things as well as a rare companionship and rich happiness.⁸

She was also a woman of intellectual power whose efficiency protected her husband from practical responsibility. Although this trait of Sarah Edwards is important, it is too much stressed. Her largest influence came in the realm of the spirit, and this capacity was to mean much to Jonathan Edwards in his future efforts to defend his word in the Great Awakening.

An oft quoted tribute to her is the one paid by the Reverend Mr. Whitefield, who was so moved by his experience in

Sola E. Winslow, op. cit., p. 115.

the Edwards household that he renewed his prayers for a
 "Daughter of Abraham" to be his wife.⁹

A comparison has been drawn by Ola Winslow to show the
 Godliness of this couple:

Benjamin Lynde, one of the representatives to the Council Court, and an exact contemporary of Jonathan Edwards, was a devout man, but he gave religion and the church only a share of his thought. . . .

Jonathan Edwards and Sarah Edwards thought otherwise. Their concept of life left no place for any pleasure to which prayer would not have been a fitting prologue. . . . Life was too short and time too precious for the Christian to give thought to anything which did not in some way look ahead to the eternities beyond.¹⁰

⁹Ibid., p. 188.

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 132-33.

CHAPTER VI

THE INFLUENCE OF ARMINIANISM UPON JONATHAN EDWARDS

The Factor of Arminianism

Any young man coming to the American pulpit in 1727, as did Jonathan Edwards, faced a life of battle. The meeting-house, designed to be the cornerstone of the American state, had diminished in authority and was attacked on every side by the secular forces of progress and change.

The first generation of settlers had come fresh from the struggles for freedom to worship according to their own consciences. Their children and their children's children had no such experience of conflict and no such stimulus to place religion in the center of their lives. Instead, they gave their dreams to their own loyalties, not to the golden age of their parents. Three generations removed from the original settlers, all paths still led to the meetinghouse, but it had been too long taken for granted. Instead of theological questions, the important things now were planting new acres, building new houses, and making village life sufficient unto itself.¹

The clergy had a name for this. They called it "decline of religion." As early as 1650 it was "too plain to be denied"

¹Ola E. Winslow, Jonathan Edwards (New York: Macmillan Co., 1940), p. 97.

that there was a "dying spirit in New England to the ways of God."² In 1678, Increase Mather had made the statement, "Clear, sound conversions, are not frequent. Many of the rising generation are professed Drunkards, Swearers, Licentious, and Scoffers at the power of Godliness."³ In 1679, the Re-forming Synod lamented the neglect of public worship and the increase of dishonesty in trade, lying, intemperance, profanity, extravagance, and a general decay of Godliness.⁴ Religion was not religion any longer. It was just an empty name.

The clergy themselves are due for some blame in this decline. As life was in a swift state of flux, the clergy continued to act as if things were static. As a result, life went swiftly ahead of them, and a wide gulf came between the six days and the seventh.

Instead of trying to meet the needs of the people, the clergy said, "Let us return to what was." Religion was preached only as a code of abstinence from such defilements as husking bees, journeys, and unsuitable discourse on the Sabbath. Emptiness begot emptiness. The older ministers saw to it that those who were ordained to follow them were rigorously schooled in the old ways, thus insuring that the

²Ibid.

³William W. Sweet, Makers of Christianity (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1937), p. 74.

⁴Ezra Hoyt Byington, "Jonathan Edwards and The Great Awakening," Bibliotheca Sacra, XL (1898), 115.

successors of the New England divines would continue to preach to deaf ears. The doctrine of regeneration was not made prominent in the preaching. Rather, ministers were preaching morality and the people were becoming more immoral every year. "Yet," says one of the old writers, "never had the expectation of reaching heaven at last been more general, or more confident."⁵ Condemnation lost its effect through too frequent use, and the Sabbath laws were openly violated. Deaf ears became more deaf, until nothing but a Great Awakening could make religion a concern of first magnitude in men's thought.

The causes for this are varied. Immigration undoubtedly had its influence. Sweet points out that

of the one hundred and one colonists who came over in the Mayflower, only a mere dozen constituted the membership of the first church, and scarcely a fifth of the Massachusetts Bay settlers were even professing Christians.⁶

This gap was widened by the waves of immigration which followed, bringing many people to the country to whom religion meant little or nothing at all.

The economic security and advancement had its influence in the decline of the standard Puritan doctrines of Election, Free Will, and Original Sin. The hardships and difficulties

⁵Ibid.

⁶William W. Sweet, Revivalism In America: Its Origin, Growth and Decline (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1944), p. 14.

of early New Englanders were such as made their belief in man's total dependence upon God a source of comfort and inspiration. But, when prosperity developed and social security was increased, then a degree of falling away from the literal acceptance of total dependence became noticed. The doctrine was retained, but men paid only lip service to it, and this even by those in high places.⁷

When the Rev. Samuel Willar, vice-president of Harvard College, preached in Boston's Old South Church, he could make the people see the world as empty, void, and full of disappointments. For their own best good they turned to the glory of God and in Him they were at home. But then Church was over, and the people went out in the Boston of that day, growing, enterprising, exciting, and absorbing. It was not empty or void. The theory of utter dependence of man upon the sovereign God ceased to have any relevance to Puritan experience.⁸

Also, the frontier exerted a leveling influence upon its people. They entertained new ideas, formed new opinions, and considered the right to achieve salvation as a natural corollary to the right to achieve social distinction.⁹

The doctrine of Original Sin and Total Depravity also

⁷Joseph L. Blau, editor, American Philosophic Addresses, 1700-1900 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1946), p. 517.

⁸Ibid., p. 519.

⁹Vernon L. Parrington, "The Anachronism of Jonathan Edwards," in The Colonial Mind (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1927), I, 143.

suffered a decline. The people considered themselves as possessing "rugged virtues" and a reliance on a strict ethical code; they did not think of themselves as hating both God and man, and wallowing in sin.¹⁰

Puritanism itself contributed to this decline by developing a trend toward a reasonable God and a system with a strong legalistic bias. Even men like John Cotton, Thomas Hooker, John Davenport, and Peter Bulkeley had gone in this direction. The covenant of grace came to mean a contract which was binding on both God and man. God bestowed it; man did not deserve it. However, he might know the terms, and if he chose to fulfill the, then God was virtually in his power. He would keep His word. Thus the Arbitrary Sovereign had been brought within predictable bounds.¹¹

The advantage of this "Federal Theology," as it was called, was that by conceiving of regeneration as a covenant with assent on both sides, the clergy could preach predestination and still offer inducements to men to open negotiations. Grace was free, but man's assent was necessary and the terms were considered binding on both signatories. Thus, human enterprise found expression in a system of determinism.¹²

From such arguments it was only one step, and a short one,

¹⁰Ibid., p. 150.

¹¹Olivia E. Winslow, op. cit., p. 150.

¹²Perry Miller, Jonathan Edwards (New York: William Sloane Associates, 1949), p. 30.

to say that good works also might put one in the way of faith. Rationalism, therefore, invaded the Puritan mind. Even Benjamin Colman, the oldest and the most famous of the divines between 1720 and 1730, was a rationalist, although not a full-fledged one, who luxuriated in emotion and was a kind of "Calvinist sentimentalist."¹³

Even in colonial New England there was no unanimity in the fundamental doctrines of Election and Free Will. The question asked at this time was whether the will of man was free or held in subjection to the stable will of God. Vigorous debates concerning these questions stirred the old world, but the doctrines were never publicly challenged in New England. In 1726, Cotton Mather wrote, "I cannot learn That among all the Pastors of Two Hundred Churches, there is one Arminian; much less an Arian, or a Gentilist."¹⁴ However, rationalism was in the air, and spread its teaching through the people and the ministry.

What complicated the situation, however, was the fact that this home-grown variety of "Arminianism" was supplemented by an imported variety of self-sufficiency from the old country. This was a new interest in man, in the happiness of man, in the freedom of man; it was a new faith in the goodness, the wisdom, and the power of man. Man was becoming the measure of all things, the last end of creation, the master of all,

¹³Ibid., p. 19.

¹⁴Vernon L. Parrington, op. cit., p. 148.

and the servant of none.

Arminianism was named after Arminius, a Dutch Calvinist, condemned at the Synod of Dort in 1619 for deviating from the orthodox line on the enslavement of the will. The dogma of Arminianism which was stressed was that of the freedom of the will, that a righteous life and good works will bring men into the way of salvation. Thus, any effort to augment human responsibility by giving the natural will a power to act in some degree by itself, was called "Arminianism," a smear word among Calvinist people.

The area of conflict can be readily seen. It centered around the fundamental question of the freedom of the will, the fundamental Calvinist and Puritan dogma that will was not free to earn grace, and the fundamental Arminian dogma that the will was free to further its salvation. Although the Arminian doctrine was not openly confessed, it was soon to be taken into account. The two theologies, Calvinism and Arminianism, could not exist together under the name of "Puritanism."

The Influence of Arminianism

Under the influence and attack of Arminian theology, Puritanism was nearly dead. However, there arose an offspring from four generations of religious enthusiasts, by

¹⁵Joseph G. Haroutunian, "Jonathan Edwards: A Study in Godliness," Journal of Religion, XI (July, 1931), 494.

right of heredity and training the child of Puritanism, one whose intellect and spirit was molded by a strong God-intoxication, and this, together with the circumstances of the times, made it natural and almost inevitable that Jonathan Edwards should become the defender and champion of the old dogmas.¹⁶ He was well equipped for his task: a theologian with the keenest dialectics and a metaphysician endowed with a brilliantly speculative mind. He was also a Puritan who protested against the tyranny of all formalism, especially that which masqueraded as sweet reasonableness.¹⁷

God Glorified In Man's Dependence

The first action of Edwards against the condition of the times was on July 8, 1731, when he delivered the weekly Thursday lecture in Boston. He was invited because he was the grandson and successor of Boston's former opponent, Solomon Stoddard, who, in 1687, had made a strong case for the naked sovereignty of God in his "Saftey of Appearing at The Day of Judgement."¹⁸ Boston was interested to see if his successor would follow in this tradition.

It is safe to assume that the audience was composed of as many divines who were able to attend. Edwards was un-

¹⁶Jonathan Edwards, An Unpublished Essay on The Trinity, edited by George P. Fisher (New York: Scribner's, 1903), p. 24.

¹⁷Vernon L. Farrington, op. cit., p. 152

¹⁸Perry Miller, op. cit., p. 10.

doubtedly quite aware that his audience was composed of those who secretly held to the "new doctrine," and also those who leaned toward these new doctrines but continued to consider themselves as conservatives. So he contented himself with presenting the old doctrine under the title, "God Glorified in Man's Dependence." His theme was that "no flesh should glory in his presence--that according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord."¹⁹ The doctrine was that "God is glorified in the work of redemption in this, that there appears in it so absolute and universal a dependence of the redeemed on him."²⁰

In conversion everything is "directly, immediately, and entirely dependent on God," and man is holy, if ever, "from mere and arbitrary grace."²¹ That everyone has all his dependence in God is shown by the fact that

He is the cause and original whence all their good comes, therein it is of him; and that he is the medium by which it is obtained and conveyed, therein they have it through him; and that he is the good itself given and conveyed, therein it is in him. . . . He is the first cause of it; and not only so, but he is the only proper cause. God gives and God accepts the Savior.²²

When Edwards had established man's dependence, he de-

¹⁹Jonathan Edwards, "God Glorified In Man's Dependence," American Philosophic Addresses, edited by Joseph L. Blau (New York: Columbia University Press, 1946), p. 521.

²⁰Ibid., p. 522.

²¹Ibid., p. 524.

²²Ibid., p. 523.

fined it in terms of personal redemption. God was under no obligation to bestow His grace; it was freely given by His arbitrary and sovereign pleasure. Man is dependent on God for everything, even the very desire for God is God-given. The redeemed also have all their good in God which shows the fullness of His power and grace.

Edwards then reasons that since the creature is wholly dependent on God, it "appears that the creature is nothing, and that God is all." However, man must be sensible of the difference if he is to give God the glory due to Him. Faith is a "sensible acknowledgement of absolute dependence on God in this affair."²³

These ideas were not foreign to the Boston divines. Jonathan Edwards, however, had included in these ideas the authority of his own religious experience. When he spoke of a satisfying spiritual joy, a "kind of effusion of God in the soul," he was not speaking the language of the catechetical divinity as he learned it at Yale, but rather he was speaking of that which before had been hateful but now was pleasant, bright, and sweet. He was taking the principle of religion as he found it in his search and inserting it in the form of Puritanism, a system which had been virtually abandoned by the New England divines. In speaking of a Deity fit for adoration rather than finite comprehension, he once again

²³Ibid., p. 532.

made God unpredictable and inscrutable, and had put man again in the dust.²⁴ This lecture supplies the doctrinal basis for the first step in the revelation of Jonathan Edwards' development and gave a glow of hope to the divines who longed for the old days.

Following his line of thought in the Notes on The Mind, he spoke of the highest good of the redeemed as consisting in the inherent good, either excellency or pleasure which is in the soul itself. The redeemed are made excellent by a communication of God's excellency to them.²⁵

Edwards did not permit the new doctrine to escape unscathed, but inserted a paragraph applying to "those doctrines and schemes of divinity that are in any respect opposite to such an absolute and universal dependence of God." He simply says that "they are repugnant to the design and tenor of the gospel."²⁶ This was a challenge to the Arminians of the age, a challenge to combat that would not be waged over ecclesiastical forms as had Stoddard's battle, but over fundamental theological issues. There could be no quarter in this war with the Harvard liberals.

The Federal Theology is conspicuous by its absence. Instead of directly attacking it, he asserted the historic Puri-

²⁴Ola E. Winslow, op. cit., p. 154.

²⁵Jonathan Edwards, "God Glorified In Man's Dependence," p. 529.

²⁶Ibid., p. 534.

tanism in terms no one could outwardly reject:

The nature and contrivance of our redemption is such, that the redeemed are in everything directly, immediately and entirely dependent on God: They are dependent on him for all and are dependent on him in every way.²⁷

He emphasized the direct and the immediate, and "contrivance" instead of "covenant." Means were made use of, but it is still God who gives them and God alone makes them effectual. "It is of God that we have ordinances, and their efficacy depends on the immediate influence of his Spirit."²⁸

Edwards also equated the continuous influence of God on the saints with the natural phenomenon of light in the atmosphere. A major belief of the Federal Theology was that man, while in nature, is not of nature; in the Covenant of Grace he is treated as a power in his own right. But, if man is like an atmosphere in which the light of the sun shines, and if without that light he is mere void and darkness, then what is man? Edwards said, "Man is nothing."²⁹

It must be remembered that at this time Locke's Essay had not influenced the thinking of New England, which was still guided by the Old Reason. Jonathan Edwards spoke outwardly in the same way; however, by incorporating the idealism of Locke with the system of a supreme and sovereign God, he had meanings behind words which most of the divines would

²⁷Ibid., p. 523.

²⁸Ibid., p. 524.

²⁹Perry Miller, op. cit., p. 32.

not be able to grasp. Nevertheless, they must have noted something strange in his vocabulary. There was a concentration upon the term "excellency," and an emphasis upon conversion as being "sensible."³⁰ He evidently was holding something back which he was not revealing, because he spoke of man being sensible of the difference between himself and God. However, New England had always thought that such an apprehension was a function of the reason which was superior to the senses. Why call this intellectual faculty "sensible," they would ask. Faith now appeared to be a linking of the sensible and the real. How could faith, which everybody knows is that by which some people go to heaven, have anything to do with joining the human senses to objective reality? These were some of the problems that the lecture must have suggested to some of the more discerning minds.³¹

Edwards' whole stress of God here is one of will, rather than idea or reason. Sovereignty became synonymous with the idea of an individual election to life instead of the earlier idea of the called election of nations to some high struggle for liberty.

From the influence of Locke, God was conceived as the universal substance underlying all external phenomena. It was His fixed and stable will which gave to the mind the idea

³⁰Jonathan Edwards, "God Glorified In Man's Dependence," p. 533.

³¹Perry Miller, op. cit., pp. 33-34.

of an external world, for things in themselves have no existence. However, he had earlier expressed the fact that he wanted to be as clear on God's relation to the mind as he was in regard to His relation to the outer world. At this time, he must have believed that God's relation to the mind and will of man was in harmony with His relation to the visible nature. Although he does not take up the discussion of this subject, the underlying idea of his "sovereignty" is that even in man's intellectual existence, God is still the universal substance. He alone exists.

In his personal story, this lecture made public the theological loyalty which became his through heredity, training, and his own conversion. He had declared for the "ancients," and had flung the glove of battle to the "moderns." As a result, he came into prominence.

The lecture also had more far-reaching results in his life. "His championships of evangelical doctrine and his zeal for reform in manners are the two discernible causes for the revival in his own parish in 1735." The lecture is also important in his career as a revival preacher because it laid the foundation of his whole evangelical structure. It marks the beginning of both the new emphasis in doctrine, and the new fervor in preaching which ten years later were

³²Alexander V.G. Allen, Jonathan Edwards (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1889), pp. 60-61.

³³Ola E. Winslow, op. cit., p. 159.

to bring about the Great Awakening.

A Divine and Supernatural Light

In his doctrine of the divine sovereignty, Jonathan Edwards had divided people into the elect and the non-elect. However, unlike most, he was not content to consider the non-elect as left by God to their own devices, for the Divine Deity, he said, includes within the range of its activity, the good and evil alike. This is the distinction of special and common grace. Special grace secures salvation; common grace underlies the world of affairs, but carries with it no saving power. By this distinction, he brings the whole world into the sphere of the Divine Sovereign.³⁵

Special grace he called supernatural, and common grace he called natural. Edwards here proposed that supernatural be defined not as the miraculous interposition of God, but rather as something above and distinct from the natural life of man. In the realm of the natural he includes a large part of human life, so large, as a matter of fact, that he leaves practically no opportunity for the spiritual. Yet he insists that the two are separated by an infinite gulf, as distinct as light from darkness.³⁶ What then is saving grace? To answer

³⁴Ibid., p. 152

³⁵Alexander Allen, op. cit., p. 65.

³⁶Ibid., pp. 65-66.

this question, he preached one of the most individual and notable sermons of his career, "The Reality of Spiritual Light." In 1734, it was published under the title, A Divine and Supernatural Light immediately imparted to the Soul, shown to be both a Scriptural and a Rational Doctrine. The emphasis of the sermon is found in his own words, "that there is such a thing as a spiritual and divine light immediately imparted to the soul by God, of a different nature from any that is obtained by natural means."³⁷

"It is no exaggeration to say that the whole of Edwards' system is contained in miniature within some ten or twelve of the pages of this work. But it is a puzzle."³⁸ By the favorite figure of his younger preaching, light, and by his most characteristic method, appeal to the rational understanding rather than the emotions, he sought to prove the reality of a divine emanation of God's beauty in the souls of those appointed to receive it. His main point is that

spiritual light is imparted, not as a mystical infusion, but as a rational conveyance through the sense. Supernatural conviction arises out of perception, it is an effect and natural consequence of this sight.³⁹

A regenerate man is one who perceives in such a fashion that in his heart he cannot help knowing the delight and the beauty. As against all merely speculative notions, here the will, the

³⁷Ibid., p. 67.

³⁸Perry Miller, op. cit., p. 44.

³⁹Ibid., p. 68.

inclination, or the heart is mainly concerned.

Jonathan Edwards was not the type who undergoes a long period of development. His whole insight was given him at once and he did not change, he only deepened.⁴⁰ His insight came with Locke's Essay, and by this time he was so thoroughly saturated with its ideas that he could not keep the words and phrases out of his discourse.

In this particular sermon, he prepares the way for the revelation of his thought by first disposing of the false lights such as the occasional conviction of sin that men have because they are miserable. What then is the true light? It is a "sense." This follows directly from his emphasis on "sense" in the 1731 Lecture in Boston. The true light is

that which consists in the sense of the heart: as when there is a sense of beauty, amiableness, or sweetness of a thing; so that the heart is sensible of pleasure and delight in the presence of the idea of it.⁴¹

With his emphasis on pleasure and beauty, he is again following his conception of the "inherent good," and with the word "idea," Edwards held out another new thought to the people.

For what New England could make of it at this time, he included this passage:

It is out of reason's province to perceive the beauty of or loveliness of anything; such a perception does not belong to that faculty. Reason's work is to perceive truth and not excellency. . . . It is not more reason immediately perceives it, than it is reason that per-

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 44.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 52.

ceives the sweetness of honey; it depends on the sense of the heart. Reason may determine that a countenance is beautiful to others, it may determine that honey is sweet to others; but it will never give me a perception of its sweetness.⁴²

However, according to Locke perception is the only inlet of knowledge. Locke also gives the following passage which explains Edwards' thought:

Our senses, conversant about particular sensible objects do convey into the mind several distinct perceptions of things, according to those various ways wherein those objects do affect them.⁴³

Thus, men perceive variously. As they perceive they are affected, and thus they act. Since men lack innate ideas within themselves, they must encounter objective reality in the form of ideas given through the senses. Since perception is the form in which men apprehend, it is that through which and by which they perform. Perception is the way a man conducts himself in the face of reality. This was one of the most important thoughts that Edwards received from Locke.⁴⁴

Puritanism had always recognized a distinction between speculative religion and living religion. "Living" religion was "feeling" what the Bible meant, but the person who felt it one day was incapable of feeling it the next. No explanation could be offered except the caprice of God; sometimes He gave the emotion and sometimes He did not. However, from

⁴²Ibid., p. 45.

⁴³John Locke, Essay Concerning Human Understanding (Chicago: The Open Court Publishing Co., 1933), p. 26.

⁴⁴Perry Miller, op. cit., p. 64.

Locke's demonstration that a thing cannot be the same to all perceptions, that it exists for each perceiver as it is perceived, and from Locke's assertion that perception is an immediate irresistible response of sensation to the impact of an object, Edwards reaches the conclusion that as a man perceives, so he is, and as he will perceive, so he is predestined to be. If he perceives in a cold way, the coldness is not in the inert object, but is his own. "He that is spiritually enlightened truly apprehends and sees it, or has a sense of it." To see it is to have a sense of it, to have a sense is to have an inclination, and as man inclines, he wills.⁴⁵

Here Edwards is looking forward to his treatise on the Freedom of The Will, written in his later life.

Everyone does not possess this true light. However, if a man does not have this divine light, then he cannot taste of divine things or have a sense of what they are. Thus, his will is actually determined, for as a man perceives, he wills, and this in a single and instantaneous moment. Therefore, a man who does not have the divine light will rage against God. This, so Allen concludes, "was an abstract conclusion, deduced from the abstract principle that the human will could not exist in a state of indifference or equilibrium."⁴⁶ Indifference or indecision pointed to a self-determining power, and since

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 65.

⁴⁶Alexander Allen, op. cit., p. 74.

God was left at the mercy of man, waiting to see which way he will turn, conceded to man a practical atheism.

Edwards here had taken the Lockean rational man, and had remodeled him into a being which was passionate in religion. He then made him available to the democracy, for people with but an ordinary degree of knowledge are capable to see the divine excellency of the things of religion. All a man needed was his "sense," which everyone in Northampton possessed. Also, perception did not depend on social status, but rather "on the sense of the heart."

Ola Winslow remarks, "Had there been no Arminian errors to confute, he might have gone far in a direction of his own"⁴⁷ as he sought to clarify such ideas.

Justification By Faith

In 1734, Jonathan Edwards went beyond the so-called insinuations of the first two publications to an explicit attack on Arminianism. In the series of sermons on Justification by Faith, Edwards put the choice clearly before the people. Either they go back to an unmitigated Calvinism, wherein the naked will of God decrees every action, or admit the mistakes of the ancestors and allow the freedom of the will to earn salvation.

Arminianism had imperceptibly pervaded the nation, although the victims were not yet aware that they were infected.

⁴⁷Ola E. Winslow, op. cit., p. 160.

By re-defining Arminianism in the context of the eighteenth century which, from his mastery of Newton and Locke he was able to do more strikingly than any other in his time, he made it evident that those who considered themselves sound Protestants were no longer entitled to the name, if they adhered to Arminianism. He demonstrated to the New Englanders of 1734 that they had ceased to believe what they professed. He did not merely call them hypocrites; he proved that they were.

This also included his cousins, the Williams family, and chiefly Israel Williams, son of Christian Stoddard. Although resentment was already present between Edwards and the Williams family, a civil war was declared in 1734 among the posterity of Stoddard. That the Williams family were lax on certain doctrines was probably public knowledge. Edwards refused to enter into judgement against them; nevertheless, he drove the point home that teaching and propagating such doctrine springs from a pernicious and fatal tendency. He revealed how his words were taken, when he said that "great fault was found with meddling with the controversy in the pulpit by such a person," and "it was ridiculed by many elsewhere."⁴⁸ This was the Williams clan making their voice heard.

⁴⁸Jonathan Edwards, Thoughts on The Revival of Religion, with a prefix, A Narrative of the Surprising Work of God (New York: American Tract Society, n.d.), p. 13.

This doctrine of Justification is, in Edwards' view, only another confirmation of the principle announced in his Boston lecture, the entire and absolute dependence of man upon God. He reaffirmed the old doctrines--the solidarity of all men in Adam, the first man, and the solidarity of the redeemed in Christ, the second man. Against the popular tendency which held that each man must suffer his own punishment, or stand on his own righteousness, he maintained that Christ had borne the punishment and achieved the righteousness by which believers were exempted from the endless fate of the un-
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believers.

Man is justified only by faith in Christ, not by any manner of his own goodness. It is not merely the remission of sins, but a status of positive righteousness in God's sight. Since every sin is heinous in God's sight, God does not consider any good or merit in the sinner. Faith alone is the means or instrument of justification, because it is the act by which the soul receives and is united to Christ, and which makes possible the imputation of Christ's righteousness to the believer. The believer is unconditionally and eternally justified on his first act of faith. Thus, Edwards reaffirmed
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the old doctrine.

In forming this doctrine, Edwards relied mainly on Newton.

⁴⁹Alexander Allen, op. cit., p. 94.

⁵⁰Thomas A. Schafer, "Jonathan Edwards and Justification By Faith," Church History, XX (December, 1951), 56.

There was, he thought, an organic connection between Newton's laws of motion and the law of salvation by faith. The important fact in the revelation of his insight, is that this is the first effort in American history to coordinate with the doctrine of Puritan revelation the new concept of science.⁵¹ The superfluity of causes in the Old Reason had to be removed for the simplicity of the Newton order of causality.

"There is a vital union between Christ and the believer," said Edwards, and even Tillotson, "one of the greatest divines on the other side of the question," will agree to that.⁵² However, throwing out the legalism of the seventeenth century, he said that "what is real in the union between Christ and His people, is the foundation of what is legal."⁵³ Therefore, that which unites them is the ground of the suitability of their being accounted as one.

He proclaimed a revolution in the assumed relation of cause to effect, that an event in one realm can cause effects in a totally other realm. Edwards went to Newton for a contradictory conception. "There is a difference between being justified by a thing, and that thing universally, and necessarily, and inseparably attending or going with justification."

⁵¹Ferry Miller, op. cit., p. 75.

⁵²Alexander Allen, op. cit., p. 98.

⁵³Thomas A. Schafer, op. cit., p. 58.

He found in the new science, a cause that does not bind the effect by producing it, the concept of an antecedent to a subsequent, "in which the subsequent, when it does come to pass, proves to be whatever it is by itself, and in itself, without determination by the precedent."⁵⁴ For him, the secret of nature was no longer that an efficient cause of itself works such and such an effect, but that "after or upon the existence of which, or the existence of it after such a manner, the existence of another thing follows."⁵⁵ All effects must have their causes; however, for Edwards no effect is a result of what has gone before it.

If faith is a cause which may or may not be put into action, or an effect of merit, then it too becomes an event which in turn is the cause of still another event, and so on, ad infinitum. He could have called this "heresy" on the strength of the Bible, but instead he appealed to nature and set up the thesis, "because the nature of things will not admit of it."⁵⁶ The nature of things will not admit of the goodness of man being prior, but must be posterior in the order and method of God's proceeding in this affair. By this conception of nature, any act, either faith or trust, does not work an effect, but is part of a sequence within a system

⁵⁴Perry Miller, op. cit., p. 75.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 79.

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 80.

of coherence. Justification follows the act of faith, not because faith is produced out of a self-determined choice, but because there is a congruity between salvation and faith, because the sequence is based on the "divine establishment that it shall follow."⁵⁷ He might have said that it was the same establishment that made solidity congruent with gravity. In taking experience as a group of ill-matched pieces, New England was making the same mistake as did those who took atoms for things, and were not able to join them into a coherent whole. But just as atoms are unitary concepts of law, and are points of resistance, so experience becomes unified only when coherently conceived. It is not meaningful when it is merely one thing producing another. It is meaningful and coherent only when God decrees, for then things do unavoidably go fatally and necessarily.⁵⁸

Eventually, Edwards found the basic formulation of all his work, that "if the will of man is a cause which is uncaused, then the acts of man must constantly defeat the purposes of God, who thereupon becomes guilty of want of foresight."⁵⁹ This was the thought in back of his mind which matured with the years and became his real critique of Arminianism.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 121.

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 123.

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 122.

On the basis of Locke and Newton, Jonathan Edwards had put aside legality for reality, passed from dualism to mechanics, from teleology to empiricism and from status to intelligence. It is also a point of interest that for the first time in his works John Locke is mentioned, but only as "a certain great man."

It must also be noted that although justification by faith is prominent in his early works, there is almost a total lack of emphasis of this doctrine in his later works. One factor to explain this is that it was necessary to defend first those doctrines which were under attack at the moment. One must also remember that his later works flow mostly out of his experience of the awakenings soon to follow. However, Thomas A. Schafer comes to the conclusion that Justification by Faith occupies an ambiguous and somewhat precarious place in Edwards' theology, and, therefore, falls from the fore-
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front of his thinking. However, this problem cannot be solved within the scope of this paper.

⁶⁰Thomas A. Schafer, op. cit., p. 57.

CHAPTER VII

THE INFLUENCE OF THE 1735 REVIVAL UPON JONATHAN EDWARDS

The 1735 Revival

When Jonathan Edwards sought to fulfill his pastoral obligations and assure his people that the Scriptural basis of the old doctrines were impregnable, he did so in such a way that he started them on an eager pursuit of salvation. The result was the greatest revival in New England history up to that time.

Jonathan Edwards has left a record of the happenings in his Narrative of the Surprising Work of God. He describes the people of Northampton as being sober, orderly, as good a sort of people as in any part of New England, and preserved the freest from error.¹ The town contained about two hundred families which mostly dwelled close together, and this accounted, according to Edwards, "for the swiftly propagated corruptions and reformations from one to another through the town."²

The people, as far as Edwards could judge, were rational and intelligent, noted for religion, and remarkable for their

¹Jonathan Edwards, Thoughts on The Revival of Religion in New England, with a prefix, A Narrative of The Surprising Work of God (New York: American Tract Society, n.d.), p. 7.

²Ibid., p. 8.

distinct knowledge in things that related to heart religion. Stoddard himself had held five "harvests," some of which were more remarkable than others, and the ingathering of souls more plentiful.

Edwards records the beginnings of the revival as being two or three years after Mr. Stoddard's death, which would be the years 1731 or 1732. At this time, the young people, who seem to be sort of a test stone for the effectiveness of preaching and religion, showed a disposition to hearken to counsel, left off their frolicking, became more decent in their attendance of public worship, and showed more of a religious concern than was previously the case.³ Soon after this, in Pascommuck, a little village three miles away that belonged to the congregation, there was a remarkable religious concern among the young people as a result of the sudden death of two of their crowd.

Following these events, Edwards delivered his sermons on Justification by Faith which set the people to seeking their salvation. Then it was, he records, "in the latter part of December, that the Spirit of God began extraordinarily to set in, and wonderfully to work among us." Very suddenly, five or six persons were to all appearances converted, and some of them in a remarkable manner. At this time, a young woman,⁴ one of the greatest company keepers in the town, was converted.

³Ibid., p. 11.

⁴Ibid., p. 14.

Then a great and earnest concern for the things of religion came to all the people of the town.

All other talk but about spiritual and eternal things was soon thrown by; all the conversation in all companies, and upon all occasions, was upon these things only, unless so much as was necessary for people carrying on their ordinary secular business. Other discourse than the things of religion would scarcely be tolerated in any company. The minds of the people were wonderfully taken off from the world. . . .⁵

The young people, who before had been a cause of anxiety for both pastor and parents, now spent their time "talking of the excellency and dying love of Jesus Christ, the gloriousness of the way of salvation," and about the wonderful sovereignty of God. Not only the young people were affected, as in former revivals, but now old men and little children were brought into this concern for religion.⁶

Edwards does make the concession that news of the successes of other towns served for a while to keep the work going among the originators in Northampton.

This work appears "extraordinary" to Edwards in the degree of the awakening, in the love and joy that many experienced, and also in the fact that it had, as never before, spread to other towns.⁷ This revival in 1735 had set the pattern, and was the forerunner and miniature of the Great Awakening in 1740.

⁵Ibid., p. 15.

⁶Ibid., p. 19.

⁷Ibid., p. 27.

The Influence of The Revival

To fulfill his desire to know more about the way God exerts Himself with respect to the Spirit, and to try to give expression as to the manner of "conversion," to which he had previously expressed a lack of knowledge, Edwards took up the task of describing the surprising work of God. He wrote this description on May 25, 1735, in answer to a request of Benjamin Colman. It was printed on November 6, under the title, A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God in the Conversions of Many Hundred Souls in Northampton, and the Neighboring Towns and Villages. In the influence which it exerted during the revival of 1740, it was the most potent piece of writing Jonathan Edwards ever penned. "Without exaggeration," says Perry Miller,

it did for New Englanders of 1736 what Goethe's Werther did for young German romantics; it perfected a formula for escape from an intellectual dilemma by opening an avenue into emotion and sensibility.⁸

From this work Edwards acquired a fame distinct from the cold theoretician of the Boston lecture. A preacher who spoke in a new way, directly to emotions, whose words were tangible to senses, who made language one with experience, this fame he now acquired; this fame he was never to lose.

⁸Perry Miller, Jonathan Edwards (New York: William Sloane Associates, 1949), p. 137.

⁹Ibid., p. 141.

In his Narrative, one senses an almost detached observer who is making the observations found in its pages, not one who was directly responsible for the awakening. But in Jonathan Edwards, there is the perfect union of the hot heart and the cool head, so that he could maintain a detachment from events in which he was deeply implicated.

One sermon which was peculiarly effective and which best represents the method that Edwards used in this and the 1740 revival is one entitled, "The Justice of God in the Damnation of Sinners." He stressed God's sovereignty in damnation and also the reality of eternal punishment. The time honored revival methods also appear: appeal to fear and denunciation of specific sins. His text was Romans 3:19, "That every mouth may be stopped." His doctrine was God's sovereignty in relation to man's helplessness. God was never more just than in casting men away forever, for man deserve nothing; they are incapable of any goodness in themselves. To admit God's justice is the first step in the path to an undeserved sal-
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 vation. Here, as in all future articles concerning sovereignty or conversion, Jonathan Edwards uses his own personal religious experience as a pattern and basis.

In the application of his doctrine, according to Winslow, he reached a high point in his eight year ministry for his ruthless preaching, as he relentlessly called the roll of the

town's sins. It had both an immediate result, and an unforeseen result in the future. When the fear had passed, the sharp edges of these stern accusations would still lacerate the people. Jonathan Edwards had lost something he could never quite regain in Northampton.¹¹

Nevertheless, Edwards remarked in his Narrative, that he had found no discourses that were more remarkably blessed than those in which the doctrine of God's absolute sovereignty with regard to the salvation of sinners was expressed.¹²

In making his observations as to the nature of the work, Edwards is again the boy observing spiders and recording their characteristics. Investigation demonstrated that people are first awakened with a "sense of their miserable condition by nature, and the danger they are in of perishing eternally;" this awareness is of such importance to them that they want to escape and get into a better state. Their cry becomes,¹³ "What shall I do to be saved?"

The preaching of God's absolute sovereignty, the conviction of the justice of God in the condemnation of sinners, and a conviction of one's own sinfulness were essential links in most conversions. This directly counteracted the Arminian influence.

¹¹Ibid., p. 162.

¹²Jonathan Edwards, op. cit., p. 40.

¹³Ibid., pp. 28-29.

The Lockean psychology had also proved accurate in the work. It was very evident that before the revival many people had "very imperfect ideas what conversion is," mainly because the old expressions did not convey those special and distinct ideas to the minds of the people, which the words were intended to signify. To some it meant little more than the names of colors mean to one who has been born blind. However, as the revival had progressed, the people were able to show by their use of words that they really had acquired "those special and distinct ideas which the words properly signify." Thus, this 1735 experiment had proved that grace comes not as argumentation or as interposition, but as idea. Conversion is a perception, a form of apprehension, derived exactly as Locke said mankind gets all simple ideas, out of sensory experience.

Reason was not to play a primary role in such undertakings. People fell into the mistake of doubting their salvation when too much use was made of their own reason in the convictions they had received, and they became afraid that they had no illumination above the natural forces of their own faculties.¹⁴

He concedes the fact that by physiological stimuli many imaginations were too much inflamed, and warns that this is a danger that must be watched, lest false "Impressions" be

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 53.

taken for real experiences.

One of Edwards' greatest fears and concerns was that the people would not take this to be a work of God. As a last effort in describing this work, and to prove to all that this was truly God's work, he gave two case studies. Being inexperienced, he was caught by the more unusual manifestations and chose two of the most spectacular examples to prove the presence and power of God. One was the example of Abigail, a "still, quiet, reserved person," and infirm of body. She was first awakened by the terrors of hell, and then so ravished by the love of God that she no longer found pleasure in the midst of town, but preferred "to sit and see the wind blowing the trees, and to behold in the country what God had made."

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Her death followed soon after this.

The second example was that of Phoebe Bartlett, aged four, who went through the cycle, crying and wreathing her body to and fro like one in anguish of spirit until she found release. She feared herself in danger of hell and shut herself up in the closet until she received assurances to the

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contrary. When his readers assumed that such behavior did greater honor to God than less spectacular deliverances, their conclusion was fair enough; therefore, when in the next de-

15Perry Miller, op. cit., p. 141.

16Jonathan Edwards, op. cit., p. 79.

17Ibid., p. 86.

cade extravagance went out of bounds, and revival marvels were induced by a score of bizarre methods, Jonathan Edwards was himself in part to blame. In these two examples, he set the tenor and tone of "surprising conversions" for most of New England.

It is, therefore, because of the enormous influence that this work had in shaping the mind of the people at that time, that it has been lamented by writers like Ola E. Winslow and Vernon L. Parrington.

On the last pages of the Narrative, there is the thought that these occurrences are in time and run a course. Analysis must, therefore, not only employ psychological and spatial terms, but become aware of the temporal morphology. Edwards had left Yale with an entire philosophy of the mind and the cosmos, but experience gradually forced one major addition upon him, a concept of the career of things in time. Out of the revival of 1735, he was beginning to confront the problem of history.¹⁸

¹⁸Perry Miller, op. cit., p. 140.

CHAPTER VIII

THE INFLUENCE OF THE GREAT AWAKENING UPON JONATHAN EDWARDS

The Great Awakening

The year 1740 broke upon the scene with a force resembling an atomic explosion. It was an upheaval which marks both an end and a beginning. Notions of religious experience that were current underwent a swift, determined change, and the relation of the church to the community, the minister to his flock, one congregation to another, in fact, the whole structure of community life, was permanently altered. It also vitalized anew the religious experience of the average man, and gave to the doctrines and forms of the church an intensely new personal meaning. New life and energy came where before things were but stale. The very destructiveness attests to the exuberance of the new life principle. According to men's capacities, their minds seemed to be stirred and their old thought patterns broken up so that they were forced to reshape the loyalties by which they lived. Also, too suddenly, it gave them a startling new sense of their own power in group action. It was also one of the most potent constructive forces in American life during the

mid-century.¹

George Whitefield

The man who is responsible for touching off the upheaval was George Whitefield. However, the ground had been well prepared. Jonathan Edwards had helped to condition the people with his Narrative, which had a large circulation. Religion was still important to the average man and doctrine was familiar. However, Whitefield came with a gospel sufficiently new to attract their attention. The apostasy of New England was a threadbare story and the average man was too comfortable in his sins. New England was the likeliest soil in the world for his gospel. Whitefield provided the necessity of immediacy, and under his impassioned preaching each hearer felt himself alone in the whole universe pursued by God. If he were to escape damnation and obtain heaven, he must do it today; after the sun set, it would be too late.²

Whitefield toured New England like a conquering monarch. Everywhere he went, scores of people flocked to hear him and be converted. He was the main topic of conversation. If any were opposed, and there were those, they kept silence for this was not the time to speak.

¹Ola E. Winslow, Jonathan Edwards (New York: Macmillan Co., 1940), p. 175.

²Ibid., p. 177.

Under fire, Whitefield would call himself a Calvinist, but his preaching emphasis was essentially democratic, that salvation was for all who would have it. In preaching a "whosoever will" doctrine at this time, he gave a religious application to certain vague impulses toward democracy, and turned an individualism as yet inarticulate into a gospel of personal safety.³

Then he left for England, leaving behind seeds which were to develop into total confusion. He had begun the breast-beating pulpit antics, and had measured his own success by the number of outcries and repentant groans from the audience. Those who followed him naturally imitated him; however, though they could invite the bedlam, they could not stop it. As a result, the Great Awakening perished in its own noise.⁴

Gilbert Tennant

There is little that needs to be said about another of the revivalists, Gilbert Tennant. He was a direct follower of Whitefield and became his successor after his departure. He chose literally to frighten men into salvation. He raged, shouted, stamped, roared, and set nerves on edge beyond endurance. From now on, this was to be the revival emphasis.

³ Ibid., p. 176.

⁴ Ibid., p. 194.

Conversion was not the beginning of a new life; it was a scramble to safety, and the way led through bedlam.⁵

Jonathan Edwards

Only two things need to be mentioned concerning Jonathan Edwards at this time. He was now at the height of his popularity among the New England people. He was the master of the New England soul; he had vindicated his proposition in experience, in the shrieks and groans of repentant Americans, in the laws of causality and perception, and he was destroying Arminianism root and branch. As a result of his Narrative, his name had become almost synonymous with "conversion" and personal religious experience. He was identified with the movement and would prosper or suffer as the movement progressed.

It was during Whitefield's first tour of New England that he met Edwards and stayed with him for a week. It was during this week that Jonathan Edwards asked his guest if he did not give too much credit to impulses, and he conveyed his dislike of Whitefield's readiness to pronounce other people unconverted without meticulous examination. He also questioned Whitefield's wisdom in insinuating that the people ought to forsake "unconverted ministers." New England believed that as long as a minister's doctrine was sound, he

⁵Ibid., p. 189.

was a means of grace, regardless of his inner condition. The clergy and not the people were the judge of conversion, and if the rabble of New England ever got it into their heads that they could forsake the settled pastors and run after any enthusiast who pleased them, the society would become chaos.⁶ Edwards saw the danger, but was unable to prevent the chaos. The tragedy is that, because his name was in people's minds, inseparably linked with conversion, he was blamed for the excesses.

Progress and Decline

From recorded fact in many contemporary accounts, the truth seems to be that for the greater part of a year after Whitefield's coming, New England's concern for religion was very intense, reaching a peak during the spring and summer of 1741.⁷ The phenomena of the first awakening were repeated in the second. Edwards noted that now "conversions were frequently wrought more sensibly and visibly," which confirmed the sensational thesis derived from Locke; the transition from one state to another, being more sensible, "might in many instances be, as it were, seen by the by-standers." Well into 1741, Edwards was persuaded, "The work seemed to be

⁶Perry Miller, Jonathan Edwards (New York: William Sloane Associates, 1949), p. 144.

⁷Ola E. Winslow, op. cit., p. 190.

much more pure, having less of a corrupt mixture, than in the former great outpouring of the Spirit in 1735 and 1736."⁸

But such a state could not last. Soon even the orderliness of a mere preaching had grown too dull for the palate of 1742, as uninvited and unannounced exhorters would disturb the service. Usually, there was enough sympathy with the intruders to render the minister helpless in quieting the tumult. Novelty now took the place of inspiration. The people tried to provide drama of their own making and when revival signs languished, they induced excitement by acting the form of it. Giving free reign to their emotions, they wept, shouted, fainted, went into convulsions, and rolled on the floor. Bodily manifestations had now become more important than a changed heart. However, it was not long before the clamour outdid itself under the notion that the greater the noise the more the Spirit of God was at work. The way out was to let the frenzy exhaust itself, as it very quickly did. By the autumn of 1742, it was past.

The Influence of the Great Awakening

The Preaching of Jonathan Edwards

The first influence of the Great Awakening, or rather an aspect that developed into an influence, may be seen in

⁸Perry Miller, op. cit., p. 145.

the preaching of Edwards. For Jonathan Edwards, the problem of communication is a primary one. In his preaching, he is the direct opposite of the Whitefield followers, for his sermons were intense, concentrated efforts to get across in the simplest language the meaning of the religious life. After physics had reduced nature to a series of irreversible equations, and after the analysis of the mind had reduced intelligence to sensory conditioning, one might say that his sermons are more explorations of the meaning of meaning.⁹

In his preaching of judgment, for which he is most noted, his main concern was not the futurity of torment, but rather the eternity and certainty of the agony. His contention was that pain has a law and the law is given in the mechanism of physical sensation. The punishment of the wicked must be "an abiding, sensible punishment," not because God is cruel, but because only out of experience can false judgment be rectified. The future life will also be "sensible," and that which "senseless" sinners will not learn must be taught "by briars and thorns, and by the flames of hell."¹⁰

Edwards underscored reality and contended that stimulus and response constitute an inviolable sequence no less than collision. Consciousness, however, must respond to reality and not to enthusiastical phantasies. If the organism re-

⁹Ibid. p. 148.

¹⁰Ibid. p. 150.

fuses consent to what must be, it is still incapable of interrupting the sequence or of defeating the design. The regenerate sense consents, not to conditional contracts, but to a chain of efficient causes.

The sight of a person writhing in conversion was found by experience to have an excellent and durable effect on the bystanders. According to the sensation doctrine of Locke, this should have been the case, because it was the transfer of an idea from one mind through a sensible medium to the mind of a perceiver.

Through the link of perception by the senses, God maintains His dominion over the moral . . . the realms of values . . . as well as the natural world. When there comes a time that imparts to perception both "a sense of the great importance and necessity of the mercy sought," and "a sense of opportunity to obtain it," then it is when a man must answer, deep in his moral being, with "the disposition of the heart to do what is resolved to be done."¹¹

In its simplicity, the Christian insight is what Locke had called a simple idea, an irreducible unity of experience, one in kind with redness, the taste of honey, and pain. It is not content, but a frame of conception. It is consent, not to a covenant, but to an experienced taste or relish.¹²

¹¹Ibid., p. 153.

¹²John Locke, Essay Concerning Human Understanding (Chicago: Open Court Publishing Co., 1933), pp. 33-38.

Redemption is a flash of experience upon a single perception so that there is given "union to a proper object, and a relish of the object," so that the natural good and moral good merge in a sense of the "real" good. However, man needs a sense of the newness and freshness of the object for which he must entertain a relish. It was the job of the divines to furnish that sense, not with such big words as would cause it, but by such words as it would follow through inviolable connection. The language of the pastors had to be changed from speculation to the objects of christian experience. It was up to the divines to supply phrases from which the sensitive minds might receive the annexed ideas.¹³

From his experience in the 1735 revival, Edwards was convinced that he had found the reason for the meagerness of previous awakenings. Through speculation hell was made unpleasant, but no one actually had the experience of living in hell. Sermons were descriptive, not factual, and the clergy was even unconvincing for a people who believed in hell. The big sounding words did not reach the heart of the people because they were too used to them. The sermon must impart the sensible idea if it is to work an effect. In the new Lockean psychology it must become, not a traveler's report, but an actual descent into hell.¹⁴

¹³Perry Miller, op. cit., p. 154.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 156.

If words become separated from objects, they become the objects, the only objects the mind any longer knows. This was the case in New England. Orators could induce verbal ecstasy, but they left the emotions untouched. They could scratch men's ears, but never scare their hearts. At least, not until a fresh perception had jolted them into a new awareness.

It was Locke, who had pointed out to Edwards that the problem was a linguistic one and that words must once more represent a reality other than themselves. This could be done only by freeing language from stale associations, and by forcing words to function in the chain of natural causes, so that from the shock upon the senses would come the apprehension of the idea. Words must be made to convey the idea of heaven, and forced to give the idea of hell.

Following the sensational premise based upon the third chapter of Locke's Essay, he made his pulpit oratory an effort to make sounds become objects, so that words would immediately be registered on the sense, not as noises, but as idea. He was a "sensational" preacher in the technical sense, and wrought an overwhelming effect by extraordinary simplicity.¹⁵

The best example of this type of preaching is the sermon for which he is most remembered, the Enfield Sermon, "Sinners

¹⁵Ibid., p. 158.

In *The Hands of An Angry God*," preached on July 8, 1741, ten years to the day after the Boston Lecture. The text was, "Their foot shall slide in due time." He had previously preached three times from this text. In the first sermon, he had presented the magnificence of God's wrath, the demonstration of that power in the burning of the world, and the contrasting picture of how it will be with those who are saved. In the second sermon, taking as his Doctrine, "The punishment of wicked men generally comes upon them when they don't expect it," he developed it from the point of view of man. He contrasted men in their false assurance of safety with the swift punishment of God. The third sermon was preached at Northampton and was essentially the same as that preached at Enfield.

In Enfield, he developed the theme of the wrath of God.

Taking the eternal consequences of God's wrath for granted he made it seem personal and immediate for each member of the congregation seated before him. Obliterating the world outside the meetinghouse walls, and foreshortening time until the final judgment was not eons hence but tomorrow and possibly today, he sent each unconverted Enfield citizen to his own well-deserving doom.¹⁶

Some of those sitting in the pews would remember this very discourse in hell. His hearers knew who these people were, as they caught hold of the pillars of the building and cried out in helpless panic.

¹⁶Ola E. Winslow, *op. cit.*, p. 191.

The results may have owed something to impulse, but it was also conscious design. For Edwards, the route from Locke's sensationalism to the burning spider was inescapable, for Locke confirmed what the spider taught, that the life of the soul is the life of the "sense." Thus, Edwards committed Puritanism, which had been a fervent rationalism based on the covenant, to a pure passion of the senses and imparted to them the terror of insecurity. He brought them face to face with a fundamentally inhuman cosmos: "There are no means within reach that can be any security to them." There is no refuge and the only thing that preserves them is the arbitrary will and forbearance of an incensed God.¹⁷

Nehemiah Strong of Northampton gives a tribute to Edwards as a preacher of judgment:

He expected without one thought to the contrary, the awful scene to be unfolded on that day, and in that place. . . . Accordingly he waited with the deepest and most solemn solicitude to hear the trumpet sound and the archangel call; to see the graves open, the dead arise, and the Judge descend in the glory of his Father, with all his holy angels; and was deeply disappointed, when the day terminated and left the world in its usual state of tranquillity.¹⁸

Such effects could be wrought only by ideas. This was an inviolable sequence arising out of a sense of newness and freshness. This was not enthusiasm. If any still doubted, let them face the facts. The time was God's visitation. Ex-

¹⁷Ferry Miller, *op. cit.*, pp. 146-47

¹⁸Ola Winslow, *op. cit.*, p. 193.

perience shows it.

The Resulting Controversy

As the revival declined to its lamentable stages, there arose a controversy among the ministers as to the genuineness of the work. Those conservatives who were against the revival were called "Old Lights," while the supporters of Whitefield and of the work of the revival were called "New Lights." A civil war ensued. It began as an argument concerning a work of God, but it became, on both sides, contention about the nature of man. It progressed to the point where there seemed to be no way to end the strife. The entire clergy was wrapped up in a hopeless tangle, for which the only real solution would have been to start over. However, since that privilege was denied, they merely wrote more pamphlets. Ola Winslow remarks that "a sit-down strike in the Boston printing houses from 1742 to 1745 would have done more for the cause of religion in America than any other imaginable blessing."¹⁹

Realizing what was happening, Edwards centered his studies upon the definitions of human species, pleading with both sides not to cling to half-formed conceptions. He was classified among the "New Lights;" however, he maintained a middle position, viewing with concern the emphasis on bodily manifestations, but insisting there might well be a connection between

¹⁹Ibid., p. 200

the manifestations and the unusual presence of divine power.²⁰ Being more passionate than Davenport and more finely intellectual than Chauncy, who was the leader of the opposition to the revival and who championed the cause of reason, he was able to comprehend those who could not comprehend each other; however he was at the same time accused by the one of being too intellectual and by the other of being too emotional.²¹

Jonathan Edwards' part in this controversy consisted in two treatises. In his Narrative, he had come forth as the reporter of the revival, but now in The Distinguishing Marks and Thought Concerning The Revival, he comes forth as the chief defender and critic of the revival. One is struck by the shift in emphasis in the books he published during this period. In Distinguishing Marks, published in 1741, Chauncy is the target, and he cautions his own followers only in an incidental manner. In Some Thoughts, published in 1742, his mood is more defensive as he is equally divided between Chauncy and the extremists. In his Treatise Concerning Religious Affections, published in 1746, Chauncy is almost ignored and his attention is turned to the enthusiasts who had made a shambles of the Awakening.²² During this decade, he had explored the phenomena of religious experience and had establish-

²⁰Ibid., p. 201.

²¹Perry Miller, op. cit., p. 180.

²²Ibid., p. 178.

ed the main outlines of what was to become a standard field of study. The main test his doctrine had to withstand was not rationalism, but the enthusiasm of his own followers.

Distinguishing Marks of A Work of The Spirit of God

The first of his apologetic treatises on the revival was an expanded sermon which had been delivered in New Haven in 1741, entitled, The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of The Spirit of God. It deals with the operation of the Spirit on the minds of the people with particular consideration to the extraordinary circumstances, and turns out to be a scientific anatomy of the group psychoses.²³ In this treatise he commits himself unreservedly to the divine origin and the divine character of the revival. However, we must remember, that in 1741, the worst feature of the revival had not yet developed.

First, he meets in a negative way the objections which have been urged against the revival. He argues that nothing can be contended against any religious movement from the fact that it is unusual or extraordinary, or from the fact that it occasions a great deal of noise about religion, or from the fact that some go into ecstasy and have visions. He himself had experienced the ecstasy and visions in his own conversion.²⁴ He then asserts the positive features of a work

²³Ibid., p. 169.

²⁴Alexander Allen, Jonathan Edwards, pp. 164-165.

of God, saying that these "the evil spirit would not do, or could he if he would."²⁵

In his last section, "Practical Inferences," he came to the vital questions to which the revival had given birth. He deals first with "bodily effects." Some look at them as having their rise in diseased or abnormal conditions of mind or body; however, Edwards appeals to his large experience as the ground of his conviction that "bodily effects" are wrought incidentally by the Spirit of God, and these give evidence of His presence and power in that congregation. He does not suggest that the degree of the influence of the Spirit is determined by the degree of effect on men's bodies, but rather stresses caution. Allen advances the conclusion that while he states that such effects are incidental, it may be that he clung to them the more strongly "in proportion as his idealism threatened to snap the bond which connects the spiritual with its physical embodiment." However, Edwards asserts "the superiority of the spiritual as if ineffably higher than all mechanical gifts or outward signs or manifestations of power."²⁶

Again, he returns to his basic conviction which he asserted throughout the controversy, that "this work is of God, despite all its extravagances." So intense is this con-

²⁵Ibid., p. 166.

²⁶Ibid., p. 174.

viction that he feels that those ministers who are opposed to him and have stood silently by, are standing in the way of God. He was referring in this instance, to Charles Chauncy.²⁷

He voices an appeal to the friends of the work and urges them to avoid all occasions of reproach. He stood like a rock in resisting the tendency to concede value to impulses and impressions. With regard to impressions of the mind which revealed the will of God, his reasoning was clear and powerful--mere impulses have no reality.

Experience confirmed the revivalist theory for Edwards, and he could expound the sensational thesis: "Words are of no use any otherwise than as they convey our own ideas to others."²⁸ In this way he justified example as "language in action."

His book closes with the contention, "we were infected from abroad." His own townsmen, after hearing of more extraordinary appearances in other towns, began to "look little in their own eyes," and, being jealous for the honor of Northampton, began to raise bigger commotions. Thus, Edwards turned his conclusion away from Chauncy to his own supporters,²⁹ warning them against errors and absurdities.

²⁷Ibid., p. 169.

²⁸Perry Miller, op. cit., p. 170.

²⁹Ibid.

Thoughts on The Revival of Religion

In 1742, the revival declined into many lamentable abuses. These evils sprang from the misapplication of the principle which Edwards was teaching, that of the immediate contact of the Holy Spirit with the human heart. He never wavered from this principle, even though it was the occasion from which came the confusion of the later revival, but rather grappled with the principle itself, making his appeal to all of New England in terms of pure reason. This he undertook to accomplish in his second polemic of the revival era, Thoughts on The Revival of Religion. Confessing that things have never yet been set in the right channel, "he makes his purpose to show what are the things which should be avoided or corrected in order to further this work of God."³⁰

His main task is again to prove that this is a work of God, regardless of the evils. Any work of God will have its stumbling blocks; however, as for Edwards, if this is not a work of God, then "we must throw away our Bibles, and give up revealed religion."³¹

First, he defends the work on the argument of the great transformation it has wrought among the churches. He calls

³⁰ Alexander Allen, op. cit., p. 183.

³¹ Jonathan Edwards, Thoughts on The Revival of Religion, with a prefix, A Narrative of The Surprising Work of God (New York: American Tract Society, n.d.), p. 158.

upon the magistrates as well as clergy to promote this work and acknowledge God in its success. One fact that gave this plea an urgency, was the fact that this work was the fore-runner of something vastly greater. America, and New England especially, was going to be turned into a paradise of God.³² From these thoughts his interest in history as the fulfillment of Scripture becomes apparent.

Edwards thought that those people who were against the revival were making a great mistake. The affections apply to the very essence of Christianity, and the life of the soul and all true religion consists in them. "The informing of the understanding," he says, "is all vain, any farther than it affects the heart; or which is the same thing, has influence on the affections."³³

Another cause of criticism was the failure to distinguish between the evil and the good associated with the movement. Among those things his opponents condemned was the style of preaching that appealed to the emotions. However, for Edwards, the emotions are the chief part of religion. He goes so far as to maintain "that speculative knowledge of divinity is not what is chiefly needed at this time, but rather warmth of devotion." The age abounds in speculative knowledge, but "was there ever an age in which there was so little sense of

³² Ibid., p. 192.

³³ Ibid., p. 114.

the evil of sin, so little love to God, or holiness of life?" What the people needed, according to Edwards, was not to have their heads stored full of knowledge, but rather their hearts touched. It is also in this same line of thought that he defends preaching the terror of hell to people who are alarmed, instead of comforting them.

Bodily excesses again come in for their major share of treatment, with Edwards once more defending them. They are, however, only incidental, not to be sought after, and the degree of the Spirit's influence is by no means to be judged by the degree of bodily effects.

35

In something of a last effort to prove to the doubting Thomases the divine character of the work, he cites the example of his own wife, Sarah Edwards, whose reputation in the colony could not be questioned. Her experience came early in 1742, and many of the excesses that were condemned by the conservative clergy were part of her story. After subordinating himself to the story, he let out a personal cry of anguish and at the same time a plea for recognition of the divinity of this experience:

Now if such things are enthusiasm, and the fruits of a distempered brain, let my brain be evermore possessed of that happy distemper! If this be distraction, I pray God that the world of mankind may be all seized with this benign, meek, beneficent, beatifical, glorious distraction! 36

³⁴Ibid., p. 241.

³⁵Ibid., p. 259.

³⁶Ibid., p. 174.

He then turns his attention to those who had misapplied his principles and were currently bringing the revival into abuses. He attempted to distinguish between what is "imaginary" and what is "spiritual." Imagination was one of the operations of that faculty known as "understanding." By it one perceived objects of the senses when those objects were not present. Rightly used, it was helpful; given free rein, it would overbalance the other workings of "understanding." This "imagination," by which objects of sense seem present when they are not, is wholly natural, being part of man's mental equipment as man. However, things "spiritual" are different, for conversion is a "sense of God in the heart," a faculty which has no counterpart in unregenerate man. It is God-given; it is supernatural.³⁷ He would have still more to say on this point in the Religious Affections.

Although combating impulses, he was obliged to admit that the tendency of this divine action of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of men was to excite inclinations, which if not satisfied would lead to confusion. Therefore, he illustrates the necessity of curbing the divine influence, by the example of people spending all their time in exhorting men and neglecting eating and sleeping.³⁸ He also brings a strong condemnation of the itinerant ministers and the confusion

³⁷Ola E. Winslow, op. cit., p. 206

³⁸Alexander Allen, op. cit., p. 218.

they were causing in the churches, mainly on the necessity of ecclesiastical order. As a matter of fact, Allen says that "he seems almost willing to limit the spread of the movement, if there is danger of its weakening or overthrow-³⁹ing the power of the clergy."

The Religious Affections

When Edwards published his treatise on the Religious Affections in 1746, the revival had ended and was thoroughly discredited. Chauncy was convinced that Edwards was an enthusiast and not to be paid any attention. Those who came after were to pay attention to this treatise, however, for it is recognized as the best exploration of religious psychology and the nature of religious experience in American literature. He was attempting to answer his own questions as to the nature of true religion, to distinguish a true from a false experience, and to draw the picture of a human soul which through grace has become united with God. In pursuing this purpose, he was fulfilling his desire which he stated in his Resolutions, to investigate more thoroughly the nature of conversion; at the same time, he was in a familiar area. He states in the Preface, "It is a subject on which my mind has been peculiarly intent, ever since I first entered on

³⁹ Ibid., p. 214.

the study of divinity."⁴⁰

Here, he addresses himself to his peers and is concerned, not with correctives, but with abstract distinctions, clear our discriminations and clear arguments. Recognizing that the late revival had been foiled by the devil, he realizes that religion in America has not thereby, come to an end. However, the majority of the divines had now long since declared for the enlightened mind rather than the heart. For them, religion was to be a rational exercise, rationally apprehended and rationally demonstrated. In this way the extravagances of 1741 would be at an end and order would be restored. Opposed to this trend, Jonathan Edwards was not advocating a trend to return to the past emotionalism, but rather he was now attempting to prove by the laws of human nature that religion is not primarily an affair of the intellect but of the heart, or that "True religion consists very much in affections."⁴¹

Religion must show itself in the exercises of the heart, for an enlightened understanding without an affected heart is as bad and useless as light without heat. Feeling lies nearer than thought to true religious consciousness and is the gateway, so to speak, to all religious experience. This corresponds exactly to the nature of the experience which he

⁴⁰ Ola E. Winslow, op. cit., p. 231.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 232.

had in college.

Early in life he had resolved to inquire into the nature of the human mind, "with respect to both its Faculties--the Understanding and the Will--and its various Instincts, and Active and Passive Powers."⁴² This he now did. He classified all symptoms as being experimentally indifferent or those with meaning. All experience in nature is valid but not all of it is true, and while the rules themselves are infallible, the technique of applying them is difficult. However, it is in consciousness itself that man requires mediation between "knowledge and faith, science and ethics, intellect and the heart."⁴³ Although having declared in his Thoughts that emotions were the same as the Will, he now gives a new definition, "The affections are not other than the more vigorous and sensible exercises of the inclination and will of the soul."⁴⁴ Thus, he re-emphasized the fact that will and emotions are the same.

However, following Locke, Edwards did not intend that will and understanding should be different "agents" or "faculties," but rather used them as ways in which a soul functions. The following quote from Locke is basic to understanding Edwards' position,

⁴²Ibid., p. 233.

⁴³Ferry Miller, op. cit., p. 180.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 181.

We may as properly say that it is the singing faculty sings, and the dancing faculty dances, as that . . . the will directs the understanding, or the understanding obeys or obeys not the will: it being altogether as proper and intelligible to say that the power of speaking directs the power of singing.⁴⁵

Chauncy contended that the faculties were powers capable of acting like a distinct being; Edwards contended with Locke, that willing and understanding are not independent centers in the brain, but "several modes of thinking."⁴⁶

By identifying will and affections and attempting to unite will and understanding, he declared the supremacy of passion. By maintaining a distinction between mere notional understanding and the sense of the heart, he intended to subordinate the understanding; he believed that when a man knows the sense or the sweetness of a thing, he has a more accurate knowledge than that by which he knows the dimensions of a triangle. He had asserted a conception of man as an active, interested, passionate being, whose relation to objective reality is factual to the extent he is concerned about it, and whose emotions and anxieties, not his clear⁴⁷ thinking, make his destiny.

He now had to distinguish between false and true emotions and show that the signs of conversion, the bodily effects, upon which so much stress had been laid, were not necessarily

⁴⁵John Locke, op. cit., pp. 138-39.

⁴⁶Perry Miller, op. cit., p. 182.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 183.

connected with true religion. He enlarged the list of these manifestations from his Distinguishing Marks, and could analyze and reduce to natural or clinical history such "counterfeit" behaviour as high affections, bodily jerks, fluent talking, fear of hell, involuntary compulsions, texts falling into the mind, or other such noble deeds. Yet, these actions neither prove or disprove anything. Since the will is emotion, they could be the by-product of conversion. However, as a by-product they are still false, and he condemns those who look for them as a sign of the spirit's action. ⁴⁸ What finally counts is not the quantity of experience, but the kind.

What then is the true reality of the Spirit? What are the distinguishing signs of the truly gracious and holy affections? The divine reality is first distinct from all that is human. This corresponds to his distinction between the common and the special grace. From here, he affirms the fact that responses of human affections is to the excellent and amiable nature of divine things as they are in themselves, ⁴⁹ and not as they have a relation to any self-interest.

Edwards gives twelve different signs of a true experience, four of which are basic to him. Here the inherent and objective come together. The primary tests are:

its origin, its relation to external reality, its relation to excellency, and finally, that which binds together all relationships--its arising from a mind that

⁴⁸Alexander Allen, op. cit., p. 222.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 225.

richly and spiritually apprehends the pattern of divine things.⁵⁰

This new idea which he called "supernatural" is no addition to knowledge, it is no new faculty of understanding, but rather a new principle of coherence in the soul which immediately becomes the foundation "for a new kind of exercise of the same faculty of understanding."⁵¹ Perry Miller says that

he supernaturalized nature, and introduced the divine element into the world, not as a substance or a quantity, not as a compound of already existing things or an addition to them, but as what metaphysicians call a new simple idea.⁵²

Edwards then draws a distinction between the moral attributes of God and His natural perfections. The moral excellence of God is in His holiness. This applied to men comprehends their true excellency as moral beings. However, the supreme test is a sense of the beauty of the universe, and because this is a sense and not an imagination, it is a sense of reality. The sense of the heart enables sight, and without this sight the universe remains the same. Unless this is recognized, nothing is seen that is worth anything, for there is no other true excellency. Thus, there is a direct insight into divine things which convinces of their reality and discloses them to human beings. For Edwards,

⁵⁰Perry Miller, op. cit., p. 186.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 187.

⁵²Ibid., p. 186.

holiness is a quality of the world of events, and it is discovered by men who have holy dispositions, just as color is another quality of the same world and is discovered by men who have eyesight. Thus, conversion is a certain type of disposition, a specific variety of affections, a "new spiritual sense."⁵³

This treatise put the experience of conversion on a sound basis, and insisted on the inner witness of the emotions, not of the mind. Edwards had given a personal interpretation to the beauty of true religion. However, the natural man can discern it as little as a man without the sense of tasting can conceive of the sweet taste of honey. He had also set down his own religious aspirations, that nothing but the religion of heaven was worthy enough, as a standard of measurement for all Christian attainment.

This treatise also had another influence. It defined clearly the issue on which Edwards was soon to make the fight of his life, and lose. The congregation was full of those who had never had the "inner witness" and were trusting to means of grace and their own efforts. This treatise showed clearly what lay ahead.

The Life of David Brainerd

Another publication which clearly showed the stand Ed-

⁵³Joseph G. Haroutunian, "Jonathan Edwards: A Study in Godliness," Journal of Religion, XI (July, 1931), 406.

wards was taking, was An Account of the Life of the late Reverend Mr. David Brainerd, published in 1749. Brainerd was a missionary to the Indians who had died while at Edwards' home, and Edwards presented the life of Brainerd as he had the experience of his own wife, as a confirmation of his own theories.

Brainerd's life and experiences closely paralleled all that Edwards had taught. First he had an opposition to God's sovereignty, but then he had an inward view, and he "knew that he had never seen before anything comparable to it for excellency and beauty; it was widely different from all the conceptions that ever I had had of God or things divine."⁵⁴ He spoke often of the nature of true, vital religion, and against the false appearances of religion which arise from⁵⁵ impressions on the imagination.

The significance of this work is that Brainerd now became identified with true piety. He supported the basic principle of Edwards' system, namely the discovery of the beauty of God as supremely excellent in itself. His joy was in views he had outside of himself, not within himself.

Perhaps one could draw something of a comparison from Edwards' first examples, given in his Narrative, which helped

⁵⁴Jonathan Edwards, The Life of David Brainerd, Missionary to the Indians, edited by Homer W. Hodge (New York: The Christian Alliance Publishing Co., 1925), p. 20.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 171.

incite some of the confusion of the Great Awakening, to his second example, that of his own wife, and finally up to the one example which more closely paralleled his idea of religious experience, that of David Brainerd.

The Dismissal

However, too many separate forces were operating against Jonathan Edwards for him to take a stand against the current trend of rationalism and succeed. Therefore, he was dismissed from the church in Northampton in 1750.

One of the basic contentions was the controversy concerning admittance to the Lord's Supper. Stoddard had abolished the profession of faith as a requirement, so that nothing would stand between the citizen and the Sacrament. The first evidence that Edwards was beginning to think differently concerning this practice is found in his Narrative, where he speaks of having evidence of conversion before people take the Sacrament, even though it was not the custom there to make this the grounds of admission.⁵⁶ However, in the last glow of the Awakening, he was beginning to reach the decision on which he would make his stand, a confession of faith as grounds of admittance to the Sacrament. In his Thoughts, he had intimated that he would like to have a covenant by which he could call his people to order. In 1742, he persuaded

⁵⁶Jonathan Edwards, Thoughts on The Revival, with a prefix, A Narrative of the Surprising Work of God, p. 24.

his people to draw up a covenant, or a public memorial which would testify to the people's determination to abide by the results of the Awakening.⁵⁷

When he published his Religious Affections in 1746, his views were made public, and it would only be a matter of time until he would demand a confession of faith for admittance to the Sacrament.

By December, 1748, the issue was out in the open. Edwards told the first applicant in four years that he must make a profession, and he refused. On July 2, 1750, within a week of nineteen years after the defiance of the Boston lecture, he delivered his acknowledgment of failure, the Farewell Sermon.

Due to Edwards' belief that a Christian is only he who has this evidence of an inner possession, the fact that he went back to the fundamental rock on which New England Dissent had built its structure, Experimental Piety, is not surprising. However, it is very difficult to turn back the clock for fifty years and succeed. Nevertheless, he maintained, as he maintained throughout his life, that natural goodness and supernatural godliness are totally distinct. He was convinced that a sincere expression of those who possessed a gracious heart was now needed. The fact that he was reversing his practice of twenty-three years, and that

⁵⁷Perry Miller, op. cit., p. 209.

such a reversal would not be expedient in the present situation, did not make him waver in his determination. "Expediency" in matters of principle was not a word in his vocabulary.⁵⁸

The shadow of his own grandfather, Solomon Stoddard, also played a large part in bringing about his dismissal. The people would not submit to anything un-Stoddarean, and the fact that they found him to be a man of deception, undoubtedly had an influence. To them, the long-delayed disclosure of his deviation from Stoddard's practice was something resembling a criminal act.⁵⁹

Two other factors conspired to raise the feelings against Edwards in Northampton, the Salary Dispute and the Bad Book Case of 1744. Back of the Salary Dispute was a growing feeling that the Pastor should have things no different than his members and should not live so aristocratic. In short, it was a feeling of democracy. This same feeling was evident in the Bad Book Case, where several young people under the leadership of Timothy Root were caught reading a hand-book for mid-wives. The assertion of Timothy Root in this affair, "I won't worship a wig," gives evidence of the growing feeling against the aristocracy with which Edwards was associated.⁶⁰

⁵⁸Ola E. Winslow, op. cit., p. 244.

⁵⁹Perry Miller, op. cit., p. 211.

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 216.

The businessmen also had a hand in Edwards' dismissal. Included in this class is Israel Williams and the Williams family, who had a grudge against Edwards for his attack on them in 1734. As far as there is a class angle to this dismissal, Edwards was sent out of Northampton "not by the populace," says Perry Miller, "but by the entrepreneurs."⁶¹

Edwards published for his people "An Humble Inquiry Into the Rules of the Word of God Concerning the Qualification Requisite to a Complete Standing and Full Communion" to explain his position, but few of them read it. In it he stresses the fact that there is only one kind of saint, those who profess godliness. Common virtues have no sanction as a basis for admittance to the Lord's Supper, but rather only those virtues arising from an inner experience.⁶² However, all of this was to no avail. The decision was taken to the Hampshire Association which ruled that he should be dismissed.

Thus, out of the sensationally instigated passions of the Awakening, he who started them and defended them came, like the first Puritans, to believe that a public confession was the only solution. Once again it was heart religion as distinguished from head religion.

⁶¹Ibid., p. 218.

⁶²Ola E. Winslow, op. cit., p. 247.

CHAPTER IX

THE INFLUENCE OF THE STOCKBRIDGE MINISTRY UPON JONATHAN EDWARDS

The Stockbridge Ministry

After his dismissal, Jonathan Edwards accepted a call to Stockbridge, a mission station started by David Brainerd, to become a missionary to the Indians.

His dismissal from Northampton actually gave him a chance to belong to the ages. In the wilderness he could preach old sermons, and in his four-by-eight study make up his mind about such problems as the freedom of the will, true virtue, and depravity. The seven years he spent in Stockbridge were ones of intense labor as he wrote the books for which he is perhaps most remembered in theological circles.

The full significance of his stay among the Indians is the fact that it gave him an opportunity to look back, reflect, and then write, so that people coming after him might know the difference between what is "counterfeit" and "real."

The Influence of the Stockbridge Ministry

The Freedom of The Will

It was Edwards' conviction that the Arminian assertion that the will is free in the sense of possessing a self-determining power, destroyed God's sovereignty and thus destroyed

the entire Calvinistic and Puritan system. Therefore, he made a final effort to maintain the Puritan theology, and devoted himself to the task of destroying the stronghold of the freedom of the will by publishing a treatise in 1754. The title gives the very essence of the trouble current at that time, The Freedom of The Will. This work was the culmination of the reaction he had signalled in Boston in 1731, and had followed through the Awakening. It put the Calvinistic doctrine once again on high ground.

According to Edwards' thought, agreeable to Locke, sensation is a cause which registers on man as a power that forms his inclination, and once he accumulates a disposition, he reacts to sensations in the manner to which he is predisposed. However, the problem was that in the center of sensory beings is a factor which deflects stimuli into action, not according to the determination of the thing, but according to a previously settled disposition of the will. This takes the problem away from the universe, and lays it on the human will.¹

Locke had said that all values are inward. Even beauty,² like other simple ideas denotes the perception of some mind. Beauty gives the highest pleasure. A thing is beautiful when

¹Perry Miller, Jonathan Edwards (New York: William Sloane Associates, 1949), p. 236.

²John Locke, Essay Concerning Human Understanding (Chicago: Open Court Publishing Co., 1933), pp. 45-49.

there is a consent of one thing to another, and the locus of this consent is in the mind of the artist. A thing gives pleasure because it is a sense that the proportioned work comes from a conscious intention. Thus, beauty is a recognition of a will. "Consent" also forms the basis for excellency. Edwards strove to lead men to this definition of excellency, "The Consent of Being To Being, or Being's Consent to Entity," from which the rule followed, "The more the Consent is, and the more extensive, the greater is the Excellency."³ The discovery gave him a conception of beauty as arising, not from a single thing but from a society. The universe aspires toward beauty, but cannot reach fulfillment without something beyond nature. If bodies are in intelligible sequence, then there is consent somewhere, in some mind. Just as the mind must jump to the concept of an indivisibility regardless of size, so, he concluded, there must be a sight of a single system of mutually consenting entities as the adequate idea of a universe, and upon beholding, it is lovely.⁴

He had found a rule of beauty and of virtue resolved into a consent to serve in the total scheme of things. The beauty and virtue depends not on what one is called to do, but upon the consent upon an act of will which follows perception. Virtue, as an act of will, follows perception and

³Perry Miller, op. cit., pp. 240-41.

⁴Ibid., p. 242.

the perception of virtue is love to the totality of Being.⁵ Absolute evil, he had said in his Notes, was self-love, or a want of beauty.

Calvin himself was the source of the difficulty. He had followed the medieval doctrine of the faculties and had placed the will under reason. The will had to wait until the reason had pronounced upon a certain thing. Then it chose whatever the reason proposed. Basically, this comes from a belief that man acts outside of cause and effect, that he is a self-originating power. By sin he was brought into the net of nature, but by grace he can escape; the regenerate will, therefore, comes back into obedience to reason.⁶

However, Edwards stood faithful to Locke's discovery that faculties are modes of motion. He asserts the functional nature of the organism. The will is not a faculty or talent for choosing, but it is the man choosing, the very willing is the doing. The desire is the will and the will is the emotions. He disagrees with Locke here that will is distinguished from desire.⁷

On the first few pages of the Freedom of The Will, Edwards discusses the principle that perception is not the import of the object, but rather the object as seen, the

⁵Ibid., p. 243.

⁶Ibid., pp. 252-53.

⁷Jonathan Edwards, Freedom of The Will (New York: Leavitt and Co., 1851), p. 2.

manner of the view, and the state of the mind that views are the significant things in perception. How a thing is perceived is a long accumulation of experience out of which is formed his inclination to perceive in such and such a manner. A person disposed to perceive melody will perceive it; to another the notes are only noises. By such a disposition, every man is determined and predestined.⁸ He sets up a second thesis, namely that will lies within the tissue of nature, and is caused by something outside itself. A choice arises from nature as truly as other events. The established law and order of things is true here also.⁹

Edwards employs Newton's principle of cause and effect. Particular acts of will must have a cause. This cause is that motive which seems to the mind to be the strongest. The will, being a passive mechanism which is necessarily drawn toward the greatest apparent good in any situation, is not free, but determined in what it wills. It is determined by the decision of the understanding concerning the greatest apparent good.¹⁰

He gives what amounts to a new definition of human liberty. He grants man freedom of action to carry out his own choices, but insists that these choices are determined by

⁸ Ibid., p. 8.

⁹ Perry Miller, op. cit., p. 257.

¹⁰ Jonathan Edwards, op. cit., pp. 4-6.

motives which lie outside of man's control. Man is free, even though he is not free to will as he pleases, when he is free to do as he wills. Thus, the freedom is limited, but in terms of acting on choices, the will is free.¹¹

In other words, Edwards restricted human liberty to the area of acting on human choices. It has nothing whatever to do with the causes which lie back of these choices. Thus, those whom God had chosen might repent if they would, but the desire to do so came from God. Man's responsibility lay in acting on the choice, no matter whence the inclination toward that choice might come.¹² Therefore, since men are free to act according to their desires or preferences, they may be held morally accountable, even though the desire is pre-determined. They are accountable in that they may do what they choose, even though they do not choose their choices.

This is not Calvinism or New England Dissent. Jonathan Edwards had made man's freedom an intermediate step and had qualified freedom rather than denying it. In other words, he made it "conditional." It is consistent with his own view of the intuitive awareness of divine things, that he should insist upon the passivity of the will. He could assume the will to be passive because he felt his own to be passive

¹¹Joseph L. Blau, Men and Movements in American Philosophy (New York: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1953), p. 26.

¹²Ola E. Winslow, Jonathan Edwards (New York: Macmillan Co., 1940), p. 300.

under the impressions he believed to be divine. Ola Winslow remarks that Edwards' "qualification of freedom in favor of God's sovereignty had an emotional basis before it buttressed an argument." She adds, that "this conclusion would seem to be inescapable in the light of the whole panorama of his thought."¹³

The Defence of Original Sin

Edwards also took the opportunity which the Stockbridge Pastorate afforded, to publish in 1757 a treatise on Original Sin. In it Edwards proceeds to show how man comes into possession of that evil inclination which he is free to follow, but not free to overcome. He confronts the Arminians at their strongest point, namely in their contention that the Calvinistic system of original sin, and the responsibility of the posterity of Adam for his sin, actually make God the author of sin. The Arminians said that nature is inherently good, and all defects and tribulations are accounted for as mismanaged policy.¹⁴ Edwards, backed by Locke and Newton, set out to prove otherwise.

A basic principle which he followed was that the course of nature as shown "by last improvements in philosophy," is an inviolable sequence of events. Whether the will or the

¹³Ibid., p. 301.

¹⁴Perry Miller, op. cit., p. 267.

sin of man is discussed, one must commence with "an established method and order of events, settled and limited by divine wisdom."¹⁵

He defined a law of nature as something in the permanent state of things, "concerned in bringing a certain sort of event to pass, which is a foundation for the constancy, or strongly prevailing probability of such an event."¹⁶ In other words, it is a tendency. To discover the tendency, one must gather all the evidence; from the tendency he could take only one inference:

that the natural state of the mind of man, is attended with a propensity of nature, which is prevalent and effectual, to such an issue; and that therefore their nature is corrupt and depraved with a moral depravity, that amounts to and implies their utter undoing.¹⁷

Thus, he called upon America to acknowledge its share in the race, and confess from the evidence that wickedness is agreeable to the nature of mankind in its present state. Experience showed that the persistence of evil is an effect, of which the prevailing disposition of the human will is the cause.

Does this make God the author of sin? God created Adam with two sets of principles, natural and supernatural. Natural principles are summed up as "self-love," and supernatural

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 268.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 269.

principles are summed up as "benevolence." When Adam fell into sin, God removed the principle of benevolence, thus leaving the principle of self-love to reign. Having no superior principle to regulate it, it became the absolute master of the heart.¹⁸

However, whether sin was a corruption of nature, or a self-love, the question still remained, "Why should I suffer for someone else's mistake?" Edwards went back to Locke for his principle: in the realm of the mind, all humanity, like the atom, is a single concept. He was advocating the unity of the race as a new definition of the brotherhood of man, one that merged all men into one conception, that discomfited the prosperous and the proud by telling them that in the nature of things God treats them all as one.

The basic passage from Locke which gave Edwards this conception is probably that

identity is when the ideas it is attributed to vary not at all from what they were that moment wherein we consider their former existence, and to which we compare the present.¹⁹

However, Edwards went further than Locke and contended that if identity is an idea, it is a natural necessity arising from the law of nature which God has fixed. If identity is a perception, then as long as God thinks of that unit as one,

¹⁸Joseph L. Blau, op. cit., p. 22.

¹⁹John Locke, op. cit., p. 237.

it is an act of God.²⁰ Thus, by being one in idea, mankind is one in being. Sin is the apostasy of all mankind by virtue of the full consent of all their hearts. It is theirs, not because God assigns it to them, "but it is truly and properly theirs, and on that ground God imputes it to them."²¹ This is no taint or tincture, but it is a property of the species. In this sense, sin is original and in no other. Thus, by being one with the race, each man is sinful and possesses no good. Arminianism, therefore, was teaching a false doctrine.

The Nature of True Virtue

The Nature of True Virtue, the only treatise that is not in the form of a polemic, was published after his death, in 1736. This is the supreme application of the method that he learned at the beginning, "that truth consists in having perfect and complete ideas of things." The Notes on The Mind had said that if one had perfect ideas he should have all things in one view, because man reasons only "in consequence of the paucity of our ideas." The distinction which he emphasized throughout his life, that between the sensible and the speculative, is here vindicated. The book is not a reasoning²² about virtue, but rather a beholding it.

²⁰Perry Miller, op. cit., p. 237.

²¹Ibid., p. 280.

²²Ibid., p. 286.

True virtue is like the atom, a single insight. It is not attained by a quantitative extension of the design, for it is a difference in kind rather than in degree.

The greater part of the treatise is a tracing out of the many masquerades to which self-love can resort in the endless effort to simulate benevolence. All virtues in which a man loves others as an appendage to himself are called "secondary virtues," and operate exclusively within the scheme of the objective good.

Edwards again identified true virtue with the beautiful, and insisted that its primary root is love to God for Himself alone.²³ The Lockean clue which Edwards followed through the years and tested in the revival, led into a realism that Locke never dreamed of, into the affirmation that the beauty of holiness is one with the nature of the objective universe. Through both reflection and experience, Edwards reached and formulated the conclusion that the highest and most enduring aesthetic emotion is that which is called out, not by material beauty, but by holiness.²⁴

True virtue is a new quality of character. It consists in perfect disinterestedness, the ability to become a detached observer of facts and to regard all events with a completely

²³Alexander V.G. Allen, Jonathan Edwards (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1889), p. 314.

²⁴John DeWitt, "Jonathan Edwards; A Study," Princeton Theological Seminary Biblical and Theological Studies (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1912), p. 120.

dispassionate objectivity. It also consists in an adequate sense of proportion. There can be no true virtue without an adequate insight into the character of the world which is thoroughly intelligible. A love which cannot envisage the good of being in general, namely the whole of creation, is never truly virtuous. To do this there must be an understanding of the logic of event, because true love and rational accuracy are inseparable.²⁵

Edwards defined benevolence as "consent, propensity and union of heart to Being in general, that is immediately exercised in a general good will." Since every individual is related to the totality of Being, true virtue is the benevolence toward the whole system. In the Christian tradition, virtue consists in love. So he defines true virtue again, as the union of the individual heart in love with the system of being.²⁶ This true virtue is the crown of experience. It is that unique quality of character which marks the transformation of the natural man to the supernatural, the evidence of the true working of the Spirit of God in the human soul.

True Virtue is the weary voice of a man at the end of tragedy, with all passion spent. But it is all the greater because Edwards knew that, by the absolute standard therein declared, he himself was as culpable as any.

²⁵Joseph G. Haroutunian, "Jonathan Edwards: A Study in Godliness," Journal of Religion, XI (July, 1931), 418.

²⁶Joseph Blau, op. cit., p. 24.

God's Last End in The Creation

A companion treatise to True Virtue is the one entitled, God's Last End in The Creation, also written after 1750 but not published until 1786. The significance for the story of Jonathan Edwards' development is very small. He dealt with the speculative subject of why God made the world. What God wanted as the ultimate end of his creating the world, was to communicate His own infinite fulness of good. The Glory of God, the sum and substance of His attributes and perfections, is the last end of all things. Since it is the highest good of man to be cognizant of the glory of God, God has made possible the fulness of human happiness and bliss, which is holiness, by displaying his own fulness.

27

The History of The Work of Redemption

In 1757, Edwards answered the call to the presidency of the College at Princeton with this qualification: that he wanted to finish a work which he called a History of The Work of Redemption. This was to be divinity in the form of history. He died before the work was finished, but the previous lectures on the subject in 1739 were published in Edinburgh in 1786.

Following his sensational premise, history is what the mind must perceive in a fashion dictated by the mind itself.

²⁷Joseph G. Haroutunian, op. cit., p. 413.

This method, discovered from Locke, and used in his arguments about the atoms and the unity of the race, is the same now employed to show that man knows only his ideas and not the things themselves. This being true, then "pastness" is nothing but a mode of ideas. That which men call history is the Idea men have of the past, not the actual events which they never witnessed.

The doctrine of the cause is also important here. History is a collocation of atomic occurrences that must have their cause outside themselves, and by perceiving their coherence, man approaches the principle in which they are organized. However, from here Edwards reached the conclusion that even as the disposition of a man makes true virtue, it also makes the truth of history; a man sees as the truth of history only what he wills to prevail. However, "in order to see how a design is carried on, we must first know the design."²⁸

History, for Edwards, is a grand conception, a design, a chain of events within a scheme of causation. Above all else, it is a unit and all phases are but the several parts of one scheme. Successive events in different ages are parts of a continuous whole; the chain is never broken. This history includes all that God accomplishes toward the end of

²⁸Perry Miller, op. cit., p. 312.

salvation.²⁹ God's design in this work was to complete the glory of all the elect by Christ.

He intended to bring them to perfect excellency and beauty in his holy image, which is the proper beauty of spiritual beings; and to advance them to a glorious degree of honor, and raise them to an ineffable height of pleasure and joy.³⁰

In such a passage as this, his concept of excellency and virtue as the highest end of man, comes to the forefront.

History is a steady progress from the fall of Adam to Christ, then a reversal of direction with the coming of the Saviour, and then a finishing state, where things are brought to completion. In each phase there has been a constant rising and falling. Thus, a declension should be interpreted as a preparation for the next and greater exertion. In this treatment of retreat and advance, carried on by the prophets, Edwards is looking hopefully toward a new and a greater outpouring of the Spirit, one he believed would be that of the final day.³¹ He preached a very stark chiliasm and centered its fulfillment in New England.

After the millennium and the last apostasy, there will come the final judgment; then the world shall be destroyed. The agent used for this destruction is the very one which³² Edwards used in the Enfield sermon, that of fire.

²⁹Jonathan Edwards, A History of The Work of Redemption (New York: American Tract Society, n.d.), p. 16.

³⁰Ibid., p. 24.

³¹Ibid., pp. 330-35.

³²Ibid., p. 407.

This clerical aristocrat, in the name of a sensational and emotional apprehension of beauty proclaimed a final judgment, that does not arrive in time, but is every moment renewed. It is a judgment upon history, because history requires it and is helpless without it. In this sense, it is pronounced anew every moment, and is as much in this moment as in any hypothetical future.

³³Perry Miller, op. cit., p. 330.

CHAPTER X

CONCLUSION

The factors that influenced Jonathan Edwards in his thinking and development are, as has been seen, numerous, and then again, few. He was a man who had two "soul-shaking" experiences, and then, due to outside pressure, was forced to reveal what had transpired within him. Locke and Newton had worked their lasting effects upon his thought, but more important, this shaping influence was shaped and moulded by the conversion and pointing of his soul toward God.

Arminianism provided the immediate impetus to this Puritan trained pioneer, and so he came to the defence of the old doctrine, utilizing the influence of Locke and Newton, for he could little write without their influence being shown. This impetus was carried even further by the awakenings, and Edwards was forced to bring all of Locke and Newton to bear upon the problems of enthusiasm. Out of this emphasis he made religion a transforming individual experience, not just a religion of the head, but above all a religion of the heart. This was not a new thought, but an old one, re-defined and placed within the context of the eighteenth century. Edwards spoke, not for the cosmopolitans, but for the provincialism from which he came. He is the essence of the old Puritanism which took root in the soil, and one that knew no way of compromising with the things of the world.

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