

JONATHAN EDWARDS AND HIS UNDERSTANDING OF REVIVAL

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ABSTRACT. From an early age Jonathan Edwards became intellectually equipped for the task of defining theology of the revival movements of North America. As a revivalist Edwards came from a Calvinistic theological tradition and moved along the plane of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Puritan theology. Through his studies and meditations on God's Word Edwards realised that the great need of his time was for a change in the way the old doctrine of sovereignty needed to be understood. The realisation of this fact led him to produce an explicitly and consistently Calvinistic theology of revival. For Edwards revival times represented unusual and extraordinary times. In his eyes, revival is a glorious and wonderful working of God when the Spirit of God is poured out in a far greater and more glorious measure.

KEYWORDS: revival, theology, Calvinistic, religious controversies, evangelistic

Introduction

This paper provides the context for Edwards's formation as a theologian of revival movements. Our main intent here is to show that Edwards is concerned to advance a Calvinistic theology of revival which is also constrained by evangelistic warmth and zeal. His work aims to establish a theological position that would embrace both the mind and the affections. He saw the need for a balanced approach due to an earlier emphasis on divine sovereignty over against man's inability. It is important to stress here that Edwards's interest in religious revivals does not originate from his desire for success, but from the truths he discovered about revival as described in Scripture. He explains that there are two underlying causes of biblical revivals: prayer and the preaching of God's Word. True revivals are not the product of man's endeavours. They start with prayer, are accomplished by God's power and grace, and through the preaching of the gospel.

In order to strengthen our argument, we shall look at the language Edwards uses and in doing that we will see that all the terms used by him lead

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us to the conclusion that the origin of revival is in God, not in man's activities.

The Context of Edwards's Theology of Revival

Steeped in Reformed Tradition but Prepared to Move On

The number of sketches that provide information about Edwards's life and development as a theologian and preacher are abundant. From these we understand that there were various circumstances and events which contributed in great measure to Edwards's development as a theological thinker with respect to revival. Over the years scholars have endeavoured to underline in great detail the intellectual and spiritual abilities which shaped Edwards into one of 'the most acute early American philosophers and the most brilliant of all American theologians'. Despite the proliferation of biographical information which is available, it will benefit us to recollect, at least for the scope of this paper, just a few key events in Edwards's life. [Among some of the most notable ones we mention Foster (1962; orig. 1907: 47-61) where he describes Edwards's earlier labours and his intellectual abilities. A very brief, but very useful biographical sketch, is presented in Story (1994: 9-11). A more detailed biography is given by Murray (1987). And the latest new biography, from which I have taken this quote, is Marsden (2003: 1).]

On October 5, 1703 Jonathan Edwards was born at East Windsor, Connecticut, time when the New England churches were suffering both numerically and spiritually. These rigorously Calvinist churches had existed in America for more than a hundred years by the beginning of the 18th century. There was evidently a great lack of conversion experiences and it is believed that this deficiency was caused by continuous preaching of divine sovereignty over against man's inability. It was on this subject that Edwards was to become one of the most prolific writers.

Edwards received his early education at home from his father Timothy Edwards (1669-1758), pastor in East Windsor from his ordination in 1694 until his death. His mother was Esther Stoddard, the daughter of Solomon Stoddard, pastor of the church in Northampton and the most influential minister in the Connecticut Valley.

From an early age, Edwards far outstripped any of his contemporaries in his development for the work of a theologian. After receiving his education at home, in 1716 he began his studies at Yale from where, in 1720, he graduated at the age of seventeen. [When Edwards was only nine years old, he was a model of sanctity. Marsden shows that Edwards prayed secretly five times a day, spoke much of religion to other boys, and organized prayer meetings with them (Marsden 2003: 25ff).]

In late 1726, Edwards moved to Northampton where he was ordained in 1727, after serving as a colleague to Solomon Stoddard. Northampton was the place where his ministry experienced the full impact of the contemporary theological situation.

Conrad Cherry, who endeavours to correct some of the misrepresentations of previous work on Edwards, explains that while Edwards was writing and preaching for his day, he was deeply entangled in the religious controversies of that time (Cherry 1990: x-xii, 8). Most of these controversies were related in one way or another to the Great Awakening and were concerned with the conflicts between rationalism and emotionalism and the subtle influences of neonomianism and antinomianism. Through a series of sermons Edwards launched an impressive battle against these influences. [Edwards's fight against Arminianism commenced with his public lecture in Boston in the year 1731 when his theme was 'God Glorified in Man's Dependence'. Three years later the fight continued through a sermon, preached in his own church, about the doctrine of a 'Divine and Supernatural Light Immediately Imparted to the Soul by the Spirit of God'. But in the year 1734 Edwards preached a sermon, afterwards expanded into a treatise and published, which, in fact, initiated his first revival. The sermon was entitled 'Justification by Faith' and it was a direct attack on Arminianism. See Hart, Lucas, Nichols (2003: 14) and Ava Chamberlain's comments in her introduction in Edwards (*Works* 18, entry nos. 501-832: 2-4) regarding the Robert Breck affair and the First Church in Springfield which was largely responsible for the rise of the Arminianism controversy in 1736.]

Cherry takes seriously the task of explaining that the primary forces which helped Edwards battle against these influences were nurtured within a Calvinistic theological tradition. Agreeing with this Foster asserts that, loyal to the past, Edwards 'was profoundly attached to the Calvinistic system, and his first instinct was to restore it to its high place of influence' (Foster 1907: 50). Others have presented Edwards as 'a consistent preacher of Calvinism' (Gerstner 1991-1993: 2), a man saturated with the same visions that had caught up the imagination of both Calvin and the Puritans. [The origins of puritanism in New England go back to John Winthrop who, with a charter from Charles I in hand, set forth aboard the *Arbella*, on March 29, 1630, to find a holy commonwealth in New England. Puritanism in New England underwent a radical change in 1662 when the Half-Way Covenant was introduced, and enjoyed special success in Connecticut Valley, due in large part to the powerful influence of Solomon Stoddard. It was into this puritan New England that Jonathan Edwards was born. It was the central Puritan issue of conversion, and the validation of that experience, that was to occupy so much of his ministry and become the subject of his writings. Compare Brand (1991: 5-9). Also, Frank Lambert who, in assessing the con-

text in which the revival occurred, explains that colonial revivalists were influenced by seventeenth-century English Puritans and were Calvinists of the evangelical stripes (Lambert 1999: 27).]

When the latter group comes in view, Harry Stout draws our attention to a great number of scholars who maintained that a distinction needs to be drawn between Edwards and the Puritans. [For the full details of this argument see Stout (1988: 142-159). A detailed exposition on this issue is also presented in Walton (2002: 7-42).] The suggestion that Edwards fell into the camp of those who rejected the federal theology remained virtually unchallenged until Conrad Cherry's complete analysis of Edwards's thoughts on the covenant. [According to Perry Miller, Edwards initiated the evangelicals' rejection of federal theology. Due to the influence and authority of Perry Miller, not only through his work on Edwards in particular, but also on American puritanism in general, many scholars have tended to accept, apparently, without question, the thesis that Edwards represents a significant, if not radical, departure from his puritan heritage (Miller 1953; Walton 2002: 36).]

Stout maintains that studies from the last decade prior to his essay have produced assessments which point to the many ways in which Edwards's thought moved along the plane of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Puritan theology. Edwards's misrepresentation, explains Stout, is to be found in the use of sources. Sermons published by Edwards were not the best evidence to prove that he was a federal theologian, because these printed works were Sunday sermons that had as their central theme the great drama of salvation (Stout 1988: 144). The conclusion, therefore, is that Edwards 'was every bit the federal theologian that his Puritan predecessors were... Throughout his career as pastor and teacher he adhered exactly to the logic and tenets of the national covenant and reiterated them in exactly the same terms as did his predecessors in the New England pulpit' (Stout 1988: 143). It is important to grant Edwards this Calvinistic and Puritan heritage, because without it we will not understand him and his work correctly. This is borne out by Cherry when he points to Edwards's debt to the Reformation and demonstrates the ways in which this eighteenth-century divine moved beyond positions held by the sixteenth-century reformers (Cherry 1990: x-xii, 3-8). Edwards himself was more than willing to acknowledge the heritage of his New England forefathers, but, as Foster notes, 'his mind was too original and his studies too exact to permit him to remain where his fathers had been (Foster 1907: 50).

Thus, it becomes clear that Edwards has not allowed himself to remain a slave to his theological heritage. He knew well how to meet and debate abundant aspects of his Puritan tradition. At the same time, he can move forward in order to advance the interests of theology by bringing new light

to bear upon perennial concerns. [See Cherry (1990: 3, 4). See also Bernard K. Duffy's comment in his forward to Stephen Yarbrough's book, where he asserts emphatically that 'Edwards's life and works demonstrate the reach of human rationality' in Yarbrough and Adams (1993: xi, xii).]

Throughout his writings, we can easily trace both conformity to the theological tradition and advancement from the tendency of the previous century. For example, in dealing with the doctrine of Justification by Faith, explains Foster, Edwards's defence of imputation conforms to the traditional values of this doctrine, but the definition of faith and repentance marks a distinct advance upon the tone of the previous century. With respect to the reason for which faith should be made the condition of justification Edwards 'departs widely from the mechanical methods of Calvinistic scholasticism and reproduces the true spiritual atmosphere of the better days' (Foster 1907: 52-53).

Thus, the mentality of the age, as well as the experience of the churches, had reached the point where the old doctrine of sovereignty needed modification. More room was demanded for the activity of man. The great necessity of the time was conversions. Edwards saw what many did not see that the kind of conversion required was deep and pervading, a work in man's soul which is produced only through divine means.

In view of these circumstances, Edwards sensed that the churches needed the old doctrine of salvation by faith, salvation through spiritual union with God and through justification, and the sinner's free forgiveness through the infinite grace of God in Jesus Christ. Edwards recognised that need and enforced it with great power. The result was the renewal of what had almost ceased, of conversions, and a new awareness in the approach of the churches to the doctrine of new birth.

In conclusion, we believe that while Edwards was a Calvinist in his theology, he was also constrained by evangelistic warmth and zeal for revival. Story rightly remarks that his Calvinism and his concern for revival were inextricably intertwined, and they produced an explicitly and consistently Calvinistic theology of revival (Story 1994: 66). With the same conviction, Ava Chamberlain explains that 'in 1734-35 Edwards laid the foundation for his reputation both as a defender of Calvinism and as an evangelist', and that with the successive editions of *A Faithful Narrative* 'this reputation spread widely both in the colonies and abroad' (Edwards *Works* 18: 5).

Later, in the 1740s Edwards endeavoured to define a theological position that would embrace both the mind and the affections. In the attempt to establish this balance Edwards rejects the efforts of those who wanted to dismiss the widespread religious stirrings as the product of deluded imaginations and manipulative ministers—declaring instead that the revivals represented the genuine work of God's Spirit—and also expresses disapproval

for those driven by the awakenings to extreme ecstatic behaviour and censoriousness, calling rather for continued commitment to the principles of order and intellect. At a time when it seemed that the opposing parties of order and spirit had little in common, Edwards devoted sustained energy to bringing the two together, an effort especially evident in his treatise on the *Religious Affections* (Edwards *Works* 2).

The Origin of Edwards's Ideas on the Revival

General Considerations

Referring to the revival movement in America and at the emergence of revivalism in Colonial New England, Crawford explains that the origins of this movement lay in the years between the Restoration of the British monarchy in 1660 and the end of the Great Awakening in the 1740s (Crawford 1991: 4).

In Jonathan Edwards's day 'revival' was not a new concept in New England's towns and congregations. [Frank Lambert, in his introduction, asserts that in contrast to other revivalists in America and Great Britain, who heralded events in western Massachusetts as ushering in what they hailed as another Reformation, to Edwards the revival in Northampton was hardly unusual or noteworthy, because he could recall six earlier instances when his congregation had experienced 'revivals' of similar intensity with the ones happening in his time as a pastor in Northampton (Lambert 1999: 11).] Powerful displays of piety and knowledge could be seen from the beginning of a church settlement. Times such as these could be associated with the early years of a town's founding or the first year of a new pastorate. Describing his own town Edwards asserts:

The town of Northampton is of about 82 years standing, and has now about 200 families... Take the town in general, and so far as I can judge, they are as rational and understanding a people as most I have been acquainted with: many of them have been noted for religion, and particularly have been remarkable for their distinct knowledge in things that relate to heart religion and Christian experience, and their great regards thereto (Edwards *Works* 4: 145).

With regard to the ministers who had undertaken the pastoral role there from the time of the town's establishment Edwards observes:

I am the third minister that has been settled in the town: The Rev. Mr. Eleazar Mather, who was the first, was ordained in [July 1661 and died] in July 1669... The Rev. Mr. Stoddard, who succeeded him, came first to the town the November after his death, but was not ordained till September 11, 1672, and died February 11, 1728/9. So that he continued in the work of the ministry here, from his first coming to town, near sixty years. And as he was eminent and renowned for

his gifts and grace; so, he was blessed, from the beginning, with extraordinary success in his ministry in the conversions of many souls (Edwards *Works* 4: 145).

Nevertheless, by the start of the eighteenth century, Protestants had come to the realization that the Reformation as a period of more than usual activity of God's Spirit had come to an end. Reformed religion entered a period of decline. [For a fuller discussion about other issues related to the social context favourable to revivals not only in New England but also in Great Britain and Scotland see Crawford (1991: 6-15).]

In such circumstances, many evangelical leaders looked for signs of a renewal of the Spirit's activity and found themselves compelled to discover and devise new ways of sustaining and promoting piety. As the intellectual and spiritual leaders of their communities, they felt responsible to interpret social conditions, to judge the moral climate, to oppose prevailing evils, and to promote religion and virtue. The devices of these leaders influenced the revival's form, and, when the revivals appeared in strength, evangelical leaders seized on them as the solution which they had sought.

But is it right to say that Edwards was moved toward revival by looking at the state of affairs present in the churches and in society at large? This can constitute a partial answer, but in Edwards's case the interest in religious revival must come from a much better and more trustworthy source.

Edwards's Theory of a Revival-Driven History of Redemption

As usual for Edwards, he goes to Scripture to find his answers and motivations for revival. Even a cursory reading through his works unfolds the fact that the origin of his ideas on revival is located in the way he understood God's Word. Edwards believed that in the Bible, God has revealed a great plan of redemption. He understood that God's plan is fulfilled through a succession of spiritual revivals and gradual increase of divine light until the final defeat of all God's enemies and the full revival and eternal restoration of Christ's kingdom.

In 1739, on the eve of the Great Awakening, Jonathan Edwards made use of Stoddard's list of biblical revivals in a series of sermons at Northampton, published in 1774 as *A History of the Work of Redemption*. [See Edwards (*Works* 9: 113-528). Alternatively, there is another publication available with the same title from The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh 2003. For a very helpful summary of Jonathan Edwards's *History of Redemption*, see Crawford (1991: 132-138). An excellent analysis of this work is presented by (McClymond 1998: 65-79). The same author addresses the question what might have been the outcome for Edwards's life and legacy if he would have fulfilled his ambitious plans to write a comprehensive *History of the Work of Redemption* in McClymond (2003: 16-39).]

He took these biblical revivals and synthesized them into a theory of a revival-driven history of redemption. Adding to and completing Stoddard's enumeration, Edwards discovers revivals of religion in Scripture and then extrapolates them into his contemporary situation. Within this system, the millennium becomes an important concept for Edwards. The same cannot be asserted with respect to his predecessor (Crawford 1991: 134). While Stoddard does not place revivals in an eschatological context, Edwards perceived the millennium as the ultimate product of the revival of religion. For Edwards the millennium will gather speed through these 'successive works' of revivals of religion. There will be, of course, periodic setbacks during the history of God's people, but despite these setbacks, God will protect the church 'against all assaults of her enemies', and will carry her 'safely through all the changes of the world' until the whole world would acknowledge God's rule (Edwards *Works* 9: 113, 122).

Thus, we see that in placing revivals at the centre of Christian history, Edwards built on the foundation laid by Solomon Stoddard, but moved on from him and developed a different assessment for the revivals and the millennium.

Our next point of interest is to observe the way in which Edwards understood the cause of the biblical revival and its effects.

Edwards's Belief that Revival's Core is in the Duty of Prayer and the Preaching of the Word

From the following analysis, it will become evident that at the core of Edwards's concept of revival stand two things: prayer and the preaching of God's Word. With regard to the first, Edwards understood that the first religious revival in human history occurred shortly after the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the garden, in the days of Enos. At the outset of his sermon on Isaiah 51:8, he says: 'The first remarkable pouring out of the Spirit through Christ that ever was... was in the days of Enos'. Edwards based this remarkable assertion on Genesis 4:26, 'Then began men to call upon the name of the Lord'. Edwards maintains that there can only be one meaning to these words, that 'prayer is a duty of natural religion' (Edwards *Works* 9: 141).

This, continues Edwards, shows that 'there was something new in the visible church of God with respect to the duty of prayer, or calling on the name of the [Lord], that there was a great addition to the performance of this duty, and that in some respect or other it was carried far beyond what-ever it had been before, which must be the consequence of a remarkable pouring out of the Spirit of God'. But prayer is an activity which God's people perform together 'in assemblies'. The use of the verb *began* in this scriptural passage implies that 'this was the first remarkable season of this nature that ever was; it was the beginning or the first of such a kind of work

of God'. Edwards argues that an increase in prayer is associated with all the revivals recorded in Scripture, with the prophecies of the outpouring of the Spirit in the last days, and with all the revivals contemporaries know by experience. 'We see by experience that a remarkable pouring out of the Spirit of God is always attended with... a great increase of the performance of the duty of prayer' (Edwards *Works* 9: 2).

Thus, Edwards identified the Northampton revivals and harvests with the very first revival. The revival at the time of Enos, by Edwards's description, was of the same nature as all subsequent revivals: 'There had [been] a saving work of God in the hearts of some before, but now God was pleased to grant a more large effusion of his Spirit for the bringing in a harvest of souls to Christ' (Edwards *Works* 9: 141-143). The revival in the days of Enos was but the first in a long series of revivals. 'And time after time, when religion seemed to be almost gone and it was come to the last extremity, then God granted a revival and sent some angel or prophet or rose up some eminent person to be an instrument of their reformation' (Edwards *Works* 9: 95).

As for the second element that stands at the core of Edwards's concept of revival, namely the preaching of God's Word, we must proceed through the present writing and arrive at the sequence when Edwards described the revival following the Babylonian Captivity. When Ezra came up from Babylon, 'he set himself to reform the vices and corruptions he found among the Jews and had great success in it'. That 'success' is clearly identified as an effect of Ezra's preaching of the Word of God: 'And the people... with great zeal and earnestness and reverence, gathered themselves together to hear the word of God read by Ezra, and gave diligent attention while Ezra and the other priests preached to 'em by reading and explaining the law'. After Ezra preached the Word 'there appeared a very general and great mourning of the congregation of Israel for their sins... and a great and general reformation' (Edwards *Works* 9: 265).

As the work of redemption, brought about through the sequence of revivals, continues down through the history of the church and enters the time of Christ's public ministry, Edwards sees that this is accomplished by one more pre-Christian revival, the 'very remarkable outpouring of the Spirit of God' that attended the preaching of John the Baptist. John 'came preaching repentance for the remission of sins' (Edwards *Works* 9: 314).

After Christ's resurrection, the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost began the process of Christ's coming in a spiritual manner to set up his kingdom. Starting with the Jews in Jerusalem, the Spirit was poured out on the Samaritans 'through the preaching of Philip', and then, chiefly through the ministry and preaching of the apostle Paul, on the Gentiles (Edwards *Works* 9: 378-379).

The pouring out of the Spirit will help the spread of religion across the globe. The Gospel will be preached in every language and multitudes from every nation will be converted. For Edwards, the spread of the Gospel across the earth will continue until the millennium. The millennium comes about in the following way:

Some shall be converted and be the means of others' conversion; God's Spirit shall be poured out, first to raise up instruments, and then those instruments shall be improved and succeeded. And doubtless one nation shall be enlightened and converted after another, one false religion and false way of worship exploded after another (Edwards *Works* 9: 459).

Seeing the success of the Gospel, Satan will put up a mighty resistance with the help of his heathen forces. 'We know not particularly in what manner this opposition shall be made. 'Tis represented as a battle...' (Edwards *Works* 9: 463). Important to observe is that 'Christ and his church shall obtain in this battle a complete and entire victory over their enemies' (Edwards *Works* 9: 356, 464). Satan will be bound for a thousand years. During the millennium, the church will enjoy peace, holiness, and prosperity. At the end of a thousand years, Satan will be loosed again, and great apostasy will threaten the church. This apostasy culminates with Christ's return to judge the world. History, and revivals, will end. The work of redemption will be fulfilled (Edwards *Works* 9: 356, 501).

In conclusion, Edwards's analysis of the work of revival is clear: the work of revival starts with prayer, is accomplished by God's power and grace, by the preaching of the gospel, and the use of the ordinary means of grace, until it culminates in glory through the Second Coming, the Last Judgment.

The Meaning of Revival for Edwards and His Involvement in the Revival

The Importance of Understanding the Language

In what follows we shall consider what precisely Edwards meant when he used the term 'revival' and how he became involved in it. As we examine the situation today, we realize that revival has in most cases a totally different meaning. For many people in the world today 'revival' usually consists of a series of planned evangelistic services for preaching, prayer, and hymn singing intended to invigorate the religious commitment of the members of the church and to promote conversions within the congregation. Such a concept would have been totally foreign to Jonathan Edwards and to the people of his day. Therefore, in discussing a concept with such widely different meanings, vocabulary and definitions become immediately important, because they affect discernment and, ultimately, our understanding of the concept.

Discussing the language evangelicals use to talk about revivals, Crawford explains that 'by developing a vocabulary to describe revivals, the evangelical clergy made it easier for themselves as well as the laity to recognize revivals and revival-related phenomena'. Crawford's theory maintains that the way we understand what is going on naturally influences the way we react to or participate in the phenomena perceived. Thus, the language available to describe phenomena may affect the very phenomena. This is what happened in the evolution of the religious revival. What people thought a revival of religion was supposed to be affected the form the revivals took (Crawford 1991: 5).

Crawford notes that at the time of the Connecticut Valley awakenings, a technical term for these occurrences had not yet emerged. Even though the ministers were seeking to promote a revival of religion, they did not refer to seasons of religious revival as 'revivals'. Instead they resorted to descriptive phrases, or to metaphors such as 'seasons of grace', and 'harvest of souls'. Crawford's main point is to show that it was the New England revivalists who publicized the concept of a season of the outpouring of grace. Crawford explains that the idea of a communal season of grace can be located without much trouble in the writings of the Connecticut Valley revivalists in the 1720s and 1730s, in the reports of New England's earthquake of 1727, and in several the published New England jeremiads since the late seventeenth century (Crawford 1991: 123-124).

Iain Murray, in his introduction, also explains that in its first phase (1620-1858) the subject of revival was understood to refer to some special seasons through which God does, in a remarkable manner, revive religion among his people. Murray continues to show, using Jonathan Edwards's phrase, that from the time of the first settlers in New England, the phenomenon of revival was regarded as a 'surprising work of God' (Murray 1994: xvii).

The Connecticut Valley revival tradition came to a full expression with the revival in Northampton and some thirty other valley towns in 1734-1735 when Edwards recognized the extraordinary character of the awakening. Edwards became directly involved in revival activities in the fall of 1734. Following his responses through the series of sermons already mentioned, preached against the threats of Arminianism and antinomianism in his own parish, Edwards soon watched the wonderful way in which God's Spirit brought revival to the Connecticut Valley. Throughout the next twelve years, nearly everything that Edwards preached and wrote bore relation in some way to what, by 1740, had become 'The GREAT Awakening' (Hart, Lucas, Nichols 2003: 14).

Having experienced a series of revivals in his own church in Northampton, Massachusetts, between 1734 and 1742, Edwards was well qualified to

write on revival. He produced a number of works on this subject. *A Faithful Narrative* (1737) (Edwards *Works* 4: 144-211) was the first extended account and analysis of a season of religious awakening in a congregation. In that work, Edwards's intention was to report objectively, scientifically, his observations on the revival. He achieved his aim so effectively that it has been observed that the work, by establishing expectations, became a blueprint for future revivals in America and Great Britain alike (Edwards *Works* 4: 26-27) Edwards's second and the most extensive work on revival was the treatise *Some Thoughts Concerning the Revival* (1743) (Edwards *Works* 4: 289-538), followed by the later treatise concerning *Religious Affections* (1746) to which we have already referred.

In his narrative, Edwards used the phrase 'general awakening' several times to refer to the renewal of concern for salvation in the community at large and not only perfected a new genre of religious literature, the revival narrative, but also classified the revival as a unique phenomenon whose characteristics were unmistakable (Crawford 1991: 124).

In *Thoughts on the Revival* much of Edwards's focus is on either defending the revival as a genuine work of God, over against those who would disparage it as a mere enthusiasm or guarding the revival against the excesses to which some went in seeking to promote it. In *Thoughts on the Revival*, Edwards uses a variety of terms to describe the work of revival. In the Preface, he calls it 'the wonderful work of God that has of late been carried on in the land' and twice refers to it as 'an extraordinary season' (Edwards *Works* 4: 291-292). In the heading of Part I, he uses two typical phrases, 'the extraordinary work' and 'a glorious work of God'. In the opening words of Part I, it is 'the great religious operation on the minds of men' (Edwards *Works* 4: 293). Later in Part I, revival becomes 'a most glorious and remarkable outpouring of the Spirit' and 'a very great outpouring of the Spirit of God' (Edwards *Works* 4: 320); it is a 'great revival of religion' and 'a glorious work of his grace' (Edwards *Works* 4: 324). Similar descriptions continue to define revival towards the end of Part I where we see phrases such as 'a very glorious and wonderful' and 'exceeding glorious work' (Edwards *Works* 4: 346).

In Part II, revival consists of 'peculiar manifestations of his glory' (Edwards *Works* 4: 348) and a 'great dispensation of his providence'. In this work:

God... does remarkably set his king on his holy hill of Zion, and Christ in an extraordinary manner comes down from heaven to the earth and appears in his visible church in a great work of salvation for his people (Edwards *Works* 4: 349).

Revival is a time 'when God is... establishing his [Christ's] dominion or showing forth his regal glory from thence [Zion]' (Edwards *Works* 4: 370).

According to Edwards, through revival God determines to glorify his Son and advance his kingdom in a particularly striking, effective and visible manner. It is a time when ‘Christ... so wonderfully manifested his glory in this mighty work of his Spirit’:

...so great and wonderful a work of God’s Spirit, is a work wherein God’s hand is remarkably lifted up, and wherein he displays his majesty, and shows great favour and mercy to sinners, in the glorious opportunity he gives them (Edwards *Works* 4: 352).

Taking these various descriptions of revival together, then, what do they tell us of Edwards’s understanding of the nature of revival? Firstly, we should note that Edwards does indeed see times of revival as unusual or extraordinary times. It is quite legitimate, in Edwards’s view, to separate periods in which God is working according to his normal means and times of unusual activity on God’s part. These latter are times of revival.

The word *extraordinary* appears thirty times in *A Faithful Narrative*, and *remarkable*, *wonderful*, and *amazing* often. ‘This seems to have been a very extraordinary dispensation of Providence’, Edwards wrote that ‘God has in many respects gone out of, and much beyond his usual and ordinary way’ (Edwards *Works* 4: 157).

Edwards found the awakening extraordinary in six respects: it was not restricted to any one category of person; it affected a great number of people; it touched the elderly and the very young, not just young adults; the progress of conversion with many was unusually rapid; the emotional intensity was unusually strong; and it reached so many towns in such a brief span of time (Edwards *Works* 4: 157-159).

Yet, Edwards argues that the awakening was something neither new nor unaccountable. In fact, in comparison with ‘former stirrings of this nature’, he found it extraordinary only in degree. Comparing the awakening with the spiritual harvest of Solomon Stoddard, he wrote:

The work that has now been wrought on souls is evidently the same that was wrought in my venerable predecessor’s days; as I have had abundant opportunity to know, having been in the ministry here two years with him, and so conversed with a considerable number that my grandfather thought to be savingly converted in that time... The work is of the same nature, and has not been attended with any extraordinary circumstances, excepting such as are analogous to the extraordinary degree of it before described (Edwards *Works* 4: 190).

But what is it that distinguishes times of revival from other times, in Edwards’s view? There are three aspects that must be noted.

Firstly, the work of revival is, in Edwards’s eyes, very glorious and wonderful. This note is inescapable, throughout his writings. He repeats it fre-

quently. Other times are ordinary times. Revival times are great and glorious times.

Secondly, revival times are characterised by a great outpouring of the Spirit of God. For Edwards, as generally for those of reformed persuasion, revival was an outpouring of the Spirit of God. [For a brief and helpful discussion of what revival meant for Edwards and other reformed theologians see Story (1994: 35-65).] He has argued that these local outpourings of the Spirit were forerunners of the revivals that would characterize the spread of the millennial kingdom. The Spirit is always at work, but in times of revival he is poured out in a far greater and more glorious measure.

Thirdly, a time of revival is a time of glorious advance of the kingdom of Christ. Christ is set forth as King, in a notable manner. His kingdom is always advancing, but in revival times it advances in a particularly glorious and wonderful way.

The Nature and the Effects of Revival as Considered by Edwards

Revival Is a Divine and Supernatural Work of God

We turn now to analyse the nature and the effects of revival as considered by Edwards. The first thing we assert in this respect is that Edwards describes revivals in terms of 'the work of God, not the work of man'. For Edwards, this is one point on which he is very clear. He continues: 'Its beginning has not been of man's power or device, and its being carried on depends not on our strength or wisdom' (Edwards *Works* 4: 384). This divine and mysterious plan is administered in God's own time through human instrumentality, in order to reveal more fully God's sovereignty and glory.

This leads us to assert that according to Edwards's definition, the nature of revival is divine and supernatural in character; it is 'the late wonderful work of God' as it comes upon the people when and how God wills it to come.

This supernatural nature of the revival needs to be underlined for those who have rejected Edwards on this view, claiming for the revival sociological explanations. [Allan Story Jr. discusses Perry Miller's and Richard L. Bushman's social explanations for the revival as against Edwards's definition of the possibility of supernatural explanation. While these social influences upon the revival need to be acknowledged, revival cannot be catalogued as a purely social movement, explains Story quoting Edwin Gaustad's response to these prominent sociological explanations (Story 1994: 43-46).]

Secondly, revivals are characterized as the extraordinary work of God that knows no boundaries. Referring to the extraordinary character of the revival, Edwards had this to say about its pervasiveness: 'The work in this town and some others about us, has been extraordinary on account of the universality of it, affecting all sorts, sober and vicious, high and low, rich

and poor, wise and unwise' (Edwards *Works* 4: 157). Thus, Edwards clearly proves that revival knew no boundaries, social or geographical, that it was both urban and rural, and that it reached both lower and upper classes.

Thirdly, revival comes as a time when the spiritual vitality of the people is restored. It usually comes after times of decline, times of unhappiness, selfishness, lack of interest in spiritual things, and a turning away from God. Such times were often visited with a 'very sudden and awful death' of young people. These unhappy events were followed by revivals whose nature was to produce love toward God, great joy, and a spiritual disposition (Edwards *Works* 4: 158). Commenting on this issue, Westra identifies this sequence and calls it a revival-declension-revival pattern that is integral to God's design for redemption. This pattern was seen, says Westra, by Edwards as uncertain in its timing and intervals yet utterly reliable in its sequence (Westra 1999: 138).

Edwards would conclude that the duration of such a gracious shower varies according to God's secret plan, and those who scoff at the communal transformation are guilty of grieving the Spirit. Before Jonathan Edwards no one had brought this commonly held assumption together into a clear exposition.

Concluding Remarks

From an early age Jonathan Edwards became intellectually equipped for the task of defining theology of the revival movements of North America. As a revivalist Edwards came from a Calvinistic theological tradition and moved along the plane of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Puritan theology. Through his studies and meditations on God's Word Edwards realised that the great need of his time was for a change in the way the old doctrine of sovereignty needed to be understood. The realisation of this fact led him to produce an explicitly and consistently Calvinistic theology of revival. For Edwards revival times represented unusual and extraordinary times. In his eyes, revival is a glorious and wonderful working of God when the Spirit of God is poured out in a far greater and more glorious measure.

Jonathan Edwards discovers the origin of revival movements in biblical history. He goes to Scripture and discovers that the doctrine which the Bible presents is that 'the Work of Redemption is a work that God carries on from the fall of man to the end of the world' (Edwards *Works* 9: 116). The work of redemption is one united work 'brought about by various steps, one step in each age and another in another' (Edwards *Works* 9: 121-122).

Through the study of Scripture Edwards discovers that from the beginning prayer and the preaching of God's Word are two fundamental causes of revival. If people desire revival, then they need to learn 'to call upon the name of the Lord' as in Enos's time. The church needs to experience an

increase in its prayer life as prayer has been associated with all the revivals recorded in Scripture. The church also needs to use the preaching of God's Word as a means to promote revivals. But it must always remember that revival is the work of God and is administered in God's own time

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