March 27, 1985

JONATHAN Edwards AND NEW ENGLAND THEOLOGY

Prayer
Scripture: I Peter 1:8,9
Hymn: 458 "O God of Bethel"

The sermons of George Whitefield in Northampton in October, 1740, brought a great renewal of the revival. It spread from Northampton to the towns of the surrounding territory. Jonathan Edwards, Eleazer Wheelock and Joseph Bellamy became for a time itinerant evangelists. They were joined by other successful revivalist preachers. The preaching of these revivalists was accompanied by dramatic physical demonstrations: strong men fell into ecstatic trances, women wept hysterically. Between December, 1740 and March, 1741, the great revival in New England was at its height. When Whitefield left New England in the fall of 1740 he was the great hero of the revival. Whitefield had urged Gilbert Tennent to continue the great work and from December 13, 1740 until March 3, 1741 Tennent preached hell fire and damnation throughout New England with results that almost equalled those of Whitefield. The emotional extremes of the revival under his preaching and his harsh criticisms of the clergy began to arouse a strong reaction against him and against the revivals in general. On March 8, 1740 at Nottingham, Pennsylvania, Tennent, before coming to New England, had preached his famous sermon on "The Danger of an Unconverted Ministry" that caused a violent rupture among the Presbyterians. Before the year was out the sermon was published and widely circulated. At the meeting of the Presbyterian Synod of Philadelphia in 1741 the revivalist group was expelled. They formed the rival Synod of New York. The split among the Presbyterians continued for seventeen years. After much bitterness it was finally healed in 1758. The antirevivalist party had greatly declined and the triumphant revivalists had become more conciliatory in spirit. The printed version of Tennent's sermon aroused strong feelings in New England.

Whitefield's Journals that were published and circulated in 1741 with strong criticisms of Harvard and Yale and of the clergy of New England provoked further reaction against the revivalists. The fanatical and emotional preaching of James Davenport in Connecticut in the summer of 1741 and again in Connecticut and Massachusetts in the summer of 1742 that led to his being charged with insanity and with his being banished from both colonies strengthened the hands of those opposed to the revivals.

One of the high points of the revivals was Jonathan Edwards' sermon preached at Enfield, Connecticut, in July, 1741. It was entitled "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." His text was Deuteronomy 32:35, "Their foot shall slide in due time." The vengeance of God that had fallen on the wicked unbelieving Israelites was ready to fall on the sinners of New England. Their feet too would slide. "The pit is prepared; the fire is made ready; the furnace is now hot; ready to receive them; the flames do now rage and glow." The congregation was so gripped by the sense of sin and fear of doom that hysteria reigned; women screamed and fainted. Edwards had to call for silence before he could complete his sermon.

It is only fair to add that this was not typical of Edwards' preaching. Edwards could powerfully portray the terror of the Lord. Of the more than five hundred sermons that survive only a small proportion are terrifying sermons.
Usually his sermons were very carefully prepared and read in a quiet-spoken, serious manner. He dwelt more on the reality of God, his infinite love and pity, and man's duty to love and obey.

A mighty storm of protest against the revivals broke in 1741 and filled New England with bitter theological controversies that split the churches into two warring camps. Those who opposed the revivals were called the "Old Lights." They were led by Charles Chauncy, the pastor of the First Church of Boston. From his pulpit in 1742 in a sermon entitled "Enthusiasm Described and Cautioned Against," he blasted the revivals. Those who favored and encouraged the revivals were called "New Lights." Jonathan Edwards of Northampton was their leader and chief spokesman. At Yale's commencement exercises in 1741, Edwards delivered an address entitled, "The Distinguishing Marks of the Spirit of God, Applied to that uncommon Operation that has lately appeared in the Minds of many of the People in New England: With a Particular Consideration of the extra-ordinary Circumstances with which this work is attended." In the address he gave an exegesis of I John 4. He made a careful survey of the revivals and the manifestations that were arousing so much criticism. He granted that there might be some who had been saved without the apparent bodily effects and that in some cases the physical manifestations might be demonic. He maintained that for the most part the revivals had been the work of the Holy Spirit. The conclusion and climax of the address was, "We must throw by our Bibles, and give up revealed religion; if this be not in general the work of God." Chauncy's sermon of 1742 was a general attack on all revivalists but in particular an answer to Edwards.

In 1742 a bitter pamphlet war raged between Edwards and Thomas Clap, Rector of Yale College. Clap published a statement that Edwards had confided to him that Whitefield in 1740 had told Edwards that he planned to bring over British clergymen to replace some of the unconverted American ministers. Edwards replied in print denying that any such conversations had taken place. Both civil and religious authorities and also laymen were enraged by the war of pamphlets.

While Edwards was away from Northampton in 1742, Samuel Buel continued the revival in Edward's Northampton church with great force. His preaching moved the people to ecstasies, faintings, cryings out, leapings for joy. One of those most moved to "floods of tears," and to extreme manifestations was Sarah Edwards, the refined wife of Jonathan Edwards. So extreme were some of her ecstasies that some of the congregation feared for her life.

To Edwards it was clear that the Holy Spirit had worked in Northampton with unusual power. In 1743 he declared, "I suppose the town has never been in no measure so free from vice—for any long time together—for these sixty years, as it has this nine years past." All over New England there were revivalists who testified to the great moral changes for the better. In 1741 Benjamin Colman speaking of Boston declared that "the very face of the town seems to be altered." A New England pamphlet pictured the revivals as "Christ riding in his chariot of salvation" and declared that New England had become God's holy city. Taverns were empty, dancing schools were closing, and profanity had ceased. Joseph Sewall of Old South Church of Boston described the effects of the revivals:

God is pleas'd to pour out his Spirit upon his People, and then his Works of Grace are as the Light which goeth forth. Many ask the Way to Zion, with their Faces thitherward, and not a few declare God's Works of Grace
towards them with rejoicing. Convictions and Conversions become more frequent and apparent....Persons that were before quietly in their Sins and unconcerned, are so awakened that they can't stifle their Convictions nor conceal their Distress....

Thomas Prince, the assistant pastor of Old South Church of Boston reported:

In this year 1741, the very face of the town seemed to be strangely altered. Some, who had not been here since the fall before, have told me their great surprise at the change in the general look and carriage of people, as soon as they landed. Even the negroes and boys in the streets surprisingly left their usual rudeness....And one of our worthy gentlemen expressing his wonder at the remarkable change, informed me, that whereas he used with others on Saturday evenings to visit the taverns, in order to clear them of town inhabitants, they were wont to find many there, and meet with trouble to get them away; but now, having gone at those seasons again, he found them empty of all but lodgers.

Samuel Finley expressed the conviction of the revivalists in a sermon, "Thirst Triumphant and Satan Raging." Revivalists confidently pointed to the great number of converts added to the churches. It was estimated that out of a population of some 300,000, between twenty-five and fifty thousand converts were added to the churches. Benjamin Trumbull in his History of Connecticut, published in 1818, estimated that in Connecticut alone between thirty and forty thousand had been added to the churches.

Edwards, keenly aware of the growing hostility between Old Lights and New Lights and of the fact that churches were splitting over the revivals, sought to defend the revivals before the whole world in a book entitled Some Thoughts Concerning the Present Revival of Religion in New-England, published in 1742.

Charles Chauncy of the First Church of Boston answered Edwards in 1743 in his Seasonable Thoughts on the State of Religion in New-England. He denounced the revivals as a resurgence of antinomian and enthusiastic heresies that had plagued the Puritans in the seventeenth century. With great diligence from all over New England he collected reports of emotional extremes that discredited the revivals. He bitterly denounced Whitefield, Tennent, and Davenport for arousing unhealthy passions. For Chauncy the chief issue between Old Lights and New Lights was an intellectual issue which he stated as "There is the Religion of the Understanding and Judgment, and Will, as well as of the Affections; and if little Account is made of the former, while great stress is laid upon the latter, it can't be but People should run into Disorders."

A religious civil war raged throughout New England that produced a flood of pamphlets from both sides. Special blame was heaped on Whitefield. The appearance of the fourth installment of his Journal called forth a pamphlet typical of the times, The Trial of Mr. Whitefield.

In 1742 the General Assembly of Connecticut passed an "Act for regulating abuses and correcting disorders in Ecclesiastical Affairs." In 1743, with churches splitting over the revivals and with revivalists withdrawing from
the churches that opposed the revivals and forming "Separated Churches", the General Consociation of the Ministers of Connecticut passed a motion against itinerant ministers. Later that year the General Assembly passed a law forbidding itinerating. In 1744 two students were expelled from Yale for attending a "Separatist" meeting.

In May, 1743, the General Convention of Congregational Ministers in Massachusetts adopted a "Testimony" against "Errors in Doctrine and Disorders in Practice." They termed Antinomian and Familistical a number of errors contrary to the pure doctrines of the gospel-- all errors that they attributed to the revivalists. They specifically condemned itinerating, the practice of uneducated persons taking on themselves the evangelistic ministry, the assuming of the prerogatives of God to judge others, the contention that "none are converted but such as know they are converted and the time when," that sanctification is no evidence of justification, and the confusions and tumults attending the revivals. The "Testimony" was signed by thirty-eight ministers.

On July 7, 1743, in Boston, the revivalist ministers held another convention and approved a "Testimony" praising the revivals as a great work of God wrought in New England. One hundred-thirteen ministers from Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Maine, and Connecticut signed this "Testimony."

When Whitefield returned to America in 1744 he found the churches of the Old Lights closed to him. Throughout this campaign that lasted until the spring of 1748 he was welcome only in New Light Churches. On the earlier tour of 1740-41 he had been warmly welcomed at Harvard and after his departure the Overseers of Harvard had set aside a special day of thanksgiving for the beneficent effects of his ministry. When he returned in 1744 the doors of Harvard were closed to him and the faculty had issued a strong statement against him. The Yale faculty had issued a blistering attack on his message, his methods, and his character. On Whitefield's last three visits, beginning in 1754, 1764, and 1770, large crowds came to hear him but he was strongly opposed by Old Light Churches.

As the theological war raged the Old Lights moved in a liberal theological direction that emphasized the use of "human means" in salvation. An attack on the old Calvinistic doctrines increased as Arminian views spread. Arminian books by English writers became popular among the Old Lights who more and more were considered theological liberals. A very popular and influential work was the attack on the five points of Calvinism by the Anglican clergyman, Daniel Whitby. Another very popular work was by a Presbyterian, John Taylor, who attacked the idea of Adamic sin and the idea of a limited atonement. These ideas spread especially in and around Boston. Harvard graduates were known for their Liberal Theology. The liberal ministers of eastern Massachusetts began to turn out their own Arminian works. Experience Mayhew in 1744 published his Grace Defended, advocating the use of means of grace in obtaining pardoning grace. A young minister, Lemuel Briant, created a furor when he published in 1749 a sermon entitled, "The Absurdity and Blasphemy of Depreciating Moral Virtue." The doctrinal ferment would finally result, following the American Revolution, in the splits in the Congregational Church that produced the Universalist and Unitarian Churches.

Jonathan Edwards was the leader of those opposing the liberal school. He was the champion of the Calvinists who dominated central and western Massachusetts. More and more he found himself embattled on every side.
Gradually he had moved in the direction of assigning a more important place to human actions. He soon found himself bitterly attacked by the rigid Calvinists. He also had growing doubts about the Half-Way Covenant and the practice of admitting the unconverted to the Lord's Supper as a means of grace. A growing number in his Northampton congregation looked on his wavering at these points as betraying his Grandfather Stoddard.

By 1744 the revival at Northampton had come to a complete halt. Between 1744 and 1748 not a single addition was made to the Northampton church. Edwards described his congregation as utterly dead. Underneath the apparent deadness was a growing criticism and resentment of the minister.

A TREATISE CONCERNING RELIGIOUS AFFECTIONS (1746)

Edwards had not lost interest in defending the revivals. His definitive answer to Chauncy was his A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections that he published in 1746. It has been described as Edward's masterpiece and one of America's most profound inquiries into the nature of religious experience. It was Edward's answer to the question, "What is true religion?" For Edwards "true religion in great part consists in holy affections." The "affections" consist of emotions, passions, the will. The "affections" are the part of the person that moves him from neutrality or mere assent and inclines his heart to either possess or reject something. Love for Edwards was the first, the chief, and the fountain of all the affections. Edwards listed and elaborated on twelve signs of genuine religious affections:

1. True spiritual affections arise from those influences that operate on the heart which are spiritual, supernatural and divine.

2. The first and objective ground of such affections is the transcendently excellent and amiable nature of divine things, as they are in themselves; they bear no relation to self-interest.

3. Those affections are truly holy that are primarily founded on the loveliness of the moral excellency of divine things.

4. True gracious affections arise from the mind's being enlightened, rightly and spiritually to understand or apprehend divine things.

5. Truly gracious affections are attended with a reasonable and spiritual conviction of the judgment, of the reality and certainty of divine things.

6. Gracious affections are attended with evangelical humiliation.

7. Gracious affections are attended with a change of nature.

8. Truly gracious affections differ from affections that are false and delusive, in that they tend to, and are attended with the lamblike, dovelike spirit and temper of Jesus Christ; they naturally beget and promote such a spirit of love, meekness, quietness, forgiveness and mercy, as appeared in Christ.

9. Gracious affections soften the heart, and are attended and followed with a Christian tenderness of spirit.
10. Truly gracious and holy affections have a beautiful symmetry and proportion.

11. Gracious affections are distinguished by the fact that the higher they are raised, the more is a spiritual appetite and longing of soul after spiritual attainments, increased.

12. Gracious and holy affections have their exercise and fruit in Christian practice.

Edwards insisted that authority can be based only on the Bible. People should not look to personal experience as the authority of revelation. He feared the kind of mysticism held by the Society of Friends. The devil may delude men into thinking that an outburst of exuberance is a special revelation. The experience that comes to the believer at conversion is not inspiration but illumination. Illumination gives no new truth; it only gives meaning to truth already contained in the Scriptures. Emotion has a place in religion if it is born of the sincere joy which comes through illumination of the Scriptures.

JONATHAN EDWARDS AND DAVID BRAINERD

One of the great gains of the Great Awakening was a renewal of interest in mission work among the Indians. The most successful and most famous of the Indian missionaries of the Great Awakening was David Brainerd (1718-1747). He was converted in one of the revivals. In 1739, shortly after his conversion, he enrolled in Yale College to study for the ministry. He became the leader in his class and won high scholastic honors. He was an ardent supporter of the revivals at a time when Yale was opposing the revivals. One day he indiscreetly remarked to some fellow students that one of the tutors was as "destitute of grace as this chair." When the administration learned of the remark in 1742 he was expelled from the college. He was also charged with attending a "Separatist" meeting. Some of the revivalist ministers strongly protested the action of the college but Yale refused to readmit Brainerd.

Later that year (1742) he was licensed to preach in the Congregational Church and under the auspices of the Society for Propagating Christian Knowledge of Scotland he was sent as a missionary to the Indians living between Stockbridge and Albany. They were so few in number that he soon persuaded them to move to Stockbridge where Sergeant was the missionary. In 1744 he was ordained by the Presbytery of New York and began work with the Indians in Pennsylvania and New Jersey. He spent a year among the Indians at the forks of the Delaware in Pennsylvania. He made two journeys to the Susquehanna River. His most promising mission was at Crosswicks, near Trenton, New Jersey. More than 130 Indians were baptized the first year. With help from the Scottish Society and the Presbyterian churches of the area he began a new mission at Cranbury, fifteen miles to the north. He founded a church and an industrial school. He made another tour through the Susquehanna Valley.

Brainerd had become engaged to Jerusha Edwards, the unusually religious daughter of Jonathan Edwards. He had suffered from attacks of tuberculosis that had begun during his college days. In the summer of 1747 he became too weak to continue his work. The Edwards took him into their home in the hope that Jerusha could nurse him back to health. He won the hearts of the whole
family and made a great impression on Jonathan Edwards. In the fall of 1747 Brainerd died at the age of 29 years. Four months later Jerusha also died of tuberculosis. She was only seventeen and Jonathan Edwards called her "The flower of the family."

Jonathan Edwards published the diary of David Brainerd with a moving account of his life and work. It became the most widely read book of its time and more than any other work aroused American interest in work among the Indians. Jonathan Edwards spoke highly of Brainerd's devotion to the Lord and especially praised his manner of prayer. "He prayed as becometh a worm of the dust." Edwards added that he never heard David Brainerd utter a prayer, including grace at the table, in which he did not include the words, "Lord, let us not outlive our usefulness."

EDWARDS DISMISSED FROM NORTHAMPTON

By the time the book, Religious Affections, came from the press in 1746, the tensions, criticisms, and murmuring in the Northampton church had become most disturbing and almost unbearable. The town was filled with gossip concerning the private affairs of the parsonage. There were growing complaints that the Edwards family maintained too high a standard of living. Edwards' wife and daughters spent too much on their clothes. The town could not forget that in 1743 Edwards had given his wife a locket that cost eleven pounds. The men murmured about Edwards spending three pounds for a hat in Boston when Ebenezer Hunt, the village hatter, sold his best quality village-made beavers for sixty-five shillings. Until 1747 Edwards did not have a fixed salary. He and his wife both urged the town to establish a fixed salary. Every year the matter of his salary had been a sore point. The people accused Edwards of spending too much money on books. Criticism mounted when he purchased a negro girl for eighty pounds to help around the house. Edwards and his family discussed the possibility of moving to another church. Edwards strongly felt that the Lord had work for him in Northampton.

The open rupture between Edwards and his church came over the discipline in the "bad book" case in 1748. Edwards had had to handle many cases of discipline during his years at Northampton. There had been frequent cases of drunkenness, adultery, stealing, cases of babies born too soon after wedlock and cases of babies born out of wedlock. Always there had been inquiries, public rebukes before the congregation, confession, and reinstatement. In March, 1748, it was brought to Edwards' attention that some of the teen agers, both boys and girls, had been circulating a "bad book"—a manual for midwives entitled, The Midwife Rightly Represented, or The Midwife Rightly Instructed. No information was recorded as to where the young people got the book—perhaps it had been taken from the library of the village doctor, Dr. Mather. On a Sunday in March, from the pulpit Edwards read out the names of six who had been accused. They implicated eleven others. The list grew to fifty-six who were said to have viewed the book. Two of the ringleaders, Timothy and Simeon Root, made a public confession. This should have closed the case. From March through June a great storm raged in the church. Edwards had publicly read out the full list of accused and called for a committee to investigate, but he had made no difference between the leaders and the others who had been implicated. Most of them were from some of the leading families of the church. Oliver Warner soon made a public confession of "unclean and lascivious expressions." The Roots and Warner had a reputation of being the town hoodlums. The idea
spread through the congregation that Edwards should have gone to the parents of the young people privately. There should have been a thorough investigation by a committee before any public mention was made of the case. As the case drug on some of the young people, especially the ring leaders, became quite insolent in their talk and behavior.

Sentiment mounted in Northampton that Edwards should be dismissed from his pulpit. This sentiment increased when Edwards sought the approval of the pulpit committee to preach a series of sermons on who should be admitted to Communion. His request was met with a firm refusal and the demand that he resign from the pulpit. Edwards refused to resign.

Edwards prepared and published in the autumn of 1749, *A Humble Inquiry into the Rules of the Word of God, concerning the Qualifications Requisite to a Complete Standing and Full Communion with the Visible Christian Church*. He took his stand against the Half-Way Covenant and Stoddardism—the position of his predecessor in the pulpit of Northampton and his grandfather, that Communion could be used as a means of grace to conversion and therefore should be administered to all who desired it. The congregation felt he had betrayed his grandfather and accused him of being dishonest and of holding the pulpit under false pretenses.

In March of 1750 Edwards delivered five public lectures on his positions after grudging permission had been given. His opponents stayed away but many visitors came from neighboring churches. The opposition determined to call a council to dismiss him.

Joseph Hawley, a cousin of Edwards, and the son of the Joseph Hawley who had committed suicide early in the revival, became the leader of the movement to get rid of Edwards. He was joined by Major Seth Pomeroy, the village blacksmith. They organized committees to handle the matter of dismissing the pastor and of securing someone to answer the *Humble Inquiry*. Solomon Williams, also a cousin of Edwards who was one of his bitterest critics furnished notes for the answer. When Peter Clark of Salem Village refused to prepare the answer, Solomon Williams, himself, prepared a bitter reply.

When Edwards learned that a Council was being formed to try the case of the church against its pastor he insisted that the Council should include not only lay delegates from Northampton but also ministerial delegates from other congregations. The Council was formed but was loaded against Edwards. After three days of bitter discussion, on June 22, 1750, two questions were put to the Council:

1. Whether it be the opinion of this council, that the reverend Mr. Edwards, persisting in his principles, and the church in theirs in opposition to his, and insisting on a separation, it is necessary that the relation between pastor and people be dissolved?

2. Whether it be expedient that this relation be immediately dissolved?

Both were resolved in the affirmative and Jonathan Edwards was dismissed from the church in Northampton.
Jonathan Edwards preached his farewell sermon on July 2, ten days after his dismissal. He carefully prepared his sermon on 2 Corinthians 1:14 "As also ye have acknowledged us in part, that we are your rejoicing, even as ye also are ours in the day of the Lord Jesus." The whole town turned out for the farewell. With great calm and restraint Edwards reminded them that for twenty-three years he had labored for their eternal welfare. He would never forget them or cease to pray for them. He asked to be remembered in their prayers. He solemnly warned them of "the future solemn meeting on the great day of the Lord; the day of infallible decision, and of the everlasting and unalterable sentence."

When a final vote of the male members of the congregation had been taken two hundred and thirty had voted for his dismissal. Twenty-three had voted to keep him. His main support had been Colonel Timothy Dwight. Colonel John Stoddard who had been his main supporter in the "bad book" case had died—a great loss to Edwards. A good friend, William Hobby prepared a minority report, A Protest, that was signed by seven who had supported him in the Council. Their Protest contained seven points:

1. Jonathan Edwards' sentiments on the subject of the dispute were thoroughly Christian.

2. His dismissal was out of proportion to the importance of the controversy.

3. There had been no attempt to convince either party of the truth or falseness of the conflicting principles.

4. The grounds for dismissal had not been set forth.

When he was dismissed Jonathan Edwards was forty-six and felt deeply that he was passed his prime. He still had a sizeable family to support. One daughter, Jerusha, had died. The oldest daughter, Sarah was the wife of Elihu Parsons, of Stockbridge, on the frontier. His daughter, Mary, had married Timothy Dwight, Jr., of Northampton, and they lived in a new house next door to the Edwards parsonage. The youngest child, Pierrepont, was an infant. There were seven other children still at home. Jonathan Edwards had no idea of where he should move to provide for his family. He believed that the Lord would lead.