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THE GREAT AWAKENING IN NEW ENGLAND
AS INTERPRETED BY EDWARDS

BY

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INTRODUCTION

THE GREAT AWAKENING IN NEW ENGLAND
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INTRODUCTION

A. The Subject Introduced

It is significant to note that Jonathan Edwards and John Wesley were born the same year (1703); Charles Wesley was born two years after (1705), and George Whitefield nine years later (1714).¹ These men, along with many others, all had a great affect upon the spiritual golden age in colonial America which is called the "Great Awakening". While it flourished, there was nothing which could rival it, but as it began to fall, its opposition made sport of the very events which at first heralded it.

B. The Significance of the Subject

There is great practical merit in the field of religious revival, especially when approached with fresh objectivity. There is a definite vital connection between the "quickenings of religion" in years past and the manner in which one looks upon this effort in the present day.

There is both a problem of methods in producing a revival and the age-important question of how to meet the

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1. Henry Fish: Handbook of Revivals, p.41.

excesses which naturally follow. To discover Edwards' methods of handling these questions and his personal estimation of the signs in his day will be the main work of this paper.

C. The Subject Delimited

The specific problem of this study will necessitate a close look at the main works of Edwards which throw light upon the facts of this revival. It will not be possible to trace to any extent the contemporary events in the rest of the colonies which were affected by this revival, nor will the attempt be made to produce a biography of Edwards. Rather the writer's purpose is to study closely the events of this revival together with the personality and background of Jonathan Edwards. With these facts as a basis, the personal evaluation which Edwards made of the conversion experience will be more intelligible.

D. The Sources of Data

The primary sources of information are those works written by Edwards in which he is concerned chiefly with the problem stated. The most important of these are: A Narrative of Surprising Conversions, Thoughts on the Revival of Religion in New England in 1740, A Treatise on Religious Affections, and A Dissertation on the Nature of True Virtue. A comprehensive source of the publications of Edwards called, Life

and Works of Jonathan Edwards, the Bungay Edition, will be used. By far the best biography, Alexander Allen's Jonathan Edwards will be used along with Perry Miller's competent book of the same title. Some reference to standard church histories and to other important biographies will be made. The writer has sought to acquire for continued inspection the major primary sources.

E. The Method of Procedure

In order to understand the complexity of this problem it is necessary to make a careful study into the immediate background of the Great Awakening in New England. "The State of Religion in the Period Immediately Preceding the Great Awakening" will be the subject of the first chapter. Its primary purpose will be to determine the setting in which this revival started.

The second chapter will be concerned with the subject, "Edwards' Life and Work as a Contribution to the Great Awakening". It will be the aim of this section to review briefly the outstanding events in the life of Mr. Edwards and to determine what factors contributed most to the character of this great revival leader. In this chapter a detailed study will be made of the events and circumstances of the two revival periods in the Northampton church.

The third chapter entitled, "Edwards' Personal Evaluation of the Evidences and Fruits of True Conversion",

will be entirely concerned with Edwards' thoughts concerning the signs of one who is truly and graciously affected by the Spirit of God.

CHAPTER I

THE STATE OF RELIGION IN THE PERIOD
IMMEDIATELY PRECEDING THE GREAT AWAKENING

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A. Introduction

The Great Awakening in America was similar to, and contemporaneous with, the Pietist movement in Germany and the Methodist revival in England.¹ This great wealth of background contributed, to a great extent, the color of the 'state of religion' in this era.

To determine the state and belief of the church of New England at a time just prior to the active ministry of Jonathan Edwards, the period known as the 'Golden Age' of the colonial cycle, will be of great value. (1640-1700)

Social and moral conditions always do much to provide the answers for the problems of any age. It is to this end that this discussion is raised in this chapter.

B. The State of the Church

The Church has ever been on the march. It had covered a great deal of ground since the landing of the

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1. Lars P. Qualben: History of the Christian Church, p.431.

colonists and seeds of liberalism had already been sown.

It has been said unjustly that the extremes of Christendom "...live together in charity and friendship.." in the reformed church at this time.¹ However, this may tend to remind one that Unitarianism developed on this very ground. An understanding of the doctrine and discipline of this church, and its relationship to that society, will serve well for estimating the state of religion.

1. Its Ministry

It is estimated that the Act of Uniformity sent nearly 2,000 ministers, who were cast out of the Church of England, to seek refuge in New England between 1660-1700.²

The minister was 'God's man' and in most cases spent his entire life in the service of one congregation; often spending his last breathing hour in the pulpit.³ During his eventful life he had acted as moral censor, preceptor of his flock, and loving father; furthermore he undoubtedly acted in the role of physician, judge, and drafter of wills and protests.⁴ His official duty included the propagation of religion in the community; consequently he was considered to be, if not in fact the master, by all means the over-seer of both public and private education.⁵

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1. Archibald Maclaine: An Ecclesiastical History, p.311.
2. Charles Hodge: Constitutional History., p.30.
3. Ola Elizabeth Winslow: Meetinghouse Hill, p.210.
4. Ibid., p.201.
5. Thomas Jefferson Wertenbaker: The Puritan Oligarchy, p.139.

Indications are that most were well steeped in Hebrew literature, the Greek and Roman classics,¹ and preached extemporaneously.² Before 1725, no young man would have hoped for ordination before his college training was complete; nevertheless, following this period education still included a minimum "...in the 'Tongues,' polemical divinity, logic, Christian doctrine, moral theology, memory training, rhetoric, practice in declaiming and expounding."³ After receiving a Harvard A.B., the young candidate often served as a tutor and achieved his A.M. degree while awaiting a church vacancy.⁴ With the qualifications which few others possessed, he was then duly elected, ordained, and registered his signature in the Town Book.⁵ Ordination sermons were largely previews of coming difficulties. Peter Hobart acknowledged that a man should rise at four o'clock; thus spending many more hours in the study than in bed.⁶ According to Henry Dunster, first president of Harvard, a minister would no sooner go to bed without "a session on his knees" than he would lay another book on top of the Bible.⁷ A standard program of devotional life called for the reading of the Bible through

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1. Life and Works of Jonathan Edwards: vol. I, p.cclii.
2. Ibid., p.cclii.
3. Winslow, op. cit., p.199.
4. Ibid., p.200.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid., p.83.
7. Ibid.

several times in a year; a portion of this daily reading to be in the original Greek or Hebrew.¹

Many preached and prayed with their congregations for the revival of religion, with chief prominence being given to the exercise of preaching as the chief mode of demonstrating truth.² The incumbent preacher was advised not to "pinch them with scanty sermons;"³ accordingly, few sermons lasted less than two hours. However, this did not at the time seem excessive, for the Sunday and Thursday sermons constituted almost the whole intellectual life of the village community.⁴ Miss Winslow relates that there was in all colonial sermons the concern for salvation:

..the scripture promise of it, the plan of it, the wonder of it, the way to get it, the first signs of it, the tests of one's possession of it, the peril of losing it, the bliss of gaining it in this world and in the next, and then the eternal enjoyment of it..⁵

Near the close of the century there was some cause for alarm concerning the error of some pastors in considering the Lord's Supper to be a means of grace.⁶ It was this error together with the growing alarm of Arminianism which caused Edwards to preach a series of sermons on "justification by faith alone."⁷

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1. Ibid., p.84.

2. Robert Baird: Religion in America, p.196.

3. Winslow, op. cit., p.91.

4. Ibid., p.92.

5. Ibid., p.95.

6. Baird, op. cit., p.94.

7. Joseph Tracy: History of the Revival of Religion, p.10.

2. Its Doctrine

"...that the founders of our church were Calvinists, and that they demanded Calvinism, and not merely faith in the absolutely essential doctrines of the gospel..." is the described theological position of the New England Puritans in 1688, when the Westminster Confession was recognized.¹ This fact is further confirmed by the large proportion of emigrants arriving, who were Calvinistic in doctrine.²

However, immediately preceding the turn of the century there was alarm in some circles concerning the tendency toward Arminianism.³ Nevertheless, the alarm was not of a serious nature, for the views of the reformers were still held on the most basic doctrines.

3. Its Membership

One cause for the great decline in religion was the new standard adopted by the Synod of 1662, of which Joseph Tracy writes,

...that persons baptized in infancy, understanding the doctrine of faith, and publicly professing their assent thereunto; not scandalous in life, and solemnly owning the covenant before the church, wherein they give up themselves and their children to the Lord, and subject themselves to the government of Christ in the Church, their children are to be baptized...⁴

even if the parents are yet unregenerate. This practice

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1. Hodge, op. cit., p.90.
2. Ibid., p.63
3. Tracy, p.8.
4. Ibid., p.4.

became widespread and reaped sad results when reinforced with Stoddard's idea of the Lord's Supper as a sanctifying and converting ordinance.¹

In New England, for the most part, the emphasis was on the autonomy of the local congregation. As practice usually follows belief, so the Half-way Covenant, largely because of the great advantage of church membership, soon after its adoption by the synod at Boston, spread through New England.² This discipline was brought about by a strong group of second generation Puritans who desired the establishment of birthright church membership.³

The Half-way Covenant was a step in the direction of destroying church discipline, filling the churches with unconverted communicants,⁴ and favoured the entrance of unconverted men into the ministry.⁵

4. Its Relation to the State

In Massachusetts, Connecticut, and New Haven, all congregational worship was a matter of public taxation until the Act of Disestablishment in 1818.⁶

Earlier, the Massachusetts body of Commons rendered that "no man shall be admitted to the freedom of this

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1. Ibid., p.4.
2. Henry Fish: Handbook of Revivals, p.45.
3. Qualben, op. cit., p.430.
4. Baird, op. cit., p. 95.
5. Fish, op. cit., p.46.
6. Qualben, op. cit., p.515.

body politic but such as are members of some of the churches."¹ The law required making church membership requisite to the enjoyment of the rights of citizenship. The Cambridge Platform invested extensive authority in the civil magistrate, causing several ecclesiastical differences to be restrained and punished by civil authority.²

Ministers of the Gospel had no direct connection with civil affairs, but yet there were few men with greater influence.³ Political power and opportunity were given to members of the churches, while they in turn looked upon government as "an ordinance of God."⁴

C. The General Moral and Religious Conditions of Society

When these people first found these shores in the attempt to escape the throne and the altar, it is said their morality was unrivalled.⁵ It must have been, for their fathers were no mean men: "...the Lightfoots, the Gales, the Seldens, the Miltons, the Bunyans, the Baxters, the Bates, the Howes, the Charnocks, the Flavels and others of scarcely inferior standing..."⁶

If the caliber of its leaders is any indication of the moral and religious tone of an era, certainly such

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1. Baird, op. cit., p.87.
2. Hodge, op. cit., p.33.
3. Baird, op. cit., p.88.
4. Ibid., p.83.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid., p.60.

men as John Cotton, Thomas Hooker, Richard Mather, Increase Mather, Cotton Mather, Jonathan Dickinson did contribute a great deal.

1. Early Evangelical Atmosphere

For several decades after the founding of Massachusetts Bay, religion was still felt to be "...the most important of blessings, both for the individual man and for the state."¹ It was yet the chief concern of its people to establish a Christian society² and to provide for the fruits thereof. Revivals were a blessing sought after by all. In those days it was little help that the law required every man to attend church worship,³ for few would have ever neglected such a divine duty.

Baird informs us that, "In proportion to the population, was there a greater amount of true knowledge of Gospel, and of practical godliness, among both ministers and their flocks..." than in any part of Christendom.⁴ Men were good simple Christians, striving amid the hardness of nature to produce true fruits of the spirit. In their study of the Bible they made every effort to relate truth to life,⁵ and this was accomplished through a strong spirit of prayer which prevailed among New England Christians.

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1. Ibid., p.100.
2. Ibid., p.99.
3. Ibid., p.94.
4. Ibid., p.101,102.
5. Ibid., p.83.

This spirit was really no stronger than was their faith in special answers to prayer.¹ There was much, Baird tells us, in their infant state which was to their favour: "a world within themselves cut off by distance and poverty from most of the alluring objects which seize on the hearts of the unconverted in a more advanced state of society."² The majority were from the middle ranks of society, and were growing in prosperity.³ Most had acquired a good education, for there were few who could not read.⁴

Revivals were not entirely a thing of the past, for the grand-father of Edwards says that during his ministry he had "five seasons of this kind."⁵ His father also had several 'uprisings.'

In many communities the early religious training of the children had prepared them to seek the work of the Spirit. There was in most homes a keen interest in regular Bible reading along with the enjoyment of the devotional literature which was available.⁶

There remained through this period a rich interest in Christian Missions among the Indians: the most notable being the establishment of the twenty-four "praying congregations" with the twenty-four Indian preachers, among the

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1. Ibid., p.196.
2. Ibid., p.197.
3. Ibid., p.100.
4. Ibid., p.83.
5. Ibid., p.197.
6. Qualben, op. cit., p.326.

Mohegans.¹

2. Signs of Decay

This is the era of skeptics such as Bolingbroke, Hume, and Gibbon; of infidel works from the pens of Hobbes and Shaftesbury.² According to Tracy, "the difference between the church and the world was vanishing."³ The standard of religious practice fell lower and lower. There was a shortage of worthy pastors, which combined with the constant threat of war, and the fearful frontier conditions, caused a laxness of morals and church discipline.⁴ Many ministers spent their lives attempting to interpret the will of God to the elect, but few gave their attention to saving the lost.⁵ The light of holiness grew dim, yet people were never more confident in their hope of reaching heaven.

Samuel Torrey described the sinful heart of New England as full of pride, worldliness, libertinism, and carnality.⁶ At the turn of the century a law was necessary to move people to apply the "duties of religion" in their conduct.⁷ "Pulpit culture" had little in common with daily living; often because congregations demanded their ministers to

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1. Baird, op. cit., p.294.
2. Fish, op. cit., p.42.
3. Tracy, op. cit., p.8.
4. Ibid.
5. Winslow, op. cit., p.95.
6. Wertenbaker, op. cit., p.170.
7. Ibid., p.172.

be scholars.¹ The clergy complained of breaches of the Lord's Day, common profanity, health-drinking and the greater sin of drunkenness, and dancing.² The latter practice provoked in reply a pamphlet entitled, "An Arrow against Profane and Promiscuous Dancing, drawn out of the Quiver of the Scriptures."³ The code of strict conduct imposed by the Church was openly ignored by many young people, hence the clergy shifted the blame to the parents who were neglecting their duties.⁴ Many neglected the proper religious education of the children, and the young were allowing themselves to associate in dangerous pastimes,⁵ while the elders' interest in faith declined nearly to the vanishing point.

Because of the social, political and religious changes the influence and authority of the minister diminished greatly after 1700. Accusations such as, "Our minister is unconverted. He is blind, leading souls to Hell. We want Gospel preaching."⁶ show that even the orthodoxy, as understood for a hundred years, came under suspicion.

Several wrote of the prevailing ignorance of the essentials of religion: Increase Mather wrote, "...Oh, degenerate New England..."⁷ In 1706 Cotton Mather said, "It is

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1. Winslow, p.84.
2. Wertenbaker, op. cit., p.170-173.
3. Ibid., p.176.
4. Ibid., p.177.
5. Tracy, op. cit., p.8.
6. Winslow, op. cit., p.228.
7. Fish, op. cit., p.43.

confessed by all who know anything of the matter...that there is a general and horrible decay of Christianity among the professors of it."¹, while in another breath he pronounced them "prodigies of wickedness."² Samuel Blair declared that, "religion lay a-dying and ready to expire its last breath of life."³ John Dunton informs us that many of this generation followed the pious example of their fathers, but others, while retaining the outward form of godliness were in fact "the most profligate and debauched wretches in the world."⁴ Finally events caused to be circulated throughout New England a report, resulting from synod action, called, "Necessity of Reformation."⁵

D. Summary

The condition of the church in New England has been dealt with in terms of its ministry and doctrine. The ministry was well educated and in most respects conscious of its great responsibility. However, there was great neglect in the realm of practical application as a result of an emphasis on scholarship.

The early fathers of New England were strict Calvinists, but it was not many decades later that the seed of Arminian doctrine caused concern. An important reason

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1. Ibid., p.44.
2. Wertenbaker, op. cit., p.170.
3. Fish, op. cit., p.44.
4. Wertenbaker, op. cit., p.170.
5. Ibid., p.181.

for the present decline in church discipline was because of the adoption of the Half-way Covenant. This soon caused a serious decline and opened the way for the entrance of unconverted men into the ministry. The Church and State relationship was in the early days quite fortunate, but was now causing serious difficulty in the fields of doctrine and church government by means of pressure exerted on the church to adopt a liberal pattern.

The moral condition of the early colonies was above reproach and its leaders excelled in piety. The tendency was yet favourable to the revival of religion and its spread, but notable signs of decay, such as over-confidence and worldliness, indicate a lack of religious interest. The time was in many respects ripe for a "spiritual reformation."

CHAPTER II

EDWARDS' LIFE AND WORK AS A CONTRIBUTION
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A. Introduction

To some extent it will be necessary to give in summary fashion some of the significant events in the life of Edwards, which will serve as the framework for the chapter. These facts and events were the bridgeheads in the development of his life.

Several steps in the "Preparation for His Calling" do overlap. However, it is apparent that for purposes of clarity they must be considered separately. The account Edwards has written of his conversion experience makes clear that it started quite early in his childhood and continued well into his early ministry. Neither is it the intent of this work to imply that the facts considered under the heading, "Formulation of Ideas", are confined to that particular era of his life under which they are listed. The influences discussed are thought to be the main ones, but not intended to be all inclusive.

The main portion of this chapter is considered under the "Northampton Ministry" of Rev. Edwards. However, the real concern in the study of this ministry will be the events leading up to and surrounding the "Revival of Religion"

under Edwards' influence. It is deemed necessary to take into consideration a few particulars in the ministry of Solomon Stoddard, who was the predecessor to Edwards at the Northampton Church. It is also necessary to account for the two years which he spent as associate pastor before the death of Stoddard. To give some reason for one's being able to picture the impression that the personality of Edwards carved upon the hearts of those who weathered his preaching is ample excuse for including a section on his preaching.

Because of the intervening time between the two revival periods one feels inclined to treat each under a separate head. Accordingly, that procedure will be followed, allowing such factors as the age, experience and spiritual growth of the revival minister to reveal themselves. In this chapter it has not been within the writer's purpose to include, to any large extent, the views of Jonathan Edwards in regard to the true results of the revival. This will be treated in the following chapter.

B. Preparation for His Calling

1. Early Background

Like most New England ministers of that age, Edwards' father conducted a school, and it was here that he received his early training.¹ His father was especially

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1. Miller, op. cit., p.37.

concerned that he excell in his studies in Latin grammar. As a product of the Puritan parish, Edwards was well acquainted with back country revivalism. Accordingly, he often referred to the local awakenings in the East Windsor parish which drew his mind to an early concern for his own relationship to God.

While yet thirteen he entered Yale¹ College where he was to become affected with the works of men like Locke and Newton. It is said that Edwards developed early a habit of writing as a means of mental culture.² At an early age, he had started to collect his "Notes on the Scriptures", whereby he interleaved his Bible with blank pages and annotated critical passages.³

Somewhere between the age of fourteen and seventeen, he made a decision to write a work which would embrace the "entire scope of human learning" and would add greatly to the world's literature on knowledge.⁴ With this in mind, he made note of all his reflections and classified them in note-books under the headings of The Mind, Natural Science, The Scriptures, and, what was left over, under Miscellan-ies.⁵ Unfortunately, he never edited his notes in this project, and we have only a mass of his thoughts, still in

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1. Ibid.
2. Allen, Jonathan Edwards, p.4.
3. Miller, op. cit., p.127.
4. Allen, op. cit., p.4.
5. Ibid.

the order that he listed them.

In 1720, he was awarded his A. B. Degree¹ accompanied with highest honors. He remained at Yale in preparation for the ministry until August, 1722, when he accepted the call to a Presbyterian church in New York.² Edwards remained there a little less than a year, but in that time he made friends who greatly influenced his spiritual life. It is said that this ministry did not prosper, so he left for home sometime in 1723. He received his A. M. Degree in the same year, and in 1724 accepted the office of senior tutor at Yale.³

While seriously ill en route to his home a year later, he had a religious experience which had a great effect on his calling.⁴ In November 1726, he was called to Northampton to be an associate pastor with his aging grandfather, Solomon Stoddard.⁵ Shortly following this he was ordained. Here he married Sarah Pierrepont whom he greatly admired for her seeming closeness to God.⁶ Less than two years after Edwards ordination, Stoddard died. Young Jonathan Edwards "assumed the helm in what was probably the most influential pulpit outside of Boston."⁷

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1. Miller, op. cit., p.38.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., p.39.
4. Ibid., p.40. see post, p.23.
5. Allen., op. cit., p.38.
6. Ibid., p.45.
7. Ibid.

2. Conversion Experience

Referring to the period of conflict following his graduation from college, Edwards said, "I made seeking my salvation the main business of my life."¹ This can easily be seen in all of his early endeavors. Although no one is "born with it", one would not go far wrong if he said that Edwards' conversion started with his birth. In view of the fact that he was brought up in a Puritan home where religion and the Church were the leading interests in his life, one finds it hard to map out the stages of his early spiritual life. However, Edwards has preserved for us an insight into this most personal area of his life. (An account of the conversion of the author is found at the conclusion of the Worcester edition of "A Narrative of Many Surprising Conversions in Northampton and Vicinity." 1832.)

A guiding principle of his theological thought was the Augustinian idea of God as absolute and arbitrary will. Yet in his pre-conversion thinking he conceived of God, as many of the philosophers had done, "as the idea of the good, the one substance, the absolute thought unfolding itself or embodying itself in a visible and glorious order."²

Before his lasting transformation, he says that he had two remarkable "seasons of awakening" in his childhood.

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1. Allen, op. cit., p.24.

2. Ibid., p.21.

One came to him as a boy before he entered college:

I was then very much affected for many months, and concerned about the things of religion, and my soul's salvation; and was abundant in my duties. I used to pray five times a day in secret, and to spend much time in religious talk with other boys, and used to meet with them to pray together. I experienced I know not what kind of delight in religion. My mind was much engaged in it, and had much self-righteous pleasure; and it was my delight to abound in religious duties.¹

However, it was not long until much of this first impression began to wear off:

. . . and I entirely lost all those affections and delights and went off to secret prayer, . . . and returned like a dog to his vomit, and went on in the ways of sin. Indeed, I was at times very uneasy, especially toward the latter part of my time at college; when it pleased God to seize me with pleurisy; and in which He brought me nigh to the grave, and shook me over the pit of hell. And yet, it was not long after my recovery before I fell again into my old ways of sin. I had great and violent inward struggles, till, after many conflicts, with wicked inclinations, repeated resolutions, and bonds that I laid myself under by a kind of vows to God, I was brought wholly to break off all my former wicked ways, and all ways of known outward sin; and to apply myself to seek salvation, and practice many religious duties . . .²

The most monumental experience of his life came perhaps when he was thoroughly established in his belief or acceptance of God's sovereignty. In this experience he was "fully satisfied as to this sovereignty of God, and His justice in thus externally disposing of men, according to His sovereign pleasure."³ The first experience of this kind

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1. Jonathan Edwards, A Narrative of Many Surprising Conversions, from the account of the conversion of Mr. Edwards. p.365.
2. Ibid. p.366.
3. Ibid. p.367.

came to him while he was reading I Timothy 1:17. He wrote that all of a sudden he felt completely free from all worldly care; this feeling being accompanied with a vision that placed him alone with Christ, wishing to be "swallowed up in God."¹

Later when he had talked it over with his father, there followed another vision of the "majesty and grace of God."² It seemed to him that his sense of divine things greatly increased until he gained a feeling of satisfaction regarding his divine (new found) relation. However, with this new feeling of security came a sense of regret for the fact that he had not sooner turned to God, that his growth in grace might have been advanced.³ From this point on, his mind was fixed on divine things, while he experienced new delights far greater than his early ones. Not long before he went to New York he wrote:

I felt a burning desire to be in everything a complete Christian; and conformed to the blessed image of Christ; and that I might live, in all things, according to the pure and blessed rules of the gospel.⁴

He then had the urge to seek an "increase of grace" as never before, and he was much concerned with the sinfulness of his former life. This led him to examine himself continually until a course of action presently came to him.

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1. Ibid. p.368.
2. Ibid. p.369.
3. Ibid. p.370.
4. Ibid.

On January 12, 1723, he was moved to make a solemn dedication of his life to God. He resolved:

. . . 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 felicity; looking on nothing else as any part of my happiness, not acting as if it were; and his law for the constant rule of my obedience; engaging to fight with all my might, against the world, the flesh and the devil, to the end of my life.¹

Nevertheless, he was later greatly humbled when he considered to what extent he had failed to accomplish his objective. In all that he did from this point on, he felt compelled to seek company only among those who showed evidence of "true piety."² Shortly after he received his Master's Degree, while en route to his home, he was taken ill and remained in a serious state for nearly three months. During this time it again pleased God to visit him and leave his mind in divine contemplations.³ These visions or "affections" however, did not cease, but continued even as he entered his ministry at Northampton, at which time he wrote: "The holiness of God has always appeared to me the most lovely of all His attributes."⁴

Having been affected by the reading of Isaiah 32:2, he wrote:

It often appeared to me delightful to be united to Christ; to have Him for my head, and to be a member

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1. Ibid., p.372, 373.
2. Ibid., p.373.
3. Ibid., p.375.
4. Ibid., p.376.

of His body; also to have Christ for my teacher and prophet. I very often think with sweetness, and longings, and pantings of soul, of being a little child, taking hold of Christ, to be led by him through the wilderness of this world.¹

On another occasion he had been riding through the woods as he often did, when leaving his horse and engaging in prayer he:

. . . had a view that for me was very extraordinary, of the glory of the Son of God, as Mediator between God and man, and his wonderful, great, full, pure and sweet grace and love, and meek and gentle condescension. This grace appeared . . . great above the heavens. The person of Christ appeared ineffably excellent with an excellency great enough to swallow up all thought and conception - which continued as near as I can judge, about an hour; which kept me the greater part of the time in a flood of tears, and weeping aloud. I felt an ardency of soul to be . . . emptied and annihilated; to lie in the dust, and to be full of Christ alone; to love him with a holy and pure love; to trust in him; to live upon him; to serve and follow him; and to be perfectly sanctified and made pure, with a divine and heavenly purity.²

After this and other similar experiences, he was greatly impressed with the seriousness of his own sinful life, and in comparison with the cases of others who came to relate their experiences, he had the feeling that his state was much worse. But yet, through the power of grace, he had no more sense of sin.³ Strangely, he pointed out that he had a more severe sense of his own wickedness later in life than he did before his conversion; yet he felt no guilt in view of God's wonderful grace. Often when a

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1. Ibid., p.376.

2. Ibid., p.377-378.

3. Ibid., p.379.

feeling of depression did engulf him, it was because "he knew his repentance was nothing compared with his sin."¹ Edwards' whole life experience of humbly walking before God and seeking His pleasure continually warmed him with a deeper knowledge of his exceeding dependence on God's grace and strength.

It is evident that Edwards sought with great anxiety to obtain a satisfactory testimony to his change of heart. Certainly, he would not be satisfied without sufficient grounds, hence escaping the danger of self-deception, which is so common among those who will not submit to internal examination. Thus, while presenting himself to be constantly examined by the spirit of God's Word, he acquired a knowledge of particulars relating to Christian character, which later enabled him to distinguish between actual and delusive affections.

3. Formulation of Ideas

When only twenty years old Edwards set down, for the purpose of regulating his life, a list of resolutions. These no doubt contain many of the principles which were most vital to his spiritual life, and contain examples of how much influence the Lord made upon his life.

Jonathan Edwards admits that he reached intellectual maturity some time before the heights of his conversion

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1. Ibid., p.380.

experience; nevertheless, it is evident that his mind was always concerned with the idea of God.¹ It might be thought that the mould of his mind being set at the very dawn of his ministry could be explained by the manner in which he guarded it from contamination. But rather it could be better explained by the fact that he incorporated into his basic thought pattern only those expressions of his age which gave meaning and simplicity to his thought.²

a. Use of Locke

In 1733 Edwards delivered a lecture to his people that was so well accepted that he was encouraged to have it published. It bore the title, "A Divine and Supernatural Light, Immediately Imparted to the Soul by the Spirit of God, Shown to be both a Scriptural, and Rational Doctrine."³ Many are of the opinion that the whole basis of his system may be found in miniature, recorded within a few pages of this work. Although he is known to have exercised a great deal of independence in all his thought, it is evident that Edwards took much delight in the reading of Locke's philosophy, especially an "Essay Concerning Human Understanding" which he had digested probably as early as the age of fourteen.⁴ With some assistance from Locke and others, he gained his basic insight early in life, and for the most part

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1. Allen, op. cit., p.5.
2. Miller, op. cit., p.46.
3. Ibid., p.44.
4. Allen, op. cit., p.5.

never changed it, only deepening it as experience led him. Throughout his life he altered little; however, he was a most severe critic of his own accomplishments declaring, "If I had more experience, and ripeness of judgement and courage, I should have guided my people in a better manner."¹

To analyze Edwards is to find that he always exalted experience over reason. He was in many respects an empiricist;² interested primarily in checking all arguments against his own. It was partly for this reason that he showed a keen interest in experience, his own, his wife's, and his people's, because here was to be found the operation and design of living a life. The decisive event in his intellectual life was evidently the reading of Locke's "Essay", which revealed to him God's strategy.³ One could not with utter consistency be a thorough empiricist, for God's way is indirection. Speaking the unexpressable is impossible. Edwards was conscious of the fact that he could not deal too much with abstractions. He says:

But we have got so far beyond those things for which language was chiefly contrived, that unless we use extreme caution, we cannot speak, except we speak exceedingly unintelligible, without literally contradicting ourselves.⁴

It was through this system that Edwards could see how suitable it was that God should govern the universe

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1. Miller, op. cit., p.44.

2. Ibid., p.55.

3. Ibid., p.52.

4. Life and Works of Jonathan Edwards, Bungay Edition, Vol I, p. cclxiii.

according to His pleasure.

The Puritan pattern of education was organized into what was called "technologia" which was an exhaustive attempt at the summary of God's ordering of the universe. As he read Locke, the arguments presented in the Puritan system became to him insignificant. He learned from this source that man can acquire the tools of materials of reason and knowledge solely from experience.¹ Mankind must be concerned, not with things as they exist in perfect form, but simply with things as they register in the mind.²

Edwards wrote in notes on "The Mind":

When we say that the world, that is, the material Universe, exists nowhere but in the mind, we have got to such a degree of strictness and abstraction, that we must be exceedingly careful, that we do not confound and lose our lives by misapprehension . . . though we suppose, that the existence of the whole material Universe is absolutely dependent on Idea, yet we may speak in the old way, and so properly and truly as ever. God, in the beginning created such a certain number of Atoms, of such a determinate bulk and figure, which they yet maintain and always will, and gave them such a motion, of such a direction, and of such a degree of velocity; from whence arise all the Natural changes in the Universe, forever, in a continued series. Yet, perhaps all this does not exist anywhere perfectly, but in the Divine Mind.³

God reaches man through the sense. In Edwards' words, "Our perceptions, or ideas that we passively receive by our bodies, are communicated to us immediately by God."⁴

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1. Miller, op. cit., p.55.

2. Ibid.

3. Bungay Edition, op. cit.. p.cclix

4. Miller, op. cit., p.55.

Edwards' basic premise was to a great extent the same as Locke's; the assurance that what the mind knows is no more than the sum of its ideas, and consequently, he said, "This great source of most of the ideas we have, depending wholly upon our senses, and derived by them to the understanding, I call sensation."¹

Again, in the manuscript of the notes on "The Mind" he says,

Our senses, when sound, and in ordinary circumstances, are not properly fallible in any thing: that is, we mean our Experience by our Senses. If we mean anything else, neither fallibility nor certainty in any way belongs to the Senses. Nor are our Senses certain in any thing at all any other way, than by constant experience by our Senses . . . and so my senses are as certain in everything, when I have equal opportunity and occasion to experience. And our senses are said to deceive us in some things, because our situation does not allow us to make trial, or our circumstances do not lead us to it, and so we are apt to judge by our experience in other and different cases.²

It was in this manner that Edwards was able to perceive how, if New England was to "remain bound to an antiquated metaphysic"³, it would bring religion to its knees. The catholic spirit which refused to force religion on men was in effect admitting that it had no message to force.⁴ Edwards was certain that he had the secret that New England had sought for a century. If Locke

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1. Ibid.

2. Bungay Edition, op. cit., p.cclxvii

3. Miller, op. cit., p.56.

4. Ibid., p.56, 57.

was sound, and Edwards was convinced that he was, then the way to make living impressions on the minds of men was through the senses. Therefore, a sermon devoid of the terms of false philosophy could "use words as God uses objects, to force sensations, and the ideas annexed to them into men's minds through the senses."¹ The ministry of Mr. Edwards is more than sufficient to illustrate how such a force could 'awaken' New England. This philosophy would have been labeled 'too modern' by that generation. Hence it is not strange to discover that Edwards was extremely cautious in his direct use of Locke. It is for this reason not surprising that many of his most discriminating works, especially those of an early date, suggest a cryptic element.²

b. Use of Berkeley

When Edwards' "Notes" appeared in 1830, he was hailed as America's pioneer idealist, for he had extended to primary qualities the same pattern which Locke applied to the secondary.³ For an illustration of this fact, one must again consult the notes on "The Mind":

And if that, which we principally mean by the thing itself, cannot be said to be in the thing itself, I think nothing can be. If color exists not out of the mind, then nothing belonging to the Body exists out of the mind but Resistance, which is Solidity,

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1. Ibid.

2. Ibid., p.50, 58, 59.

3. Ibid., p.60, 61.

and the termination of this Resistance, with its relations, which is Figure, and the communication of this Resistance, from space to space, which is Motion; though the latter be nothing but modes of the former. Therefore, there is nothing out of the mind but Resistance. And not that neither, when nothing is actually resisted. Then, there is nothing but the Power of Resistance. And as Resistance is nothing else but the actual exertion of God's Power, so the Power can be nothing else, but the constant Law or Method of that actual exertion. And how is there any Resistance, except it be in some mind, in idea?¹

Mr. Edwards must be given much credit as a speculative philosopher and psychologist. However, it is extremely possible that an early copy of Berkeley's "Treatise Concerning the Principles of Understanding" published in 1710, might have reached the eager hands of Edwards.² The resemblance between Edwards' thought and Berkeley's system of philosophic idealism is very striking; yet, it is not known for sure that Edwards had read Berkeley so early.³ It should also be noted that Edwards did not follow Berkeley in those areas wherein he contradicted Locke. Doctrines exist only in the form of perception for Edwards, and reaction to the stimulus of life is what is meant by perception.⁴ Past generations of New Englanders had always distinguished between 'speculative' religion and 'vital' religion. Hence, essentially the difference between the understanding and the feeling.⁵ In practice, Edwards felt

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1. Bungay Edition, op. cit., p.cclix
2. Miller, op. cit., p.61.
3. Allen, op. cit., p.14.
4. Miller, op. cit., p.65.
5. Ibid., p.65.

men would respond to ideas according to their basic natures. Moreover, as they act, so are they predestined to be. In this respect he said, "He that is spiritually enlightened truly apprehends and sees it; or has a sense of it."¹ All a man needs to enable him to respond to the truth of religion is his sensory equipment. From that stage on all is dependent upon the condition of his heart.²

c. Use of Newton

It is quite possible that Edwards came across Newton's "Principia" as early as 1719.³ In the "Notes" one is able to trace along with Locke's idealism a bit of Newton's naturalism. Edwards wrote of existence:

. . . so that, which we call place, is an idea too. therefore, things are truly in those places; for what we mean, when we say so, is only, that this mode of our idea of place appertaining to such an idea. We would not therefore be understood to deny, that things are where they seem to be. For the principles we lay down, if they are narrowly looked into, do not infer that. Nor will it be found, that they at all make void Natural Philosophy, or the sciences of the Causes or Reasons of corporeal changes; for to find out the reasons of things, in Natural Philosophy, is only to find out the proportion of God's acting. And the case is the same, as to such proportions, whether we suppose the World only mental, in our sense, or no.⁴

There was for him a unique connection between Newton's laws of motion and Calvin's principal law of salvation by faith.⁵

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1. Ibid.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid., p.71

4. Bungay Edition, op. cit., p.cclix.

5. Miller, op. cit., p.74.

He was now convinced that no system of theology would survive modern speculative thought unless it was at peace with scientific thought. There was a series of Edwards' sermons published in 1838 which is illustrative of his effort to reconcile Puritan theology with the 'new science.'¹ He tried to formulate in Newtonian language the concepts of salvation and faith, as effect and cause.² Every New Englander before him adhered to the 'Federal Theology', but Edwards could no longer accept this doctrine which presented God as obligated to men.³ As he learned from the "Principia", "all effects must have their causes, but no effect is a 'result' of what has gone before it." In his own words:

. . . This is something different from faith's being the condition of justification, only so as to be inseparably connected with justification . . yet nothing in us but faith renders it meet that we should have justification assigned to us.⁵

The understanding of this distinction is absolutely necessary to the understanding of Edwards' theology. In Edwards' system an act "either of faith or of lust", is not of sufficient consequence to effect a result, but only a particular detail within a coherent pattern.⁶ In the old system, God must wait upon the will of men; in the new, according to Edwards;

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1. Ibid., p.75.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid., p.76

4. Ibid., p.79.

5. Quoted by Miller, op. cit., p.81.

6. Miller, op. cit., p.81.

The nature of things will not admit of a man's having an interest given him in the merits or benefits of a Saviour, on the account of any thing as a righteousness, or virtue, or excellency in him.¹

Edwards was greatly affected by Newton's physics. Nevertheless, it is clear that he used Newton only to confirm his own thinking. There was a point in his life where he deliberately turned his back upon philosophy, and regarded it from this point only as a "scaffolding to the real structure" certainly to be discarded when no longer useful.²

C. Northampton Ministry

1. The Northampton Church

For the full understanding and appreciation of the ministry of Jonathan Edwards, while pastor of the church at Northampton, it is necessary that a portion of its policies and background be reviewed here. In like manner, a few facts concerning the person of Solomon Stoddard, and the call and reception of Jonathan Edwards, will be valuable.

a. Solomon Stoddard

In 1726, when he suggested Edwards as his assistant, Stoddard had been minister to that church for the past fifty-five years.³ He was known throughout New England and enjoyed undisputed authority among the churches and ministers. His reputation for preaching included the memory of several

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1. Quoted by Miller, op. cit., p.81.
2. Allen, op. cit., p.19, 20.
3. Works, op. cit., p.lxxix.

occasions when souls were awakened. There had been several revivals within the memory of his people; the most recent ones occurring in 1712 and 1718.¹ During the nine years preceding Mr. Edwards' settlement, there was witnessed "a far more degenerate time among his people, particularly among the young, than ever before."²

Admission to the Lord's Supper had originally been granted only to those who, upon examination, presented satisfactory evidence of their regenerate nature.³ However, since 1704, Stoddard had regarded it as a converting ordinance, encouraging all who would, to benefit themselves by it. When Stoddard died, in February 1729, it was an occasion for sorrow throughout the region, for he had been held in great respect as a "spiritual father".⁴

b. Edwards the Associate Pastor

Upon receiving proposals from the people at Northampton, and convinced of Stoddard's need of his assistance, in September, 1726 he resigned his tutorship at Yale College and accepted the invitation.⁵ He was then only twenty-three years of age, and in poor health, which was for him a normal condition. With extreme care, however, it was possible for him to keep his health in a tolerable

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1. Ibid.
2. Ibid., p.lxxx.
3. Ibid., p.lxxix.
4. Ibid., p.lxxx.
5. Works, op. cit., p.lxxiv.

condition.¹ Even at this immature age he presented a countenance which was stern and grave. Nevertheless, it was not long before all were convinced that the Lord had revealed to him a large measure of His grace. In all important fields of learning Edwards had distinguished himself as a qualified minister of the Lord in wisdom as well as conviction. Many of the congregation of this large church had known him either directly or through his family since his childhood. Thus many were concerned for his success.² The work of grace became again visible in the first few years of his ministry, as several cases of "attention to religion" blossomed into about twenty sincere conversions.³ It was not long, however, before these effects passed and were followed by several years of indifference to religion.

Edwards made it his practice to spend an average of thirteen hours each day in study. He rose often as early as four o'clock in the morning; and, except for a brief period spent either in riding on horse back or chopping wood; he spent his entire day at work.⁴ It was his practice to spend very little time visiting in peoples' homes unless sickness made it absolutely necessary. He felt that he could be much more effective in giving his time to preaching and writing, or in consulting people as they came to his study.⁵

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1. Ibid., p.lxxviii.
2. Ibid., p.lxxix.
3. Ibid., p.lxxxii.
4. Miller, op. cit., p.128.
5. Works, op. cit., p.lxxx.

He did spend considerable time preaching in neighborhood meetings, catechizing children, and exercising needed church discipline. One is rather surprised to find that in this early period, in addition to the duties mentioned, he was able to keep up his "Notes on the Scriptures", "Miscellanies"- a work published a few years later called, "Types of Messiah"- and, in the midst of it all to marry Sarah Pierrepont.

2. Edwards as Pastor.

It was Edwards' practice to prepare two discourses every week; one to be preached on the Sabbath, and the other to be delivered one evening in the week.² From the start he made up his mind not to spend his time exclusively in sermon preparation but to give a fair portion of his time to the study of the Bible and theology. This aim he was able to accomplish in his early ministry and it did much to prepare him for the great work which he became a part. His own words testify to this fact:

. . . to study the Scriptures so steadily, constantly, and frequently, as that I may find and plainly perceive myself to grow in the knowledge of the same.³

Contrary to the popular conception, he used no gestures while he preached, but, as one of his friends related, "he looked on the bell rope until he looked it off."⁴

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1. Ibid., p.lxxxix
2. Ibid., p.lxxx
3. Ibid., lxi.
4. Miller, op. cit., p.51.

Until after he met George Whitefield, Edwards preached from a manuscript, but in spite of it he spoke as if truly inspired.¹ Apparently he reached his preaching maturity at an early date, for he was noted for the power and ability he had to impress upon a congregation the subject at hand.² Grandfather Stoddard, when preparing a sermon, would compose it as an essay, and in keeping with the doctrine, he would last of all prefix it with a text.³ In contrast, Edwards would extract from a Bible text the lesson it taught in experience, and after reasoning it out, he would apply it to the Calvinistic pattern.⁴ He was not concerned with ingenious or novel methods of presenting truth, but was well satisfied with the age-old mode of expressing Puritan dogma. He was well convinced that the tenets of the Calvinistic system were Christian interpretations of reality.⁵ In July 1731, he preached a sermon that was so well received that many people insisted that he have it published.⁶ It was in this manner that he was able to reach many outside people and gain the respect of many of his brother clergymen.

In his delivery his chief asset was no doubt the quality of his voice, of which many testified that it had a strangely arresting authority.⁷ Thomas Prince was impressed

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1. Winslow: Jonathan Edwards, p.135.
2. Ibid., p.139.
3. Miller, op. cit. p.52.
4. Ibid., p.48.
5. Ibid., p.47.
6. Allen, op. cit., p.126.
7. Winslow: Jonathan Edwards, p.134.

by his habitual and great solemnity, looking and speaking as in the presence of God.¹ If one now considers it painful to read the sermons of Edwards, especially on the subject of eternal punishment, certainly it would have been extremely painful to have heard them from his mouth. Without doubt, he was the greatest preacher of his age; however, his effectiveness did not rest with either his powerful gesture or strong voice,² but with his deep sincerity. The intensity of his preaching was directed to the individual and its effects were made predominately on the will. There was a tone of severity in his voice, but one was soon convinced of his tender concern.³

3. The First Revival of Religion

a. General Account

During a large part of 1732 and 1733 there was felt in Northampton a general decline in the practice of religion. There was greatest concern for the young people, who were in many ways acting disgracefully. There was a marked trend perceivable at this time of young people ignoring the authority of the home and parents and very often failing to give strict attention to the Gospel taught in Church.⁴ Mr. Edwards was much troubled by this fact and the

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1. Ibid.

2. Title: "God Glorified in Man's Dependence."

3. Allen, op. cit., p.104.

4. Works, op. cit., p.lxxxiv.

manner in which they were in the habit of conducting themselves on the Sabbath evenings and following the weekly lecture. It was for this reason that in 1734, he made recommendations to his young people from the pulpit, advising them to spend the time following the public lecture in a meeting of prayer and fellowship.¹ People were so convinced by the effects of these sermons that many, young and old alike, gave evidence of taking his advice. Most of the people found it advisable to go to their homes following the meetings, rather than visiting as had been the habit. Mr. Edwards' sermons began to have an increasing effect upon the people. It is recorded that his sermons suddenly became filled with the power of the Spirit, especially a work called, "A Divine and Supernatural Light Immediately Imparted to the Soul by the Spirit of God, shown to be both a Scriptural and Rational Doctrine."² This was well received and was followed by increased reaction to the efforts of Mr. Edwards.

About the same time, in a farm village called Pascommuck, several persons were converted. Consequently, there developed among the young people in Northampton a serious concern for the things of religion.³ Another event which led to an enlivened interest among the people was a

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1. Ibid.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.

series of "Discourses on the great doctrine of Justification by Faith alone." It was in this form that Edwards set forth his views on the then current Arminian controversy. He informs us that he was greatly criticized for attempting to defend his position from the pulpit. Nevertheless it was the occasion for the beginning of God's work among the Northampton people, as many flocked to Christ as their Saviour as a result.¹ Prior to this sermon there had been apparent among a few of the people a marked sympathy for the doctrine of works, but as Edwards explained the Scriptural meaning of salvation, many were convinced of their erroneous opinions, and "sought to be accepted by God purely on the strength of the righteousness of Christ."² A short time following there were five or six who were "savingly converted." Among these converts was a young woman who had the reputation of being a great "company-keeper".³ These experiences were of such a nature that many others were led into a sincere concern for their spiritual well-being.⁴ Early in 1735, this concern for religious truth spread to many other people, and among all classes there was a true interest in salvation. In the following months, the spirit increased bringing "a steady work of conversion which seemed

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1. Ibid., p.xcii.

2. Ibid., p.lxxxv.

3. Jonathan Edwards: A Narrative of the Surprising Work of God, p.14.

4. Ibid.

to alter every aspect of community and family life, giving the whole town the appearance of the presence of God."¹

Mr. Edwards spoke of the town as "never so full of love, nor so full of joy, nor yet so full of distress, as it was then."²

In two months' time, according to Edwards, the number of those who were apparently genuinely converted totaled about thirty a week.³

Among all people in the town there was an earnest concern "to get the kingdom of heaven." The interest became so intense that many were tempted to neglect everyday affairs.⁴ The work of conversion was carried on in a most astonishing manner, and as Edwards testified,

From day to day for many months together, might be seen evident instances of sinners brought out of darkness into marvellous light, and delivered out of an horrible pit, and from the miry clay, and set upon a rock, with a new song of praise to God in their mouths.⁵

In the spring and summer of 1735, Edwards says:

There were remarkable tokens of God's presence in every house. It was a time of joy in families on account of salvation being brought unto them; parents rejoicing over their children as new born, and husbands over their wives, and wives over their husbands. The goings of God were then seen in his sanctuary, God's day was a delight, and his tabernacles were amiable. Our public assemblies were then beautiful, the congregation was alive in God's service, everyone earnestly intent on the public worship, every hearer eager to drink in the words of the minister as they came from his mouth; the assembly in general were,

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1. Ibid.
2. Ibid., p.1xxxv.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid., p.348.
5. Ibid.

from time to time, in tears while the Word was preached; some weeping with sorrow and distress, others with joy and love, others¹ with pity and concern for the souls of their neighbors.

The Spirit did not only come to new converts, but to those who had been formerly wrought upon, and renewed and refreshed their spirits. During this period many who had nourished doubts in their hearts concerning their state of spiritual well-being were given peace. Young people were found to spend much time discussing religion:

. . . talking of the excellency and dying love of Jesus Christ, the glory of the way of salvation, the wonderful, free, and sovereign grace of God, his glorious work in the conversion of a soul, the truth and certainty of the great things of God's Word, the sweetness of the views of his perfections. . .²

In the beginning many ridiculed the work and referred to several of those affected as possessed with distempers. There were also others who were only curious and when in Northampton on visits or business became savingly blessed, causing the work to be spread in other towns.³ The news of the spreading of the Spirit was a help in upholding the work among the Northampton people. Strangely enough the parish at Windsor was blessed at about the same time as Edwards' people; each without knowledge of the circumstances of the other.⁴ Edwards was impressed with the universal

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1. Ibid., p.348.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid., p.349.

4. Ibid.

scope of this work; he spoke of it as an "extraordinary dispensation of providence", far beyond the ordinary way in which God sent forth His spirit. He wrote of it:

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, It reached the most considerable families and persons, to all appearance, as much as others. In former stirrings of this nature, the bulk of the young people have been greatly affected; but old men and children (little) have been so now.¹

During Stoddard's ministry it was usually the case that more women would be converted than men. However Edwards found that the number of males and females converted was about equal.² At the time when the "Narrative of Conversions" was written, Edwards received "about six hundred and twenty communicants, which included almost all our adult persons."³

News of these events traveled fast, but certainly more than anything else, the lectures of Mr. Edwards were influential in spreading the effects of this revival to the surrounding territory. A great many of those who were curious enough to visit Northampton were also "awakened."⁴ At about the same time there were similar revivals reported in ten of the surrounding communities, while in Connecticut there were about seventeen such occurrences.⁵ It was re-

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1. Ibid., p.349.
2. Ibid., p.350.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid., p.lxxxv.
5. Ibid.

markable that no class or age group was exempt from the awakening which accounted for the conversion of more than three hundred persons in six months' time.¹

b. Manner of Awakening

The "Narrative of the Surprising Work of God," written in 1736, is an account of the revival in New England, written in answer to the request of the Rev. Dr. Watts and Rev. Dr. Guyse of London.² In this narrative Edwards wrote of the "manner of conversion" in the following sequence:

- 1.) Legal Troubles or Convictions
- 2.) Conviction of the Justice of God
- 3.) Discovery of All-sufficient Grace
- 4.) Display of Affections³

It is plain, however, that Edwards did not intend that all experiences should conform to this mould, but rather he intended to show the great analogy in all. Although the facts in cases concur in many respects, there was yet a great variety in the manner in which persons were wrought upon by the Spirit.

1.) Legal Convictions:

Usually an individual is first made conscious of his sinful condition in respect to the law, and when convinced that he may surely "perish for eternity", he is

.....

1. Ibid.

2. Bungay Edition, op. cit., p.344-346.

3. Ibid., p.350-359.

anxious to improve his condition.¹ According to Edwards:

Some are more suddenly seized with conviction - it may be, by the news of others' conversion, or something they hear in public, or in private conference - their consciences are smitten, as if their hearts were pierced through with a dart. Others are awakened more gradually, they begin at first to be something more thoughtful and considerate, so as to come to a conclusion in their minds, that is is their best and wisest way to delay no longer, but to improve the present opportunity. They have accordingly set themselves seriously to meditate on those things that have the most awakening tendency, on purpose to obtain convictions; and so their awakenings have increased, till a sense of their misery, by God's Holy Spirit setting in therewith, has had fast hold of them. Others who before had been somewhat religious, and concerned for their salvation, have been awakened in a new manner; and made sensible that their slack and dull way of seeking, was never like to obtain that purpose.²

These awakenings commonly took two patterns; one caused the person to turn from his sin, the other to witness a great fear of his former wicked practice.³ Another effect caused some to be earnestly concerned about the ways of obtaining their salvation, such as Bible reading, prayer, the ordinances of the Church, and private meditation. The place of congregating was now changed, for "it was no longer the tavern, but the minister's house that was thronged far more than ever the tavern had been wont to be."⁴ There has been a great variety of ways in which fear has come upon persons; some are given a great degree of hope and encouragement, while others are filled with a sense of God's displeasure.⁵

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1. Ibid., p.350,351.

2. Ibid., p.351.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

Often persons were so filled with fear and distressing apprehensions that they were afraid that the Spirit had forsaken them. Edwards was convinced that several persons suffered many needless distresses, probably at Satan's hand.

He said:

One knows not how to deal with such persons; they turn everything that is said to them the wrong way, and most to their own disadvantage. There is nothing that the devil seems to make so great a handle of, as a melancholy humour; unless it be the real corruption of the heart.¹

Satan seemed to be restrained to a great extent, however, because most stumblingblocks that hindered the sinners' progress were removed.² Very often persons were overcome by a sense of the wrath of God, sometimes failing to understand how such a righteous God could tolerate such sinners as they were.

During the time of "legal convictions" various types of inner corruption appeared,

. . . and Satan the old inhabitant seems to exert himself, like a serpent disturbed and enraged. Many in such circumstances, have felt a great spirit of envy towards the godly, especially towards those who are thought to have been lately converted . . . Indeed, some have felt many heart-risings against God . . . at his way of dealing with mankind . . . themselves in particular.³

It seems in this venture to be the aim of the Spirit of God to utterly convince man of his absolute dependence upon the sovereign grace of God and the need of a mediator.⁴ They

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1. Ibid.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.

were led,

. . . more and more to a sense of their exceeding wickedness and guiltiness in his sight; their pollution, and the insufficiency of their own righteousness; that they can in no wise help themselves, and that God would be wholly just and righteous in rejecting them and all that they do, and in casting them off for ever.¹

Gradually, as they become more and more convicted of the evil state of their souls, they appear to themselves to grow worse; where, as their awakening begins, they are pained with the sense of their outward condition, and gradually burdened with inner sins,

. . . the dreadful corruption of their nature, their enmity against God, the pride of their hearts, their unbelief, their rejection of Christ, the stubbornness and obstinacy of their wills; and the like.²

While under the first awakenings and realizing God's anger in the face of sin, they often are brought to confess their sins and offer obedience to religious duties, as if they would move God to compassion.³ However, when this failed, and they perceived their condition to become worse, there was a great temptation to stop seeking altogether. Edwards said:

They have more distressing apprehensions of the anger of God towards those whose hearts work after such a sinful manner about him; and it may be, have great fears that they have committed the unpardonable sin, or that God will surely never show mercy to them who are such vipers; and are often tempted to leave off in despair.⁴

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1. Ibid.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., p.352.
4. Ibid.

They have not learned that there is something else to be done. If it is suggested to them that they are depending too much on their own merits, the darkness yet remains, for this truth when it appears, comes slowly.¹ Finally comes the dawn. Perhaps after they have sought in all directions, God in His wondrous mercy puts forth His Spirit to convince them of their utter helpless and depraved condition; and the need for Christ and His gospel is laid upon their hearts.² As they seek salvation, at times too much dependent upon their own efforts, they ultimately learn that it is gained only with the influence of the Holy Spirit applied to their experience.³ In other cases persons are brought into a saving knowledge with much less pain and in a shorter time.

2.) Conviction of the Justice of God:

Next in order comes the conviction of God's justice in saving whom He will. Some gave this account:

. . . that they saw God was sovereign, and might receive others and reject them; some, that they were convinced, God might justly bestow mercy on every person in the town, . . . and damn themselves to all eternity; . . . that they see God may justly have no regard to all the pains they have taken, and all the prayers they have made; some, that if they should seek, and take the utmost pains all their lives, God might justly cast them into hell at last, because all their labours, prayers, and tears cannot make an atonement for the least sin, nor merit any blessing at the hands of God . . . that he may dispose of them just as He pleases; . . . that God may glorify Himself in their damnation, and they wonder that God has suffered them to live so long, and has not cast them into hell

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1. Ibid.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.

long ago.¹

Some are brought into this conviction by a sense of sinfulness in general, while others may be plagued by the sense of some particular evil practice, very often convinced that the "sin of unbelief" is the worst.² The restless struggle which sometimes precedes the conviction of God's justice eventually comes to a calm; "then the pressing weight upon their spirits is taken away."³ A conviction of the justice of God is accompanied often with a sense of tranquility:

Some express themselves, that they see the glory of God would shine bright in their own condemnation; and they are ready to think that if they are damned, they could take part with God against themselves, and would glorify His justice therein.⁴

This, however, Edwards would say, represents an extreme sense of self-denial which Scripture does not require.⁵

3.) Discovery of All-sufficient Grace:

With the discovery of all-sufficient grace, Christ became the object of desire, and greater comfort was achieved; yet, "some have their thoughts more especially fixed on God, in some of His sweet and glorious attributes in the Gospel, and shining forth in the face of Christ."⁶

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1. Ibid., p.353.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

Others regarded the all-sufficiency of the mercy and grace of God, the truth and faithfulness of God, the truth and certainty of the gospel, the glory and wonder of the dying love of Christ, or the sufficiency of His blood as the most valuable aspect of God's grace.¹ Many found comfort in a particular Scripture passage, or in many, while others discovered divine things without such aids. Grace seems to have appeared as a result of specific longings of the soul after God and Christ: "to know God, to love Him, to be humble before Him, to have communion with Christ in His benefits."² Edwards found that when questioned even those who had a "satisfying view" of God's grace without a distinct idea of Christ, based their hope on the gospel revelation of mercy.³ Frequently it happened that some who were "awakened" resolved to devote their lives to the service of Christ, but were yet not conscious of their conversions: "not being sensible that the obedient and joyful entertainment which their hearts give to this discovery of grace, is a real acceptance of it."⁴ It was found that those who beforehand had known the most about these things were more confounded than others.

4.) Display of Affections:

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1. Ibid.

2. Ibid., p.354.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

Edwards marveled at the manner in which these experiences moved the affections:

. . . when God did as it were suddenly open their eyes, and let into their minds a sense of the greatness of His grace, the fulness of Christ, and His readiness to save - after having been broken with apprehensions of divine wrath, and sunk into an abyss, under a sense of guilt which they were ready to think was beyond the mercy of God, their joyful surprise has caused their hearts as it were to leap, so that they have been ready to break forth into laughter, tears often at the same time issuing like a flood, and intermingling a loud weeping. Sometimes they have not been able to forbear crying out with a loud voice, expressing their great admiration.¹

The news of another's conversion Edwards said, was one of the chief factors in promoting the work of the Spirit.²

He also noted that occasionally persons received "saving convictions" by way of applying that which they heard from the pulpit to their reason, and made it a part of their private meditations.³ Many were so drawn by the love of God in Christ that all their thoughts were of the desire to be with Him. Mr. Edwards writes:

Several of our young children have expressed much of this; and have manifested a willingness to leave father and mother and all things in the world, to go and be with Christ.⁴

Concerning the "manner of awakening" in general, the most obvious characteristic is that of the vast differences both in manner and degree. However, Edwards was convinced that "it is plainly the same Spirit that breathes

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1. Ibid.

2. Ibid., p.355.

3. Ibid., p.356.

4. Ibid.

and acts in various persons."¹

c. Treatment of Those Awakened

1.) Preaching Ministry:

Edwards gave this definition of conversion: "Conversion is a great and glorious work of God's power, at once changing the heart, and infusing life into the dead soul."² One is impressed immediately with the authoritative and determined manner in which Mr. Edwards guided his flock in this time of spiritual awakening. Although God does not confine His work to any standard procedure, the Northampton pastor found ample proof of the fact that the doctrines of the sovereignty and justice of God were vital and productive of conversions.³ He found his most effective sermons to be those in which he insisted upon the doctrine of God's absolute sovereignty with regard to the salvation of sinners.⁴ A few of the famous discourses which were preached in 1735 were on the following subjects:⁵

1. Justification by Faith Alone. Romans 4:5
2. Pressing into the Kingdom of God. Luke 16:16
3. Ruth's Resolution. Ruth 1:16
4. The Justice of God in the Damnation of Sinners. Romans 3:19
5. The Excellency of Christ. Revelation 5:5-6

Early in this work Edwards apparently decided what course he would follow in the treatment of those who were awakened.

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1. Ibid., p.357.
2. Ibid., p.355.
3. Miller, op. cit., p.139.
4. Bungay Edition, op. cit., p.353.
5. Ibid., p.xcii.

His first concern was to plead that each sinner repent and believe.¹ He found that several sermons which he preached from Romans 3:19 "had an immediate saving effect." In these he attempted to illustrate how God would be justified if He rejected men forever.² He found this text to be the most fruitful in convicting men's hearts. During this period in which all his powers were put into service, Edwards' health remained good. The strain on his faculties was exhausting:

In addition to his ordinary duties as a teacher and pastor, his public lectures were now multiplied, private lectures were weekly appointed in different parts of the town, and his study was almost daily thronged by multitudes, looking to him as their spiritual guide. From the adjacent villages, also, great numbers resorted to him, for the same purpose, having the highest confidence in his wisdom and experience; and numerous ministers from various parts of the country, came to his house, to witness the triumphs of divine grace, and to gain, from his counsels and his measures, more just conceptions of the best manner of discharging the highest and most sacred duties of their office.³

2.) Meetings and Counselling:

Edwards seems to have handled the situation with good sense and practical wisdom. He appointed singing meetings, met with his flock in small groups, encouraged them to meet in private homes, invited them to come to him privately, and promoted universal harmony.⁴ Many young

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1. Ibid., p.lxxxv.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid., p.lxxxvi.

4. Winslow: Jonathan Edwards, p.163.

children formed religious societies in town.¹ Edwards felt it his duty:

. . . greatly to insist upon it with them that God is under no manner of obligation to show mercy to any natural man, whose heart is not turned to God: and that a man can challenge nothing either in absolute justice, or by free promise from anything he does before he has believed on Jesus Christ, or has true repentance begun in him.²

Any advice to the contrary would have only promoted "self-flattery and carelessness", and at the same time put an end to awakenings.³ Edwards found it necessary to some extent to evaluate a person's experience and inform him of his good estate. However, it was not a judgment of the person, but rather of the qualifications of his experience.⁴ Many, he was sure, needed a guide, and for this reason, he felt it was his duty as pastor "to assist and instruct persons in applying scripture-rules and characters to their own case."⁵ He was a means of encouragement to them, rejoicing with them in their hope. It appeared that none have stood more in need of instruction than those who formerly had a knowledge of religion.⁶ Nevertheless, some not fully convicted, were not helped by instruction, but lived on in their state for years.

When people are affected with imaginary ideas and strange sights, special precautions must be taken: ". . . great care has been taken both in public and in private to

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1. Bungay Edition, op. cit., p.349.
2. Ibid., p.352.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid., p.355.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid., p.354.

teach persons the difference between what is spiritual and what is merely imaginary."¹ The young "company-keeper"² who was one of the earliest converts, caused Edwards much anxiety, for he feared that she would be a cause of reproach to religion.³ He was troubled often about what the effect of peculiar awakenings would have on the general public. When some were tempted to judge their neighbor's standing in the church, Edwards would remind them how impossible it is for a person to know another's heart. He insisted that fruits were far better than profession alone.

3.) Admission to Membership:

It had been Stoddard's practice to look at church membership as "not dependent upon a candidate's relating evidences of his conversion experience."⁴ At that time, the Sacrament was looked upon as a saving ordinance and was therefore open to all. When Edwards admitted members, he desired sufficient evidence for their faith. When the probation period was longer, there was less danger of false profession.⁵ It is probably true that Edwards had not yet examined the Scripture for grounds for admission of members, but only accepted Stoddard's views as they stood.⁶ It was

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1. Ibid., p.358.
2. Ante, p.41.
3. Bungay Edition, op. cit., p.348.
4. Ibid., p.lxxxv.
5. Ibid., p.lxxxv, lxxxvi.
6. Ibid.

this point which later caused much dissension in the church, and led to Edwards' dismissal. It is likely, however, that at this early point (1735), the church would have changed its practice in this matter.¹ This might have prevented subsequent unfortunate developments.

d. Causes of Decline

In the spring of 1735, it became evident that the end of this great spiritual influence had come. The most obvious cause for the interruption of this awakening is found in the excessive physical strain and excitement which had lasted so long.² This is true for both ministers and laymen. Things had moved at an exhausting pace. Another cause for the decline might well be laid to those who had watched this work of the Spirit, not confessing their sins, but becoming more hardened in their denial.³ The controversy regarding the calling of a minister to the Springfield Church likely had an important affect. Several ministers were involved in it, which "too powerfully engrossed the attention both of ministers and people."⁴ The revival of religion, Edwards said,

. . . is nothing more than the immediate result of an uncommon attention, on the part of a church and congregation, to the truth of God. . . particularly to the great truths, which disclose the worth of the soul, and the only way in which it can be saved.⁵

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1. Ibid.
2. Bungay Edition, op. cit., p.lxxxvi.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.

Therefore it was natural that to stop the spirit of revival, it was only necessary to divert the peoples' attentions from these truths.¹

It was a bad omen that spring when Thomas Stebbins, a man of weak mind, attempted suicide. It was fatal news when some weeks later Joseph Hawley, an uncle of Jonathan Edwards, cut his throat and died on the sabbath. Most were convinced that this was a sign of the wrath of God upon the wickedness of the town.² A special fast day was appointed and people humbled themselves before God. It was evident that the end had come; God had withdrawn His Spirit from their presence. When more suicides were attempted and many other excess came out into the open, the public began to question seriously the wholesomeness of all the excitement.³

Before long it became evident that new converts had come into the church who did not belong there. These had to be disciplined. Dissension returned to the parish.⁴ In a final attempt in 1736, Edwards printed some "awakening sermons", but there was no response.⁵

4. Second Revival of Religion (1740-1742)

a. General Account

Again in the spring of 1740 the Spirit caused

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1. Ibid.
2. Winslow: Jonathan Edwards, p.165.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid., p.166.
5. Ibid.

another general awakening. The "stirrings" began in the spring, but it was not until several months later, after Mr. Whitefield's visit in 1741, that it became general.¹ According to "Thoughts on the Revival of Religion", it brought with it a surprising increase of consideration for eternal things:

. . . a disposition to hearken to what is said of such things, with attention and affection; a disposition to treat matters of religion with solemnity, and as of great importance; to make these things the subject of conversation; to hear the Word of God preached, and to take all opportunities in order to it; to attend on the public worship of God, and all external duties of religion, in a more solemn and decent manner; so that there is a remarkable and general alteration in the face of New England in these respects.²

Edwards, in the above mentioned work, gave a general account to this attention to religion as follows:

Multitudes in New England have lately been brought to a new and great conviction of the truth and certainty of the things of the gospel; to a firm persuasion that Christ Jesus is the Son of God, and the great and only Saviour of the world; and that the great doctrines of the gospel touching reconciliation by His blood, and acceptance in His righteousness, and eternal life and salvation through Him, are matters of undoubted truth. They have had a most affecting sense of the excellency and sufficiency of this Saviour, and the glorious wisdom and grace of God shining in this way of salvation; and of the wonders of Christ's dying love, and the sincerity of Christ in the invitations of the gospel . . . and now, instead of meeting at taverns and drinking-houses, and of young people in frolics and vain company, the country is full of meetings of all sorts and ages of persons - young and old, men, women, and children - to read and pray, and sing praises, and to converse of the things of God and another world. In very many places the main of the conversation in all companies turns on religion, and things of a spiritual nature. Instead of vain mirth among young people, there

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1. Miller, op. cit., p.196.

2. Bungay Edition, op. cit., p. 374.

is now either mourning under a sense of the guilt of sin, or holy rejoicing in Jesus Christ: and, instead of their lewd songs, there are now to be heard from them songs of praise to God, and the Lamb that was slain to redeem them by His blood. And there has been this alteration abiding on multitudes all over the land, for a year and a half, without and appearance of a disposition to return to former vice and vanity.¹

In 1740 and 1741, the conversions appeared to be much more genuine than during the former great outpouring of the Spirit in 1735 and 1736.² Attention to religion was certainly far more powerful and universal at Northampton, yet there are few places where so few of the excesses common to revivals were experienced. It was Edwards' opinion that the revival was genuine until it became infected from outside sources.³ Very often those things which the people observed in other churches, such as the display of violent emotions, were imitated as desirable. It is to some extent true that the example of Mr. Whitefield in his visit to Northampton did much to lead people, at least those with sensible emotions, to the excesses which were much feared. Although much impressed with the manner in which Mr. Whitefield appealed to persons, Edwards felt that he was not altogether discreet, and found it necessary to rebuke him publicly on one occasion.⁴ Mr. Edwards wrote that many ministers without sound discretion

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1. Ibid., p.375.

2. Tracy, op. cit., p. 198.

3. Bungay Edition, op. cit., p.cxi.

4. Ibid., p. cxii.

did not effectively suppress, outcries, falling down and swooning, in the time of public and social worship, the speaking and praying of women in the church and in mixed assemblies, the meeting of children by themselves for religious worship, and singing and praying aloud in the streets . .¹

Much of this trouble was caused by lay exhorting. These men who felt called by the Spirit to roam the country, preaching whenever they could find a gathering, made it their business to judge both the minister and the church. Often the clergy was accused of being "unsaved", and advice was given to the congregation to withdraw from him.² This was often the cause of quarrels in the church. Many outsiders for this reason formed a prejudice against revivals in general.

"Thoughts on the Revival of Religion in New England in 1740", in company with a sermon called, "The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God", were circulated throughout the colonies and Scotland. The effect was incalculable, but certainly stronger than any known works of their nature.³ In 1743 one hundred and sixty ministers published their attestations to the first work mentioned above. They gave testimony to this effort of Edwards as a genuine work of the Holy Spirit.⁴ In the same year the convention of ministers in Boston stated:

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1. Ibid.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., p.cxiv.
4. Ibid., p.cxii.

Those who were regarded as converts confirmed the genuineness of the change which they professed to have experienced by the external fruits of holiness in their lives, so that they appeared to those who had the nearest access to them, as so many epistles of Jesus Christ,¹ written not with ink, but by the Spirit of the living God.

In March 1744 Edwards lamented to a friend that the awakening was dead and "that the state of affairs in New England was truly melancholy."² Yes, the end was here, but not before one hundred and fifty congregations in New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maryland and Virginia had felt the greatest influence of the Spirit of God that has been recorded since the time of Christ's mission on earth.³

b. Manner of Awakening

1.) Young People and Children Converted:

This new attention to the influence of the Spirit was first noticed in the young people, causing them to make religion the general subject of their conversations. It was also evidenced in greater numbers coming to Mr. Edwards to talk with him in regard to their salvation.⁴ This same attitude continued throughout the following summer and autumn. In October, George Whitefield came to confer with the Northampton pastor about the work of the Spirit in 1735. He remained there four days and preached five sermons; re-

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1. Quoted from John Gillies by Charles Hodge, op. cit., p.52.
2. Miller, op. cit., p.197.
3. Bungay Edition, op.cit., p.cxii.
4. Ibid., p. xciv.

proving backsliders and summoning all to return to the ways of God.¹ His visit was followed by a widespread awakening of those who had previously professed religion. Mr. Edwards wrote of Whitefield's visit:

He preached here four sermons in the meetinghouse, besides a private lecture at my house, one on Friday, another on Saturday, and two upon the Sabbath. The congregation was extraordinarily melted by every sermon; almost the whole assembly being in tears for a great part of the sermon time . . . Immediately after this, the minds of the people in general appeared more engaged in religion, showing a greater forwardness to make religion the subject of their conversation, and to meet frequently together for religious purposes, and to embrace all opportunities to hear the Word preached . . . in a very short time, there appeared an awakening and deep concern among some young persons that looked upon themselves as in a Christless state; and there were some hopeful appearances of conversion; and some professors were greatly revived . . . By the middle of December, a very considerable work of God appeared among those that were very young; and the revival of religion continued to increase; so that in the spring an engagedness of spirit about things of religion was become very general amongst young people and children . . .²

For a period of a few months after this early outbreak there was an obvious decrease in the attention to religion, until May 1741, when Edwards preached, in a private home, a sermon on Christian love. Of this meeting he wrote:

Near the conclusion of the discourse, one or two persons, that were professors, were so greatly affected with a sense of the greatness and glory of divine things, and the infinite importance of the things of eternity, that they were not able to conceal it - the affection of their minds overcoming their strength, and having a very visible affect upon their bodies.³

The young people immediately held a conference to hear the

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1. Ibid.

2. Quoted by Tracy, op. cit., p.193.

3. Bungay Edition, op. cit., p.c.

testimony of those previously affected. It had a great affect upon the group. Edwards wrote:

The affection was quickly propagated throughout the room; many of the young people and children, that were professors, appeared to be overcome with a sense of the greatness and glory of divine things, and with admiration, love, joy, and praise, and compassion to others, that looked upon themselves as in a state of nature; and many others were at the same time overcome with distress, about their sinful and miserable estate and condition; so that the whole room was full of nothing but outcries, faintings, and the like.¹

From all over town people came to hear and witness what was going on. The meeting continued for several hours, "the time being spent in prayer, singing, counselling, and conferring."² Several days later, after a weekday meeting, Edwards took the children under seventeen aside for some special instruction. At this meeting they were greatly affected with the warnings and counsels that were given to them. At the pastor's home some time later there was a meeting of new communicants. He wrote:

Many seemed to be very greatly and most agreeably affected with those views, which excited humility, self-condemnation, self-abhorrence, love, and joy: many fainted under these affections. We had several meetings that summer, of young people, attended with like appearances. It was about that time, that there first began to be cryings out in the meetinghouse; which several times occasioned many of the congregation to stay in the house after the public exercises were over, to confer with those who seemed to be overcome with religious convictions and affections, which was found to tend much to the propagation of their impressions, with lasting effects upon many; conference being, at these times,

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1. Ibid.
2. Ibid.

commonly joined with prayer and singing.¹

2.) Deep Emotional Reactions:

At several other meetings that summer people would cry out in the meeting, being so overcome with the Spirit of God. Even the children held meetings all over town. Many were affected in these groups in a saving fashion. A letter of Mr. Edwards to a minister in Boston contains a remarkable account of the work of conversion at this time. Of the children he wrote:

. . . the room was filled with cries; and when they were dismissed, they almost all of them went home crying aloud through the streets, to all parts of the town. The like appearances attended several such meetings of children, that were appointed. But their affections appeared by what followed, to be of a very different nature: in many, they appeared indeed but childish affections, and in a day or two would leave them as they were before; others were deeply impressed; their convictions took fast hold of them, and abode by them; and there were some that from one meeting to another, seemed extraordinarily affected for some time, to but little purpose, their affections presently vanished from time to time; but yet afterwards, were seized with abiding convictions, and their affections became durable.²

Religious experience reached a peak during the months of August and September. The remarkable thing about this revival was that the effects of the Spirit seemed to be greatly upon the younger generation: "those who were not come to years of discretion in that wonderful season, nine years ago; children, or those that were then children."³ During

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1. Ibid.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.

these months emotions ran high and the Spirit of God worked in many ways. Edwards wrote:

There was an appearance of glorious progress of the work of God upon the hearts of sinners, in conviction and conversion, this summer and autumn, and great numbers, I think we have reason to hope, were brought savingly home to Christ . . . It was a very frequent thing, to see a house full of outcries, faintings, convulsions, and such like, both with distress, and also with admiration and joy . . . there were some that were so affected, and their bodies so overcome, that they could not go home, but they were obliged to stay all night where they were.¹

Now there were many who had formerly been converted, and in a measure left God, who now had a second conversion. Edwards wrote:

They were first led into the wilderness. . . having much deeper convictions . . . than ever before . . . beyond that they had felt before their first conversion. Under these convictions, they were excited to strive for salvation, and the kingdom of heaven suffer violence from some of them, in a far more remarkable manner than before; and after great convictions and humblings, and agonizing with God, they had Christ discovered to them anew, as an all-sufficient Saviour, and in the glories of His grace . . .²

There was one particular way in which the work of this period differed from the previous one in 1735. Convictions seemed to be stronger and conversions made more visible. Mr. Edwards said of the external effects:

The progress of the Spirit of God in conviction, (was) from step to step, more apparent; and the transition from one state to another, more sensible and plain; so that it might, in many instances, be as it were seen by bystanders.³

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1. Ibid.

2. Ibid., p. ci.

3. Ibid.

3.) The Ecstasy of Mrs. Sarah Edwards:

Following these events there was a general decline in religious awakening until February 1742, when Mr. Buell came to preach in Northampton. Mr. Edwards was on a missionary tour in the colonies.¹ Under Buell's preaching the work of grace began with greater power than before. His preaching was followed by a flow of religious exercises and emotions far more spectacular than any previous works in the Northampton church. Edwards said:

. . . there were instances of persons lying twenty-four hours in a trance, apparently senseless, though under strong imaginations, as though they went to heaven and had there visions of glorious objects . . . When the people were raised to this height, Satan took the advantage, and his interpretation, in many instances, soon became apparent, and a great deal of pains were necessary to keep the people from running wild.²

Probably the most remembered event of this period is the religious exercises of Mrs. Sarah Edwards. She attained the heights of her religious ecstasy during the short visit of Mr. Buell. At the request of Mr. Edwards she wrote a detailed account of her affections. She said:

. . . I felt a strong desire to be alone with God, to go to Him, without having any one to interrupt the silent and soft communion, which I earnestly desired between God and my own soul; and accordingly withdrew to my chamber. It should have been mentioned that, before I retired . . . these words, in Rom. viii.34. came into my mind, 'Who is he that condemneth; it is Christ that died, yea rather that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us;' as well

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1. Ibid., p.xcii.

2. Quoted by Charles Hodge, op. cit., p. 41, Part II.

as the following words, 'Who shall separate us from the love of Christ.' . . . I cannot find language to express, how certain this appeared - the everlasting mountains and hills were but shadows to it. My safety, and happiness, and eternal enjoyment of God's immutable love, seemed as durable and unchangeable as God himself. Melted and overcome by the sweetness of this assurance, I fell into a great flow of tears, and could not forbear weeping aloud. It appeared certain to me that God was my Father, and Christ my Lord and Saviour, that he was mine and I his. Under a delightful sense of the immediate presence and love of God, these words seemed to come over and over in my mind, 'My God, my all; my God, my all.' The presence of God was so near, and so real, that I seemed scarcely conscious of any thing else. God the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ, seemed as distinct persons, both manifesting their inconceivable loveliness, and mildness, and gentleness, and their great immutable love to me. I seemed to be taken under the care and charge of my God and Saviour, in an inexpressibly endearing manner; and Christ appeared to me as a mighty Saviour, under the character of the lion of the tribe of Judah, taking my heart, with all its corruptions, under his care, and putting it at his feet. In all things, which concern me, I felt myself safe under the protection of the Father and the Saviour; who appeared with supreme kindness to keep a record of everything that I did, and of everything that was done to me, purely for my good.¹

Although, often enduring similar high experiences, Mrs.

Edwards was not one to neglect the ordinary business of house-keeping. She had a large family to take care of during this period of revival. On one occasion she exclaimed, "Oh how good it is to work for God in the daytime, and at night to lie down under his smiles."²

4.) Embarrassment of Emotional Excesses:

In the summer of 1742 there were still isolated instances of awakening, but compared with the past, very

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1. Bungay Edition, op. cit., p. civ, cv.

2. Ibid., p.378.

feeble. Edwards said:

. . . in the general, people's engagedness in religion, and the liveliness of their affections, have been on the decline; and some of the young people especially, have shamefully lost their liveliness and vigour in religion, and much of the seriousness solemnity of their spirits.¹

The latter part of the revival season was to some extent infected with excesses from outside sources.² An extraordinary use of the emotions was referred to as "boldness for Christ", and became the envy of many. It became popular among some to display raptures and violent emotions. Concerning these Edwards wrote:

The effects and consequences of things among us plainly show the following things, viz. That the degree of grace is by no means to be judged of by the degree of joy, or the degree of zeal; and that indeed we cannot at all determine by these things, who are gracious and who are not; and that it is not the degree of religious affections, but the nature of them, that is chiefly to be looked at. Some that have had very great raptures of joy, and have been extraordinarily filled, (as the vulgar phrase is) and have had their bodies overcome, and that very often, have manifested far less of the temper of Christians in their conduct since, than some others that have been still, and have made no great outward show. But then again, there are many others, that have had extraordinary joys and emotions of mind, with frequent great affects upon their bodies, that behave themselves stedfastly, as humble, amiable, eminent Christians.³

Edwards did not feel that great emotional manifestations were necessary to insure a person's possession of saving grace. However, he was convinced that bodily effects were evidences of the special presence and power of the Spirit

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1. Ibid., p. ciii.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

of God. Weeping and fainting were not regarded by him as "certain evidences" of the Spirit, but rather "probable tokens of God's presence, and arguments of the success of preaching."¹ Of this he said:

. . . when I see them excited by preaching the important truths of God's word, urged and enforced by proper arguments and motives, or consequent on other means that are good, I do not scruple to speak of them, and to rejoice in them, and to bless God for them, as such. I confess that when I see a great crying out in a congregation, in the manner that I have seen it, when those things are held forth to them that are worthy of their being greatly affected by, I rejoice in it, much more than in appearance of solemn attention and a show of affection by weeping; and that, because when there have been those out cries, I have found from time to time a much greater and more excellent effect. To rejoice that the work of God is carried out calmly, without much ado, is in effect to rejoice that it is carried on with less power, or that there is not so much of the influence of God's Spirit. For though the degree of the influence of the Spirit of God on particular persons is by no means to be judged of by the degree of external appearances, because of the different constitutions, tempers and circumstances of men; yet, if there be a very powerful influence of the Spirit of God on a mixed multitude, it will cause, some way or other, a great visible commotion.²

To the minister, one of the most embarrassing features of the revival was disturbances such as these in the Sabbath morning worship. These exercises became much sought after, especially near the end of this period of the Great Awakening. It went so far, in some places, that people were known to rival each other in efforts to produce the most striking effects.³ Here is an illustration of the physical

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1. Allen, op. cit., p. 167.
2. Tracy, op. cit., p.229.
3. Miller, op. cit., p.179.

extremes that appeared with some convictions:

Extraordinary views of divine things, and the religious affections, were frequently attended with very great effects on the body. Nature often sunk under the weight of divine discoveries, and the strength of the body was taken away. The person was deprived of all ability to stand or speak. Sometimes the hands were clinched, and the flesh cold, but the senses remaining. Animal nature was often in a great emotion and agitation, and the soul so overcome with admiration, and a kind of omnipotent joy, as to cause the person, unavoidably, to leap with all the might, with joy and mighty exaltation. The soul at the same time was so strongly drawn towards God and Christ in heaven, that it seemed to the person as though soul and body would, as it were of them selves, of necessity mount up, leave the earth, and ascend thither.¹

Nevertheless, even when some who have displayed true affections do fall into great errors, it cannot be argued that the work is not of God.

c. Treatment of Those Awakened

1.) Spiritual Counselling:

It was fortunate for New England that during this period of revival Edwards had already digested the experiences of the previous awakening in 1735. As a spiritual guide, he was already prepared in his own mind. In his mind were settled principles regarding the manner in which a genuine revival of religion would affect the hearts of his people.² He was thoroughly familiar with its cause, and he had ample opportunity to observe its nature. This is Edwards' view of revival:

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1. Bungay Edition, op. cit., p.376.
2. Ibid., cxiii.

He regards it as caused - not by appeals to the feelings or the passions, but - by the truth of God brought home to the mind, in a subordinate sense by the preaching of the gospel, but in a far higher sense by the immediate agency of the Holy Spirit. He considered such an event, so far as man is concerned, as the simple effect of a practical attention to truth, on the conscience and the heart. He felt it to be his great, and in a sense his only, duty, therefore, to urge divine truth on the feelings and consciences of his hearers, with all possible solemnity and power.¹

In accord with this basic principle he taught people to embrace all opportunities to hear the word preached. It was common during this period for many to come and consult the pastor concerning the salvation of their souls.² He served as a spiritual counsellor and guide to multitudes in the country in which he was the recognized revival authority. He was known to give personal advice to many, even to interrupt his work to write a letter of comfort and instruction to one who feels in a Christless condition.³

2.) Young People's Conferences:

It was the practice of the Northampton church to hold young people's conferences and in these meetings inquire into the experiences of those recently affected by the Spirit.⁴ This proved to be a big help in spreading the revival. Especially during the early part of this awakening a special attempt was made to confer with and advise the younger children. This was a great blessing in many cases, but there

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1. Ibid.

2. Ibid., p.cxix.

3. Ibid., p.xcv.

4. Ibid., p.c.

were occasions when the enthusiasm of the children got out of hand.¹

3.) The Attitude and Influence of the Minister:

In a letter to a Scotch friend he enclosed a list of aims and resolutions agreed upon by a Boston ministers association. They were listed under three headings and included such things as (1) a concern for the minister's own spiritual estate, (2) hope that the great doctrines of the gospel be preached, and (3) that private conferences be held for the examination of candidates for the communion.² Edwards held that above all external virtues a minister must practice humility. A preacher can with little effort act an assumed part. He wrote:

When a minister is greatly succeeded from time to time, and so draws the eyes of the multitude upon him, and he sees himself flocked after and resorted to as an oracle, and people are ready to adore him and to offer sacrifice to him, as it was with Paul and Barnabas at Lystra, it is almost impossible for a man to avoid taking upon him the airs of a master. All young ministers . . . should take warning . . . of . . . Uzzah the son of Abinadab. He seemed to have a real concern for the ark of God, and to be zealous and engaged in his mind; but God smote him for his want of humility and taking too much upon himself.³

Edwards, with the Scripture as his guide and experience as his teacher, could tell evangelical faith when he saw it, and he knew how to guide individuals into a saving knowledge

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1. Ibid.

2. Ibid., p.cxiix.

3. Fish, op. cit., p.158,159.

of their Lord.¹ Observation had confirmed in the mind of Edwards the truths that philosophy and the study of the Bible had early formed in his thought concerning the true nature of the revival of religion.² This question had directed his thoughts even as a young boy who experienced occasional "stirrings" in his father's parish. Mr. Edwards was conscious of the difficulties that attended every revival of religion. The trouble arose time after time over a faulty conception in respect to the question: What is the nature of true religion?³ What evidences of holiness are acceptable in the sight of God? If this question could be answered to the satisfaction of all, the problem of revival would be solved. It was apparent that much false religion might prevail during a revival of true religion, and that as a result hypocrites might be found among true professors. Some were of the opinion that those who are strongly seized upon should be removed from the presence of the other worshippers. However, Edwards felt that their influence was wholesome upon the hearts of those who witnessed them.⁴ He spent considerable time in counselling his people as to how to distinguish between imagination and true workings of the Spirit of God.⁵

4.) The Covenant:

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1. Bungay Edition, op. cit., p.clii.
2. Ibid., p.cxxiv.
3. Ibid.
4. Tracy, op. cit., p.229.
5. Allen, op. cit., p.165.

Mr. Buell remained for a few weeks after Mr. Edwards returned from a preaching tour, and the affections rose even higher. In writing of some of the effects Mr. Edwards said, ". . . great appearances attending his labours; may in their religious affections being raised far beyond what they had ever been before . . ." ¹ Among the newly awakened Christians two things were noticed; a complete lack of spiritual pride, and a sense of the importance of moral and social duties. ² In March Mr. Edwards drew up a covenant and submitted it to the congregation for their approval. All above fourteen years of age signed it and it was dedicated on a day of fasting and prayer. In general it was a full commitment to the ways of the Lord; an acknowledgment of His care. ³ The new covenant which the people of Northampton entered into was a measure to stop some of the physical and mental exercises which Edwards feared would flood the congregation. It was also in this connection that in the winter of 1742 - 1743, he preached the sermons which now make up the "treatise on Religious Affections." ⁴

d. Causes of Decline

There were still isolated instances of awakening following the summer of 1742, but the influence of the Spirit

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1. Bungay Edition, op. cit., p.ci.
2. Ibid., p.377.
3. Ibid., p.ci.
4. Miller, op. cit., p.196.

of God was declining in outward manifestation.¹ At the same time Edwards' relations with his church began to deteriorate. Perry Miller writes:

. . . as he asked for salary increases; certain of the townspeople responded by criticising the extravagance of his scale of living, and particularly said cruel things about Sarah's clothes.²

It is almost inconceivable that a man who had been loved and respected as much as he, could in a matter of a few months suffer the complete alienation of his people. This is the most sorrowful result of the whole Great Awakening. Much could be said in the defense of both sides. Edwards was not a man to give up, even to accept as final the withdrawing of God's Spirit at this time. He fought it with all his might and mind. It seems he was totally insensible to the opposition of his people, but was concerned only for the renewal of the Spirit. There were many unfortunate things done on both sides. One of the unfortunate acts involved what has come to be known as the "bad book".³ Edwards became angered concerning the reading of this book, which was only a handbook for midwives, and proceeded to interrogate and prosecute these children publicly for their childish curiosity. The manner in which this matter was handled was met with open hostility from a majority of the Northampton people. At this time a spirit of jealousy and strife was

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1. Bungay Edition, op. cit. p.ciii.
2. Miller, op. cit., p.197.
3. Ibid.

engendered, which proved fatal to the progress of revival. In 1744 Edwards repudiated the former policy of Solomon Stoddard and demanded of all new members a profession of faith and experience before he would admit them to the communion.¹ This measure caused much bad feeling and became the issue over which the Northampton congregation finally dismissed Mr. Edwards from his pulpit.

During the time of its decline Mr. Edwards sought the help of outside friends. Accordingly organized movements for prayer were started both in churches in Scotland and in the colonies.² In his preaching Edwards made every attempt to rekindle the flames of 1735. When they did not respond, Miller writes: "He berated them, recalling their past glories, celebrating the reputation of Northampton as the leader of the revival, denouncing the present lassitude and factional strife."³ Mr. Edwards wrote to Rev. Erskine of Edinburgh that he had great reason to fear "that Arminianism, Arianism, and even Socinianism", are daily propagated in New England churches and colleges.⁴

It has been estimated that the number of true converts in this revival totaled about 30,000 in New England alone, at a time when the population was not more than 300,000.⁵ In spite of the errors and irregularities, it

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1. Ibid., p.198.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. Hodge, op. cit., p.55, PartII.

5. Baird, op. cit., p.199.

must be conceded, that the Great Awakening was a constructive and liberalizing force, directed by sober-minded and devout men who were well versed in the Scriptures and in the history of religion.

D. Summary

The early background of Jonathan Edwards was in a way extraordinary. He came from an exceptionally pious family and the environment of his youth led him early to seek religious truth. He was an excellent student and had a great thirst for knowledge, which he applied with diligence to the Calvinistic doctrines he inherited. He studied the modern philosophers and naturalists of his time: the most important being John Locke, Bishop Berkeley, and John Newton. His use of their thinking aided him greatly in formulating his all-embracing system of theology early in his life. This system was to become the basis for his entire life's work.

Well fortified in many fields, Edwards began his ministry after spending a brief period at Yale College as senior tutor. Soon after coming to the Northampton church, he inherited the pulpit of the most influential church outside of Boston. When Solomon Stoddard, with whom he had been associate pastor for about two years, died and left Edwards in full command of the Northampton pulpit, he immediately impressed upon New England the fact that he was fully capable of running the affairs of that important parish. He was a preacher whom few men could ignore, and as he set

out to impress God's Word upon the hearts of his congregation, he was blessed with great success. The first revival of religion was a true manifestation of God's grace and power and lifted Northampton and vicinity from the clutches of apathetic religion straight into the arms of God. As the revival ran its course and finally incorporated some of the evil excesses which were feared, the Spirit of God, just as suddenly as it had come, departed leaving Northampton breathless. The second awakening which appeared about five years later was in the beginning even of greater effect than the first. By this time all New England and several of the other colonies had become interested and effected by its spirit. The Spirit of God so affected the people of Northampton that many refused to be concerned any more with the business of the world. Similar awakenings affected the people in other New England churches, and in the course of two years they spread throughout the colonies. The Northampton congregation, in the meanwhile, was greatly troubled with excesses resulting from the display of false emotions by some indiscreet persons. The work of the Spirit, hampered by rising contentions, gradually abated, and these people found themselves rather stunned and back where they started.

A series of unfortunate events caused a misunderstanding between Edwards and his people which eventually resulted in his dismissal. Edwards gave the initial spark

to the Great Awakening, and as its work continued he became its chief ambassador. Few events in the whole scope of Christian history have affected the hearts of a people as much as this work which was carried on under the leadership of Jonathan Edwards.

CHAPTER III

EDWARDS' PERSONAL EVALUATION
OF THE EVIDENCES AND FRUITS OF TRUE CONVERSION

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A. Introduction

There is no question of greater importance to mankind than: "What are the distinguishing qualifications of those that are in favour with God and entitled to His eternal rewards?"¹ It is significant that the results of any revival of religion be studied and that they be evaluated in their true light. It is fortunate in the light of this present study that Jonathan Edwards has in various ways attempted to do this very thing by publishing his highly objective reflections upon the lasting results of the Great Awakening.

The most truly representative account of his thoughts on this matter was entitled "A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections, (1746). The aim of this chapter will be to present his interpretation of the true character of conversion, and the certain signs of the work of God's Holy Spirit. Inasmuch as the above mentioned treatise incorporates the bulk of his thinking on this subject, it will be employed as the chief reference in this chapter.

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1. Bungay Edition, op. cit., p.234.

B. The Exercise of Religious Affections

1. The Testimony of Scripture

It is a very mysterious thing how in the Church of God good and evil effects seem to be so thoroughly mixed. Edwards pointed out that this was no new thing.¹ There was great apostacy soon after the revival in Josiah's day. The awakening of the Jews under the preaching of John the Baptist reversed itself. And the results following the preaching of Jesus Christ bear even a greater testimony to this fact. Edwards wrote, ". . . of the many that were called, but few were chosen."² It will always be so until there comes a time when "God will give much greater light to His people." The devil has his greatest advantage where true religion is mixed with counterfeit religion.³ Until Christians learn to distinguish the false from the true, Satan will continue to deceive the minds of men concerning the state of their souls. It is, therefore, of great importance that the nature of true religion be determined.⁴

The Scriptures, especially the Epistles, reveal how much persecution and trial tend to distinguish the true from the false in religion. A trial proves the faith of a Christian. It is a true test. Trials are beneficial in

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1. Ibid., p.234,235.

2. Ibid., p.234.

3. Ibid., p.235.

4. Ibid.

another way; they purify and refine, "that nothing may be left but that which is true."¹ Even under suffering the early Christians were filled with inner affections, i.e. with joy and love to Christ.

2. The Meaning of Affection

In the words of Edwards, "the affections are no other than the more vigorous and sensible exercises of the inclination and will of the soul."² According to him the soul is composed of two principal faculties: the one is capable of perception which is called the understanding. The other faculty is called the inclination, "and as it respects the actions determined and governed by it, the will: and the mind, with regard to the exercises of this faculty, is often called the heart."³ The mind, when engaged in the exercises of approving and disapproving, is commonly spoken of as the heart. Of this he writes:

The will, and the affections of the soul, are not two faculties; the affections are not essentially distinct from the will, nor do they differ from the mere actings of the will and inclination, but only in the liveliness and sensibility of exercise. - It must be confessed, that language is here somewhat imperfect . . . In some sense, the affection of the soul differs nothing at all from the will and inclination, and the will never is in any exercise further than it is affected; it is not moved out of a state of perfect indifference, any otherwise than as it is affected one way or other.⁴

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1. Ibid., p.236.
2. Ibid., p.237.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.

The inclination causes one to act, but not all the motions of the inclination or will are commonly considered affections. Yet the distinction is only in degree and manner of use.¹ It is not the body, however, that is the seat of the affections, but the mind. Although the affections and the passions are often spoken of as being the same, Edwards implies that the passions have more to do with desire or animal drives.²

3. Its Relation to Religion

The affections are not only related to religion, but they account for a very large part of true religious experience. Edwards wrote:

. . . who will deny that true religion consists, in a great measure, in vigorous and lively actings of the inclination and will of the soul, or the fervent exercises of the heart? That religion which God requires, and will accept, does not consist in weak, dull, and lifeless wishes, raising us but a little above a state of indifference.³

Romans 12:11 teaches, "Be ye fervent in spirit, serving the Lord." Such a fervent spirit is the very heart of religion and is the fruit of true regeneration. Concerning this Mr. Edwards says:

If we be not in good earnest in religion, and our wills and inclinations be not strongly exercised, we are nothing. The things of religion are so great, that there can be no suitableness in the exercises of our hearts, to their

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1. Ibid.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.

nature and importance, unless they be lively and powerful. In nothing is vigour in the actings of our inclinations so requisite, as in religion; and in nothing is lukewarmness so odious. True religion is evermore a powerful thing; and the power of it appears, in the first place, in its exercises in the heart, its principal and original seat.¹

Therefore, true religion is, as II Timothy 3:5 implies, the power of godliness, and the external appearances are only the form of it. Religion in the Epistles is often represented as running, fighting, or striving to gain the prize. Grace is operative in persons in varying degrees. Nevertheless, in all who possess it to any degree, the heart is inclined in affection toward God.²

God has not only created man with such affections, but man is so made that the affections become spring-boards for action. Edwards maintained:

. . . as true religion is practical, and God hath so constituted the human nature, that the affections are very much the spring of men's actions, this also shows, that true religion must consist very much in the affections.³

Man is not moved to action but remains indifferent, unless he is motivated by love, hate, fear, or the like.

This is a certain fact that religion will be of meaning to a person to the extent that it affects him. Mr. Edwards explains:

There are multitudes who often hear the word of God, of things infinitely great and important, and which most

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1. Ibid., p.238.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

nearly concern them, yet all seems to be wholly ineffectual upon them, and to make no alteration in their disposition or behaviour; the reason is, they are not affected with what they hear. There are many who often hear of the glorious perfections of God . . . they hear of the great works of God's wisdom . . . they hear of the unspeakable love of God and Christ . . . they hear of the great things of another world. . . They also hear the peremptory commands of God, his gracious counsels and warnings, and the sweet invitations of the gospel. Yet they remain as before, with no sensible alternation, either in heart or practice, because they are not affected with what they hear.¹

Another reason which Edwards gives for regarding the affections as so important to religion is that the Scriptures elevate them to a high position.² They speak in such terms as: Fear the Lord, hope in His mercy, love the Lord, thirst for God, rejoice in the Lord. Furthermore, they represent true religion as consisting in the great commandment of love. Romans 8:8 declares: "He that loveth another, hath fulfilled the law." And Paul in another epistle speaks of love as the greatest thing in religion. Without doubt then, as much as this love represents the sentiment of the soul, it can be nothing else but affectionate love. Accordingly, Edwards says, ". . . the essence of all true religion lies in holy love; and that in this divine affection - and habitual disposition to it, that light which is the foundation to it, and those things which are its fruits - consists the whole of religion."³ It is obvious

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1. Ibid.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., p.240.

that when the Scriptures speak of "hardness of heart," actually what is meant is a heart which is unaffected. Therefore, it is logical that sin is to a great extent a lack of pious affections and the possession of these pious affections constitutes holiness. Edwards' theory is that religion exists in the heart in exact proportion to the degree of affections. He says:

. . . there is much affection in the true saints which is not spiritual; their religious affections are often mixed; all is not from grace, but much from nature. . . But yet it is evident, that religion consists so much in the affections, as that without holy affections there is no true religion.¹

4. The Importance of Affections

Mr. Edwards took great pains to refute the Arminian error which was becoming increasingly widespread. In refutation of the extreme position which was disregarding all religious affections, he wrote:

Because many who, in the late extraordinary season, appeared to have great religious affections, did not manifest a right temper of mind, and run into many errors, in the heat of their zeal; and because the high affections of many seemed to be so soon come to nothing, and some who seemed to be mightily raised and swallowed with joy and zeal for a while, seemed to have returned like a dog to his vomit: hence religious affections in general are grown out of credit with great numbers, as though true religion did not at all consist in them. Thus we easily and naturally run from one extreme to another.²

Several months before the other extreme had appeared. People were viewing the very high exercises of religious affections

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1. Ibid., p.243.

2. Ibid.

without so much as inquiring into their nature or source.

How quickly now people dashed from that extreme to the other!

Of this Edwards wrote:

If persons did not appear to be indeed very much moved and raised, so as to be full of religious talk, and express themselves with great warmth and earnestness, and to be filled, or to be very full, as the phrases were; it was too much the manner, without further examination, to conclude such persons were full of the Spirit of God, and had eminent experiences of his gracious influences.¹

But then the tide turned, and in Edwards' words, ". . . instead of esteeming and admiring all religious affections, without distinction, it is much more prevalent to reject and discard all without distinction."² It was in this situation that Satan seemed to be sowing tares among the wheat. When it became apparent that some of the results of the last revival were not genuine but rather the consequences of false affections, it seemed that the devil chose to work in another manner. The affections and emotions of the mind appeared of no consequence, and as such were shunned. This doctrine led to a lifeless religion. It was thought that there must be something else besides affection in religion. But Edwards asserted, "True religion consists so much in the affections, that there can be no true religion without them."³ Certainly if men possess a right knowledge of religious truth, it cannot help but affect the heart. To ignore the testimony

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1. Ibid.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.

of the heart is to abet the hardening of the hearts of men.

In Edwards words:

For persons to despise and cry down all religious affections, is the way to shut all religion out of their own hearts, and to make thorough work in ruining their souls. . . . And let it be considered, that they who have but little religious affection, have certainly but little religion . . . A man's having much affection, does not prove that he has any true religion: but if he has no affection, it proves that he has not true religion.¹

The right way to deal with the affections is not to approve all appearances, but to distinguish between those which have as their true object and source the all-sufficient grace of God and those which are the mischief of the evil one.

It follows, that if true religion consists of the affections to a great degree, all means should be employed to activate them. However, one must take great care to excite the true affections of the Spirit. Edwards insisted:

. . . there may be such means, as have a great tendency to stir up the passions of the weak and ignorant persons, and yet have none to benefit their souls: for though they may have a tendency to excite affections, they have little or none to excite gracious affections.²

If the affections are such a part of true religion, then one has every cause to be ashamed if he is little affected!

Concerning this faculty and man's God-given purpose Edwards writes:

God has given to mankind affections, for the same purpose as that for which he has given all the faculties and principles of the human soul, viz. that they might be sub-

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1. Ibid., p.244.

2. Ibid.

servient to man's chief end, and the great business for which God has created him, that is, the business of religion. And yet how common is it among mankind, that their affections are much more exercised and engaged in other matters, than in religion!¹

The glory of our blessed God and the virtues of our precious Saviour are the most worthy objects to excite our true affections.

C. The Nature of True Affections

The Scriptures provide basic principles for one to study wherein true affections differ from those which are not. It does not, however, seem to be the intent of God that ministers or laymen have possession of all the rules by which they might be able to distinguish in an absolute manner the destiny of men's souls. Scripture does not provide sufficient evidence to judge the affections of friends and neighbors with any degree of certainty. Nevertheless it is plain that Christ has given rules to Christians with which they can judge those who profess religion in order to protect them from false teachers.²

1. Their Source

a. The Indwelling Spirit

True saints, that is those who are sanctified by the Spirit of God, are referred to in the New Testament as

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1. Ibid.

2. Bungay Edition, op. cit., p.263.

'spiritual men.'¹ The ungodly or natural man lacks all spiritual grace. The term 'spiritual' does not imply a relation to the human soul, nor are people called 'spiritual' because they are familiar with those things which are immaterial, but rather it implies a relation to the Holy Spirit. Edwards says:

Spirit, as the word is used to signify the third person in the Trinity, is the substantive, of which is formed the adjective spiritual in the Holy Scriptures. Thus Christians are called spiritual persons, because they are born of the Spirit, and because of the indwelling and holy influences of the Spirit of God in them.²

Paul in Romans 8:6 testifies to the origin of life and peace and speaks of it all in terms of being spiritually-minded. What he means by this, Edwards explains, is "having the indwelling and holy influences of the Spirit of God in the heart." This is the source of all true affections. The Spirit of God has been given to His true saints, that He may be a "fountain of living water" and the indwelling principle of all life. This is the only manner in which God's Spirit may dominate the whole life. Thus, when the Spirit of God is indwelling, the heart is filled with holy affections, because the nature of the Spirit of God is holiness. Edwards wrote:

The Spirit of God so dwells in the hearts of the saints, that he there, as a seed or spring of life, exerts and communicates himself, in this his sweet and divine nature.

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1. Cf. I Corinthians 2:14,15.
2. Bungay Edition, op. cit., p.264.
3. Ibid., p.265.

He makes the soul a partaker of God's beauty and Christ's joy, so that the saint has full fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ, in thus having the communion or participation of the Holy Ghost. The grace which is in the hearts of the saints, is of the same nature with the divine holiness, though infinitely less in degree; as the brightness in a diamond which the sun shines upon, is of the same nature with the brightness of the sun, but only that it is as nothing to it in degree.¹

This may correctly be referred to as a spiritual nature.

God has never influenced the minds of natural men in such a manner. It is not difficult to understand that with an image of divine holiness within him, the creature must respond in keeping with that influence. Again Edwards wrote of the Spirit's work:

. . . not only the manner of the Spirit's relation to the subject of his operations, is different; but the influence and operation itself, and the effect wrought, exceeding different. So that not only the persons are called spiritual, as having the Spirit of God dwelling in them, but those qualifications, affections, and experiences that are wrought in them by the Spirit, are also spiritual. Therein they differ vastly in their nature and kind from all that a natural state; and also from all that of which men or devils can be the authors. It is a spiritual work in this high sense; and therefore² above all other works is peculiar to the Spirit of God.

b. The Spiritual Sense

God communicates the goodness of His nature through the gift of His Spirit to man. Hence it may be said, "that truly gracious affections arise from those influences that are spiritual and divine."³ It is an apparent truth that

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1. Ibid.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.

only true saints possess the Spirit or that which is spiritual. Natural men are void of the gracious influences of God and will remain so, for Paul says in I Corinthians 2:14:

"The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God . . . because they are spiritually discerned." Therefore, natural men have no fellowship with Christ or pure thoughts of Him. Edwards wrote:

. . . natural men are represented in Scripture, as having no spiritual light, no spiritual life, and no spiritual being; and therefore conversion is often compared to opening the eyes of the blind, raising the dead, and a work of creation, wherein creatures are made entirely new, and becoming new-born children.¹

It can be concluded then that affections which are genuine are not natural, but are the result of the Supernatural.

Edwards felt that with the influences of the Spirit in the heart of man there results also a new inward perception.

He wrote:

If grace be . . . an entirely new kind of principle; then the exercises of it are also new. And if there be in the soul a new sort of conscious exercises, which the soul knew nothing of before, and which no improvement, composition, or management of what it was before could produce; then it follows that the mind has an entirely new kind of perception or sensation.²

This new spiritual sense is diverse from anything that is perceived by man in his natural state. It cannot be denied that the Spirit of God does have His influences on natural men, but this is done without producing spiritual sense.³

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1. Ibid., p.266.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

It follows then that spiritual affections are greatly different from those that arise in the minds of natural men. In some ways there is a common ground between gracious affections and others. An example would compare a Christian's love for God, and a natural man's love for his family.¹ An unconverted man may have religious apprehensions which to him are new, but they are nothing like the experiences of a spiritual man. The natural man's affections may come from the powerful influence of Satan.

c. Special Influences

The Holy Spirit makes a special impression on the mind of the believer, who is in turn caused to express ideas that can be distinguished as coming from God and not from an evil source. Certain effects must be accepted as distinguishing features of the Spirit's influence because they are, ". . . some of the things that the devil would not do if he could."² These include such things as a great regard for Holy Scripture, the acceptance of Christ's deity, opposition to the interests of Satan, and a spirit of love for God and man.³ Edwards remarked:

Upon the whole, I think it is clearly manifest, that all truly gracious affections arise from special and peculiar influences of the Spirit, working that sensible effect or sensation in the souls of the saints, which are entirely different from all that is possible a natural man should

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1. Ibid., p.267.

2. Works of President Edwards, Worcester Edition, Vol. I, p. 544.

3. Ibid., p.539-543.

experience; different, not only in degree and circumstances, but in its whole nature. So that a natural man not only cannot experience that which is individually the same, but cannot experience anything but what is exceedingly diverse, and immensely below it, in its kind; and that which the power of men or devils is not sufficient to produce, or any thing of the same nature.¹

This truth is useful in discovering false religious affections which are delusions of Satan. Many exercises of the imagination are of this nature and involve no spiritual grace. During revivals many such things are accepted as spiritual discoveries.² Edwards writes of such evidences,

. . . it is exceedingly apparent that such ideas have nothing in them which is spiritual and divine, in the sense wherein it has been demonstrated that all gracious experiences are spiritual and divine. These external ideas are in no wise entirely, and in their whole nature, diverse from all that men have by nature: so far from this, they are of the same sort which we have by the external senses, among the inferior powers of human nature.³

Men do receive these illusions, however, yet there is apparently nothing in them of worth. In these words Edwards emphasized their low nature:

It is certainly not above the power of Satan to suggest thoughts to men; because otherwise he could not tempt them to sin. And if he can suggest any thoughts or ideas at all, doubtless imaginary ones, or ideas of things eternal, are not above his power; for these are the lowest sort of ideas. These ideas may be raised only by impressing the brain. Abundant experience certainly shows, that alterations in the body will excite imaginary ideas in the mind; as in a high fever, melancholy, etc. These external ideas are as much below the more intellectual exercises of the soul, as the body is a less noble

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1. Bungay Edition, op. cit., p.267.
2. Ibid., p.268.
3. Ibid.

part of man then the soul.¹

Persons are sometimes convinced that an influence which suggests words of Scripture to the mind must be of the Spirit. This may be mistaken for the voice of God. In answer to this Edwards wrote:

. . . affections built on that notion, that texts of Scripture are sent immediately from God, are built on no spiritual foundation; and are vain and delusive. Persons who have their affections thus raised, if they should be asked, whether they have any new sense of the excellency of the things contained in those Scriptures, would probably say, Yes, without hesitation: but it is true no otherwise than because they have taken up that notion, that the words are spoken immediately to them. That it is, which makes them appear sweet, excellent, and wonderful.²

It is absurd that some should regard this "voice from God" as their conversion experience. God imparts a knowledge of religion to man after he believes, not before.³ Edwards implied this doctrine when he said, "nothing is of the nature of true virtue, in which God is not the first and the last."⁴ Belief comes first. Edwards said:

The Spirit of God is a Spirit of truth, and not of lies: he does not bring Scriptures to men's minds in order to reveal to them that they have a personal and possessive interest in God's promises, when they have none, having not yet believed. For this would be the case, if God bringing texts of Scripture to men's minds, in order to show them that their sins were forgiven, or that it was God's pleasure to give them the kingdom, or anything of that nature, went before and was the foundation of their first faith. No promise of the covenant of grace belongs possessively to any man, until he has first believed in Christ; for it is by faith alone that we become thus interested in Christ, and the promises of the new covenant

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1. Ibid., p.269.

2. Ibid., p.270.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid., p.126.

made in him.¹

The only true basis one has for believing that he is converted is the truth of the Gospel. There is no need for secret revelation. Mr. Edwards states:

If a sinner be once convinced of the veracity of God, and that the Scriptures are his word, he will need no more to convince and satisfy him that he is invited; for the Scriptures are full of invitations to sinners, to the chief of sinners, to come and partake of the benefits of the gospel.²

The true influence of the Spirit is felt only as it applies the Word of God to the heart, thereby enlightening the mind and giving the soul a spiritual sense.

2. Their Motivation

a. Not Self-love

Some argue that all love is founded on the desire to benefit one's self. They say that men love God only to the extent that they seek their own happiness. Must not man, however, first love God before he knows that esteem for God is to his own advantage?³ Certainly there is in God's holy nature attributes which will call forth affections for him; yet not for self-gain. Edwards said:

That kind of affection to God or Jesus Christ, which thus properly arises from self-love, cannot be a truly gracious and spiritual love . . . For self-love is a principle entirely natural, and as much in the hearts of devils as angels; and therefore surely nothing that is the mere result of it, can be supernatural and divine.⁴

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1. Ibid., p.270.
2. Ibid., p.271.
3. Ibid., p.275.
4. Ibid.

Therefore, self-love cannot be a properly motivated affection. The basis for true love of God is the inherent worth of His nature. Those who seek God for profit, Edwards said,

. . . begin at the wrong end; they regard God only for the utmost limit of the stream of divine good, there it touches them, and reaches their interest. They have no respect to that infinite glory of God's nature, which is the original good, and the true fountain of all good, and of liveliness of every kind.¹

Affections rooted in self-love ignore altogether the beauty and the glory of the divine nature. These notions usually arise from a false idea of God. God is more than goodness and mercy. He is also sovereign judge. Without this knowledge men may "love a God of their own forming in their imaginations, when they are far from loving such a God as reigns in heaven."² Such men are deluded in respect to their own state, often regarding themselves high in God's favour. Edwards said:

After awakenings and distress, through fears of hell, they may suddenly get a notion, through some impression on their imagination, or immediate suggestion with or without texts of Scripture, or by some other means that God loves them, has forgiven their sins, and made them his children; and this is the first things that causes their affections to flow towards God and Jesus Christ: and then, upon this foundation, many things in God may appear lovely to them, and Christ may seem excellent . . . They allow God to be lovely in himself no otherwise, than that he has forgiven and accepted them, loves them above most in the world, and has engaged to improve all his infinite power and wisdom in preferring, dignifying, and exalting them, and will do for them just as they would have him.³

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1. Ibid.
2. Ibid., p.276.
3. Ibid.

b. Love of God

In Edwards' mind the affection of Christian love is the source of all affections. To this end he writes:

Now the divine excellency of God, and of Jesus Christ, the word of God, his works, ways, &c. is the primary reason, why a true saint loves these things (divine things); and not any supposed interest that he has in them, or any conceived benefit that he has received or shall receive from them.¹

True love involves first seeing that God is an object of love, and then, after being captivated with this thought, one is able to see God's tender love and mercy as a benefit. The Christian's affections must begin with God. This is a sure test, for as Edwards says, "there are things which the devil neither can nor will do; he will not give men a spirit of divine love . . . nor could he if he would."² True gratitude to God for his mercy originates with a love for what God is. His free grace is in itself an object of beauty:

That wonderful and unparalleled grace of God which is manifested in the work of redemption, and shines forth in the face of Jesus Christ, is infinitely glorious in itself, and appears so to the angels; it is a great part of the moral perfection and beauty of God's nature.³

The Christian's joy which has as its object of affection the beauty of divine things is entirely different from the hypocrite's joy in self-glory. For the true saint, the objects of affection are the glory of God and the beauty of

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1. Ibid., p.275.

2. Worcester Edition, op. cit., p.544.

3. Bungay Edition, op. cit., p.277.

Jesus Christ.¹

3. Internal Influences

a. Enlightenment

Gracious affections are not "heat without light", but come in the wake of spiritual knowledge.² As a result of this light the Christian has a better understanding of God and Christ than before. In the case of some it is a renewal of faded light. Edwards' conception of the importance of sensations becomes important in this respect, for he would consider false any affections which are not the result of an enlightened understanding.³ For instance:

. . . when a person is affected with a lively idea, suddenly excited in his mind, of some shape, or beautiful pleasant form of countenance, a shining light, or other glorious outward appearance: here is something conceived by the mind; but nothing of the nature of instruction . . . Truly spiritual and gracious affections are not raised after this manner; these arise from the enlightening of the understanding.⁴

Accordingly, one cannot validly judge that a work is not of the Spirit "because of the extraordinary degree in which the minds of persons are influenced."⁵ Edwards wrote of the enlightened understanding:

There is a new understanding of the excellent nature

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1. Ibid., p.278.

2. Ibid., p.281.

3. Post, p.29.

4. Bungay Edition, op. cit., p.282.

5. Worcester Edition, op. cit., p.526.

of God and his wonderful perfections, some new view of Christ in his spiritual excellencies and fulness; or things are opened to him in a new manner, whereby he now understands those divine and spiritual doctrines which once were foolishness to him.¹

Religious affections are not genuine unless they follow a spiritual light and involve a supernatural understanding of divine things. This is a development of the spiritual sense.² Edwards explained this knowledge as,

. . . a cordial sense of the supreme beauty and sweetness of the holiness or moral perfection of divine things, together with all that discerning and knowledge of things of religion, that depends upon the flows from such a sense.³

This understanding, Edwards said, consists in a sense of the moral beauty of divine things; such as the sufficiency of Christ as a Mediator and the sufficiency of His blood as atonement for sin.⁴ In general true affections embrace God's method of salvation in Christ and include an experimental knowledge of religion. The Spirit's methods are instruction and persuasion, hence, "the sons of God are led by the Spirit of God, in their behavior in the world."⁵

b. Conviction

All true Christians have a firm conviction of the great truths of the gospel. They experience an enlightenment which is sufficient to remove all doubt concerning the

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1. Bungay Edition, op. cit., p.282.
2. Post, p.94.
3. Bungay Edition, op. cit., p.283.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid., p.286.

essential doctrines of religion. Their belief is now so well founded that it becomes the basis for a new life. This conviction involves such facts as, "Christ's being the Son of God, and Saviour of the world, and the great things he has revealed concerning himself, and His Father, and another world . . ."¹ Edwards wrote of their experience:

. . . they have not only a predominating opinion that these things are true, and so yield their assent, as they do in many other matters of doubtful speculation; but they see that it is really so; their eyes are opened, so that they see that really Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. And as to the things which Christ has revealed, of God's eternal purposes and designs, concerning fallen man, and the glorious and everlasting things prepared for the saints in another world, they see that they are so indeed. .²

The heart is changed by a sudden awakening to the reality of religion. The exact time of conversion is unimportant because the Spirit of God is limited to no form. Edwards said:

Some are convinced of the truth of the gospel in general, and that the Scriptures are the word of God: others have their minds more especially fixed on some particular great doctrine of the gospel, some particular truths that they are meditating on, or reading of, in some portion of Scripture. Some have such convictions in a much more remarkable manner than others: and there are some who never had such a special sense of the certainty of divine things impressed upon them, with such inward evidence and strength, have yet very clear exercises of grace; i.e. of love to God, repentance, and holiness. And if they be more particularly examined, they appear plainly to have an inward firm persuasion of the reality of divine things, such as they did not use to have before their conversion.³

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1. Ibid., p.288,289.
2. Ibid., p.289.
3. Ibid., p.356.

The Scriptures confirm that genuine awakenings "are attended with a conviction and persuasion of the truth of gospel declarations."¹ Many apprehensions do not provide convincing evidences of reality and are therefore misleading. Conviction of truth must be founded on real evidence of one's judgment which is convincing to the reason. A conviction of the judgment, Edwards said, "arises from having a spiritual apprehension of those things in the mind", essentially a spiritual sight of Christ.² A spiritual conviction comes only to those who are regenerated by the Spirit and are moved to do good works.

The mind can be convinced both directly and indirectly. Truth is directly experienced in experimental religion. Edwards wrote:

Unless men may come to a reasonable solid persuasion and conviction of the truth of the gospel, by internal evidences . . . by a sight of its glory; it is impossible that those who are illiterate, and unacquainted with history, should have any thorough and effectual conviction of it at all.³

The manner in which prejudices against divine things (for the natural mind is set against Gospel truths) are removed, is evidence of the indirect effect of conviction.⁴ There is no doubt, however, that men experience in great variety the clearness of views. Hence the strength of their faith appears in varying degree.

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1. Ibid., p.289.
2. Ibid., p.290.
3. Ibid., p.292.
4. Ibid., p.293.

c. Change of Nature

True conversion involves affections of a transforming nature. These affections so alter the soul of a believer that his life is transformed into a pattern which could not be followed by a natural man. Edwards wrote of how Scripture describes this change of nature:

. . . being born again; becoming new creatures; rising from the dead; being renewed in the spirit of the mind; dying to sin, and living to righteousness; putting off the old man, and putting on the new man; being ingrafted into a new stalk; having a divine seed implanted in the heart; being made partakers of the divine nature . .¹

If as the result of certain affections there is no noticeable change in a person, then the experience was in vain. Conversion to Edwards "is a great and universal change of the man, turning him from sin to God."² Sin is an enemy to the Christian. The evidence is plainly against a man who experienced high affections but gives no evidence of a changed heart. Sin that is deeply rooted will have a tendency to show its face occasionally, but in the final analysis the grace of God will create a new man. Edwards wrote:

If a man before his conversion was, by his natural constitution, prone to lasciviousness, or drunkenness, or maliciousness; converting grace will make a great alteration in him, with respect to these evil dispositions; so that however he may be still most in danger of these sins, they shall no longer have dominion over him; nor will they any more be properly his character.³

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1. Ibid., p.302.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.

Divine grace works continually in men's hearts until perfection is reached. A large part of this change of nature is in terms of Christian self-denial.¹ It causes a man to renounce all worldly inclinations including self and to empty himself so that he may be spiritually filled.

4. External Manifestations

a. Christian Graces

A definition of the Christian spirit may properly be understood from the Bible's description of the attributes of true saints.² The external test when applied should indicate the true disposition of the heart.

Christian holiness has as its principle aim God's holy nature. Experience is Christian only to the degree in which it conforms to Him. The most complete revelation of God's nature is to be seen in the earthly walk of Jesus Christ. Speaking of Christian virtues, Edwards said, "And what are these virtues but such as humility, meekness, love, forgiveness, and mercy; which belong to the character of Christians . . .³ In brief, it may be said of a Christian that Christ-likeness is his aim.

Living the Christian life is frequently referred to as fighting the Christian battle and saints are spoken of as soldiers of God:

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1. Ibid., p.295.

2. Ibid., p.303.

3. Ibid., p.304.

The whole Christian life is fitly compared to a warfare. The most eminent Christians are the best soldiers, endued with the greatest degrees of Christian fortitude. And it is the duty of God's people to be steadfast, and vigorous in their opposition to the designs and ways of such as are endeavouring to overthrow the kingdom of Christ, and the interest of religion . . . True Christian fortitude consists in strength of mind, through grace, exerted in two things; in ruling and suppressing the evil passions and affections of the mind; and in steadfastly and freely exerting and following good affections and dispositions, without being hindered by sinful fear, or the opposition of enemies.¹

The Christian spirit cannot be limited but must embrace the whole of life. Edwards wrote:

. . . private affections, or good will limited to a particular circle of being, falling infinitely short of the whole existence, and not dependent upon it, nor subordinate to general benevolence, cannot be of the nature of true virtue.²

The most outstanding ideals of Christian character involve the influence and operation of forgiveness, love, and mercy. To this end Edwards wrote: "The Scripture is as plain as possible, that none are true saints, but those who are of a disposition to pity . . . that a righteous man and a merciful man are synonymous expressions."³ No true Christian is dominated by a spirit contrary to the spirit of Christ. Edwards said: " The Scripture knows no true Christians, of a sordid, selfish, cross, and contentious spirit. Nothing can be a greater absurdity, than a morose, hard, close, high-spirited, spiteful, true Christian."⁴

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1. Ibid., p.305.
2. Ibid., p.125.
3. Ibid., p. 306.
4. Ibid., p.307.

b. Christian Growth

The more sincerely a Christian loves God the greater is his desire to love Him. Mr. Edwards said:

The kindling and raising of gracious affections is like kindling a flame; the higher it is raised, the more ardent it is; and the more it burns, the more vehemently does it tend and seek to burn. So that the spiritual appetite after holiness, and an increase of holy affections, is much more lively and keen in those who are eminent in holiness, than others; and more than grace and holy affections are in their most lively exercise, than at other times. . . And therefore this is the nature of spiritual affections that the greater they be, the greater the appetite and longing is, after grace and holiness.¹

Joy and zeal are no judge of the degree of grace, for even the most eminent saints are but babes in contrast to the future state of perfection.²

Paul declares in Philippians 3:13-15, "Forgetting these things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark. Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded." Because of the spiritual sense which the Christian has, being persuaded of his imperfections, his soul seeks holy things. As long as grace is imperfect it must be a growing state.³ Mark 9:24 describes this striving: "Lord, I believe, help thou my unbelief." The Christian who lives by this principle is in least danger from the devil.⁴ One of the distinguishing characteristics of the Christian is his God-

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1. Ibid., p.312,313.
2. Ibid., p.ciii.
3. Ibid., p.313.
4. Ibid., p.398.

seeking attitude. Edwards believes that the Church will reach an adult state wherein faith, hope, and charity will reign as Christian graces. In this connection he reasons:

Therefore I do not expect a restoration of these miraculous gifts in the approaching glorious times of the church, nor do I desire it. It appears to me that it would add nothing to the glory of those times of the church, but rather diminish from it. For my part, I had rather enjoy the sweet influences of the Spirit, showing Christ's spiritual divine beauty, infinite grace, and dying love, drawing forth the holy exercises of faith, divine love, sweet complacency, and humble joy in God, one quarter of an hour, than to have prophetic visions and revelations the whole year. It appears to me much more probable that God should give immediate revelations to his saints in the dark times of prophecy, than now in the approach of the most glorious and perfect state of his church on earth. It does not appear to me that there is any need of those extraordinary gifts to introduce this happy state, and set up the kingdom of God through the world; I have seen so much of the power of God in a more excellent way, as to convince me that God can easily do it without.¹

c. Christian Practice

The most worthy exercise of gracious affections is the practice of Christian living. To make a business of living by Christian rules implies three things:

1. That his behavior or practice in the world, be universally conformed to and directed by Christian rules . .
2. That he make a business of such a holy practice above all things . .
3. That he persists in it to the end of life; so that it may be said . . . to be . . . the business of his life.²

Obedience to the laws of Christ is a most important part

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1. Worcester Edition, op. cit., p.558.
2. Bungay Edition, op. cit., p.314.

of being spiritually minded. It means avoiding wicked practices as well as practicing positive religion. Edwards said,

That all true saints, all who obtain eternal life, do thus persevere in the practice of religion, and the service of God, is a doctrine so abundantly taught in the Scripture, that particularly to rehearse all the texts which imply it would be endless.¹

Temptations and trials make it difficult to continue in the holy walk of duty, but they serve in many ways to strengthen the believer. Christians may be found at times to backslide. But, Edwards wrote,

. . . they can never fall away so as to grow weary of religion and the service of God, and habitually to dislike and neglect it, either on its own account, or on account of the difficulties that attend it. . . They can never backslide so as to continue no longer in a way of universal obedience; or so, that it shall cease to be their manner to observe all the rules of Christianity, and do all duties required, even the most difficult, and in the most difficult circumstances. .²

This is true because gracious affections are influenced and strengthened by the indwelling Holy Spirit. This is the most vital principle in the Christian life. He wrote:

If God dwells in the heart, and be vitally united to it, he will show that he is a God by the efficacy of his operation. Christ is not in the heart of a saint as in a sepulchre, as a dead saviour that does nothing; but as in his temple, one that is alive from the dead. For in the heart where Christ savingly is, there he lives, and exerts himself after the power of that endless life, that he received at his resurrection. Thus every saint who is the subject of the benefit of Christ's sufferings, is made to know and experience the power of his resurrection.³

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1. Ibid., p.315.
2. Ibid., p.316.
3. Ibid.

This power working through the affections is evidenced in Christian growth and in the conquering of the will. Genuine affections produce Christian practices because they are not self-produced, but motivated by divine stimulus.¹ Edwards said, "What makes men partial in religion is, that they seek themselves, and not God, in their religion, and close with religion, not for its own excellent nature, but only to serve a turn."²

Only true Christians are able to obtain a life of devotion and obedience, for unsaved men are basically workers of iniquity.³ The judging of the experiences of others according to the rules of holy Scripture is necessary, Edwards found.⁴ But the judging of persons is not advisable. He wrote:

God seems so strictly to have forbidden our judging our brethren in the visible church, not only because he knew that we were infinitely too weak, fallible, and blind, to be well capacitated for it, but also because he knew that it was not a work suited to our proud hearts; that it would be setting us vastly too high, and making us too much of lords over our fellow-creatures. Judging our brethren, and passing a condemnatory sentence upon them, seems to carry in it an act of authority, especially to sentence them with respect to that state of their hearts, on which depends their liableness to eternal damnation.⁵

Of all the testimony for saving grace a holy life is the most distinguishing.⁶ It is not only a sure sign of true

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1. Ibid., p.317.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid., p.319.

4. Worcester Edition, op.cit., p.559.

5. Bungay Edition, op. cit., p.416.

6. Ibid., p.320.

conversion in the Christian, but it is a godly witness to others.

D. Summary

Religious affections, according to the opinion of the Scriptures, constitute the major part of the personal experience of the Christian. A religious affection is a response to a divine stimulus, and is the only method by which eternal truth is received by the mind. These exercises are extremely significant because they are present and active in direct proportion to the amount of truth retained.

Genuine affections have as their source God's Holy Spirit which takes full possession of the heart and works its changing influences. The motive behind gracious affections is an unselfish love for God followed by an embracing of His mercy to the sinner.

Internally the affections bring truth to the heart, convict the mind of its reality, and work a glorious change in the whole person. In a more external fashion the Christian spirit with all its graces takes control of and dominates the new life. A sincere Christian is never satisfied with his level of attainment, but continually presses onward toward the heavenly goal. Although a believer is apt to stumble occasionally, he makes obedience to the laws of Christ the dominant concern of his life.

CHAPTER IV

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

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A. Summary

In contrast with its earlier glory, the Church in New England, a decade before the commencement of the Great Awakening, was in a state of religious and moral decline. This was due in a large measure to a general feeling of apathy regarding the practice of religion and the slow infiltration of Arminian doctrine from the continent of Europe. This was the condition of New England when Jonathan Edwards began his ministry.

Edwards appeared upon the scene as pastor of the large church in Northampton well prepared spiritually and intellectually to make his contribution as a minister of the Gospel. Early in life, he formulated a psychology of religious experience, using some of the ideas of such prominent contemporary men as Locke and Berkeley, together with his Calvinistic training, to produce a system of theology for which he is still remembered.

Following his masterly preaching, a spiritual awakening appeared in the Northampton church which was the greatest work of the Holy Spirit ever to come upon New England. This awakening took place in 1734 and 1735, affecting the lives of nearly every person in the town. The Spirit left as suddenly as it appeared, but was followed

about five years later by an even greater general awakening which soon spread throughout New England and the Middle Colonies. In Edwards' opinion this 'stirring' was of a purer nature than the preceding one. It affected all ages and all social classes with such a 'filling' of the Spirit that many were caused to cry out; some in the distress of their conviction, others with joy at their renewal of heart. Near the close of this awakening emotional feelings ran so high that some digressed into unfortunate excesses and helped to hasten the Spirit's departure. A heated theological controversy in which Edwards was involved was also a distracting influence. As the town settled back to normal, dissensions arose and because of several unfortunate misunderstandings Edwards was forced from his pulpit.

In two works especially, Edwards later published his accounts and evaluations of conversion experiences; they are entitled, Thoughts on the Revival of Religion in New England in 1740, and A Treatise on Religious Affections. In his psychology he reserves for the affections the largest part in the conversion experience. For this reason he is chiefly concerned with their various evidences and gives much attention to the explanation of the nature of true affections. Genuine affections, he feels, reach the heart through the sensory organs and can only be received in this manner. The Spirit of God finds a home in the hearts and minds of men furnishing them with a spiritual sense which

becomes the ruling principle of life and directs the most gracious affections to the holy pursuit of Christian growth and practice.

B. Conclusion

In view of the evidence presented in this thesis, it is the opinion of the writer that the Great Awakening in New England was definitely a glorious work of the Holy Spirit of a much desired nature. Religious revival is of great practical merit to the Church of God and is of timeless value, especially under the guiding hand of a true servant of God of Edwards' caliber. The preaching, counselling, and leadership which Edwards used in guiding his congregation are still modern and practical in this age. They are worthy of more study than this thesis could present. The excesses which accompanied this revival are serious and must be guarded against in any work of this nature, but they cannot be regarded as wholly the fault of Mr. Edwards or attributed to the methods he employed, for a work of this magnitude cannot entirely be controlled by any one leader.

The question might be raised whether or not these methods as they stand can be applied in the Church today. For some this may involve a questioning of Edwards' doctrine which, however, is not on trial here. For those to whom his theology is basic in solving this problem a further study will undoubtedly prove beneficial.

Certainly it may be concluded that all methods and doctrines which result in such a clear evidence of divine revelation in the lives of so many people must be used by those who desire human hearts to be filled with the Spirit of Christ. If this need is timeless, then so are these Scriptural Evangelical means.

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