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Abstract

Thomas Chalmers once wrote in admiration of Jonathan Edwards that "I have long esteemed him as the greatest of theologians, combining in a degree that is unexampled the profoundly intellectual with the devotedly spiritual and sacred, and realizing in his own person a most rare yet more beautiful harmony between the simplicity of the Christian pastor on the one hand, and, on the other, all the strength and prowess of a giant in philosophy. And yet, despite Chalmer's insistence on balancing Edwards's intellectual eminence with his spirituality, the spiritual structures of Jonathan Edwards remain very much an unexplored territory. Although Edwards's student, Samuel Hopkins, remembered that Edwards was "frequent and punctual" in "secret prayer" and "often kept days of fasting and prayer, and set apart portions of time for devout meditation on spiritual and eternal things, as part of his religious exercises in retirement," nevertheless even Hopkins found Edwards's practice of devotional life very much a closed book. "He made a secret of such exercises" and "nothing can be said of them but what his papers discover, and what may be fairly inferred from circumstances." Still, as Chalmers indicated, it is difficult to read Edwards, even at his most philosophical, and not find that Edwards's spiritual disciplines were intimately bound up with his pastoral and intellectual life. [excerpt]

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by
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Thomas Chalmers once wrote in admiration of Jonathan Edwards that “I have long esteemed him as the greatest of theologians, combining in a degree that is unexampled the profoundly intellectual with the devotedly spiritual and sacred, and realizing in his own person a most rare yet most beautiful harmony between the simplicity of the Christian pastor on the one hand, and, on the other, all the strength and prowess of a giant in philosophy.”¹ And yet, despite Chalmers’s insistence on balancing Edwards’s intellectual eminence with his spirituality, the spiritual structures of Jonathan Edwards remain very much an unexplored territory. Although Edwards’s student, Samuel Hopkins, remembered that Edwards was “frequent and punctual” in “secret prayer” and “often kept days of fasting and prayer, and set apart portions of time for devout meditations on spiritual and eternal things, as part of his religious exercises in retirement,” nevertheless even Hopkins found Edwards’s practice of devotional life very much a closed book. “He made a secret of such exercises” and “nothing can be said of them but what his papers discover, and what may be fairly inferred from circumstances.”² Still, as Chalmers indicated, it is difficult to read Edwards, even at his most philosophical, and not find that Edwards’s spiritual disciplines were intimately bound up with his pastoral and intellectual life.

The general context of Edwards’s spirituality lies in the overall resurgence in spirituality and devotional forms across Europe in the late 17th and early 18th centuries. In fact, English Puritan “casuistical divinity” (or “practical divinity”) freely appropriated a variety of devotional styles, techniques and book titles originally perfected in Caroline and Non-Juror devotional theology and in the ascetic theology of Counter-Reformation Roman Catholicism. One prominent example of this kind of sharing was the use of a devotional technique known as “composition of place,” in which one seeks by imaginative meditation to place oneself vividly and experientially in a certain Biblical or spiritual position. In Puritan hands, this could range from Cotton Mather’s repeated desire to “lie in the dust” before Christ, all the way to Joseph Alleine’s eerie evocation of the “burning fiery furnace” of judgement (an image which Edwards himself would appropriate in his most celebrated sermon) as the place for the unconverted mind to locate itself. Such borrowings could take place because, whatever else divided 17th-century Puritans from 17th-century Roman Catholic devotionalists, they were all curiously agreed in one fundamental respect — the priority of “heart-religion.” This was sharpened in New England hands by the tendency of Puritan psychology to regard the mental “faculties” — the will and the affections — as one single intellectual function. On those terms, to discipline “the heart” spiritually was not merely to move the affections; it was to capture the entire personality.

On the other hand, one aspect of English spirituality which does set Puritan spirituality off from its Anglican or Roman counterparts is the predominance of the motif of pilgrimage.³ What is more, the theme of pilgrimage was linked to the curious apparatus of "preparation" for the receipt of grace, since the pilgrimage motif seemed a convenient metaphor for a gradual growth toward grace, assisted by the devotional use of such "means of grace" as Bible-reading, prayer, public worship, the sacraments, and preaching. In time, the Great Awakening would deliver a tremendous blow to these ideas of gradualism in grace, and with it, the place of pilgrimage in Calvinist spirituality. And ironically, no one would take more dramatic issue with the pilgrimage motif in Puritan devotion than Jonathan Edwards.

It is clear, at the very start, that Edwards regarded "heart-religion" as the fundamental determinant of spiritual life. He owed this regard to his own experiences, and to his reading in the Continental pietists (students of Edwards's enigmatic "reading list" have paid curiously little attention to the presence of Johan Arndt and other pietist writers in it), to the English Puritans of the previous century (and especially Shepard, Hooker, and Flavel) and above all to the fiery evangelicalism of his grandfather Stoddard. In that light, it should come as no surprise that Edwards seized upon the conventional image of pilgrimage as a means of expressing the rise and progress of "heart-religion" in the soul. His early sermons in Northampton, when his literary efforts were almost wholly poured into sermon construction, are unadventurous expositions of "the business of getting into the kingdom of God" along the same basic route of preparation, humiliation, and self-consciousness that had been laid out for a century before in the New England churches. In one of his fast-day sermons for March, 1735, Edwards laid out the customary path of preparation for salvation by use of the "means of grace"; in normal terms, "God's manner is first to prepare men's hearts and then to answer their prayers," and the general operation of this "work of preparation" was "commonly wrought by Gradual Experience."⁴

This gradualism was based on the sanctifying influences of "the use of appointed means," which Edwards, in a sermon from March, 1736, compared to Jacob's Ladder. "God has as it were set a ladder on the Earth for men to Climb to happiness" upon, and "the ordinances of the Covenant & ... that Gospel are as it were the Rungs of that Ladder." And just as one climbs the rungs one-by-one, Edwards promised, so "the diligent use of means prepares the heart for God's Grace & makes it better Established." Nor were the "means" limited only to "attending on the Sacraments, Baptism & the Lord's Supper." They might also include meditative exercises, such as "Confession & Meditation" on "death, Eternity, Judgment," "Prayer in its various Kinds," or "Reading & hearing the word of God." He was even willing to include simple moralism as a "means of grace" — to be "Carefully & Continuously avoiding all moral Evil," and to be "Living soberly, doing justly, and Observing the Gospel Rules of Charity (forgiveness, temperance, meekness & the like) are as

much as any other the means of God's appointment for seeking conversion."⁵ But the overall purpose of the use of these "means" was not to sit in enjoyment of them, but to use them to push on further on the pilgrims' pathway as "the principal means for Growth in Grace."⁶

So Edwards began his ministry in Northampton by fashioning a structure of spiritual exercise which corresponded at all major points to the general Puritan blueprint. Since the center of Christian life was (even for introspective Puritans) the church, then the starting point of spiritual life was the proper spiritual use of public worship. Strict Sabbatarian that he was, Edwards made his own devotional preparations for public worship beginning on Saturday evenings.⁷ In his so-called "Personal Narrative," Edwards recalled that these Saturday evening devotional preparations had garnered particularly rich rewards for him as he anticipated the next morning's worship:

On one Saturday night ... I had such a discovery of the excellency of the gospel above all other doctrines, that I could not but say to myself, "This is my chosen light, my chosen doctrine;" and of Christ, "This is my chosen prophet." ... Another Saturday night, (January 1739) I had such a sense, how sweet and blessed a thing it was to walk in the way of duty; to do that which was right and meet to be done, and agreeable to the holy mind of God; that it caused me to break forth into a kind of loud weeping, which held me some time, so that I was forced to shut myself up, and fasten the doors.⁸

He approvingly described in 1735 how the newly awakened converts in Northampton not only inverted the normal priorities of time by the way they "longed" for the Sabbath "before it comes," but even abolished all priorities except that of the Sabbath by their proto-Pavlovian response to the church-bell. "Some by only hearing the bell ring on some occasion in the week time, have been greatly moved, because it has put them in mind of its Ringing to call the People together to worship God."⁹

Edwards particularly pointed to the proper use of "divine worship, in public and private." He warned Northamptonites in October of 1746 "to take heed to themselves how they behave when they go to the house of God and attend the solemn duties of God's publick worship there."¹⁰ Among those "duties," Edwards attached no small importance to his own public prayers in the worship services. Edwards had found very early in his life that "when I am in a lifeless frame in secret prayer, to force myself to expatiate as if I were praying before others more than I used to do"; and he forced himself "never to count that a prayer, nor to let that pass as a prayer, nor that as a petition of a prayer, which is so made, that I cannot hope that God will answer it."¹¹ This, to judge by Samuel Hopkins's comments, greatly strengthened Edwards's capacity for public prayer within the confines of the bare Congregational liturgy, where the pastor's *extempore* prayer not only had to serve an explicitly intercessory purpose, but also had to function as an ongoing testimony to the righteousness of the Congregational repudiation of prayerbook worship.

He was quite singular and inimitable in this, by any who have not a spirit of real and undissembled devotion; yet he always expressed himself with decency and propriety. He appeared to have much of the grace and spirit of prayer; to pray with the

spirit and with the understanding; and he performed this part of duty much to the acceptance and edification of those who joined with him. He was not wont, in ordinary cases, to be long in his prayers: An error which he observed was often hurtful to public and social prayer, as it tends rather to damp than promote true devotion.¹²

One aspect of public spirituality to which Edwards devoted a rather surprising degree of attention was singing. "Public singing of God's praises is an ordinance instituted by Christ to be observed in the Christian Church," Edwards told a "singing meeting" in Northampton in the summer of 1736; and the dominical authority of that ordinance was re-enforced by Edwards's observation that nothing seemed to have greater devotional impact on the converts of the revivals in Northampton than "public singing": "it has been observable that there has been scarce any part of divine worship, wherein good men amongst us have had grace so drawn forth and their hearts so lifted up in the ways of God, as in singing his praises."¹³ Edwards found that confession of sin to God was greatly assisted by "singing psalms — especially psalms or hymns of penitence" and he pointedly rebuked himself in one passage because "for the time past of my life, I have been negligent, in that I have not sufficiently kept up that part of divine worship, singing the praise of God in secret and in company...." He used not only conventional metrical singing, but to practice chanting as well, so as to more easily be able to sing a greater variety of things than just the metrical psalms: "to praise God by singing psalms in prose, and by singing forth the meditations of my heart in prose." This appears to be a resolution he not only kept but expanded, for twenty years later, in *Some Thoughts Concerning the Revival*, Edwards still found that there was considerable devotional delight "in singing praises to God and Jesus Christ, and longing that this present life may be, as it were, one continued song of praise to God; longing ... to sit and sing this life away; and an overcoming pleasure in the thoughts of spending an eternity in that exercise...."¹⁴

Perhaps even more surprising is the attention Edwards gave to the sacraments in public worship. In contrast to what Anglican and Roman Catholic devotionalists prepare us for, Edwards betrays not the slightest indication of belief in the communication of sacramental grace or of eucharistic presence, and nothing in his sacramental devotion hangs on either of those pegs. At best, the Communion is simply an occasion upon which God may directly give grace; usually, the Communion is an occasion for subjective re-dedication of the communicant to fellowship with God and the Church. And yet it would be a mistake to conclude that Edwards viewed sacrament times as anything less than seasons of very special spiritual meditation. As flat as Edwards's notion of sacramental grace might have been, he more than compensated for that by the intensity with which he focussed on the question of sacramental identity. Edwards professed not to understand why, when the revivals abounded with so much fervent preaching, those who were truly sympathetic to the spirit of the Awakening should not adopt a weekly communion:

I don't see why ... it is not as proper that Christ's disciples should abound in this duty, in this joyful season, which is spiritually supper time, a feast day ... wherein

Christ is so ... manifesting his dying love to souls, and is dealing forth so liberally of the precious fruits of his death. It seems plain by the Scripture, that the primitive Christians were wont to celebrate this memorial of the suffering of their dear Redeemer every Lord's Day ... [and] I can't but think it would become us, at such a time as this, to attend it much oftener than is commonly done in the land.¹⁵

Edwards interpreted the inevitable refusal of the Northampton congregation to take his suggestion as a silent reluctance to acknowledge his right to measure their spiritual sincerity, or at least to deny him as many occasions as possible to do it. That moved Edwards to experiment with strategies in public devotion which could function as surrogate tests of "heart-religion." One such aspect of public devotionism outside the church which Edwards strongly favored was the "private meeting," where like-minded individuals came together in homes or elsewhere for joint devotional reading, prayer, and conversation. "Godly conference" was a long tradition in English Puritanism, and Edwards seems to have imitated it at a precocious age. In the "Personal Narrative," he recalled how as a boy "... I with some of my schoolmates joined together, and built a booth in a swamp, in a very retired spot, for a place of prayer" and "used to spend much time in religious talk with other boys; and used to meet with them to pray together." "In process of time," his interest in these meetings "wore off" and he "left off secret prayer"; but he seems to have rediscovered the value of the "private meeting" in his first, brief pastorate in New York in 1723, where he enjoyed an "abundance of sweet religious conversation in the family where I lived...." He continued thereafter to find that "I gain knowledge abundantly faster" in "free religious conversation," and see "the reasons of things much more clearly than in private study."¹⁶

For that reason, soon after he came to Northampton, he "proposed it to the young people, that they should agree among themselves to spend the evenings after lectures in social religion, and to that end divide themselves into several companies to meet in various parts of the town...." He exhorted "a meeting of young people" in Northampton in July, 1740, that "when they meet together," they "should avoid all corrupt discourse one with another and should practise that whereby they may promote the good of each others' souls."¹⁷ Because it was from meetings like this that Edwards watched the 1734-35 awakening blossom in Northampton, it angered Edwards considerably that the regularly stated meetings of ministers in Hampshire County seemed to have so little of this spirit in them.

The state of the times extremely requires a fullness of the divine Spirit in ministers, and we ought to give ourselves no rest till we have obtained it. And in order to this, I should think ministers, above all persons, ought to be much in secret prayer and fasting, and also much in praying and fasting one with another. It seems to me it would be becoming the circumstances of the present day, if ministers in a neighborhood would often meet together and spend days in fasting and fervent prayer among themselves ... and also if, on their occasional visits to one another, instead of spending away their time in sitting and smoking, and in diverting, or worldly, unprofitable conversation, telling news, and making their remarks on this or the other trifling subject, they would spend their time in praying together, and singing praises, and religious conference.¹⁸

One kind of "religious conference" which Edwards especially promoted

was household worship. Edwards thought that on Sundays, “heads of families should be instructing and counselling their children, and quickening them in the ways of religion, and should see to it that the Sabbath be strictly kept in their houses,” and especially “after a dead time in religion, ’tis very requisite that religion should revive in heads of families....” Phebe Bartlet, the pre-adolescent role model of the *Faithful Narrative* “was greatly affected by the talk of her brother, who had been hopefully converted a little before,” and to Edwards’s delight she appeared “very desirous, at all opportunities, to go to private religious meetings.”¹⁹ In his own household on the other days of the week, Edwards “as he rose very early himself,”

was wont to have his family up betimes in the morning; after which, before they entered on the business of the day, he attended on family prayers: When a chapter of the Bible was read, commonly by candle light in the winter; upon which he asked his children questions according to their age and capacity; and took occasion to explain some passages in it, or enforce any duty recommended, &c. as he thought most proper.²⁰

Years later, Edwards’s daughter Esther recorded her frank admiration of her father’s devotional guidance after visiting him in Stockbridge in September of 1756:

Last eve[ning] I had some free discourse with My Father on the great things that concern my best intrest — I open’d my diffculties to him very freely and he as freely advised and directed. The conversation has removed some distressing doubts that discouraged me much in my Christian warfare — He gave me some excellent directions to be observed in secret that tend to keep the soul near to God, as well as others to be observed in a more publick way — What a mercy that I have such a Father! Such a Guide!²¹

Given what is known about Edwards’s ideas on public devotion, we would like to know some more about the advice on private devotion to which Esther Edwards alluded. We know that Edwards aimed to establish, as the basic element of private devotion, a regular routine of private prayer. “Set apart a day for secret prayer and fasting by yourself,” Edwards advised in 1741, “in searching your heart and in looking over your past life, and confessing your sins before God....” In his boyhood, in the booth in the swamp, he remembered praying five times a day, although in his diary for 1723, he had by that time concluded that “it [is] best commonly to come before God three times a day....” He also appears to have planned a long-range schedule of devotional subjects, too: he proposed to himself in 1735 to “set apart days of meditation on particular subjects; as sometimes, to set apart a day for the consideration of the greatness of my sins; at another, to consider the dreadfulness and certainty, of the future misery of ungodly men; at another, the truth and certainty of religion....” He further resolved in 1723 to set aside “the end of every month, to examine my behavior, strictly by some chapter in the New Testament, more especially made up of rules of life” and “at the end of the year, to examine my behavior by the rules of the New Testament in general” and “the book of Proverbs.”²²

However, what Edwards stressed was not so much any particular schedule

of prayer, but having the schedule itself, for devotion unseconded by discipline would, as Edwards had experienced, be a devotion which languished. It was the mark of the hypocrite, Edwards maintained, not to keep such a schedule of prayer, for hypocrites “first begin to be careless” about prayer, “and after that they more easily omit it again.” Such “hypocrites may continue for a season in the duty of prayer,” Edwards warned his congregation in June, 1740, “yet ’tis their manner after a while in a great measure to leave it off.”²³ By contrast, little Phebe Bartlet was so “frequent in her closet; till at last she was wont to visit it five or six times in a day: and was so engaged in it, that nothing would at any time divert her from her stated closet exercises.”²⁴

In addition to a rule of private prayer, Edwards regarded reading and study as a structure of devotion. Edwards took for granted that the Bible would form the foundation of his spiritual reading, but he also assumed that the study of Protestant dogma would have devotional fruit to yield to the earnest seeker. The most important underlying theme in Edwards’s immaterialist philosophy was his conviction that what the mind knew and apprehended was more certain and reliable than mere sensation; hence, to see “the perfect idea of a thing is for all intents and purposes the same as seeing the thing.” The idea of the imputation of righteousness to the justified would appear to the contemplative mind as the very thing itself:

... whenever the saints behold the beauty and amiable excellency of Christ as appearing in his vertue and have their souls ravished with it ... the very beholding his excellency as thus manifested is an enjoying of it as their own. And while the saints have the pleasure of these views they may also have the additional pleasure of considering that this lovely vertue is imputed to them. ‘Tis the lovely robe and robe of love with which they are covered. [Christ] gives it to them and puts it upon them and by the beauty of this robe recommends them to the savour and delight of God....²⁵

Edwards found this to be particularly true concerning the “doctrines of grace” — the “quinqarticular points” with which Calvinism was identified in the 18th century — and any other aspects of theology concerned with God’s transcendence. In the “Personal Narrative,” he recalled

Absolute sovereignty is what I love to ascribe to God. But my first conviction was not so. The first instance that I remember of that inward, sweet delight in God and divine things ... was on reading those words, 1 Timothy i:17, Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honor and glory for ever and ever, Amen. As I read the words, there came into my soul ... a sense of the glory of the Divine Being.... My mind was greatly engaged to spend my time in reading and meditating on Christ, on the beauty and excellency of his person, and the lovely way of salvation by free grace in him. I found no books so delightful to me, as those that treated of these subjects.²⁶

And, with a touch of innocent egotism, Edwards even professed to derive devotional value from reading his own writings, since he found it “a good way, when I am disposed to reading and study, to read of my own remarks, the fruit of my study in divinity, &c ... to set me agoing again.”²⁷

His routines of study and reading thus became the mill for meditation and

contemplation. But it was not only the reading of dogma which offered fuel for spiritual fires. Edwards has often been singled out for his frequent uses of analogy between natural science and theology for the purpose of meditation — and justly so, provided that one remembers that the ultimate purpose of this meditation was devotional and not scientific or aesthetic. What Edwards saw in the beauty of nature was harmony, not pleasant landscapes, and the harmony which he found in all parts of created nature was for him typological of both the harmony which exists within the Trinity and which ought to exist between God and his saints. To see the beauty of God in Christ was a persistent theme in Edwards's writing, but, in truth, it had less to do with 18th-century concerns about sensation and knowledge than it did with the internal eye of contemplation:

It was meet that it should be so [Edwards wrote in one of his "Miscellanies"] that the other creatures might see him that was the highest creature, the first born of every creature, the head of all creatures, to be a transcendent instance of obedience to God & respect to his authority ... that when they see a person of so great dignity, so great an instance of submission to God and exceeding respect to his majesty and authority, it might make a strong impression on their minds of the majesty, honorableness and infinite dignity of the divine Being and the sacredness of his authority.²⁸

It was because the "creatures" shadowed forth spiritual meanings that Edwards so often refreshed himself by lonely horse-rides out beyond Northampton. He had begun this habit beside "Hudson's River" during his brief first pastorate in New York, and he continued it alongside the Connecticut. It was on one of these occasions in 1737 that "having alighted from my horse in a retired place, as my manner commonly has been, to walk for contemplation and prayer, I had a view that for me was extraordinary, of the glory of the Son of God, as Mediator between God and man, and his wonderful, great, full, pure, and sweet grace and love, and meek and gentle condescension." At that moment, "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." This same recollection also contains a vivid account of the fearless pleasure Edwards took in watching thunderstorms as a contemplative exercise. "I felt God, so to speak, at the first appearance of a thunder storm; and used to take the opportunity, at such times, to fix myself in order to view the clouds, and see the lightnings play, and hear the majestic and awful voice of God's thunder, which oftentimes was exceedingly entertaining, leading me to sweet contemplations of my great and glorious God." Not surprisingly, hearing this "awful voice" prompted Edwards to respond with his own, since "while thus engaged, it always seemed natural to me to sing, or chant for my meditations; or, to speak my thoughts in soliloquies with a singing voice."²⁹

When there were no thunderstorms available, Edwards turned inwards to supply a fund of mental images for devotional meditation. "A person that maintains grace in lively exercise is as it were never alone," Edwards wrote in

1750, “but is entertained from within himself with the conversation of a most excellent companion when retired from other company.” Despite Edwards’s self-portrait of himself as stiff and reticent, he was easily capable of advising his correspondents in the most purple of imagery to take “hold of Christ’s hand, keeping your eye on the marks of the wounds in his hands and side, whence came the blood that cleanses you from sin, and [hide] your nakedness under the skirt of the white shining robes of his righteousness.” At the moment of such a contemplation, “what thoughts can they entertain of God’s worthiness to be obeyed & submitted to when they behold this Person that submitted to & went through such sufferings in his great glory at God’s right [hand]...”? What else except the desire to “come, cast yourself at his feet, and kiss them, and pour forth upon him the sweet perfumed ointment of divine love, out of a pure and broken heart, as [Mary] poured the precious ointment out of her broken alabaster box.”³⁰

And scattered across the “Personal Narrative” are indications that Edwards regularly practiced composition of place on his own. “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,” Edwards wrote, “I love to think of coming to Christ, to receive salvation of him, poor in spirit and quite empty of self....” At another point, like Cotton Mather, Edwards “panted after this, to lie low before God, as in the dust; that I might be nothing, and that God might be ALL, that I might become as a little child.” It is only here that we at last catch the one glimpse of Edwards which it has been all too easy to suppose is the sum of New England spirituality — withdrawn to the stillness of his study, hunched over and oblivious to the whole world of sense, longing in the boundless vista of the devotional imagination to be “cut off entirely from my own root, in order to grow into, and out of Christ; to have God in Christ to be all in all; and to live by faith on the son of God, a life of humble unfeigned confidence in him.”³¹

And yet Edwards was not willing to completely abandon the world of sense, any more than he was willing to practice spirituality solely in terms of Hawthornian introspection. Edwards regarded the imagination with a thoroughly pre-Romantic apprehension, suspicious from as early as the 1720’s that imagination could easily slide over into moral self-deception. His early note on “the prejudices of imagination” reveals how watchful Edwards was of the way people manipulate “what they can actually perceive by their senses” into the “enormously false.” Therefore, in his “Directions for Judging of Persons’ Experiences,” Edwards saw to it that “the operation” of grace “be much upon the Will or Heart, not on the Imagination ... though they draw great affections after ’em as the consequence.”³² And should this behavior persist beyond the bounds of “a solid sense and conviction of truth, and of things as they are indeed,” Edwards was then inclined to believe that this “trouble of mind” was evidence, not of a hyper-active imagination, but of outright unconvertedness.

But in that case, then the devotional use of the “means” as part of a

pilgrimage toward salvation could easily contribute to a colossal mistake of identity. In May, 1740, Edwards began cautioning Northampton that "Tho a people that live under means are wont in general to seek and hope for salvation, yet 'tis the election only that obtain and the rest are blinded." Four months later, he had concluded that "means won't win" out over "the obstinacy of some wicked men ... nor will all the advantages enjoyed in God's visible church take any effect upon them..." And by December, 1741, he was already warning Northampton parishioners that "some persons under means of grace are in such a state that they are not only dead but they are as it were twice dead and plucked up by the roots."³³ Forbidding as that conclusion sounded, it was, on the grounds of Edwards's logic, only reasonable: for how could the sinner pray, without having his praying be sin? or read the Bible without his Bible-reading being sinful? In that case, the use of "means" was worse than futile: "it will be worse for 'em at the day of judgment than for the worst sort of them that never had the gospel offered to 'em."³⁴ The real truth of the users of "means" and the climbers of the preparationist ladder was that "their striving is not so much an earnest seeking to God, as a striving to do themselves that which is the work of God." Edwards ominously concluded, "Many who are now seeking have this imagination; they labor, read, pray, hear sermons, and go to private meetings, with the view of making themselves holy, and of working in themselves holy affections."³⁵

But it was the Awakening, not logic, which finally forced him to abandon preparationism, for if there was one lesson to be learned from the Awakening, it was how dramatically visible and discernable sainthood really was. The possessor of truly religious affections knows them within at once by "a kind of intuitive knowledge of the divinity of the things exhibited in the gospel." It was not that there was no mental activity at all, "but it is without any long chain of arguments; the argument is but one, and the evidence direct; the mind ascends to the truth of the gospel but by one step, and that is its divine glory."³⁶

That left Edwards no real alternative but to insist that, because conversion was not only immediate but visible, there could be no admission to the sacraments except for those elect who could demonstrate their discovery of grace. "Those who are born of God alone are admitted to the privileges of God's family," Edwards declared in 1750. And so the pilgrimage motif disappears completely from Edwards's preaching in the 1740's, just as any notion of preparation for grace disappears also. "They that live under means of grace and don't bring forth good fruits are like ground that the showers of rain do only cause to bring forth briars and thorns," Edwards warned in February, 1747; even though "many sinners have means often used for their conversion and after pretend to do something towards it," the reality as Edwards had seen it played out in Northampton was that "it never once comes to pass."³⁷ After the 1740's, Edwards's responses to inquirers about devotional exercises become, in effect, evangelistic sermons for those whom he thought needed them. For Edwards, abandoning the pilgrimage motif in devotion served a prudent and

hortatory purpose, in that it never let people think that by doing better they were doing good. "Godliness consists not in an heart to purpose to do the will of God," Edwards admonished his parish in 1743, "but in an heart to do it."³⁸

This conversion of meditation into exhortation also gives us an insight into a certain obtuseness in Edwards's mind in dealing with people. Edwards's notion of devotion in the 1740's and '50's, contrasted with the image of pilgrimage, amounts in real terms to a simple effort to subordinate personal devotion to communal revival, and that meant (in effect) the re-direction of the life of the Northampton community by Edwards. But Northampton had never accepted such direction from any of its ministers. Furthermore the symbolic movement of the town's business out of the church building and into a separate meeting house in 1738 meant that Edwards was condemning himself to a struggle to turn back the hands of the clock. But that effort need not have cost him his pulpit, nor would it have, in the final analysis, if he had paid more attention to his own advice. Although Samuel Hopkins noted with what care Edwards attended to his family devotional exercises, even Hopkins had to admit that Edwards was surprisingly indifferent to the private meetings for godly conversation which he had encouraged young Northamptonites to form in 1734. "He did not make it his custom to visit his people in their own houses, unless he was sent for by the sick; or he heard that they were under some special affliction." Hopkins wrote: "It appeared to him, that he could do the greatest good to souls ... by preaching and writing, and conversing with persons under religious impressions in his study."³⁹ Edwards was not the last minister in New England to make the mistake of supposing that the duties and responsibilities of pastoral ministry could be performed from behind a desk or a rampart of books, but in his case he paid for it dearly. His people heard only Edwards's ever-escalating devotional demands from the pulpit; they never saw those powerful moments of spiritual ecstasy which he locked away behind his door, and which might have made them understand that he demanded no less of himself than he did of them.

FOOTNOTES

1 Chalmers, in *Works*, 1:318; see also Ralph G. Turnbull, *Jonathan Edwards the Preacher* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1958), 150, and Iain Murray, *Jonathan Edwards: A New Biography* (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987), 464-465.

2 Hopkins, in Sereno Edwards Dwight, "Memoirs of Jonathan Edwards, A.M.," in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Edward Hickman (1834; London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), 1:c1xxxiii; and "Memoirs of the Late Reverend Jonathan Edwards," in *The Works of President Edwards* (Worcester, MA.: Isaiah Thomas, Jr., 1808), 1:48.

3 Charles E. Hambrick-Stowe, *The Practice of Piety: Puritan Devotional Disciplines in Seventeenth-Century New England* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 54-90.

4 Sermon manuscript on Psalm 10:17, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University (all subsequent references to Edwards's sermon manuscripts and "miscellanies" will refer to the Edwards collection at the Beinecke Library).

5 Sermon manuscripts on Genesis 28:12 and Exodus 20:24.

6 Edwards, "The Christian Pilgrim," in *Works* (1834), ed. Hickman, 2:245.

7 "Memoirs of the Late Reverend Jonathan Edwards," in *Works* (1808), 1:53 and Edwards, "Christian Cautions," in *Works* (1834), ed. Hickman, 2:178-179.

8 "Some Account of his Conversion, Experience, and Religious Exercises, written by himself." in

- 9 "Memoirs of the Late Reverend Jonathan Edwards," in *Works* (1808), 1:46-47.
- 9 Edwards, "Unpublished Letter of May 30, 1735," in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards: The Great Awakening*, ed. C. C. Goen (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1972), 105.
- 10 *Ibid.*, 102-103; Sermon manuscript on Ecclesiastes 5:1.
- 11 Edwards, "Diary" and "Resolution 29," in *Jonathan Edwards: Representative Selections*, eds. Clarence H. Faust and Thomas H. Johnson (New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 1962), 47, 40.
- 12 "Memoirs of the Late Reverend Jonathan Edwards," in *Works* (1808), 1:58.
- 13 Sermon manuscript on Colossians 3:16, "For a singing meeting June 17, 1736"; and Edwards, "A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God in the Conversion of Many Hundred Souls in Northampton," in *WJE: The Great Awakening*, 151.
- 14 Edwards, "Diary," in S. E. Dwight, "Memoirs of Jonathan Edwards," in *Works* (1834), ed. Hickman, 1:xxvi, xxxi; and "Some Thoughts Concerning the Revival," in *WJE: The Great Awakening* (New Haven, CT, 1972), 337-338.
- 15 Edwards, "Some Thoughts Concerning the Revival," in *WJE: The Great Awakening*, 522.
- 16 Edwards, "Personal Narrative" and "Diary," in *Representative Selections*, 57, 64, 49.
- 17 Sermon manuscript on Ephesians 4:29; Edwards, "Faithful Narrative," in *WJE: The Great Awakening*, ed. C. C. Goen, 148.
- 18 Edwards, "Some Thoughts Concerning the Revival," in *WJE: The Great Awakening*, ed. C. C. Goen, 507.
- 19 Edwards, "The Perpetuity and Change of the Sabbath," in *Works* (1844), 2:103; Sermon manuscript on Luke 1:17 (August 1741); and "A Faithful Narrative of Surprising Conversions," in *WJE: The Great Awakening*, ed. C. C. Goen, 199, 202.
- 20 "Memoirs of the Late Reverend Jonathan Edwards," in *Works* (1808), 1:52.
- 21 *The Journal of Esther Edwards Burr, 1754-1757*, eds. Carol F. Karlson and Laurie Crumpacker (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984), 224.
- 22 Edwards, "Diary," in S. E. Dwight, "Memoirs," in *Works* (1834), 1:xxvii, xxxiv, xxxvi, liv.
- 23 Edwards, "Hypocrites Deficient in the Duty of Prayer," in *Works* (1844), ed. Hickman, 2:72; Sermon manuscript on Job 27:10.
- 24 Edwards, "A Faithful Narrative," in *WJE: The Great Awakening*, ed. C. C. Goen, 199.
- 25 Edwards, *Miscellanies* no. 260 and 791.
- 26 Edwards, in "Memoirs of the Late Reverend Jonathan Edwards," in *Works* (1808), 1:33-34.
- 27 Edwards, "Diary," in S. E. Dwight, "Memoirs," in *Works* (1834), ed. Hickman, 1:xxxv.
- 28 Edwards, *Miscellanies* no. 1226.
- 29 Edwards, in "Memoirs of the Late Reverend Jonathan Edwards," in *Works* (1808), 1:35-36, 43-44.
- 30 Edwards, Sermon manuscript on Proverbs 6:22, and *Miscellanies* no. 904.
- 31 Edwards, in "Memoirs of the Late Reverend Jonathan Edwards," in *Works* (1808), 1:38, 42.
- 32 Edwards, "Of the Prejudices of Imagination," in *WJE: Scientific and Philosophical Writings*, ed. Wallace E. Anderson (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1980), 196-197; "Directions for Judging of Persons' Experiences," in *Selections from the Unpublished Writings of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Alexander B. Grosart (Edinburgh: Ballantine and Co., 1865), 183.
- 33 Sermon manuscripts on Romans 1:17 and Jude 12.
- 34 Sermon manuscript on Matthew 10:14-15.
- 35 Edwards, "Self-Flatteries; or, the Vain Self-Flatteries of the Sinner," in *Works* (1834), ed. Hickman, 2:219.
- 36 Edwards, *WJE: The Religious Affections* ed. John E. Smith (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), 298-299.
- 37 Sermon manuscripts on John 12:13, Hebrews 6:8 (1747) and Jeremiah 13:27 (1748).
- 38 Sermon manuscript on Deuteronomy 5:27-29.
- 39 "M memoir of the Late Reverend Jonathan Edwards," in *Works* (1808), 1:58-59.