

Great Effusions of the Holy Spirit - the Advocacy of True Revival

by Michael A.G. Haykin

Michael A.G. Haykin explores the advocacy of true revival through the insights of Jonathan Edwards, emphasizing the essential role of the Holy Spirit and the need for discernment in spiritual experiences.

Scripture: Psalm 51:17, John 14:26, Romans 8:26, 1 Corinthians 2:12, Galatians 5:22, Ephesians 4:30, 1 Thessalonians 5:19, 1 John 4:1

Topics: "Holy Spirit", "True Revival"

Description

Michael A.G. Haykin delves into the writings of Jonathan Edwards, highlighting his significant contributions as a theologian of Revival. Edwards' personal experiences with revival, meticulous observations, and profound understanding of the human heart led to some of the most profound literature on revival in the Church's history. His works emphasize the importance of recognizing one's spiritual destitution, absolute dependence on God's grace, and the exaltation of the Lord Jesus by the Holy Spirit. Edwards navigates the complexities of the Great Awakening, addressing both the zealots and critics, seeking to correct extremes and promote genuine spirituality rooted in biblical truth.

Transcript

Chapter 4 of:

Jonathan Edwards: The Man, his Experience and his Theology

Volume 3 The "Toronto Blessing": A Renewal from God?

Jonathan Edwards' writings on revival are of especial importance, because he is, as Martyn Lloyd-Jones once described him, "preeminently the theologian of Revival." (1) His writings on revival possess ongoing value, because, first of all, they are rooted in a personal and intimate acquaintance with revival. The earliest letter that we possess from his hand, written to his elder sister Mary when he was but twelve years of age, tells of a revival in his hometown of East Windsor, Connecticut, under the preaching of his father, Timothy Edwards. He describes it as "a very remarkable stirring and pouring out of the Spirit of God," in which it was common on Mondays, after the Word had been preached the day before, for "above thirty persons to speak with Father about the condition of their souls." (2)

More significantly, the revival that made a profound impact on the Connecticut Valley during the winter of 1734-1735 first began in his church in Northampton, Massachusetts. Then five years after this regional revival there occurred the Great Awakening, which, as we have seen in Chapter 1, swept the entirety of the American colonies from 1740 to 1742. Although the English itinerant evangelist George Whitefield was the main human instrument in this revival, Edwards also played a very prominent role in it. He too traveled and preached extensively beyond the borders of his own parish. (3) Even more significantly, in print Edwards was this revival's most theologically astute champion as well as its most perceptive critic. This dual role with regard to the revival called forth some of Edwards' finest books.

Then, Edwards' reflections on revival are still of immense value because Edwards possessed a wonderful facility for meticulous and minute observation. This facility can be seen in the intriguing and detailed investigation which he conducted during the early 1720s into the way that spiders made their webs. (4) Later in his life, this gift, now exercised in the realm of pastoral ministry and theology, yielded a profound understanding of the human heart and its workings. Sereno E. Dwight, Edwards' great-grandson and one of his early biographers, stated that Edwards' "knowledge of the human heart, and its operations, has scarcely been equaled by that of any uninspired preacher." Dwight goes on to mention three probable sources for this insightful understanding of the human heart: Edwards' perceptive reading of the Scriptures; "his thorough acquaintance with his own heart"; and his grasp of philosophy. (5) Thus, it should not be surprising that the combination of personal experience and empirical insight-- insight that is thoroughly rooted in Scripture--produced some of the most profound literature on revival in the history of the Church. To quote Lloyd-Jones again: "If you want to know anything about the psychology of religion, conversion, revivals, read Jonathan Edwards." (6)

Faithful Narrative (1737)

As we have already noted in Chapter 1, the Northampton revival of 1734-1735 was subsequently described and analyzed by Edwards in his Faithful Narratives. Here Edwards is writing as a historian. He is primarily seeking to narrate what took place during the revival. Unlike his later works on this subject, he did not intend to produce a detailed structure of the way that the Spirit works corporately in revival or individually in conversion. Nevertheless, Edwards does provide a pattern of sorts to the working of the Spirit in conversion.

First, Edwards shows how individuals become aware of the miserable condition in which they actually exist and "the danger they are in of perishing eternally." Some of these persons are "brought to the borders of despair, and it looks as black as midnight to them a little before the day dawns in their souls." (7) Many of them initially seek to reform their lives--"to walk more strictly, and confess their sins, and perform many religious duties, with a secret hope of appeasing God's anger, and making up for the sins they have committed." When, Edwards notes, these people "see unexpected pollution in their own hearts, they go about to wash their own defilement and make themselves clean." (8) Invariably, though, such attempts at self-cleaning, reform and self-help fail, and they are led on to the next step by the Spirit of God.

The second step on the pathway to conversion is for the Spirit to bring these persons to a "conviction of their absolute dependence on his [God's] sovereign power and grace, and an universal necessity of a mediator." (9) Coupled with this conviction is a deep sense that God would be entirely just in sending them to hell forever, the realization of what Edwards calls their "just desert of hell." "Their own exceeding sinfulness, and the vileness of all their performances" leads them to "a conviction of the justice of God in

their condemnation." (10) For Edwards, only when people come to a humble recognition of their complete spiritual destitution in the face of God's righteous demand for a holy life are they in the place where they are ready to embrace the Saviour whom God has graciously provided.

This step is an important one in Edwards' morphology of conversion, for it reveals the great importance that the Northampton pastor placed on correct doctrine. Recognition of the sovereignty of God in salvation, one of the main themes at the heart of Calvinism, is for Edwards part and parcel of the Spirit's work in revival." (11) Not surprisingly, Edwards notes that of the sermons which he preached during this period of revival, those which were the "more remarkably blessed" were those "in which the doctrine of God's absolute sovereignty with regard to the salvation of sinners, and his just liberty with regard to answering the prayers, or succeeding the pains, of natural men, continuing such, have been insisted on." (12)

The sinner's recognition of his or her desperate spiritual plight and the consciousness that God alone can save are what Edwards calls "legal humiliation" and "the drift of the Spirit of God in his legal strivings with persons." (13) These discoveries do not necessarily indicate that saving grace is present. But where that grace is present, it eventually manifests itself "in earnest longings after God and Christ: to know God, to love him, to be humble before him, to have communion with Christ in his benefits." And it has been Edwards' observation, he points out, that the source of these longings has been "a sense of the superlative excellency of divine things, with a spiritual taste and relish of them." (14)

It is vital to note that Edwards sees the work of the Holy Spirit as being absolutely essential to revival. It is the Holy Spirit that awakens the lost to their desperate state and unless the Holy Spirit is poured out upon a community no revival can take place. Even orthodox preaching is in vain, if the Spirit not empower it. However, it is also important to note that in this book which is written to describe how the Holy Spirit works in the time of revival, Christ is mentioned far more often than the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is only explicitly mentioned 35 times in the narrative, whereas, Christ is mentioned more than 85 times. For Edwards, the heart of the Spirit's work is the exaltation of the Lord Jesus.

The selection from the Faithful Narrative in the following pages is taken from The Works of Jonathan Edwards (1834 ed.), 1:344-364.

Distinguishing Marks (1741)

On September 10, 1741, Edwards addressed the faculty and students of Yale College at the school's annual commencement exercises. His address was based on I John 4:1, "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world." In his address Edwards especially sought to deal with opposition to the Great Awakening. A couple of months after the address, Edwards had it published "with great enlargements" as The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God. The published treatise contains an introduction and three main sections. In his introduction Edwards notes that the main purpose of I John 4 is to set forth "some certain rules, distinguishing and clear marks," whereby the church might discern what is and what is not a genuine work of the Spirit.

In the first section of the work Edwards lists nine "negative signs" or evidences, which cannot be used to determine whether or not the Spirit is at work in an individual's life or corporately in revival. In the second section, Edwards gives five "sure, distinguishing Scripture evidences and marks" of a genuine work of the Holy Spirit. Finally in the third section, Edwards provides an application to the situation of his day.

The selections from the Distinguishing Marks seek to summarize the main points of the first two sections of this treatise. They are taken from the Works of Jonathan Edwards, 2:261-269. The titles given to the nine "negative" signs and the five "positive" signs are those of the editors.

Some Thoughts (1743)

Edwards' second major defense of the Great Awakening is *Some Thoughts Concerning the Present Revival of Religion in New England*. Written during the course of 1742, it was not actually published till mid March, 1743. During the period of time that Edwards devoted to writing it, division over the revival was becoming increasingly obvious. Two parties were emerging, the Old Lights and the New Lights, which, Edwards observes, had the tendency to divide the churches in New England into "two armies, separated, drawn up in battle array, ready to fight with one another."

On the one side were ministers like James Davenport, a Congregationalist minister from Southhold, Long Island, and Andrew Croswell (1709-1785), the pastor of a Congregationalist church in Groton, Connecticut. At the height of the revival in New England in the early 1740s, both of these men assured individuals who either fell to the ground, or experienced bodily tremors, or saw visions while they were preaching that such experiences were a sure sign of the Spirit's converting work. In Croswell's words, only those who have had such "divine Manifestations ... know what true Holiness means." He asserted that "God never works powerfully, but men cry out disorder, for God's order differs vastly from their nice and delicate apprehensions" of him. (15) Davenport, for his part, claimed to have the ability to distinguish who was among the elect of God, a "gift" which he especially sought to exercise when he called into question the spiritual state of certain ministers who had refused to allow him to preach from their pulpits.

Prominent also in Davenport's ministry was a devotion to loud, boisterous singing. While vibrant singing has regularly been a mark of movements of revival in the history of the church, some of the lyrics written by Davenport were cause for deep concern. For instance, in *A Song of Praise for Joy in the Holy Ghost* (1742), Davenport wrote the following of the Holy Spirit's work in the believer's life:

It makes me Abba Father cry,

With confidence of soul.

It makes me cry, My Lord, My God,

And that without control. (16)

To profess the loss of self-control as the work of the Spirit of God was worrisome to both advocates and critics of the revival.

Although Davenport later confessed that he had been wrong in much of what he had said and done, he had helped to spark a "wild-fire" spirit which in many places made havoc of the revival. Moreover, he had furnished anti-revival forces with ammunition for their attacks. These forces were captained by Charles Chauncy (1705-1787), co-pastor of the most prestigious Congregationalist church in Boston, who could say of Davenport in particular: "he is the wildest Enthusiast [i.e. fanatic] I ever saw." (17)

Chauncy had first written of the revival in 1741, when he actually gives thanks for what the Spirit of God was doing. He has no doubt, he writes, that there are "a number in this land, upon whom God has graciously shed the influence of this blessed Spirit," something for which he and his readers ought to be

thankful. Yet, he goes on to note some concerns. There have arisen "unchristian heats and animosities" along with "rash, censorious, uncharitable judging." "Evil speaking, reviling and slandering" have become all too common." Here, Chauncy clearly has in view the uncharitable way that men like Davenport often treated those whom they judged to be unconverted.

By the following year the prominent Boston pastor had become much more critical. In July of that year Davenport had appeared in Boston and specifically sought out Chauncy to pronounce judgment on the latter's spirituality. The encounter, which took place in the doorway of Chauncy's study, decisively turned the latter against the revival. He quickly fired off a sermon, published as *Enthusiasm Described and Cautioned Against*, in which he accused Davenport and his ilk of being "enthusiasts," who show their true true colours by their blatant disregard of the "dictates of reason." (19) As a safeguard against their fanaticism, he first encourages his hearers and readers to use the Scriptures--"the great rule of religion, the grand test in matters of salvation"--to test what was going in New England. He also draws attention to the fact that "the Spirit of God deals with men as reasonable creatures." Reason, though not to be set up in place of God's revelation in the Bible, was essential to the Christian life. Failure to use it, as Davenport and his followers appeared to be doing, was a sure way to fall into "all manner of delusion." (20)

In particular, Chauncy stresses that the arousal of one's "passions and affections" needs to be carefully monitored. The "passions," when properly acted upon by the Spirit, "tend mightily to awaken the reasonable powers." If one's passions are set ablaze, but one's reason and understanding are not enlightened, it is all to no avail. Reason and judgment, the "more noble part" of the human being, must be preeminent in all religious experience, otherwise it is but a sham and "enthusiasm." Real religion, he concludes, is "a sober, calm, reasonable thing." (21)

In August, 1742, Chauncy penned a further attack on the revival in an open letter that he wrote to a minister in Scotland. In it Chauncy declares: "There never was such a spirit of superstition and enthusiasm reigning in the land before; never such gross disorders and barefaced affronts to common decency; never such scandalous reproaches on the Blessed Spirit, making him the author of the greatest irregularities and confusions." Again Chauncy expresses a hope that through the events of the revival "a good Number ... have settled into a truly Christian temper." Nevertheless, he is firmly persuaded that in general the revival is nothing more than the "effect of enthusiastic heat."

The goodness that has been so much talked of, 'tis plain to me, is nothing more, in general, than a commotion in the passions. I can't see that Men have been made better, if hereby be meant, their being formed to a nearer resemblance to the divine being in moral holiness. 'Tis not evident to me, that persons, generally, have a better understanding of religion, a better government of their passions, a more Christian love to their neighbour, or that they are more decent and regular in their devotions towards God. I am clearly of the mind, they are worse in all these regards. They place their religion so much in the heat and fervour of their passions, that they too much neglect their reason and judgment. (22)

For Chauncy, the excesses of the revival revealed its true nature: it was not at all a work of God's Holy Spirit, but merely an instance of uncontrolled emotionalism. Viewing the revival through the lens of the antics of Davenport and others like him, it is not at all surprising that Chauncy came to the conclusion that the revival was mostly heat with little light, and therefore to be rejected as spurious.

Chauncy's main attack on the revival was his *Seasonable Thoughts on the State of Religion in New-England* (1743). It continues to press home what Chauncy saw as the main work of the Spirit, the

enlightenment of the mind. "An enlightened mind, and not raised affections," he will state, "ought always to be the guide of those who call themselves men; and this, in the affairs of religion, as well as other things: And it will be so, where God really works on their hearts, by his Spirit." (23)

Edwards thus found himself in the unenviable position of giving an answer to both of these sides in the debate about the nature of the revival. To pious zealots like Davenport he will stress that biblical Christianity must involve the mind and reason. When God converts a person, light is shed upon the mind. On the other hand, there is much more to conversion than enlightenment. In response to Chauncy and those of his persuasion, he will thus maintain that genuine spirituality flows out from a heart aflame with the love of God. There is no genuine Christianity without a warm heart. *Some Thoughts* thus seeks to chart a *via media* in the debate about the revival.

It should be noted that there is a discernible difference between *Some Thoughts* and Edwards' earlier book, *Distinguishing Marks*. While both books defend the revival as essentially a glorious work of God the Holy Spirit, it is increasingly apparent to Edwards as he writes *Some Thoughts* that there are problems in the revival. To be sure, this awareness is not absent from *Distinguishing Marks*. As Edwards writes in that work: if men and women "wait to see a work of God without difficulties and stumbling-blocks, it will be like the fool's waiting at the river side to have the water all run by. A work of God without stumbling-blocks is never to be expected." (24) But by the time that he publishes *Some Thoughts*, he is increasingly critical of the imprudent excesses committed by "friends" of the revival. In fact, as Iain Murray has pointed out, the book's structure seems to reflect this change in reflection on the revival. (25)

The book is divided into five main parts. In the first part the Northampton pastor defends the revival as a "glorious work of God." The next division of the book outlines the "obligations that all are under to acknowledge, rejoice in, and promote this work." The third section seeks to vindicate the "zealous promoters" of this work. The largest part of the book is Part IV, which focuses on how the friends of the revival need to correct various problems in the work. The final section is devoted to outlining various things that could be done to further promote the revival.

The length of the fourth part of the book makes it abundantly clear that Edwards' growing concern is the very real danger of fanaticism. "One truly zealous person," he observes, "may do more (through Satan's being too subtle for him) to hinder the work, than an hundred great and strong, and open opposers." (26) It is not hard to imagine that he may have had Davenport in mind at this point. As Iain H. Murray has noted, Edwards was convinced that Davenport did more "towards giving Satan and those opposers [of the revival] an advantage against the work than any other person." (27)

In recent remarks on the Great Awakening, William DeArteaga has argued that it was not Davenport's fanaticism but Chauncy's opposition that quenched the Great Awakening. "In spite of Edwards's own theories," he writes, "it seems that the Great Awakening was not quenched because of its extremists. It was quenched because of its opponents." (28) But this opinion flies in the face of not only Edwards' *Some Thoughts*, written in the midst of the revival, but also his *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections* (1746), written a number of years after the revival. By the time that Edwards came to write *Religious Affections* he had had the time to reflect deeply on the revival and its outcome. And instead of toning down his views from *Some Thoughts*, he sharpens them: the Great Awakening was quenched more by fanaticism than by opposition.

The entirety of Part IV of *Some Thoughts* is reprinted below. It is taken from the *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, I :397-420.

Religious Affections (1746)

Jonathan Edwards published *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections* in 1746. The immediate historical occasion for the treatise is the Great Awakening, but, as Edwards himself notes, the book is the culmination of some twenty-five years of thought about the nature of true spirituality and religious experience. (29) Edwards is attempting to correct the extremes of both sides of the revival--enemies like Chauncy and overly zealous friends like Davenport. The bulk of the book, though, is directed towards the latter. Only a thirteenth or so of the book is a response to opponents like Chauncy; the rest seeks to rectify the mistakes and errors of the overly zealous.

The book is divided into three sections. The first is a response to the opponents of the revival. The second and third sections critique the extreme zealots like Davenport. The second section gives twelve signs that cannot be used to prove that the Holy Spirit is at work in an individual's life. In Section III Edwards then gives twelve signs that are distinguishing marks of true spirituality. As Iain Murray has rightly stated: the *Religious Affections* "is unquestionably one of the most important books possessed by the Christian church on the nature of true religion." (30)

The selections from this treatise are taken from the *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, 1 :236-336.

FOOTNOTES:

(1) "Jonathan Edwards and the Crucial Importance of Revival" in his *The Puritans: Their Origins and Successors* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987), 361. In the words of J. I. Packer, Edwards' theology of revival "is, perhaps, the most important single contribution that Edwards has to make to evangelical thinking today" [*A Quest for Godliness. The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1990), 316]. See also the remarks in this regard by R. E. Davies, *I Will Pour Out My Spirit: A History and Theology of Revivals and Evangelical Awakenings* (Tunbridge Wells, Kent: Monarch Publications, 1992), 26: 'No one who studies the topic of revival will dispute the statement that Jonathan Edwards, the eighteenth-century American preacher and writer, is the classic theologian on the subject.'

(2) "The Earliest Known Letter of Jonathan Edwards", *Christian History*, 4, No.4 (1985), 34.

(3) Helen Westra, *The Minister's Task and Calling in the Sermons of Jonathan Edwards* (Lewiston, New York/Queenston, Ontario: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1986), 34.

(4) For his fascinating writings on spiders, see his *Scientific and philosophical Writings*, ed. Wallace E. Anderson (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1980).

(5) "Memoirs of Jonathan Edwards, A. M." [*The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (1834 ea.; rear., 1:clxxxix)]. I owe this reference to John Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1990), 95-96. Piper has some good comments on this aspect of Edwards' ministry; see *ibid*, 95-98.

(6) "Jonathan Edwards and the Crucial Importance of Revival", 361.

(7) See p. 131.

- (8) See p. 136.
- (9) See p. 134.
- (10) See p. 138.
- (11) Samuel T. Logan, Jr., "Jonathan Edwards and the 1734-35 Northampton Revival", *Preaching and Revival* (London: The Westminster Conference, 1984), 69.
- (12) See. p. 137
- (13) See p. 134.
- (14) See p. 141.
- (15) Cited Clarke Garrett, *Spirit Possession and Popular Religion. From the Camisards to the Shakers* (Baltimore/London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 115.
- (16) Cited Thomas Templeton Taylor, "Spirit of the Awakening: The Pneumatology of New England's Great Awakening in Historical and Theological Context" (Unpublished Ph. D. Thesis, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1988), 325.
- (17) A Letter from a Gentleman in Boston, to Mr. George Wishart, One of the Ministers of Edinburgh, Concerning the State of Religion in New England [in Richard L. Bushman, ea., *The Great Awakening. Documents on the Revival of Religion, 1740-1745* (1970 ea.; repr. Chapel Hill, North Carolina/London: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 121].
- (18) Cited Taylor, "Spirit of the Awakening", 342-343.
- (19) Most of Enthusiasm Described and Cautioned Against may be conveniently found in Eugene E. White, *Puritan Rhetoric: The Issue of Emotion in Religion* (Carbondale and Edwardsville, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1972), 103-116. For a good discussion of Chauncy's theological position, see Conrad Cherry, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards. A Reappraisal* (1966 ea.: repr. Bloomington / Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990), 164-167; Taylor, "Spirit of the Awakening", 335-370.
- (20) White, *Puritan Rhetoric*, 106, 112-113.
- (21) *Ibid.*, 114-115. See also the the discussion of this sermon by Taylor, "Spirit of the Awakening", 343-352.
- (22) Letter from a Gentleman in Boston (Bushman, ea., *Great Awakening*,120).
- (23) *Seasonable Thoughts on the State of Religion in New-England* (Boston: Samuel Eliot, 1743), 327.
- (24) *Works of Jonathan Edwards*. 2:273.
- (25) *Jonathan Edwards A New Biography* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987), 237-238.
- (26) See p. 229.
- (27) *Jonathan Edwards*, 225.

(28) Quenching the Spirit: Examining Centuries of Opposition to the Moving of the Holy Spirit (Lake Mary, Florida: Creation House, 1992), 55.

(29) Works of Jonathan Edwards, I :234.

(30) Jonathan Edwards, 267.

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