

## INTRODUCTION

### I. HISTORICAL

WHEN Jonathan Edwards died of a smallpox vaccination on 22nd March 1758, two months after moving to Princeton as its President, he left a mass of manuscript material, including over a thousand sermons and pieces in various stages of completion. One of his major theological works, *The Great Christian Doctrine of Original Sin Defended*, was on its way through the press. Books for which Edwards has become famous, such as *The History of Redemption* (1774), *The End for which God created the World*, *The Nature of True Virtue* (1765) were published posthumously, as were some of his sermons and extracts from his voluminous *Miscellanies* which were in effect his theological and philosophical notebooks. Since the various editions of Edwards' *Works* published in the nineteenth century, manuscript items have continued to appear, making quite a large body of material in print but not included in his *Works*, and not readily available. The largest of these items is *Charity and Its Fruits*, sermons on *I Corinthians 11*, edited by his great-grandson Tryon Edwards and published in 1852.<sup>1</sup> The three reprinted here, though slighter, are not less important for understanding Edwards.

#### *Treatise on Grace*

In 1854 Alexander B. Grosart was commissioned to prepare a new edition of Edwards' writings and was given access to the mass of his manuscripts. This edition never appeared, because, according to Faust and Johnson, Grosart quarrelled with the American executors of Edwards' estate over his removal of material to Scotland.<sup>2</sup> Extracts from this material were privately printed by

<sup>1</sup> This has been republished (London 1969).

<sup>2</sup> C. H. Faust and T. H. Johnson, *Jonathan Edwards: Representative Selections*, revised edition, New York 1962, p. 424.

him in 1865, in an edition of only three hundred copies, as *Selections from the Unpublished Writings of Jonathan Edwards of America*. The *Treatise on Grace* was the chief item in this selection, which besides included some annotations on the Bible, sermons and letters. Grosart writes of the *Treatise*, 'This Manuscript was found by itself carefully placed within folds of thick paper, and tied up with a silk ribbon. It proved to be arranged into chapters and sections, all paged; and, in short, precisely as now printed . . . there can be no doubt that the Manuscript was intended for publication.'<sup>1</sup> There is no clear indication when it was written though A. V. G. Allen believes that both it and the *Observations* came after 1752.<sup>2</sup>

When a search was made at the turn of this century for the documents that Grosart took from America, nothing was found. Faust and Johnson hazard that Grosart did not in fact possess documents of any great interest, but the impression given in his Introduction to the *Selections* is the reverse of this. 'I have personally transcribed from the original MSS now in my possession, the contents of the present volume'. 'I possess already priceless and hitherto unknown materials for a worthy Biography.'<sup>3</sup>

It is not clear, therefore, just what manuscripts Grosart took to Scotland and how many, if any, he returned. Harvey Townsend claimed that Grosart 'never rendered a satisfactory accounting for some of them'. If so, Grosart certainly merits Townsend's description of him as 'irresponsible'.<sup>4</sup> So it is not clear where, if anywhere, the autograph of the *Treatise on Grace* is. It is not mentioned as being in either of the two principal collections of Edwards' manuscripts, at Yale and Andover-Newton Theological Seminary.

<sup>1</sup> *Selections*, p. 12.

<sup>2</sup> A. V. G. Allen, *Jonathan Edwards*, Edinburgh 1889, p. 346.

<sup>3</sup> *Selections*, pp. 11, 15.

<sup>4</sup> *The Philosophy of Jonathan Edwards from his Private Notebooks*, ed. Harvey G. Townsend, Eugene, Oregon 1955, p. xi.

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### *Observations Concerning the Scripture Economy of the Trinity and the Covenant of Redemption*

This, the smallest of the three items, is in effect a section (No. 1062) from a copy of Edwards' *Miscellanies*, pages 573–88 of a manuscript book prepared for publication by Edwards' son. It was published by E. C. Smyth in 1880, with an introduction and appendices. Smyth believed it to be the unpublished essay of Edwards on the Trinity referred to by Horace Bushnell and O. W. Holmes (see p. 4). A volume of Edwards' *Miscellaneous Observations* copied by his son was published in Edinburgh in 1793 by Edwards' friend and correspondent John Erskine, but for some reason the section republished by Professor Smyth was omitted by Jonathan Edwards junior and remained in America. Smyth could give no explanation of the decision to hold back the section, except that it was perhaps not considered by Edwards' son to be of sufficient interest at the time. Another still shorter entry of Edwards on the Trinity was reprinted by Smyth in 1904 in *Exercises Commemorating the Two-Hundredth Anniversary of the Birth of Jonathan Edwards*, Appendix I, pp. 8–16, and is reprinted in Harvey Townsend ed. *The Philosophy of Jonathan Edwards*, pp. 252–61. Townsend does not mention this section as forming part of the *Miscellanies* when he estimates that as much as three-quarters of the *Miscellanies* have been published in more-or-less adequate texts. Pending the publication of the standard edition of Edwards' *Miscellanies*<sup>1</sup> Townsend's volume, a carefully edited selection under subject headings derived from Edwards' own index, is invaluable.

Professor Smyth provided a very lengthy Appendix to the *Observations*, consisting mainly of further extracts from the unpublished *Miscellanies* in support and elucidation of the newly-published text. Only those extracts that serve to underline the extent of Edwards' commitment to covenant theology (for the significance of this commitment see below) have been retained.

<sup>1</sup> Due to be published by Yale University Press, edited by Professor Thomas Schafer.

*An Essay on the Trinity*

This appeared in 1903, edited by G. P. Fisher (1827–1909), who was for many years Professor of Ecclesiastical History at Yale. He assumes that the *Essay* was in fact the ‘treatise’ mentioned by Horace Bushnell in 1851<sup>1</sup>, as providing an ‘*a priori* argument for the Trinity’ and also mentioned by O. W. Holmes. Holmes had written:

‘The writer is informed on unquestionable authority that there is or was in existence a manuscript of Edwards in which his views appear to have undergone a great change in the direction of Arianism, or of Sabellianism, which is an old-fashioned Unitarianism, or at any rate show a defection from his former standard of orthodoxy, and which its custodians, thinking it best to be wise as serpents in order that they might continue harmless as doves, have considered it their duty to withhold from the public. If any of our friends at Andover can inform us what are the facts about this manuscript, such information would be gratefully received by many enquirers, who would be rejoiced to know that so able and so good a man lived to be emancipated from the worse than heathen conceptions which had so long enchained his powerful, but crippled understanding.’<sup>2</sup>

Fisher believed that the item referred to was the *Essay* and that Professor Smyth was mistaken in thinking that it referred to the fragment of Edwards that he published, on account of the fact that Bushnell refers to it as a ‘treatise’, which the *Observations* published by Smyth certainly was not. In the second of two articles in *Bibliotheca Sacra* in 1881 Professor E. A. Park had referred to an ‘early metaphysical and scholastic but utterly orthodox argument on the Trinity’ which ‘has been mislaid and cannot yet be found’. The Edwards family had in fact put this in the hands of Professor Park who was hoping to write a biography of Edwards. On his death the manuscripts went to Yale.

<sup>1</sup> *Christ in Theology*, p. vi.

<sup>2</sup> *Pages from an Old Volume of Life*, p. 396 (vol. viii of the Riverside Edition of the *Writings of O. W. Holmes*, London 1891).

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Why was it not printed sooner than 1903? Fisher hazards the guess that it was on account of Edwards' upholding of the Nicene doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son of God which nineteenth-century New England theology had abandoned and derided. It would have been something of an embarrassment to them to have had the orthodox view defended by someone who was on all hands regarded as the founder of their school. On this view not heterodoxy, but orthodoxy, prevented its earlier publication. However this may be, it is clear that the contents of the *Essay* do nothing to justify the rather back-handed remarks of Holmes. The most obvious reason why Edwards did not publish this himself, along with the *Treatise on Grace*, is that he was prevented by his sudden death. Writing to the Princeton trustees in 1757 he mentions his plans for writing on other aspects of the Arminian controversy, for writing a *History of the Work of Redemption*, and a *Harmony of the Old and New Testaments*. He goes on, 'I have also many other things in hand, in some of which I have made great progress, which I will not trouble you with an account of. Some of these things, if Divine Providence favour, I should be willing to attempt a publication of.'<sup>1</sup>

The date of the composition of the *Essay* is not known, but it is clear from alterations to the draft that it was composed over a considerable number of years, and in any case could not have been finished (assuming Edwards had finished it, in content if not in style) before 1727, for the simple reason that in it Edwards refers to John Hurrion's *Christ Crucified* which was not published until then. The *Essay* has not been reprinted since 1903, though fragments of it appear in Faust and Johnson's *Representative Selections*.

## II THEOLOGICAL

In introducing the themes dealt with by Edwards in these writings it will be convenient to start with his concept of divine grace, which can be regarded as a pivotal notion of his theology.

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, ed. Hickman, London 1840, vol. i, p. ccxvii. (All references to Edwards' *Works* are to this edition).

Edwards believed that the Bible taught one unified theme, trinitarian in scope, comprising a revelation of God's redemptive grace. This same belief had been articulated by Edwards' Puritan forebears in terms of covenant theology; according to this scheme God the Father had covenanted with the Son (as the head and representative of the church) to redeem the church through the Son's propitiatory sacrifice, and the Holy Spirit was conceived of as the agency of application of the 'benefits' or 'fruits' of Christ's death to the elect—bringing them to repentance and saving faith, granting them the grace of adoption and assurance, and progressively sanctifying them. Theologians such as Ames, Perkins and Preston were prominent 'covenant theologians' in Britain, and Turretine and Witsius on the continent, but its influence was pervasive in Reformed circles in the seventeenth century, and found classic expression in such documents as the *Westminster Confession of Faith*.

At two points in these re-published writings Edwards seems to modify this covenant doctrine. (*Essay*, p. 123-4; *Treatise*, p. 68). In each case he stresses that the common way of expressing the Holy Spirit's part in the covenant does not do full justice to biblical teaching which the theology was meant to summarize and systematize; in particular it inadequately expresses the biblical teaching on grace and on the Trinity. (It will become clear how closely interwoven these two matters were in Edwards' thinking.) In the *Treatise on Grace* he says 'If we suppose no more than used to be supposed about the Holy Ghost, the honour of the Holy Ghost in the work of redemption is not equal in any sense to the Father and the Son's; nor is there an equal part of the glory of this work belonging to Him. Merely to apply to us, or immediately to give or hand to us blessing purchased, after it is purchased, is subordinate to the other two Persons . . . But according to what has now been supposed, there is an equality. To be the wonderful love of God, is as much as for the Father and the Son to exercise wonderful love; and to be the thing purchased, is as much as to be the price that purchases it. The price, and the thing bought with that price, answers each other in value; and to be the excellent benefit offered,

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is as much as to offer such an excellent benefit.' (p. 67–8. Cf. the similar passage on pp. 123–4 of the *Essay*, and also *Observations*, p. 88 'The Spirit was the inheritance that Christ, as God-man, purchased for Himself and His Church'). The Holy Spirit is not the agent of application, He is what is given to the Church.

This modification, which is clearly one *within* the Westminster covenantal framework and not *of* it, is in the interests of securing two important gains. Firstly, Edwards' aims to highlight the *immediacy* and *uniqueness* of the gift of divine grace conveyed into the soul. Each of these teachings is prominent throughout Edwards' work; in 1734, when he was thirty-one, his sermon, 'A Divine and Supernatural Light immediately imparted to the Soul, shown to be both a Scriptural and Rational doctrine' was published. This is a firm declaration of the truth that the Spirit of God 'acts in the mind of a saint as an indwelling, vital principle . . . he unites himself with the mind of a saint, takes him for his temple, actuates and influences him as a new supernatural principle of life and action . . . Holiness is the proper nature of the Spirit of God.'<sup>1</sup> This immediate divine light 'reveals no new doctrine, it suggests no new proposition to the mind, it teaches no new thing of God, or Christ, or another world, not taught in the Bible, but only gives a due apprehension of those things that are taught in the word of God.'

In his famous *Religious Affections* the negative consequences of this stress were worked out in the light of the enthusiastic, anti-nomian excesses of the Great Awakening; a true work of God in the soul is not to be identified with bodily or psychological disturbances which could have a natural explanation, such as a readiness to talk about religion, or the occurrence to the mind of texts of scripture. A true work of grace consists in the Spirit of God being 'given to the true saints to dwell in them, as his proper lasting abode; and to influence their hearts, as a principle of new nature, or as a divine supernatural spring of life and action'.<sup>2</sup> Christian practice is the true sign of such a work, both to our-

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, vol. ii, p. 13.

<sup>2</sup> *Works*, vol. i, p. 265.

selves and to others. The point is further elaborated in *Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God* (1741) and in his sermon 'True Grace Distinguished from the Experience of Devils', published in 1752.

Further, this experience of divine grace is unique. Edwards makes this point by means of a distinction between common and special grace, or, equally often, between natural and supernatural experiences. The elaboration of this distinction is the main purpose of the *Treatise on Grace*. 'Special or saving grace . . . is not only different from common grace in degree, but entirely diverse in nature and kind.' (p. 25.) It follows that conversion (i.e. regeneration) must be instantaneous and 'it is impossible for men to convert themselves' (p. 36-7). The importance of this for Edwards' Calvinism is obvious; but what is just as important is the way in which it makes man immediately dependent on God. A man cannot keep God at a distance either by his autonomous, self-determining will (this is Edwards' argument in the *Freedom of the Will*), nor by endeavouring to prepare himself for grace. Such preparation, though a duty, can only 'increase and improve and new-model and direct qualities, principles, and perfections of nature that they have already' (*Treatise*, p. 37). 'Grace must be the immediate work of God, and properly a production of His almighty power on the soul.' (p. 38.) As Professor James Carse has recently put it:

Once a person has supposed that he can put himself into the alcove of his soul without any real connection with what passes by on the outside, he takes his relationship with God out of history. Now there is no public act of God—no commandment, no moral government, no ecclesiastical institution—that can in the least influence our relationship to him if we do not want it to. Our business with God will be *where we like it* and *when we choose*.<sup>1</sup>

It was this 'distancing' of men from God that Edwards emphatically opposed.

So it is strictly inappropriate to speak of 'habits of grace'. 'All

<sup>1</sup> *Jonathan Edwards & The Visibility of God*, Scribner's, New York, 1967, p. 62.



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succeeding acts of grace must be as immediately, and, to all intents and purposes, as much from the immediate acting of the Spirit of God on the soul, as the first.' (p. 74.) It is this point about the immediate dependence of man on God that is behind Edwards' famous imprecatory sermons which many have found so repellent. Their titles make this clear—'God glorified in Man's Dependence', 'Sinners in the hands of an angry God'. Whatever may be thought of the propriety of the language used in these sermons, it is clear that they are not the work of a ranter but were designed to impress the minds of his hearers with the truth about themselves as he saw it. This emphasis on immediate dependence was also an important factor in his opposition to the 'half-way' covenant of Solomon Stoddard which led to his dismissal from Northampton in 1750.

The fact that the tests of such a supernatural work of grace are ethical does not mean that in Edwards' view the supernatural is reduced to the ethical. He had no Kantian difficulties about knowing that God had revealed Himself in history and through Scripture, but he was confronted with an acute pastoral problem posed by the Great Awakening; how can a man know truly that God is at work in his life? Edwards' answer to this was unequivocal, 'gracious affections have their exercise and fruit in christian practice'. Christian practice is a sufficient test of Christian grace; but this does not mean that Christian practice is Christian grace.

Edwards' contrast between common and special grace is firmly tied by him to ethics in the following way: the natural man is dominated by self-love; the spiritual man loves 'being in general'. His views on ethics were propounded in *A Dissertation on the Nature of True Virtue*, posthumously published in 1765. There he argues that true virtue consists in love to being in general. 'True virtue most essentially consists in BENEVOLENCE TO BEING IN GENERAL. Or perhaps, to speak more accurately, it is that consent, propensity, and union of heart to being in general, which is immediately exercised in a general good will.'<sup>1</sup> It follows, Edwards argues, 'that true virtue must chiefly consist in LOVE

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, vol. i, p. 122.

TO GOD, the Being of beings, infinitely the greatest and best'.<sup>1</sup>

This connection between grace and ethics is very clear in the *Treatise on Grace*. 'He that is once brought to see, or rather to taste, the superlative loveliness of the Divine Being, will need no more to make him long after the enjoyment of God, to make him rejoice in the happiness of God, and to desire that this supremely excellent Being may be pleased and glorified.' (p. 48) Thus by love to 'being in general' Edwards means a love that has God, the supreme and infinitive being, as its chief object and sufficient condition. 'Therefore he that has true virtue, consisting in benevolence to being in general, and in benevolence to *virtuous* being, must necessarily have a supreme love to God, both of benevolence and complacence.'<sup>2</sup> One important component of this love to God as Edwards shows both in the *Treatise* and in the *Affections* is love to God *for his own sake*. 'The main ground of true love to God is the excellency of His own nature, and not any benefit we have received, or hope to receive, by His goodness to us . . . love or affection to God, that has no other good than only some benefit received or hoped for from God, is not true love.' (p. 49) Compare this rather Kantian stance with the *Affections*, Part III, Section II; '*The first objective of gracious affections, is the transcendently excellent and amiable nature of divine things, as they are in themselves; and*

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, vol. i, p. 125.

<sup>2</sup> *Works*, vol. i, p. 125. A. V. G. Allen in *Jonathan Edwards*, p. 359 accuses Edwards of inconsistency at this point in an effort to show that the *Treatise on Grace* represents a later and better phase of Edwards' thought than that found in *Virtue*. He says that whereas in *Virtue* Edwards gave pride of place to love of benevolence as the primary ground of virtue, to which he subordinated love of complacence, this is reversed in the *Treatise*. This apparent turn-about is resolved by the consideration that in *Virtue* Edwards placed love to being in general (in which, he says virtue essentially consists) as prior to both love of benevolence and love of complacence. He argues in chapter 1 of *Virtue* that complacence and benevolence presuppose beauty otherwise 'that would be to suppose that the beauty of intelligent beings primarily consisted in love to beauty; or that their virtue first of all consists in their love to virtue. Which is an inconsistency, and going in a circle.' 'Therefore . . . the primary object of virtuous love is being, simply considered.' This Edwards calls 'absolute' or 'pure' benevolence. Pure benevolence necessarily brings about complacence, which in turn produces benevolence 'out of gratitude to him for his love to general existence'.

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not any conceived relation they bear to self, or self interest.' Edwards' argument here, as elsewhere in the *Affections* is that the natural man is capable of loving God for selfish reasons, but not of loving God as He is in himself. 'A natural principle of self-love may be the foundation of great affections towards God and Christ, without seeing anything of the beauty and glory of the divine nature. There is a certain gratitude that is a mere natural thing.'<sup>1</sup>

It is often asserted that Edwards was a mystic,<sup>2</sup> and certainly isolated phrases may give countenance to this view. But his general position is clear. The imparted Spirit enlightens the mind with regard to what Edwards calls 'divine things', the Biblical message of salvation through Christ. 'There is a new understanding of the excellent nature 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 unto him.'<sup>3</sup> This is not mysticism. The experience of divine grace leads to the individual *judging* that such and such is the case.<sup>4</sup> There is no claim to 'cosmic consciousness', and Edwards guards himself against excess by making certain qualifications. (See e.g. p. 109 of the *Essay*.) Edwards is reaffirming the classic Puritan insistence on Word and Spirit.

And what about the relation between this imparting of grace and justification by faith? A man trusts Christ as a result of the imparting of divine life and light. Theologically, faith is the gift of God's grace; psychologically, a man believes when the object of belief is taken to be worthy of belief, and this happens, according to Edwards, when a man is given a sense of the beauty of divine things. Justification is by faith alone, but Edwards' teaching about the implanting of divine life enables him to do justice to his belief that the faith that justifies is never alone. This is one reason why

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, vol. i, p. 275.

<sup>2</sup> e.g. by G. P. Fisher, 'The Philosophy of Jonathan Edwards', in *Discussions on History and Theology*, New York 1880, pp. 227, 228.

<sup>3</sup> *Works*, vol. i, p. 282.

<sup>4</sup> See Conrad Cherry, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards: A Reappraisal*, Garden City, New York 1966, p. 23.

he hesitates over labelling faith *the* condition of justification. Faith is not the necessary and sufficient condition for justification. 'If it be that with which, or which being supposed, a thing shall be, and without which, or it being denied, a thing shall not be, we in such a case call it a condition of that thing. But in this sense faith is not the only condition of salvation or justification; for there are many things that accompany and flow from faith, with which justification shall be, and without which it will not be, and therefore are found to be put in Scripture in conditional propositions with justification and salvation, in multitudes of places; such are love to God, and love to our brethren, forgiving men their trespasses, and many other good qualifications and acts.'<sup>1</sup> (See also the Appendix to *Observations*, p. 96).

So far we have sketched Edwards' views of grace as the communication of divine life and the connection of this with ethics. Edwards' trinitarian views form to a great extent the other side of this coin. It has already been seen that Edwards is unhappy merely to speak of the Holy Spirit as the *applier* of redemption on account of the fact that this does not do justice to the deity of the Holy Spirit. It is now time to develop this a little more fully.

The *excursus* on the Trinity in Chapter 3 of the *Treatise* is to be taken as an attempt by Edwards to understand the nature of grace more fully by showing what, according to Scripture is 'the nature of the Holy Spirit' (p. 56). Here he expounds his view that the Holy Spirit is best understood as the personal love of God the Father. It is in this sense that Edwards understands the Apostle John's assertion that God is love. The 'is' here is that of identity; that is, the love of which John speaks is not merely the result of the Spirit's work in the regenerate it *is* the Spirit. Hence his frequent reference to 'communication'. (Cf. the *Essay* at this point; 'God is love' shows 'Love to be essential and necessary to the deity so that his nature consists in it.' (p. 98; also p. 106-7).) Edwards further claims that it is since God's love is primarily to himself, that the love of the Father is the Spirit; and it is because the Holy Spirit is, in this incomprehensible manner, the personal love of God, that

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, vol. i, p. 623. 'Justification by Faith Alone.'

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we never read in the Bible of the Son loving the Spirit, or of the love of the Holy Spirit to men, or of communion or fellowship with the Holy Spirit (*Treatise*, p. 62; *Essay*, p. 116).

The upshot of this is that each person of the Trinity is to be regarded as having an equal part in the work of redemption. 'There is an equal glory due to the Holy Ghost on this account, because He is the love of the Father and the Son, that flows out primarily towards God, and secondarily towards the elect that Christ came to save.' (*Treatise*, p. 66.) And hence it is that the New Testament speaks of grace as 'spiritual'; 'it is of the nature of the Spirit' (p. 68).<sup>1</sup>

Further, the insistence on the equality of the persons of the trinity and their co-operation in man's redemption makes any denial of Edwards' commitment to classic Reformed covenant theology extremely hard to credit. That Edwards abandoned the covenant theology of his fathers, in spirit if not always in the letter, is the claim of Perry Miller in his important and influential study of Edwards,<sup>2</sup> and of P. Y. de Jong in *The Covenant Idea in New England Theology*.<sup>3</sup>

In order to estimate the force of these objections it will be necessary to make a few general remarks about covenant theology. Many Reformed theologians, Edwards included, make the distinction between the covenant of redemption, and the covenant of grace. The former refers to the trinitarian 'agreement' to redeem; the latter to the covenant relation between Christ and the church. Edwards puts it in the following way: 'It seems to me, there arises considerable confusion from not rightly distinguishing between the covenant that God made with Christ and with His church or believers in Him, and the covenant between Christ and His church, or between Christ and men. There is doubtless a difference

<sup>1</sup> The significance of Edwards' trinitarianism for his ethics has been discussed by Henry Stob, 'The Ethics of Jonathan Edwards' in *Faith and Philosophy*, ed. A. Plantinga, Grand Rapids 1964, pp. 111-37. See also R. A. Delattre, *Beauty and Sensibility in the Thought of Jonathan Edwards*, New Haven 1968.

<sup>2</sup> *Jonathan Edwards*, 1949. (Republished by Meridian Books, 1959. Page references are to this edition.)

<sup>3</sup> Grand Rapids 1945.

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between the covenant that God makes with Christ and His people, considered as one, and the covenant of Christ and His people between themselves.' (*Observations*, Appendix, p. 94-5, also p. 96.)

It is clear to start with that Edwards was, in general terms, a 'covenant theologian'. Besides his bold trinitarianism already discussed there are two other important pieces of evidence to support this; certain external details of his life, and his explicit avowal of this doctrine in the *Observations*.

The external details are quite straightforward; writing in 1746 to his friend and former pupil, Joseph Bellamy, and referring to two standard exponents of covenant theology, Van Mastricht and Turretine, Edwards states: 'They are both excellent. Turretine is on polemical divinity; on the 5 points, and all other controversial points; and is much larger in these than Mastricht; and is better for one that desires only to be thoroughly versed in controversies. But take Mastricht for divinity in general doctrine Practice and Controversie; or as an universal system of divinity; and is much better than Turretine, or any other Book in the world, excepting the Bible, in my opinion.'<sup>1</sup> Elsewhere Edwards refers to 'the great Turretine'. Further, when Edwards was dismissed from his church at Northampton in 1750 he was approached by his Scottish friend and correspondent John Erskine, about the possibility of emigrating to Scotland. Edwards replied that there would be 'no difficulty' in subscribing to the substance of the Westminster Confession.<sup>2</sup>

Edwards' *Observations* support this. The chief point he makes is that the persons of the Trinity ought not to be understood in terms of their role in redemption, but *vice versa*: the headship of the Father in the Trinity is shown by his choice of the Son as the mediator of the Covenant and the redeemer of the church (p. 79). Again, God's determination to communicate Himself in the creation of the universe is prior to His determination to redeem. The natural equality of the members of the Trinity means that

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Joseph Bellamy, 15th January 1746, printed by F. B. Dexter, 'On the Manuscripts of Jonathan Edwards', in *Massachusetts Historical Society Proceedings*, Second Series, vol. xv, pp. 12-13, 1902.

<sup>2</sup> *Works*, vol. i, p. clxiii.

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the subordination of the Son and the Holy Spirit must be *covenantal* not ontological in character. The Sonship of Christ is eternal (p. 91-2) and when redemption is complete the ontologica Trinitry remains. There is no space to discuss the complex issues raised here but Edwards' commitment to covenant theology is clearly shown both by the orthodoxy of his views and the fact that he expounds them with his customary reverence, intellectual intensity and thoroughness.

But what about Edwards' commitment to the covenantal character of the relationship between God and His church? It is this that Miller questions, on the grounds of Edwards stress on the immediacy of the grace of God and the dependence of man on God, the very points brought out in this Introduction. Is Miller warranted in drawing the conclusion that he does? He makes two points about the popular presentation of covenant theology in Edwards' day, that 'At the moment of conversion . . . the saint is received into a compact with the divine, and thereafter depends for his security upon the fact that the transaction is on record' and that 'by conceiving of regeneration as the drawing up of a covenant, requiring assent on both sides, the clergy could, even while professing absolute predestination, offer to men rational inducements for their attempting to open negotiations'.<sup>1</sup> Supposing that these are historically accurate claims, it is clear that the first has an antinomian thrust, while the second is Pelagian and legalistic. Opposition to both of these does not entail denial of the covenantal character of the relationship between God and men.<sup>2</sup> What Edwards is doing is re-stating the *sovereignly gracious* character of the covenantal relationship, for which 'christian practice' is the

<sup>1</sup> Perry Miller, *Jonathan Edwards*, p. 30, also pp. 76-77.

<sup>2</sup> Miller's claim that in his sermon 'God glorified in Man's Dependence' Federal Theology is conspicuous by its utter absence (p. 30) is untrue. Several passages are explicitly 'covenantal' e.g. 'Jesus Christ is not only of God in his person, as he is the only-begotten Son of God, but he is from God, as we are concerned in him, and in his office of Mediator. He is the gift of God to us: God chose and anointed him, appointed him his work, and sent him into the world. And as it is God that *gives*, so it is God that *accepts* the Saviour.' *Works*, vol. ii, p. 3.

only firm ground of assurance. Any attempt to 'rationally induce' men to come to God, implies a Pelagian view of the will and is implicitly naturalistic; pastorally, it is counter-productive, for it implies that men have the power to, and hence could afford to postpone their turning to God; but they could not afford to think of postponement if they were 'in the hands' of God. Edwards' preaching was a reaffirmation of the gracious, holy character of God's covenantal dealings with men. And he was being quite consistent in asserting in public that 'the redeemed are in everything directly, immediately and entirely dependent on God for all their good' while elaborating in his private notebooks the orthodox distinction between the covenant of redemption and the covenant of grace.

P. Y. de Jong also judges that Edwards is guilty of departing from classic covenant theology. Though his allegiance to Calvinism is acknowledged yet de Jong argues that Edwards 'did perhaps more than anyone else toward preparing for the complete and final eradication of this idea (i.e the covenant) from New England religious life'. He is accused of 'Anabaptist individualistic piety'; in his hands the covenant idea became 'no more than an anthropological representation of God's dealings with men'.<sup>1</sup> The grounds for this charge are mainly three; his championing of revival, his doctrines of imputation and of the will, and his ecclesiology. But de Jong fails to show that Edwards' discriminating endorsement of revival is inconsistent with covenant theology. Edwards' teaching on imputation and the will are connected. If, as B. B. Warfield<sup>2</sup> and John Murray<sup>3</sup> have argued, Edwards taught the immediate imputation of Adam's sin to his posterity, it is hard to see how de Jong can fairly claim that Edwards denied Adam's federal headship and so depart from the 'organic conceptions so strongly embedded in the Calvinism of Scotland and the Netherlands'.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *The Covenant Idea in New England Theology*, pp. 150, 143.

<sup>2</sup> 'Edwards and the New England Theology', in Hastings, *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, reprinted in *Studies in Theology*, New York 1932.

<sup>3</sup> *The Imputation of Adam's Sin*, Grand Rapids 1959, p. 54.

<sup>4</sup> *op. cit.*, p. 150.



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On ecclesiology it is true that Edwards made active faith a prerequisite for attending communion, and tied regeneration and faith closely together. But do either of these positions entail a departure from covenant theology? It seems at times that Edwards is being faulted for what later New England theologians made of his position. B. B. Warfield's estimate that 'what he teaches is just the "standard" Calvinism in its completeness' is beyond serious dispute.

Space forbids more than a brief mention of two further points about Edwards' theology which these writings highlight. For all his reaffirmation of orthodoxy it is clear that he is not averse to theological development. (See for example his statement on the biblical teaching on the Trinity on p. 125-6 of the *Essay*.) But his view of development is determined by his view of faith and reason and the authority of Scripture. His theological method is to test such developments by the way they illuminate scripture and cohere with what it already clearly teaches. Secondly, he took very seriously the imagery of the Bible. This comes out clearly in the closing pages of the *Essay* where he argues that the sun in particular is a representation of the Trinity. As Miller has pointed out in his Introduction to Edwards' manuscript, *Images or Shadows of Divine Things*,<sup>1</sup> he regarded biblical language not as rhetorical embellishment, but as figures and types intended to convey *truth*. It is therefore no mere literary accident that, say, the colours of the rainbow are used to illustrate certain particular biblical truths. The imagery is appropriate because the natural order is a shadow of the spiritual. The expositor must therefore spiritualize on the basis of the lead that scripture gives in the matter, otherwise he will inevitably get in bondage to his own fancy.

### III. PHILOSOPHICAL

Edwards' major philosophical work is of course *Freedom of the Will*, but the items reprinted here are not without interest from a philosophical standpoint. Three matters will be touched on briefly;

<sup>1</sup> New Haven 1948.

his indebtedness to Locke, his 'ontological proof' of the Trinity, and his general position on the question of faith and reason.

*Locke.*

Edwards self-confessed dependence on Locke is well known. But what is its exact extent? This is a large question<sup>1</sup> but the evidence of these items reprinted here is that Edwards used Locke where it suited him, rather than followed him uncritically. It is one of the oddities of the history of ideas that whereas many of Edwards' contemporaries in Britain found the seeds of deism in Locke<sup>2</sup>, Edwards used him to buttress Calvinism

The most obvious influence of Locke occurs in Edwards' use of his terminology to enforce the supernatural character of divine grace. This is most evident of all in the *Affections* but it comes out also in the *Treatise* in what Edwards says about *meaning*. Expounding *I Corinthians xi, 14* in light of his doctrine of the 'new sense' Edwards says of a man without divine grace 'He does not know what the talk of such things (viz. 'divine things') means; they are words without a meaning to him; he knows nothing of the matter any more than a blind man of colours' (p. 28).

This is the Lockean theory of meaning; words without ideas to match them are meaningless. The use of words is to be 'sensible marks of *ideas*, and the *ideas* they stand for are their proper and immediate signification'.<sup>3</sup> Hence someone who lacks the 'new sense of things' finds the language meaningless. He has no ideas for which the words used stand. In his chapter 'Of Faith and Reason, and their Distinct Provinces', Locke has an interesting section on 'new simple ideas' in which he asserts that a revelation of new simple ideas is necessarily incommunicable. Edwards never tackles the problems of communication between those possessing the new sense; they communicated, and that was sufficient. But

<sup>1</sup> I have discussed some aspects of it in an article 'John Locke and Jonathan Edwards: A reconsideration', in *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, vol. viii, no. 1, January 1969.

<sup>2</sup> See J. W. Yolton, *John Locke and the Way of Ideas*, London 1956.

<sup>3</sup> Locke, *Essay*, Book III, ch. 2. s. 1.

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it is safe to say what he would reply—that God communicates new simple ideas not in the sense of giving new information which others cannot know but in the sense that he makes certain propositions *worthy to be believed*, and part of this change is moral. Thus the test of whether a man has this new sense or not is public—‘christian practice’. Edwards’ problem was less that of how men could communicate than that of preventing men from thinking that participation in the life and language of a religious community was a sufficient condition of divine grace. There was plenty of religious language in New England, but little Christian practice. That one could participate in the public religious language was not sufficient to show that one had true spiritual understanding. Love is the test of the reality of ‘divine work’ within a man.

This discussion raises many complex issues in the philosophy of mind and the philosophy of language which cannot be gone into here. The problems about the meaning of expressions that refer to one’s private states, and how these are best analysed, are at the centre of modern discussion. However, it is fairly clear that Edwards is committed to an empiricist theory of meaning even though he has different views from Locke on the scope and limits of human knowledge. (See the discussion on ‘faith and reason’ below).

Consistently with his position on meaning Edwards follows Locke on definition. Locke had argued that ‘the *names of simple ideas, and those only, are incapable of being defined*’.<sup>1</sup> The reason for this is that ideas are simple, uncompounded. Since a definition (in the sense in which Locke is using the word) is the definition of a word by another word or words there can be no definition of simple ideas. They have no features that can be picked out by a *definiens*. The meaning of simple ideas is ‘to be *got* by those *impressions* objects themselves make in our minds, by the proper inlets appointed to each sort. If they are not received this way, all the *words* in the world, *made use of to explain or define any of their names, will never be able to produce in us the idea it stands for*.’<sup>2</sup>

Can the divine love which is communicated to the hearts of

<sup>1</sup> *Essay*, Book III, ch. iv. s. 7.

<sup>2</sup> *Essay*, Book III, ch. iv. s. 11.

God's people be defined? Edwards' answer to this is a firm negative. 'Things of this nature are not properly capable of a definition. They are better felt than defined.' (*Treatise*, p. 47.) The new simple idea is *sui generis*; any definition of it would be a naturalizing of the supernatural character of the divine work in the soul.

*The 'ontological proof' of the Trinity.*

The ideas terminology that Edwards derived partly at least from Locke, is carried over into the *Essay on the Trinity*. B. B. Warfield calls it an attempt at an 'ontological proof'<sup>1</sup> of the Trinity. Edwards argues as follows: if God has an idea of something absolutely perfect 'there is nothing in the pattern but what is in the representation'. As, according to Edwards an idea of love is an instance of love, so God's idea of Himself is Himself. 'Therefore as God with perfect clearness, fullness and strength, understands Himself, views His own essence (in which there is no distinction of substance and act but which is wholly substance and wholly act) that idea which God hath of Himself is absolutely Himself.' (p. 101.) This is an ingenious and bold argument, which might fairly be called 'ontological'. To have an idea of  $x$ , where  $x$  is 'non-material' is for  $x$  to exist. Hence God's idea of Himself, a most perfect spirit, is Himself, i.e. is what the Bible calls the Word of God. And the necessary affection that arises between God and His Word is the Holy Spirit. 'This is the eternal and most perfect and essential act of the Divine nature, wherein the Godhead acts in an infinite degree and in the most perfect manner possible. The deity becomes all act, the divine essence itself flows out and is as it were breathed forth in love and joy. So that the Godhead therein stands forth in yet another manner of subsistence, and there proceeds the third Person in the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, viz. the deity in act, for there is no other act but the act of the will.' (p. 106.)

The difficulty with this is clear. For one thing Edwards' premiss that an idea of  $x$  where  $x$  is 'non-material', e.g. an emotion, is

<sup>1</sup> B. B. Warfield, 'The Biblical Doctrine of the Trinity', in *Biblical and Theological Studies*, Philadelphia 1952, p. 26.

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equivalent to an instance of  $x$ , is dubious. A person does not have to be in a fright to have an idea of fear. But disregarding this, what God's idea of Himself will be will not be another person of the Godhead but another God. If a perfect idea of  $x$  entails that  $x$  exists then Edwards has proved too much—not the second person of a trinity of persons but a second *theos*. His argument is implicitly tri-theistic. It is clear however from the *Essay* that he does not regard this as a convincing proof. He considers objections, particularly that his thesis would deny personality to the Holy Ghost (p. 118), and fully allows the limitations of his case. 'But I don't pretend fully to explain how these things are and I am sensible a hundred other objections may be made and puzzling doubts and questions raised that I can't solve. I am far from pretending to explaining the Trinity so as to render it no longer a mystery. I think it to be the highest and deepest of all divine mysteries still, notwithstanding anything I have said or conceived about it. I don't intend to explain the Trinity.'<sup>1</sup> (p. 119–20.) Edwards was a metaphysician, but he was no rationalist. The mysteries of revelation were to be mysteries still.

His motive was not rationalistic; rather he wanted to say a little more than had been said before within the limits of the biblical data and thereby to make things as 'easy and intelligible' as possible. His argument was less an attempt at a formal proof of the Trinity than a model in terms of which more justice could be done to the biblical record than previously.

### *Faith and Reason.*

Edwards lived in the Age of Reason, and he did not despise the use of the intellect. Yet reasoning was to be subordinated to the authority of Scripture, which Edwards took with absolute seriousness, and which has made him into such a tragic figure

<sup>1</sup> Compare 'Rabbi' Duncan, 'The Trinity is my highest Theologoumenon. I reach it, and find in it the supreme harmony of revealed things. But it is equally irrational and irreverent to speculate on the nexus between the Persons. This is not revealed, and I think it is not revealable.' *Colloquia Peripatetica*, 5th edn., Edinburgh 1879, p. 165.

to later liberal commentators. Reason was to be used not so much to provide a rational foundation to Christian belief (Edwards says remarkably little about the 'theistic proofs') as to undergird biblical doctrine where possible (as in the *Freedom of the Will* where he provided a metaphysical refutation of Arminianism by showing the incoherence of the notion of the self-determining power of the will), and to enable faith to seek understanding (as in the *Essay*).<sup>1</sup>

Though, as has been shown, he had debts to Locke, the latter's way of relating faith to reason was not one of them. On Locke's view, revelation is natural reason enlarged by a new set of disclosures about past, present and future, communicated by God, e.g. 'that part of the angels rebelled against God and thereby lost their first happy state, and that the dead shall rise and live again'.<sup>2</sup> This information from God is to be believed; this is the province of faith, while reason vouches the truth of the revelation by accepting certain testimonies and proofs that accompany the revelation and that show it to be from God. Revelation covers those things that men are not in the best position to know, but even these must be consistent with the 'clear and self-evident dictates of reason'.<sup>3</sup> Any truth from God will be accompanied 'by some marks which reason cannot be mistaken in'. But as Locke does not say what 'truths above reason' are, nor provide any criterion for distinguishing 'x comes from God' from 'x does not come from God' this position is hardly a stable or satisfactory one.

For Edwards on the other hand the Bible was God's revelation to which the one possessed of the new sense of divine things would willingly submit himself. But this does not entail that a man's reason is inert, though it does close the door to any rationalistic repudiation or reduction of Scripture. Reason's function is to be the elucidator of and apologete for the divine mysteries. Edwards uses 'reason' in two senses; in a strict sense, as logical argument, and in

<sup>1</sup> For a general statement of the relationship between reason and revelation see *Miscellaneous Observations on Important Theological Subjects*, ch. 7, in *Works*, vol. ii, pp. 479ff.

<sup>2</sup> *Essay*, Book IV, ch. xviii. s. 7.

<sup>3</sup> *Essay*, Book IV, ch. xviii. s. 10.

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his work he continually exposes the logical incoherences of critics of Protestant orthodoxy like Whitby and Chubb (in *Freedom of the Will*) and Taylor of Norwich (in *Original Sin*). And he uses arguments to construct models to elucidate mysteries (as in the *Essay*) or to propound solutions to difficulties (as in *Original Sin*, when by a metaphysical argument about personal identity he tries to show that the whole of Adam's posterity was identical with Adam when he fell, and hence was culpable). But he was always ready, as has been shown, to acknowledge the limits of such speculations. Secondly, he uses 'reason' in a more informal sense, as when, in the *Treatise*, he writes that religion that has no true regard for God is 'unreasonable'.