

Holy Children are Happy Children:  
Jonathan Edwards and Puritan Childhood

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## **Abstract:**

The eighteenth century is often considered the most important era in the history of childhood. Old Puritan conceptions of original sin and physical punishment gave way to Enlightenment concepts of childhood innocence and rationality. Jonathan Edwards was a central figure who stood in the midst of this intellectual change. Situated quite literally in the middle of the transitioning eighteenth century, Edwards' attempted to bridge the gap between Puritan conceptions of childhood and new ideas made popular by John Locke. Sometimes the bridge held firmly, and other times it cracked widely. Edwards' theological and philosophical understanding of childhood was at the heart of both his preaching and writing. An examination of Edwards' rhetoric to children reveals a great deal about how he attempted to reconcile these two different ideologies. His ability to reason with children and redirect their wills to God was unique for his time. While Edwards' view of childhood is far from modern, the ideas that he expressed had a large impact on American childhood conceptions throughout the following centuries and into today.

## **Table of Contents**

<u>Introduction</u> – A Man of His Time: Edwards and Historical Context .....	3
<u>Chapter 1</u> – “More Hateful than Vipers”: Edwards and Original Sin .....	17
<u>Chapter 2</u> – Children as “White Paper”: Edwards on Conversion and Rationality .....	39
<u>Chapter 3</u> – “Begin Life with God”: Edwards’ Interaction with Children .....	61
<u>Chapter 4</u> – “The Easiest Way of Reforming a People”: Edwards and Education .....	84
<u>Conclusion</u> – A Complex Character: Edwards’ Childhood Legacy .....	105
<u>Bibliography</u> .....	115

## **Introduction**

### **A Man of His Time: Edwards and Historical Context**

In 1737 Jonathan Edwards wrote an account of religious revival that sent shockwaves from the American mainland to continental Europe. The work, titled, *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God in the Conversion of Many Hundred Souls in Northampton*, detailed the renewed spiritual fervor that swept over Edwards' New England parish, and provided extensive insight as to how Christian conversion takes place. The text was translated into several languages and made Jonathan Edwards an international celebrity.<sup>1</sup>

Near the end of this important treatise, Edwards describes a particular instance in which God's work was particularly apparent: the genuine conversion of Phebe Bartlett. Not only does he make this the capstone of his essay, but he uses it as a pinnacle example and metaphorical measuring stick for all future conversions. Certainly, if the account is to be believed, Bartlett is deserving of this position. According to the narrative, Bartlett was in deep despair over her own sin and the prospect that she might go to Hell. Unable to be comforted by family and friends, her countenance suddenly changed, and she proceeded to cry, "the Kingdom of Heaven is come to me!"<sup>2</sup> Full of joy, Bartlett emphatically declared "I love God! ... Yes, better than anything!"<sup>3</sup> In the following weeks, her signs of conversion became even more apparent. Edwards writes how she heartily lamented the unsaved status of her siblings, cherished the Sabbath, desired to attend private religious meetings, attended to prayer at home, and (especially noteworthy to Edwards)

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<sup>1</sup> David W. Bebbington, "Remembered Around the World: The International Scope of Edwards's Legacy," in *Jonathan Edwards at Home and Abroad*, ed. David W. Kling and Douglas Sweeney (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), 180-181.

<sup>2</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *A Faithful Narrative (1737)*, in *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 4, *The Great Awakening*, ed. C. C. Goen (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 200.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 201.

“manifested great love to her minister.”<sup>4</sup>

Upon reflection of Bartlett’s story, Edwards’ mention of her may seem strange. In a society and time in which patriarchy reigned supreme, it seems uncanny for a thirty-four year old male minister to use a young female as the prime example of religious faith. Edwards’ use of females, and perhaps his partiality towards females, has been pointed out by several historians in recent scholarship.<sup>5</sup> While the role of gender for Edwards may be noteworthy in this instance, there is another element to this story that is perhaps even more striking. Phebe Bartlett was not a young woman; she was only four years old.

Although Phebe Bartlett’s conversion reveals a great deal about Jonathan Edwards and Puritan society, it is important to remember that she represents a very small fraction of the childhood experience in colonial North America. In fact, as sociologists Allison James and Alan Prout note, childhood itself is a social construction.<sup>6</sup> While biological immaturity is a common feature among all people groups, this is perhaps the *only* necessary commonality when discussing youth among various cultures and periods of history. The historical study of childhood is therefore not an examination of its biological frameworks, but is instead the careful analysis of how it is conceived by a particular group of people, or person. As such, James and Prout duly note that childhood “can never be entirely separated from other variables such as class, gender, or ethnicity.”<sup>7</sup> This is certainly the case in colonial North America, where the ideas

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 205.

<sup>5</sup> See George M. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 19, 249; Mary Ava Chamberlain, “The Immaculate Ovum: Jonathan Edwards and the Construction of the Female Body,” *William and Mary Quarterly* (April 2000), accessed August 13, 2015, <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.liberty.edu:2048/stable/pdf/2674477>.; Kathryn Kish Sklar, “Culture versus Economics: A Case of Fornication in Northampton in the 1740’s,” *The University of Michigan Papers in Women’s Studies*, (October 1977), accessed March 23, 2015, <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/mfs/acp0359.0003.001/37:5?rgn=main;view=image>.

<sup>6</sup> Allison James and Alan Prout, eds., *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood: Contemporary Issues in the Sociological Study of Childhood* (London: Routledge, 1990), 3.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 3-4.

and experiences of Native American, enslaved African, and German female children differed significantly from those in Puritan New England.<sup>8</sup> Yet, while these variances cannot go overlooked, there arose in the late seventeenth century a shift in childhood understanding that greatly impacted each of these groups. As a result, the proceeding eighteenth century can be seen as the most important era for defining the modern view of childhood. The combination of Enlightenment thinking and Evangelical revival provided an intellectual depth regarding childhood unparalleled up to that point in history.<sup>9</sup> At the heart of this intellectual surge was another variable that extended beyond the limits of class, gender, and ethnicity: religion.

Jonathan Edwards was a central figure who stood in the midst of this Enlightenment and Evangelical mix. Situated quite literally in the middle of the transitioning eighteenth century, Edwards' attempted to bridge the gap between Puritan conceptions of childhood and new ideas made popular by John Locke. Sometimes the bridge held firmly, and other times it cracked widely. It may seem strange, however, that for a man who thought so deeply about childhood, he never wrote a single treatise exclusively on the topic. Perhaps his life was cut short before the opportunity arose. Nevertheless, Edwards' theological and philosophical understanding of childhood was at the heart of both his preaching and writing. He often extrapolates on the large implications for children in his various theological works. Understanding childhood was central to Edwards, because understanding humanity was central. It seemed to him that in no place could grasping the intricacies and complexities of human depravity, innocence, and faith be better observed than in that of children. In children, Edwards saw all the possibilities of the future. As a pastor, Edwards felt that he would be held responsible for their eternity. In this sense, and in many others, Edwards was a Puritan through and through.

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<sup>8</sup> For a broader examination of the varying experiences and conceptions of childhood in colonial North America, see James Marten, ed. *Children in Colonial America*, (New York: New York University, 2007).

<sup>9</sup> James, *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood*, 36-37.

Childhood in Puritan New England was both genuinely cherished and strictly monitored. Child-rearing was held in high regard, with an astonishingly large number of tracts being published on the topic.<sup>10</sup> Puritans valued proper etiquette and behavior among their youth, requiring them to bow in the presence of their parents and keeping them from an excess of frivolous activities.<sup>11</sup> Their greatest fear in child-rearing was not a neglect for children, but an overindulgence. Sports and other leisurely activities that had been common in England were, for the most part, highly discouraged. Instead, children and youths were taught grammar, catechisms, and other forms of religious education during their free time.<sup>12</sup> This does not mean that play was completely nonexistent among young Puritans, but rather that they viewed it as wholly non-productive. It was the antithesis of the Puritan mindset. As historian Bruce C. Daniels notes, “Puritans believed that the ideal leisure activity was both productive and pleasurable.”<sup>13</sup> If pleasurable activities could not be productive, perhaps children could be trained to find productive activities pleasurable.

Many children, such as eight-year-old Benjamin Franklin, were “sent-out” at a young age to spend time at a grammar school.<sup>14</sup> Already “fond of reading,” Franklin began to read books such as *Pilgrims Progress* and later R. Burton’s *Historical Collections*.<sup>15</sup> He adhered to the Puritan mindset by finding pleasure in education itself. While the details of child-rearing and the concept of “breaking the will” will be discussed later, the larger narrative is to show that the ideal child should not behave like a child at all. While some historians suggest that Puritan

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<sup>10</sup> Steven Mintz, *Huck’s Raft: A History of American Childhood* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 10.

<sup>11</sup> Fischer, *Albion’s Seed: Four British Folkways in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 101.

<sup>12</sup> Mintz, *Huck’s Raft*, 10.

<sup>13</sup> Bruce C. Daniels, *Puritans at Play: Leisure and Recreation in Colonial New England* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1995), xviii.

<sup>14</sup> Fischer, *Albion’s Seed*, 101.

<sup>15</sup> Benjamin Franklin, *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, and Company, 1886), 13, 19., accessed July 15, 2015, Google Books.

childhood was nothing more than “miniature adulthood,” it is clear that Puritans themselves had a distinct vision for childhood and youth.<sup>16</sup> Adult behavior was encouraged among young Puritans, but it was not expected. Childhood and youth were not an extension of adulthood, but were rather a time in which one prepared for adulthood.<sup>17</sup> While this nuance may appear to be insignificant, it is highly important because it denotes an ideological separation between stages of life.

The standards that children were expected to adhere to often wavered between noble and impossible. Some youth became distraught, even stooping into despair when they came face to face with their own inadequacy.<sup>18</sup> Yet, the lofty expectations of Puritan adults were seen to be the necessary steps in maintaining a society that they had come to cherish. The godliness of their society, and therefore God’s favor on their society, was directly correlated to the godliness of their offspring. If children became less than ideal, so would everything else. This is why children remained front and center in matters of religion. They were dedicated to God, even before they were born.<sup>19</sup> The health of Christian society could be directly measured by the piety of its children. Although the inclusion of Phebe Bartlett by Jonathan Edwards may seem odd by modern standards, it would have been a welcome occurrence – the return to an ideal – for Puritans. While early childhood conversion may have been uncommon, it was not unheard of.

The late seventeenth century saw several tracts published describing similar stories. James Janeway’s 1671 *A Token for Children* is perhaps the most popular. Janeway, an English nonconformist preacher, includes numerous fictitious accounts of childhood conversions and

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<sup>16</sup> Ross W. Beales Jr, “In Search of the Historical Child,” in *Growing Up in America: Children in Historical Perspective*, ed. N. Ray Hiner and Joseph M. Hawes (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1985), 22-23

<sup>17</sup> Karin Calvert, *Children in the House: The Material Culture of Early Childhood, 1600-1900* (Boston: University Press of New England, 1992), 52.

<sup>18</sup> Philip Greven, *The Protestant Temperament: Patterns of Child-rearing, Religious Experience, and the Self in Early America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 55.

<sup>19</sup> Gillian Avery, *Behold the Child: American Children and Their Books, 1621-1922*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 14.

deathbed narratives. He describes a child between eight and nine years old who would “spend much time in reading the scripture . . . She was exceeding dutiful to her parents, very loth to grieve them in the least; and if she had at any time (which was very rare) offended them, she would weep bitterly.”<sup>20</sup> Puritans and their children would have been familiar with these stories. His book, according to historian Jillian Avery, “was one of the most powerful pieces of writing ever produced for children.”<sup>21</sup> Even in families who did not allow fiction, *A Token for Children* was usually an exception.<sup>22</sup> This is perhaps because the Puritans saw the stories as not wholly fictitious, but well within the realm of possibility.

Several other accounts helped confirm this belief for them. In 1679 publishers issued several tracts in both England and America that relayed the tale of Charles Bennett, a three year old boy in London who could speak Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. Bennett, who would be called a prodigy by modern audiences, had a knowledge of scripture that was unparalleled.<sup>23</sup> Jonathan Edwards’ account of Phebe Bartlett, as told to him by her parents, evoked similar imagery. While the validity of the story may be debated, what cannot be debated is its relevance and resonance with other New Englanders. Bartlett’s story was far more than an ideal example of conversion as it represented the ideal Puritans sought. She was not just a sign of God’s work in an individual’s heart, but was symbolic of God’s continued favor on their society.

For decades, New England ministers had exhorted the younger generations to live piously. Historian Harry Stout’s book *The New England Soul* explains this mindset in great

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<sup>20</sup> James Janeway. *A Token for Children, Being an Exact Account of the Conversion, Holy and Exemplary Lives and Joyful Deaths, of Several Young Children* (London, 1671), Reprint (Worcester, MA: James R. Hutchins, 1795), 8-9, accessed August 21, 2015, <https://archive.org/stream/tokenforchi00janeiala#page/n1/mode/2up>.

<sup>21</sup> Avery, *Behold the Child*, 33.

<sup>22</sup> The book became so popular that Cotton Mather produced his own version of the book, titled *A Token for Children in New England*.

<sup>23</sup> William E. A. Axon, ed., *The Wonderfull Child. Tracts issued in 1679 relating to Charles Bennett of Manchester, alleged to speak Latin, Greek, and Hebrew, when three years old without having been taught* (Chetheam Society, 1902), 1-2, accessed August 2, 2015, Google Books. These tracts were compiled, edited, and republished by English librarian William E. Axon in 1902.

detail. Stout discusses the strong sense of providence among early Puritans, and their desperate desire to see it followed through. Children were burdened with the task of manifesting what their parents had envisioned. The youth would inherit God's covenant with New England, just as David inherited God's covenant with his father Solomon.<sup>24</sup> Yet, as Stout writes, "If they succeeded in keeping the covenant, they praised only the founders; to warrant praise in their own right the children must somehow outdo the founders, a near-impossible task."<sup>25</sup> On top of this impossibility for ministers, was a concerning drop in church membership among young people. Without membership, their children could not be baptized. The result would be disaster for the church, and society as a whole. The quick fix was the controversial Half-Way Covenant of 1662, which allowed half-members of churches to baptize their children. While it may have provided temporary relief, the Half-Way Covenant did little to ease the concerns of New England ministers.<sup>26</sup> In one of the last sermons by the first generation of Puritan settlers, John Davenport beseeched the youngsters in attendance to uphold their society. Writing from Isaiah 5:1-8, Davenport warns, "And see that your fruitfulness in good, answereth the cost & pains that God hath been at with you in his Vineyard, lest the Lord be provoked to deal with us, as he did with his ancient Vineyard."<sup>27</sup> The task of maintaining godliness fell to a new generation.

Jonathan Edwards stood at the end of this long legacy, in a society that showed more signs of decay than it had at any other point in its short history. The son of a preacher, Edwards was immersed in the concept of preserving the New England Way. As sexual immorality and

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<sup>24</sup> Harry S. Stout, *The New England Soul: Preaching and Religious Culture in Colonial New England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 67-69.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>26</sup> Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: From Colony to Providence* (London: University of Oxford Press, 1954), 88-89, 104.

<sup>27</sup> John Davenport, *A Sermon Preached at the Election of the Governour, at Boston in New-England May 19th 1669*, ed. Paul Royster, 16, Nebraska-Lincoln Digital Commons, <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1052&context=etas>.

other youthful pleasures became more common, concern for society increased.<sup>28</sup> Edwards saw himself as responsible for upholding the Puritan way of life, and he recognized that it began with children. It is unsurprising then, perhaps even expected, that revival would originate with youth. Whether divinely orchestrated or not, the religious awakening of the eighteenth century was a direct response to the diminishment of the old Puritan order. Revival revealed that not only was God's covenant with New England still intact, but also that his blessing exceeded that of earlier times. Even when revival waned, the possibility of its renewal remained.

The centrality of children to Edwards, if only from a Puritan ministerial perspective, is important. Given Edwards' added theological insight and far-reaching legacy, it could be assumed that his interaction with childhood and youth is well documented. Yet, there is surprisingly little that has been written exclusively on the topic.

The historical study of childhood itself is relatively new. Its origins can be traced to Philippe Ariés' 1962 monumental book *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*. His book shows that the concept of childhood is socially constructed and varies throughout history. After making the assertion that "in medieval society the idea of childhood did not exist," Ariés goes on to show how school and family eventually became the focus for children.<sup>29</sup> If concepts of childhood were indeed socially constructed, then the study of the topic would give vast insight into society as a whole.

Since Ariés, there have been numerous books on the history of childhood, many of which address the Puritan social construct. The most well-known historian of this topic is Philip Greven, who examines the different methods of child-rearing during the First Great Awakening, claiming that there were three different religious modes (evangelicals, moderates, and genteel)

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<sup>28</sup> Daniels, *Puritans at Play*, 126.

<sup>29</sup> Philippe Ariés, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*, trans. Robert Baldick (London: Vintage, 1962), 125.

that affected the experience of children and ultimately determined how they perceived society and experienced God in adulthood.<sup>30</sup> Greven's portrayal of Edwards is of a man "obsessed with punishment and with the terrors of hell."<sup>31</sup> To Greven, Edwards instilled fear in children due to his "preoccupation" with sin and infant depravity.<sup>32</sup> Edwards is placed in the "evangelical" category, and as such, focused most of his attention on "breaking the wills" of youth.<sup>33</sup> The problems with Greven's analysis of Edwards are numerous. Greven's lack of theological detail and selective sourcing give way to an unbalanced critique of Edwards' actions. The larger problem for Greven is also a methodological one, and has been criticized by childhood historian Carol Z. Stearns. She writes, "Although evangelicals and moderates are clearly separated in his [Greven's] treatment, they were not so clearly separated in real life."<sup>34</sup> This certainly rings true with Jonathan Edwards, who exhibited traits of evangelicals, moderates, and the genteel.

In almost every book on New England childhood written both before and after Greven, Jonathan Edwards is mentioned only briefly. He is most commonly used as just another example of the Puritan belief in original sin and depravity. Other sources, including those written specifically about Edwards, seem to do no better. Most fall in alignment with historian William J. Scheick, who discusses Edwards' interactions with children as part of a larger focus on the family.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Greven, *The Protestant Temperament*, 21,151,265. Also see Philip Greven, *Spare the Child: The Religious Roots of Punishment and the Psychological Impact of Physical Abuse* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991).

<sup>31</sup> Greven, *Spare the Child*, 57.

<sup>32</sup> Greven, *The Protestant Temperament*, 29.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 33-35.

<sup>34</sup> Carol Z. Stearns, "'Lord Help Me Walk Humbly': Anger and Sadness in England and America, 1570-1750," in *Emotion and Social Change: Toward a New Psychohistory*, ed. Peter N. Stearns and Carol Z. Stearns (New York: Holmes & Meir Publishers, 1988), 60.

<sup>35</sup> William J. Scheick, *The Writings of Jonathan Edwards: Theme, Motif, and Style* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1975), 41. Also see Gerald R. McDermott, *One Holy and Happy Society: The Public Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), 12-13. McDermott's book on Edwards' public theology follows along these same grounds. While there is not a specific focus on children and youth, implications can be made from several sections, particularly McDermott's treatment of Edwards and the national covenant. McDermott reveals that Edwards viewed society's problems as the

Three biographies of Edwards by Perry Miller, Iain H. Murray, and George Marsden respectively, show a progressive recognition of childhood. In Miller's book, childhood and youth are almost never mentioned. He mainly focuses on Edwards as a philosopher-theologian and the impact that his ideology had on contemporaries. While Miller briefly discusses the revival among young people, he does not point out the significance of the age group.<sup>36</sup> Published in 1949, Miller's book was written nearly fifteen years before Ariés first introduced childhood history, and shows no recognition of youth as a social construction.

Murray's 1987 biography demonstrates little improvement. He too emphasizes Edwards' intellectual contributions, although improves upon Miller's work by detailing more of Edwards' private life. In describing the relationship between Edwards and his wife Sarah, Murray notes how Edwards often met to talk with his own children about spiritual matters.<sup>37</sup> Murray's inclusion of this fact, while shedding light on child-rearing techniques, does not expound upon its implications.

George Marsden's 2003 book, however, gives a great deal of importance to Edwards' interactions with children. In detailing roots of the Northampton revival, Marsden writes, "It all began with the young people."<sup>38</sup> He notes how Edwards often preached to children, and extrapolates on Edwards' child-rearing techniques.<sup>39</sup> However, despite the plethora of historical context and significance given to children, Marsden does not provide an in-depth examination of Edwards' theology of childhood or the rhetoric used in his sermons to young people, most likely

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consequences of breaching the founding fathers' sacred promise. If society continued to act in ungodly ways, their trouble would persist. Perhaps the most important part of McDermott's book is the strong connection that he shows between Edwards' theological ethics and their application to social reality. It seems that this connection could be strengthened even further through a closer examination of how Edwards' conceptualized childhood, and how he taught society's next generation to behave.

<sup>36</sup> Perry Miller, *Jonathan Edwards* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press Publishers, 1949), 162.

<sup>37</sup> Iain H. Murray, *Jonathan Edwards: A New Biography* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987), 183.

<sup>38</sup> Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 150.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 321.

due to the large scope of his book.

The most extensive theological discourse on Edwards and children comes from David Sims in his book *The Child in American Evangelicalism and the Problem of Affluence*. Although Sims does much good in dispelling the common view of Edwards as a preacher of wrath, he has difficulty navigating what he believes to be a blatant duality in Edwards' theology of childhood.<sup>40</sup> Sims is unable to resolve the apparent tension in Edwards' belief that children are simultaneously sinful, and examples of great faith. The problem, however, may not be as much with Edwards as it is with Sims' approach. Sims, like many writers on the subject, views Edwards from one perspective. Sims' preoccupation with theology does not allow for adequate analysis of history.<sup>41</sup> The opposite is true for many other scholars.

Perhaps the best current sources on Jonathan Edwards and childhood are two articles written by Catherine A. Brekus.<sup>42</sup> These essays show balance in detailing the theology and history behind Edwards' interactions with children. Brekus shows the twofold dynamic of Jonathan Edwards' view towards children by explaining his emphasis on child depravity, while also showing his belief that children can have rich spiritual lives.<sup>43</sup> Brekus however, like Sims,

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<sup>40</sup> David Sims, *The Child in American Evangelicalism and the Problem of Affluence: A Theological Anthropology of the Affluent American Evangelical Child in Late Modernity* (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2009), 54.

<sup>41</sup> This is also true of George Francis Wortley in his 1927 dissertation titled "The Status of the Child in New England Congregationalism from Jonathan Edwards to Horace Bushnell." Wortley gives a thorough analysis of Edwards' theology of childhood, specifically the nuances that he expresses in their conversion. However, the analysis expresses little interest in historical context and makes several claims that have been proven false in recent years, such as the idea that "the child is a miniature adult." See George Francis Wortley, "The Status of the Child in New England Congregationalism from Jonathan Edwards to Horace Bushnell" (PhD diss., Hartford Seminary, 1927), 24.

<sup>42</sup> See Catherine A. Brekus, "Remembering Jonathan Edwards's Ministry to Children," in *Jonathan Edwards at Home and Abroad*, ed. David W. Kling and Douglas Sweeney (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003). Also Catherine A. Brekus, "Children of Wrath, Children of Grace: Jonathan Edwards and the Puritan Culture of Child-Rearing," in *The Child in Christian Thought*, ed. Marcia J. Bunge (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001).

<sup>43</sup> Brekus, "Children of Wrath, Children of Grace," 312.

expresses difficulty in reconciling the two.<sup>44</sup> Also in contrast to many contemporaries, Brekus states that there is no evidence that Edwards, for example, recommended the physical punishment of children. As a result, although critical of Edwards, she concludes that he is neither as “saintly” nor “sinister” as historians have often depicted him.<sup>45</sup> While Brekus’ analysis of Jonathan Edwards’ childhood rhetoric is extensive, her narrative provides room for even deeper examination of Edwards’ speeches to children, as well as an analysis of the greater impact of his childhood conception, especially by tracing its theological and philosophical origins.

The best approach to Edwards, therefore, is a balanced one that equally addresses theology, philosophy, and historical context. The modern trend of Edwards scholarship is directed toward theology and also maintains a separate yet growing interaction with social history. Meanwhile, the history of childhood is gaining in popularity but continues to lack a detailed theological emphasis. Thus, a work on Edwards and Puritan childhood would at once continue the aim of Edwards scholarship and provide new theological insight into the history of childhood.

While a balanced approach is long overdue, this does not mean that all elements of Edwards are equal in importance. Edwards was at once a philosopher, theologian, and pastor. However, each title held the other in check. Perry Miller has famously written on Edwards’ philosophical ideologies and expounded on their implications. He suggests that Edwards, due to his neo-platonic tendencies, possibly would have slipped into mysticism and pantheism without holding strictly to the confines of Calvinist theology.<sup>46</sup> Edwards’ theology, however, was also held in restraint by his role as a pastor. He wrote much of his doctrine in response to specific problems experienced within his parish. Anri Morimoto explains how Edwards chose the

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 311.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 328.

<sup>46</sup> Perry Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1956), 195.

Catholic term “infusion” over “illumination” in discussing the work of grace in a sinner’s heart. The reason for this decision by Edwards was to avoid confusion with Arminian doctrine that was becoming increasingly popular in New England. Although “illumination” had been the word-choice used by John Calvin himself, Edwards found it necessary to frame the terminology to avoid local conflict. “Illumination” could imply a human origin for conversion, but “infusion” could only be interpreted as God’s work alone.<sup>47</sup>

As a result, the lens through which Edwards must be viewed is pastor-theologian-philosopher. This concept is at the heart of Patricia J. Tracy’s 1980 book *Jonathan Edwards, Pastor: Religion and Society in Eighteenth Century Northampton*. She writes, “Part of this ahistorical distortion of Edwards’s thought has derived from our forgetting that Edwards was not a thinker by profession: the vocation and social role of Intellectual had not really been invented yet. Edwards was a pastor: he had made a profound commitment to serve God through his daily labors, and his vocation was to persuade others to share his vision of divine glory.”<sup>48</sup> Jonathan Edwards began his career as a Northampton minister. First ordained in 1727, Edwards spent several years under the tutelage of his famous grandfather Solomon Stoddard, and succeeded him upon his death.<sup>49</sup> Edwards pastored the church for over twenty years, overseeing several religious revivals before being formally dismissed by the congregation in 1751.<sup>50</sup> It was only after his dismissal that Edwards engaged in lengthy doctrinal works such as the *Dissertation Concerning the Nature of True Virtue* and an essay on original sin.<sup>51</sup>

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Anri Morimoto, *Jonathan Edwards and the Catholic Vision of Salvation* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), 14, 16, 20.

<sup>48</sup> Patricia J. Tracy, *Jonathan Edwards, Pastor: Religion and Society in Eighteenth Century Northampton* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1980), 7.

<sup>49</sup> Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 110-111.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, xiv. In 1741, Edwards preached the now famous “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God Sermon” to a congregation in Enfield, CT. His vivid depiction of Hell and damnation evoked a stirring response from the audience, and has come to be a symbolic representation of the Great Awakening’s excessive emotionalism.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 450.

Edwards' *Original Sin*, although written near the end of his life, is the logical starting point for understanding his concept of childhood. It is built upon not only a deep theological history, but also his history of experience. Before Jonathan Edwards discussed the intimacies of infant depravity in this long treatise, he spoke to children from the pulpit. Before he expounded in great detail upon the work of grace in an infant's soul or enumerated on the sinful nature of children and their need for conversion, Edwards wrestled with the issues himself.

## Chapter 1

### **“More Hateful than Vipers”: Edwards and Original Sin**

The Puritan view of childhood, although full of hope and promise, was most essentially predicated on a particular view of human nature. To them, all people, including children and infants, were eternally separated from God and marred with a corrupt disposition from conception. Children were rebels against God, whose individual wills had to be broken through discipline and orderly conduct. They believed that godliness increased with age, and even derived their view of God from this concept.<sup>1</sup> If God himself looked like an old man, infants looked more like animals. This imagery was further emphasized by their inability to walk or talk, and great measures were taken to change these conditions as soon as possible.<sup>2</sup> Fathers baptized their children within two weeks of their birth, and dedicated them to the covenant God had made with their community.<sup>3</sup> While the theology and implications for baptism will be discussed later, the noteworthy element is that behind almost all child-rearing practices and customs loomed a belief in the historical doctrine of original sin.

The Christian doctrine of original sin has its most clear extra biblical origin with Saint Augustine of Hippo in the late fourth and early fifth centuries. Responding to Pelagius, Augustine affirmed the idea that humanity as a whole is corrupted by Adam’s sin, and that the only immediate remedy prior to faith is baptism.<sup>4</sup> Although the doctrine was officially accepted

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<sup>1</sup> David Hackett Fischer, *Growing Old in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 35.

<sup>2</sup> Steven Mintz, *Huck’s Raft: A History of American Childhood* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 16. Mintz notes how all children, regardless of gender, were dressed in large gowns to prevent them from crawling. Many were placed in large wooden carts that served the same purpose as modern day walkers.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, *Huck’s Raft*, 15.

<sup>4</sup> Martha Ellen Stortz, “‘Where or When Was Your Servant Innocent?’ Augustine on Childhood,” in *The Child in Christian Thought*, ed. Marcia J. Bunge (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001),

by the Church in proceeding years, some continued to challenge it.

By the seventeenth and eighteenth century in New England, not much had changed. The vast majority of preachers still held original sin not only to be true, but essential. In 1656, John Cotton wrote a tract specifically for children, titled, *Spiritual Milk for Boston Babes in Either England: Drawn Out of the Breasts of Both Testaments*. In it, he produces a number of questions and answers that he deemed necessary for children to memorize, similar in style to catechisms that had previously been published in England. One of these questions is a clear teaching of original sin. He writes, “Q. What is your corrupt Nature ? Answ. My corrupt nature is empty of Grace, bent unto sinne, and onely unto sinne, and that continually.”<sup>5</sup> Although brief, this inclusion reveals a great deal about the pervasiveness of the doctrine of original sin in Puritan society. Not only does it directly apply to children, it should also be directly taught to them. It seems fitting then, that the first lesson in the *New England Primer* was “In Adam’s fall, we sinned all.”<sup>6</sup> Original sin was not just a child-rearing philosophy for adults, but was a truth that everyone in society should be made painfully aware of. However, there were some who questioned it.

While a more optimistic view of human nature has its origin with Pelagius, the popularity of this view came to a peak with the Age of Enlightenment in the eighteenth century. As historian George Marsden notes, the doctrine of original sin “was one of the chief points on which eighteenth-century Calvinists were at odds with their optimistic era.”<sup>7</sup> Still, the direct precursor to Enlightenment thinking about human nature can be seen in the early 1600s. Much of

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79. Pelagius suggested that humanity did not lose its moral ability to do good after Adam’s fall. He believed that people are not born good or bad, but are free to act in any way. To him, human nature was not inherently corrupt.

<sup>5</sup> John Cotton, *Milk for Babes. Drawn Out of the Breasts of Both Testaments. Chiefly, for the Spirituall Nourishment of Boston Babes in Either England: But May Be of Like Use for Any Children (1646)*, ed. Paul Royster, 2, Nebraska-Lincoln Digital Commons, <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1018&context=etas>.

<sup>6</sup> George M. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 27.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 451.

the opposition to original sin is derived from contemplation on the essence of childhood. While Puritans saw depraved beings in need of instruction and love, others such as Anglican bishop John Earle saw only tender innocence.

In his famous 1628 work *Micro-Cosmographie*, Earle contemplates how humans act at various stages of life. He sees children as exhibiting the innocence of Adam before the fall. They are happy and joyful creatures who are only corrupted through time and experience. Earle declares that a child “knowes no evill, nor hath made meanes by sinne to bee acquainted with misery.”<sup>8</sup> Earle may have even been an influence for John Locke’s *tabula rasa* concept in writing that a child’s soul “is yet a white paper unscruled with observations of the world, wherewith at length it becomes a blurr’d Note-booke.”<sup>9</sup> In direct opposition to the Puritan concept of “godliness with age,” Earle saw only increasing corruption. As a person ages, he becomes a “stayer lower from God” and “much worse in his breeches.”<sup>10</sup> As a member of the Church of England, it is unclear whether or not Earle intended to directly contradict Puritan teaching, or if he was simply writing from his own observation apart from doctrinal debates. Nevertheless, his teachings and others like him regarding the essential nature of children provided the grounds from which later theologians could challenge the doctrine of original sin.

In 1740, dissenting minister John Taylor took up this cause with his widely popular and controversial *The Scripture-Doctrine of Original Sin Proposed to Free and Candid Examination*. An early adherent to traditional orthodoxy, Taylor came to question the Calvinist doctrine of original sin. While the treatise itself is long and complex, Taylor is keen to note several objections to original sin as they pertain to infants and children. After referencing biblical

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<sup>8</sup> John Earle, *Micro-Cosmographie*, originally published 1628, reprint (London: Queen Square Bloomsbury, 1868), ed. Edward Arber, 21, accessed August 28, 2015, <https://archive.org/stream/microcosmographi00earluoft#>.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 22.

passages in which Jesus welcomes little children, Taylor observes that “Here little Children are made Patterns of Humility, Meekness, and Innocence.”<sup>11</sup> He suggests that if this is true, children cannot possibly be “young Ferments of Spite and Envy ... Malice and Rage” as Calvinists have suggested.<sup>12</sup> Conversely, children have “natural good qualities” such as curiosity and affection towards parents, that when combined with the grace of God, gives parents the “greatest Encouragement, even the Hopes of eternal Life, to bring up their Children in the Nurture and Admonition of the Lord.”<sup>13</sup> Taylor concedes, like Earle, that children may be tempted and induced to sin as Adam was, but they are not counted as sinners on his account. He suggests that any death or disaster that is brought upon them is not due to their sinfulness, but instead falls in accordance with the mysterious “Blessing” that God has poured upon humanity since the time of Noah.<sup>14</sup>

Taylor’s attack on original sin gained a great deal of publicity and influence. It became such a threat to orthodoxy that Jonathan Edwards was given a copy by his trans-Atlantic connection, John Erskine. Edwards saw in Taylor’s arguments the ugly head of Arminianism, which he feared was taking root in New England.<sup>15</sup> As mentioned earlier, the crux behind Edwards’ fear of Arminianism, and perhaps every other variance from Calvinistic principles, was his drive to uphold Puritan society. When Arminianism began to take hold, even in prominent

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<sup>11</sup> John Taylor, *The Scripture-Doctrine of Original Sin Proposed to Free and Candid Examination* (London: J. Wilson, 1740), 78, accessed August 10, 2015, <https://archive.org/stream/scripturedoctrin00tayl#page/n121/mode/2up>.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 77-78. Taylor is responding to the Calvinist writings of “R.R.,” whom he frequently quotes (as he does here). “R. R.” most likely refers to a defense of original sin by Isaac Watts published in the same year, titled *The Ruin and Recovery of Mankind: or an attempt to vindicate the Scriptural account of these great events upon the plain principles of reason*.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 79-80.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 82-83.

<sup>15</sup> Lauren Davis Gray, “Birthing The New Birth: The Natural Philosophy Of Childbirth In The Theology Of Jonathan Edwards” (M.A. thesis., Florida State University, 2009), 48. Arminianism was based on the teachings of sixteenth-century theologian Jacobus Arminius, who believed (among other things) that humans were capable of doing good, and that God’s grace in a soul is the continuance of this existing good. To Edwards and many others in the eighteenth-century, Arminianism came loosely to be defined as any belief that was not Calvinist.

American universities, the consequence was nothing short of earth-shattering to Edwards. The implications were far more than a simple doctrinal dispute. For a man whose worldview and conception of life itself was predicated solely on the ultimate sovereignty of God, anything that undermined this truth would be catastrophic. In a society that had built itself off of the constant drive to battle against humanity's inherent sinful nature, Taylor's contradictory teaching would abolish the New England Way. If children were viewed as naturally good, and treated as such, there would be nothing to stop parents from overindulging them. And, if children were overindulged, they would become proud, disrespectful, and lazy.

Edwards wrote his response to Taylor while he served as overseer of an Indian boarding school in Stockbridge, several years after he had been dismissed as pastor by his once faithful Northampton congregation. Fittingly, Edwards' dismissal itself is steeped in his view of, and concerns for, children and youth. Much to the chagrin of his congregation, Edwards proposed abandoning the Half-Way Covenant that had been established since 1662. The Half-Way Covenant was intended as a temporary fix for a lack of new church membership among young people. Without parental membership, a child could not be baptized. Therefore, it was proposed that those who professed faith, but lacked a conversion experience, may become "half-members" and baptize their children.<sup>16</sup>

Although he originally supported his grandfather and pastor Solomon Stoddard in upholding this rule, Edwards soon became dismayed at the blatant hypocrisy present in the congregation. Half-way members eagerly baptized their children, but had no real concern for the depravity of their children's souls and their desperate need for religious instruction and discipline. Edwards concluded that the parents might become more concerned if they themselves

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<sup>16</sup> Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: From Colony to Providence* (London: University of Oxford Press, 1954), 88-89.

had to first show signs of conversion.<sup>17</sup>

The capstone in Edwards' subsequent dismissal also surrounded his attitude toward youth. Already concerned with a downward trend among his parishioners, he soon discovered that several young men (who were members of the church), between the ages of twenty-one and twenty-nine, had obtained several popular books regarding medicine and midwifery. One of these books, *Aristotle's Compleat Master Piece in Three Parts: Displaying the Secrets of Nature in the Generation of Man*, included information about men's and women's anatomy and sexual functions. Though scientific in nature, it nonetheless excited the minds of young men who were unfamiliar with these details. While making obscene jokes and comments, they charged other boys ten shillings to view the books' explicit content. Perhaps even more alarming was the fact that they also used the information to taunt and tease girls in the town. As a result, Edwards came down harshly on them, calling out the names of all those involved in front of the congregation.<sup>18</sup>

Yet, the majority of the congregation's reaction was not against the boys, but against Edwards. They saw Edwards as too harsh and unfair for a matter that they perceived to be of little significance.<sup>19</sup> Their indifference to the matter not only reveals a changing attitude toward sexuality in New England, but perhaps more importantly, a changing ideology toward children and youth. The young people were treated unfairly by Edwards not simply because their actions were "not so bad," but because they were in fact *young people*. Edwards must have seen this dismissal of responsibility as the fruit of overindulgence and lack of early discipline. The difference between Edwards' view of the case and many members of his congregation was in their perspective on human nature. Edwards viewed all acts in light of natural sinfulness, and it was becoming clear to him that an increasing number in the congregation viewed acts in light of

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<sup>17</sup> Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 354.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 293.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 304.

youthful innocence. To Edwards, if only sinful nature had been treated more seriously as infants, perhaps cases such as this could have been avoided. In the end, it was largely Edwards' view of children that turned his congregation against him.

There is little doubt that the aspects of Edwards' dismissal influenced his response to John Taylor several years later. Original sin was at the heart of his dealings with children and also the foundation of how he viewed society. In order to hold tightly to his hopes for New England, Edwards had to craft a treatise on original sin that was just as tight.

Jonathan Edwards' doctrine of original sin hinges on his belief in a duality of human principles. He suggests that humans have a lower set of principles that are untainted by original sin, natural and instinctual in nature, which produce self-love and love of pleasure. However, it is the supernatural principles of divine love, which are spiritual in nature, that have been erased due to original sin. This duality of principles allowed Edwards to explain how people can be capable of good, yet still be completely depraved of (spiritual) good in God's eyes. Edwards' believed that without God's infusing of divine grace upon a sinner's heart, it was impossible for supernatural principles to appear.<sup>20</sup> As a result, all humans are naturally depraved and have a propensity to sin. Without the presence of supernatural principles, it is impossible for God to see them as anything but sinners.

In his argument, Edwards acknowledges a counterpoint that suggests people cannot be counted as natural sinners if they do more good than bad. Edwards responds by drawing the

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<sup>20</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Original Sin*, in *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 3, ed. Clyde A. Holbrook (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 381. As Anri Morimoto notes, Edwards' use of the word "infusion" was a deliberate choice. It was a Catholic term that stood in opposition to the more Protestant usage of "illumination" or "imputation." Edwards chose the Catholic term in order to distinguish himself from Arminian ideology that emphasized personal merit in grace, which could be implied from "illumination." However, despite terminology, Edwards' concept of grace remained identical to Calvin, who saw that grace operates upon the whole personality. In this way, infusion of grace resulted in a changed disposition. Edwards also saw usefulness in the term "infusion" to support his idea that God's grace "unites the division of understanding and will." See Anri Morimoto, *Jonathan Edwards and the Catholic Vision of Salvation* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), 20-25.

analogy of a boat. He concludes that even if a boat floats more hours than it sinks, it cannot be considered a good boat. If it fails to complete the journey, it is bad. The same is true with people. Apart from grace, people are unable to live up to the standard of perfection that God has demanded. They too are unable to complete the journey.<sup>21</sup> To Edwards, doing good was not exceptional. It was not an action that should be counted toward someone. Criminals are punished for breaking the law, but citizens are not rewarded for keeping it.<sup>22</sup> Criminals were indeed the perfect comparison to Edwards for those who sin. However, the idea of willfully breaking God's law ran much deeper for Edwards than it did even for many supporters of original sin in the past.

As the doctrine of original sin had historically been known, it was Adam's sin in the Garden of Eden that imputed the guilt of sin to all subsequent humanity. Aware of this conception, Edwards instead decided to take a different course. It is here that Edwards begins to show signs of uniqueness. Rather than affirming the Westminster Catechism's language of imputation, Edwards instead suggests that all people are *partakers* in Adam's sin. Depravity is built into human nature not only because of Adam's actions, but because of everyone's actions through Adam. Edwards likens all of humanity to one tree, with Adam as the root and the proceeding generations as the branches. Consequently, God does not deal with each person on an individual basis, but looks at the tree as a whole. "We are all one and the same," writes Edwards.<sup>23</sup> Everyone is a part of Adam and thus is responsible for the first sin.

Historian Mary Ava Chamberlain expands on this theory in her essay "The Immaculate Ovum: Jonathan Edwards and the Construction of the Female Body." Chamberlain shows how Edwards' idea of participation in Adam's sin is not only metaphorical, but also quite literal. Edwards held to the conception of preformation or encasement, which according to Chamberlain,

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<sup>21</sup> Edwards, *Original Sin*, 129.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 132-133.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 391.

“stipulated that God formed all embryos at creation and encased them inside one another to await the moment when they would be conveyed to a mother's womb and grow into a mature fetus.”<sup>24</sup>

The idea of preformation becomes especially helpful to Edwards when discussing the birth of Christ, whose embryo, he suggests, was divinely preserved throughout all of history and protected from the corruption of sin. Unlike other Protestant theologians who “hesitated” to affirm Mary’s sinful nature, Chamberlain writes that for Edwards, “Mary's filthy womb” was a representation of the intimate effects of original sin.<sup>25</sup>

In her essay, Chamberlain shows in great detail the concept of transmission of sin and guilt through the embryos of women. However, very little is mentioned regarding the role of Adam’s seed. As for Edwards he seems to have believed that humanity was preformed in Adam as well.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, it is the original sin of Adam that is referred to in the historical doctrine. Although Chamberlain writes that “Edwards clearly perceives that preformation has implications for the means of transmission of original sin,” she does not expand on these implications.

While preformation for Edwards gives some practical explanation as to how all of humanity can be “present” in the original sin, there do appear to be some logical inconsistencies. If humanity is encased in both the womb of Eve and the seed of Adam, as Edwards suggests in “Miscellanies No. 769,” then it seems difficult to reconcile participatory action. After all, it is the joining of the two that makes a person. In order for someone to participate with Adam in his sin, it appears that personhood would have to already be established. Edwards does not extrapolate

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<sup>24</sup> Mary Ava Chamberlain, “The Immaculate Ovum: Jonathan Edwards and the Construction of the Female Body,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 62, (April 2000): 289-290, accessed August 13, 2015, <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.liberty.edu:2048/stable/pdf/2674477>.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 305.

<sup>26</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “Miscellanies No. 769,” in *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 18, *The "Miscellanies,"* (Entry Nos. 501-832), ed. Eva Chamberlain (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).

further on this problem in any of his writings, leaving some level of ambiguity.<sup>27</sup> Chamberlain suggests a failure on Edwards' part to "perceive the distinction between ovist and animalculist versions of the theory."<sup>28</sup> Regardless, Edwards' concept of participatory original sin directly counters the proposition that it is unfair of God to punish humans for a sin that they themselves did not commit. Since people are guilty of a sin from conception (or before conception – again, ambiguity), they are naturally depraved and inclined to commit more. Edwards believed with "utmost certainty" that every man "born of the race of Adam, by ordinary generation, that unless he be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."<sup>29</sup> Edwards believed that because everyone is directly guilty of sin, they are directly liable to the fires of Hell.

Jonathan Edwards' notion of participatory action implies too that infants, even unborn infants, are also subject to this punishment. In a clear response to Taylor's concept of childhood innocence, Edwards spends much time discussing their guilt. He points out how young children begin to sin as soon as they are capable of doing anything. This, he says, is true of all children, even those who are raised in the homes of especially pious parents.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, this undeniable propensity to sin, despite circumstances, clearly shows an inherently corrupt nature. Edwards' logic on this issue sounds strikingly similar to that of Augustine, who claims to have seen "jealousy in a baby" and other signs of corruption.<sup>31</sup> Augustine was not shy in declaring that

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<sup>27</sup> The main point in Edwards' "Miscellanies No. 769" is to give practical explanation to the doctrine of election. Edwards shows that the seeds of Adam and Eve were divinely paired throughout history. He suggests that just as this election occurs physically since the time of Adam, it may occur spiritually through Christ. The implications of this concerning childhood conversion will be discussed later in this essay.

<sup>28</sup> Chamberlain, "The Immaculate Ovum," 310. Chamberlain explains in her essay the ongoing debate between ovist and animalculist biological conceptions during the seventeenth century. Animalculists believed that sperm contained all the necessary features of a being, and that its interaction with ovum only increased its size and consistency. Ovists believed that beings are microscopically preshaped in the ovum and that interaction with sperm increases growth. Chamberlain believes Edwards was most likely aware of these biological theories, and tried to use them (although ambivalently) in his theology.

<sup>29</sup> Edwards, *Original Sin*, 370.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 200.

<sup>31</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 28.

“there is none free from sin, not even the infant who has lived but a day upon this earth.”<sup>32</sup>

Augustine, whose footsteps were later followed by Edwards, could not fathom a time when someone was ever innocent.

Also in contrast to Taylor, Edwards affirmed that death proves the existence of original sin. He reasoned that it would be unfair of God to allow people to die who committed no sin. And, since infants of all ages died, they too must be guilty.<sup>33</sup> He writes, “it appears in fact, all mankind, during that whole time which preceded the law of Moses, were subjected to that temporal death, which is the visible introduction and image of that utter destruction which sin deserves; not excepting even infants, who could be sinners no other way than by virtue of Adam's transgression....”<sup>34</sup> While the subject of infant death is scarcely discussed in today's modern society, the same could not be said for seventeenth and eighteenth century Puritans. In even the healthiest of New England towns, almost ten percent of children died before they reached one year of age.<sup>35</sup> With this pervasiveness of infant death, it is no wonder that Jonathan Edwards drew some theological implications. He could see it as nothing but the terrible consequence of sin, as opposed to Taylor's vague declaration of God's mystery.

Edwards also used the biblical story of Sodom to illustrate his point. In Genesis 18, God declared that if even ten people in Sodom were found to be innocent, he would spare the entire city from annihilation. Unable to do so, God soon destroyed Sodom and all those in it. Although infants are not mentioned in the biblical text, Edwards could clearly see the implications. He believed that there must have been at least ten infants to be found in Sodom, and, if they were

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>33</sup> Edwards, *Original Sin*, 206.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 345.

<sup>35</sup> Mintz, *Huck's Raft*, 15.

truly innocent, God would have spared the city.<sup>36</sup>

The same, he reasoned, must have been true with infants before Noah and the great flood. Can it not be supposed, Edwards writes, that “if infants are perfectly innocent, that he would have spared the old world, in which there were, without doubt, many hundred thousand infants, and in general, one in every family, whose perfect innocence pleaded for its preservation?”<sup>37</sup> The answer was clear to Edwards. Infants were not spared by God because they were not innocent. Furthermore, if innocence could exist apart from Christ, as Taylor suggested, then not only is his sacrifice lessened in value, but “Christ is dead in vain.”<sup>38</sup> In Edwards’ mind, Christ’s substitutionary death was supremely beautiful and ultimate because it was supremely necessary. When the sinfulness of man is diminished, then so is the goodness of God. And, if God is not totally good, he ceases to be anything.

The guilt and consequences of sin for children ran deep with Jonathan Edwards, as it did for many Puritans before him. It is clear that Edwards strived in his doctrine to maintain a view of childhood that would encourage discipline and instruction. As mentioned, old Puritan thought likened children to animals in both physical ability and spiritual state. In a society that was constantly changing around him, Edwards was not afraid to harken back to these ideas. In *Some Thoughts Concerning Revival*, Edwards famously wrote,

As innocent as children seem to be to us, yet if they are out of Christ, they are not so in God's sight, but are young vipers, and are infinitely more hateful than vipers, and are in a most miserable condition, as well as grown persons; and they are naturally very senseless and stupid, being "born as the wild ass's colt" [Job 11:12], and need much to awaken them.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Edwards, *Original Sin*, 215-216.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 217.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 356.

<sup>39</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “Some Thoughts Concerning the Revival: Ten Criticisms Answered (1742),” in *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 4, *The Great Awakening*, ed. C. C. Goen (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 394.

In this instance, Edwards uses rather harsh language to emphasize the utter depravity of children. There is no doubt, however, that Edwards' words were mainly influenced by the circumstances surrounding him. It is perhaps not a stretch to assume that this statement was much less a doctrine concerning children than it was a warning to ambivalent or overindulgent parents. Nevertheless, it remains clear that Edwards saw children, without divine grace, as miserably far from innocent.

The implications of this doctrine, as many have pointed out, hold Edwards to a belief in infant damnation. Throughout history, the concept of original sin has always left theologians at a loss to clarify this uncomfortable consequence. As a result, church fathers invented a plethora of explanations. Augustine believed that the only remedy to infant damnation was the sacrament of baptism.<sup>40</sup> Thomas Aquinas proposed that, deserving neither of heaven or hell, all infants go to a "children's limbo" upon their death.<sup>41</sup> Both Martin Luther and John Calvin implied that infants might be unexplainably capable of faith, and could be saved the same way as adults.<sup>42</sup>

While Edwards' view of infant faith, conversion, and baptism will be discussed in the next chapter, it is his view of infant damnation that has been most criticized by theologians, and therefore must first be clarified. Edwards' most explicit treatment of the topic is a brief rumination of thoughts in the "Miscellanies" appropriately titled "Infant Damnation." In it, Edwards declares that it would be "exceeding just, that God should take the soul of a new-born infant and cast it into eternal torments, or else that those infants that are saved are not saved by

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<sup>40</sup> Stortz., "'Where or When Was Your Servant Innocent?' Augustine on Childhood," 79.

<sup>41</sup> Cristina L. H. Traina, "A Person in the Making: Thomas Aquinas on Children and Childhood," in *The Child in Christian Thought*, ed. Marcia J. Bunge (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), 114-115.

<sup>42</sup> Jane E. Strohl, "The Child in Luther's Theology: 'For What Purpose Do We Older Folks Exist, Other Than to Care for ... the Young?'" in *The Child in Christian Thought*, ed. Marcia J. Bunge (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), 141, 164.

the death of Christ.”<sup>43</sup> In Edwards’ statements, he seems to be challenging a growing notion in society that it is uncharacteristic of God to send infants to hell. Edwards was quick to dismiss any ideas that would diminish God’s ultimate sovereignty or lessen the sinfulness of man.

Several historians, including both Sims and Brekus, have straightforwardly declared Edwards a staunch believer in infant damnation.<sup>44</sup> Yet, a careful reading of Edwards’ thoughts in the “Miscellanies” reveals that his beliefs are much more nuanced. Contextually, Edwards’ point is that if children are indeed sent to Hell, then it is not unfair, but “exceeding just.” In other words, God would not punish children for something that was not worthy of punishment. Not only this, but God only punishes people in accordance to how much they deserve. He writes that “because their sin is not accompanied with such aggravating circumstances, so neither shall their punishment be so aggravated.”<sup>45</sup> Edwards contends that the only way one can view God’s punishment of infants as unfair, is if they believe infants are fully innocent, contradicting the doctrine of original sin. Edwards also suggests that God is in no way obligated to show mercy to any being, just as he did not show mercy to the fallen angels.<sup>46</sup>

However, in all of Edwards’ thoughtful reflections on the subject, it is important to note that he never explicitly states that all unborn infants *are* sent to Hell, only that *if* they are, it would be fair. For someone as shrewd as Edwards, one may have expected a more certain stance. Perhaps Edwards felt uncomfortable with his own doctrine and remained purposefully indefinite. While Edwards’ precise theology of conversion will be discussed in the next chapter, it is

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<sup>43</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “Miscellanies No. n,” in *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 13, *The “Miscellanies:” Entry Nos. a-z, aa-zz, 1-500*, ed. Harry S. Stout (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 169.

<sup>44</sup> Catherine A. Brekus, “Children of Wrath, Children of Grace: Jonathan Edwards and the Puritan Culture of Child-Rearing,” in *The Child in Christian Thought*, ed. Marcia J. Bunge (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), 30; See also David Sims, *The Child in American Evangelicalism and the Problem of Affluence: A Theological Anthropology of the Affluent American Evangelical Child in Late Modernity* (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2009), 56.

<sup>45</sup> Edwards, “Miscellanies No. n,” 169.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*.

noteworthy in this instance to remember that Edwards believed *all* people are saved by the infusion of God's grace in their hearts, apart from works. This means that salvation is ultimately only truly dependent on God's divine election. It implies that infants are in fact at no disadvantage when it comes to regeneration, but may instead be at an advantage because their hearts have not yet been hardened.<sup>47</sup> Edwards seems to at least suggest that there is hope for a great number of infants (although he does not say how many) to be saved. Edwards was most likely content in being indefinite about both infant damnation and salvation because he believed in a truly sovereign and good God.

As mentioned, Edwards' doctrine of original sin and total depravity aligned him with old Calvinist thinkers and Puritan ministers. Many historians and sociologists have pointed out the often detrimental effects of this doctrine for children. Puritans derived the child-rearing technique of "breaking the will" from these concepts. After all, if children are guilty sinners, they must be constantly rebuked and disciplined. New England children lived in a religious society that persistently reminded them of their depraved condition. The doctrine of original sin preoccupied their minds at all stages of life.<sup>48</sup> Philip Greven notes how the idea of infant damnation may have caused parents to create an emotional distance between themselves and their young children.<sup>49</sup> Fear, like love, was seen to be an essential aspect of child-rearing. Many parents tried to "scare obedience" into their offspring. As a result, those who had their wills broken as children often became paranoid in adulthood. There was an endless obsession over the state of their salvation and prospect that they might go to Hell. As a youth, Edwards kept track of

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<sup>47</sup> Jonathan Edwards, "Miscellanies No. 849," in *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 20, *The "Miscellanies," 800-1152*, ed. Amy Plantinga Pauw (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 78.

<sup>48</sup> Jean Delumeau, *Sin and Fear: The Emergence of a Western Guilt Culture, 13<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> Centuries* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), 248.

<sup>49</sup> Philip Greven, *The Protestant Temperament: Patterns of Child-rearing, Religious Experience, and the Self in Early America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 29.

sins on a daily basis – a score card for signs of divine grace.<sup>50</sup> Edwards’ uncle, Joseph Hawley II, became so distraught over the condition of his soul that he committed suicide, setting off a trend in suicidal tendencies by others in the town.<sup>51</sup> Some youth became severely depressed and angry, although it was seldom expressed.<sup>52</sup> It was not uncommon for children to become entangled in a culture of fear and repression, although the pervasiveness of this is often exaggerated.<sup>53</sup>

This entanglement did not exist in certain Christian denominations and sects. Monica Kiefer notes how Quakers and other Pietists saw the child as being neither good nor bad, but possessed the ability to choose either. Lutherans and Anglicans took a more middling stance, resisting both the Calvinist language of total depravity and Pietist infant amorality.<sup>54</sup> One might conjecture whether or not these various sects had an influence on later Enlightenment thinking. John Earle, an early articulator of Enlightenment ideals, was, after all, Anglican. While Puritan tradition had mostly viewed children as “brands to be snatched from the burning,” the new Enlightenment way of thinking saw them more and more as “innocents to be sheltered from corruption.”<sup>55</sup>

Jonathan Edwards stood firmly in the middle of these two varying conceptions. In fact, seeing the positives and negatives of both, he attempted to reconcile the two. As shown, Edwards clearly saw the importance of the old Puritan doctrine of original sin. He believed that infants were guilty of sin and worthy of punishment. Yet, Edwards also used similar language to

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<sup>50</sup> Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 52.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 163, 168.

<sup>52</sup> Philip Greven, *Spare the Child: The Religious Roots of Punishment and the Psychological Impact of Physical Abuse* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 64, 172, 133.

<sup>53</sup> Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 20. As Marsden notes the obvious patterns of will-breaking and suppression in Puritan households, he also shows that child-rearing was not devoid of signs of love and affection.

<sup>54</sup> Monica Kiefer, *American Children Through Their Books, 1700-1835* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1948), 29, 39-40. Barry Levy, *Quakers and the American Family: British Settlement in the Delaware Valley* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

<sup>55</sup> William Sloane, *Children’s Books in England and America in the Seventeenth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955), 22-23.

Enlightenment figures in lifting children up as the epitome of faith and godliness. In *Religious Affections* (1746), Edwards explains in great detail the similarities between child-like behavior and Christ-like faith. In fact, he concludes that everyone “should become as little children, in order to our entering into the kingdom of God.”<sup>56</sup> Just as children are naturally disposed to love their earthly father, so should Christians be naturally disposed to love their Heavenly Father.<sup>57</sup> Edwards notes, “The strong and lively exercises of a spirit of childlike, evangelical, humble love to God, give clear evidence of the soul's relation to God, as his child; which does very greatly and directly satisfy the soul.”<sup>58</sup> To Edwards, love for God was a clear sign of adoption. Furthermore, children are examples in that they are plain and simple, flexible, trusting, and not full of deceit. They do not rely on their own understanding, but instead surrender to superior knowledge.<sup>59</sup>

Perhaps the most interesting and surprising aspect of *Religious Affections* is Edwards’ statement that “Little children are innocent and harmless.”<sup>60</sup> In doing so, Edwards sounds less like an old-time Calvinist and more like John Taylor. Edwards even supports his belief by using the same Bible verses that Taylor does in his criticism of original sin, in which Jesus welcomes little children to himself.<sup>61</sup> A far cry from “vipers,” children in this instance are portrayed as pure and obedient. It seems that Edwards embraced the increasingly popular Enlightenment idea of childhood innocence and melded it into his religious doctrine. Edwards did the same with the Calvinist belief of original sin and total depravity. The mixture is puzzling to say the least.

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<sup>56</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections*, in *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 13, ed. Paul Ramsey (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), 117.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 238.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 349.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.* Edwards quotes from Matthew 19:14 which states, "Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of heaven." In addition, he uses similar quotations from Matthew 10:42, Matthew 18:6, and John 13:33.

David Sims has written on what he sees in Edwards to be ambivalent ideology. He concludes,

Clearly, Edwards was conflicted in his theological anthropology of children. He believed children are born of original sin and capable of mischief, bitterness, unforgiveness, deceitfulness and a host of other sins. At the same time, he believed children (at least up to some point) were innocent and guileless, exemplary embodied evidence of regeneration. This ambivalence in Edwards may reflect a general characteristic of contemporary thought in Edwards's day not only toward children but also toward women as well.<sup>62</sup>

Sims expresses difficulty in reconciling how Edwards could view children as naturally depraved and capable of no good, while affirming them as an example of Christian faith. Both he and Catherine Brekus suggest that Edwards saw newborn infants as momentarily free from sin. Yet, the freedom of sin disappears so quickly that it is “not worthy of notice.”<sup>63</sup> In order to make the comparison in *Religious Affections*, Edwards must have believed that there was a period in a child's life, however short, where they “displayed the spirit of love and adoption.”<sup>64</sup> However, this idea runs contrary to Edwards' doctrine of participatory action in Adam's sin. If all people are guilty from conception, there seems to be no room for momentary freedom from sin. It would also not explain Edwards' apparent belief in infant damnation. At a glance, it is understandable that Brekus and Sims see a conundrum in Edwards' reasoning. Still, it was not common for Edwards to be so blatantly contradictory on a subject, especially one that he thought so much about.

Edwards' apparent inconsistency can be explained in several ways. To begin, *Religious*

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<sup>62</sup> Sims, *The Child in American Evangelicalism and the Problem of Affluence*, 54.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

*Affections* and *Original Sin* were written and published roughly ten years apart.<sup>65</sup> This is not to say that Edwards changed his mind during the interim, but instead that he wrote each treatise in relation to different events. *Religious Affections* concentrated on the innocence and trustworthiness of children because these were the qualities he most desired to see by those in his congregation. Edwards and others had been deceived by the supposed conversions of many during the Great Awakening. However, their “signs of grace” quickly vanished with the revival. Edwards wrote *Religious Affections* to outline how true affection should appear, drawing from many of his own experiences.<sup>66</sup>

On the other hand, Edwards wrote *Original Sin* in direct response to John Taylor and the threat of Arminianism. Edwards’ contact with Indians at Stockbridge also impacted his articulation of the doctrine. He closely interacted with a Native American culture that was very different from his own. Forced to acknowledge and reconcile these differences from a Christian worldview, Edwards credited Indian faults to original sin. As Marsden notes, their flaws “arose not out of any inherent inferiority, but from being part of the human race.”<sup>67</sup> Without a right conception of God, the Native American society had declined to its current state. As a result, Edwards’ doctrine was directly impacted by his context. It seems logical to conclude, therefore, that Edwards did not believe two separate truths as much as he did emphasize two different aspects of one truth at separate times.

In addition to these contextual differences, the childhood paradox must also be viewed in light of Edwards’ typological theory. Throughout Christian history, typology referred to the idea

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<sup>65</sup> *Religious Affections* contained a number of sermons that Edwards preached from the years 1742 and 1743. His essay on *Original Sin* was not published until 1758.

<sup>66</sup> Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 287. Edwards’ wrote *Religious Affections* both to show what true conversion looked like, and also to affirm that affection is a sign of grace. In doing this, he responded to critics of the revivals such as Charles Chauncy, who asserted that all emotion was animalistic and ungodly. Edwards grounded himself as a moderate by cautioning the use of an excess of emotion while also declaring some form of emotion as valid.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 452.

that Old Testament scripture pointed to and spoke of New Testament truth. Edwards was unique in that he used this concept but applied it to almost all aspects of life, including nature and society. In his typological writings, Edwards makes numerous analogies in which he shows how natural occurrences have a spiritual parallel.<sup>68</sup> In *Images of Divine Things*, Edwards makes several of these analogies pertaining to children. He compares the filthiness of childbirth to the early wretched condition of a person's soul, and later parallels the physical maturation from childhood to manhood with the spiritual maturation of grace in a believer.<sup>69</sup> When viewed in this way, it seems clear that statements regarding the innocence of children in *Religious Affections* referred only to their physical innocence and how they are perceived relative to, and in, the minds of men. Conversely, *Original Sin* referred to their spiritual guilt, and how they are perceived relative to, and in, the mind of God. When Edwards calls children vipers, he precedes it by saying "in God's sight...." He also opens the same statement by declaring "As innocent as children seem to be to us." Edwards saw the difference between the innocence and guilt of children as being a simple point of view.

In context, *Religious Affections* never asserts that children are sinless or that they exhibit supernatural principles at any time. This is clearly misunderstood by Sims and Brekus. Rather, Edwards points out the natural principles that are displayed in them, such as love to parents. It is these natural principles that point to the supernatural ones. Love to earthly fathers points to love for the Heavenly Father. Children are not *truly* innocent, but may still represent innocence. In fact, Edwards makes this point clear in *Original Sin*.

"That little children are made patterns of humility, meekness and

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<sup>68</sup> Michael J. McClymond and Gerald R. McDermott, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 118.

<sup>69</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Images of Divine Things*, in *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 11, *Typological Writings*, ed. Wallace E. Anderson, Mason I. Lowance, and David H. Watters (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 54, 61.

innocence” (in Matthew 18:3, I Corinthians 14:20, and Psalms 131:2). But when the utmost is made of this, there can be no shadow of reason to understand more by these texts, than that little children are recommended as patterns in regard of a negative virtue, innocence with respect to the exercises and fruits of sin, harmlessness as to the hurtful effects of it, and that image of meekness and humility arising from this, in conjunction with a natural tenderness of mind, fear, self-diffidence, yieldableness, and confidence in parents and others older than themselves. And so, they are recommended as patterns of virtue no more than doves, which are an harmless sort of creature, and have an image of the virtues of meekness and love.<sup>70</sup>

This segment by Edwards gives the best explanation as to how he can at once speak of children as innocent while also affirming their guilt. Edwards argues against Taylor that just because children may have *less sin* does not mean that they are *sinless*. Just because children are physically incapable of committing sins or lack an awareness of evil, does not mean that they do not have a corrupt nature and disposition toward evil. While the fruits of this disposition may not be seen right away, they will eventually become apparent.

Edwards held that the severity and frequency of sin increased with age.<sup>71</sup> This is affirmed in many of his writings, but perhaps no more clearly than when he states, “Dispositions to evil are commonly much stronger in adult persons, than in children, when they first begin to act in the world as rational creatures.”<sup>72</sup> Those who were unsaved actually became less-godly with age. Edwards’ belief in this principle was also influenced by his circumstances. Many older church members stood opposed to the emotionalism of the Great Awakening. This backlash created a great amount of tension between Edwards and his members. Edwards’ support of revivalism and perceived favoritism toward youth created a generational conflict that eventually contributed to

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<sup>70</sup> Edwards, *Original Sin*, 422-423.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 134, 137.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.

his dismissal from Northampton.<sup>73</sup> His call for childlike behavior in *Religious Affections* and notion of increased sin with age were clear jabs at his elderly challengers and impacted his theology.

Edwards viewed life from dual lenses, both physical and spiritual. For those who were truly Christians, Edwards could affirm like Puritans before him that virtue and benevolence increased – God looked like an old man. However, for those who were not infused with divine grace, Edwards affirmed like many Enlightenment thinkers that sin and hardness of heart increased – godliness looked more like a child.<sup>74</sup> Edwards declared that original sin and child-like faith were not contradictory. He answered the critiques of men such as Earle and Taylor by reaching into his Calvinist background, while with the other hand loosely grasping newer Enlightenment ideals of childhood innocence. The difference between these two views, and the secret behind their opposition, hinged on Edwards’ detailed view of conversion. Here too, Edwards attempted to bridge the gap between Calvinism and the Enlightenment.

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<sup>73</sup> Kenneth P. Minkema, “Old Age and Religion in the Writings and Life of Jonathan Edwards,” *Church History* 70, no. 2 (December 2001): 675, accessed July 21, 2015, [http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.liberty.edu:2048/stable/3654545?loginSuccess=true&seq=1#page\\_scan\\_tab\\_contents](http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.liberty.edu:2048/stable/3654545?loginSuccess=true&seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents).

<sup>74</sup> As will be shown in chapter four, this later way of thinking received some backlash from older Puritan contemporaries.

## Chapter 2

### **Children as “White Paper”: Edwards on Conversion and Rationality**

No matter how innocent children appeared to be in the eyes of men, Jonathan Edwards recognized their immense guilt in the eyes of God. Ultimately, it was God’s view that mattered most because eternity was at stake. Without God’s grace in their souls, even the youngest of infants was liable to the same fires of hell as grown men. All people, regardless of age, were sinners and in need of grace. Children too needed to be saved. The lingering problem with this idea, however, was that very young children appeared to lack the requisite ability to choose Christ as their savior. They seemed to lack the ability to be converted.

Still, this was not a new problem for those who held to the doctrine of original sin. There were a variety of explanations throughout history as to how infants could be saved. While key differences existed in some of these ideas, the common denominator was always baptism. From Augustine to John Calvin, almost all of the church fathers held infant baptism to be a sign of salvation. Some believed, such as Augustine, that it was baptism itself that erased the effects of original sin.<sup>1</sup> Thomas Aquinas held that baptism is necessary for the “infusion of their souls,” since infants lack the “movement of their free-will.”<sup>2</sup> Martin Luther later affirmed a similar principle, but concluded that it is not the one act of infant baptism that saves a child. Instead, it is the repetitive and metaphorical return to baptism throughout life that shows the effects of the

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<sup>1</sup> Martha Ellen Stortz, “‘Where or When Was Your Servant Innocent?’ Augustine on Childhood,” in *The Child in Christian Thought*, ed. Marcia J. Bunge (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), 79.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. The Fathers of the English Dominican Province, 1948 reprint (Westminster, Md.: Christian Classics, 1981), Question 113 Article 3  
<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/aquinas/summa.i.html>.

first.<sup>3</sup> John Calvin viewed baptism more as a command for the elect, than as a remedy to original sin. Since humans cannot truly know those who are elected by God unto salvation, all infants should be baptized at birth. Baptism does not make one a member of the Covenant, but, Calvin believed, gives meaning to those who are *already* members of the Covenant, whether they be newborn infants or old men.<sup>4</sup>

New England Puritans, for the most part, agreed with Calvin's view of infant baptism. As Protestants, they recognized that salvation was available only through faith, and did not require a sacrament. The introduction of the Half-Way Covenant in 1662 reveals a great deal about the changing perception of infant baptism. It allowed parents who were not full members to still baptize their children and pass on God's Covenant blessing. While there were some who stood opposed, the eventual widespread acceptance of the Half-Way Covenant speaks volumes about a society that almost always strived to maintain traditional practices.

Puritan tradition held that baptism was an outward sign (much as circumcision was in the Old Testament) that marked inclusiveness in God's Covenant blessing. It signaled a transferal of the Covenant to the next generation. However, Puritans came to find that this did not always lead to conversion. When unconverted parents began to have children of their own, they were unable to be baptized.<sup>5</sup> The implications of this led to panic. Without baptism, God's continued Covenant blessing in New England was impossible. And, without the blessing, prospects for

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<sup>3</sup> Jane E. Strohl, "The Child in Luther's Theology: 'For What Purpose Do We Older Folks Exist, Other Than to Care for ... the Young?'," in *The Child in Christian Thought*, ed. Marcia J. Bunge (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), 143.

<sup>4</sup> Barbara Pitkin, "'The Heritage of the Lord': Children in the Theology of John Calvin," in *The Child in Christian Thought*, ed. Marcia J. Bunge (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), 184-185.

<sup>5</sup> George M. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 29-30. Marsden notes the apparent contradiction between infant baptism and visible sainthood. Baptism "suggested an inclusive Christian nation" while visible sainthood "suggested a New Testament church separated from the rest of the nation." Many Puritans were unable to comprehend or reconcile this tension. Perhaps this is why baptism and salvation eventually became intertwined and confused.

salvation remained slim. The resulting Half-Way Covenant reveals a Puritan preoccupation with baptism, and suggests that the idea of Covenant blessing and salvation were placed so closely together, they eventually became intertwined.

Thomas Shepard, a New England pastor in the early seventeenth century, wrote a tract on the subject that was later published in 1663, only a year after the establishment of the Half-Way Covenant. In it, Shepard defended the necessity of infant baptism, writing in poetic form, “Unto the seal of Baptisme, all / That are within the Gospel call; / I mean Believers and their seed; / To whom the Lord hath Promised, / To be their God; and doth reveal / Their right to's Covenant and the seal.”<sup>6</sup> To Shepard, denying infants baptism would be the same as the disciples trying to prevent children from coming to Christ – a sentiment worthy of great rebuke.<sup>7</sup> Shepard’s writing is symbolic of the ideology that came to encompass most Puritan thinking during the late seventeenth century. Infant baptism was more than a symbol, it was a right. To reject it was to reject salvation.

Understanding this pervading mindset also sheds light on Jonathan Edwards’ controversial abolishment of the Half-Way Covenant at Northampton. Far from seeing a mere theological difference, his congregation viewed his actions as nothing short of denying salvation to their young children. If the nuances in Jonathan Edwards’ theology of infant salvation are difficult for modern historians to pinpoint, they must have been almost unknowable to the congregation. Edwards had been clear on multiple occasions regarding the sinfulness of children. It is logical to assume that his hearers came to the conclusion that if their infants were not baptized, they would go to hell. Conversely, all indications suggest that these same parishioners

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<sup>6</sup> Thomas Shepard, *The Church Membership of Children and their Right to Baptisme* (1663), Evans Early American Imprint Collection, University of Michigan, “Anagr: O a map’s thresh’d,” accessed August 14, 2015, <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/evans/N00045.0001.001/1:5?rgn=div1;view=fulltext>.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

also believed that baptism into the Covenant indicated a type of conversion. If young baptized children were already a part of God's Covenant and held His favor, they could be more easily seen as innocent. This working of baptism appears to be what was at the heart of the childhood controversies that Edwards dealt with. It explains both his emphasis on the depraved nature of children after baptism, and gives context to his thoughts on conversion.

Like Thomas Aquinas, Edwards believed that salvation occurred only through the infusion of God's grace upon a person's soul. Unlike Aquinas, however, Edwards did not think that this infusion was directly caused by baptism. Rather, it was solely dependent on God's divine election. Without God's work in a child's heart, baptism was completely meaningless. Edwards also drew a distinction between the terms "regeneration" and "conversion." While Edwards admits that these often occur simultaneously, he nevertheless correlates regeneration with the infusion of God's grace, and conversion with the visible manifestation of it. It is regeneration that brings the soul back "from that state of sin into which we fell by the first apostasy of mankind."<sup>8</sup> Edwards speaks of regeneration mysteriously, referencing it as the "work of God's Spirit."<sup>9</sup> In other works, he appears to allude that this act of regeneration could occur at any time, even during infancy.<sup>10</sup> Once regenerated, a person's entire soul is transformed, and they become a new creation.<sup>11</sup>

This distinction between regeneration and conversion left the possibility open to Edwards that someone could be regenerated but not live to see their conversion. Edwards recounts several biblical instances in which people, such as Zaccheus, seemed already predisposed to follow

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<sup>8</sup> Jonathan Edwards, "Miscellanies No. 847," in *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 20, *The "Miscellanies," 800-1152*, ed. Amy Plantinga Pauw (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 71.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

<sup>10</sup> Jonathan Edwards, "Miscellanies No. 849," in *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 20, *The "Miscellanies," 800-1152*, ed. Amy Plantinga Pauw (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 76.

<sup>11</sup> Edwards, "Miscellanies No. 847," 71, accessed August 13, 2015.

Christ before they showed signs of conversion.<sup>12</sup> In other words, someone could already be saved, but not converted. It seems evident that Edwards had infant salvation in mind when contemplating this doctrine. Regeneration changed a person's disposition from naturally depraved to one supernaturally bent toward God. Children could go to heaven without clearly "choosing" Him.<sup>13</sup>

Yet, Edwards may have in fact believed that some infants, in a sense, *do* choose God. His theory of preformation in Adam, and God's divine election in his seed, allowed Edwards to assert that all people chose to sin. In other words, people are preformed (elected) in Adam's physical seed and thus have a sinful disposition that will be expressed through sinful acts. "Miscellanies No. 769" seems to suggest that the same may be true with Christ's spiritual seed. Some people are preformed (elected) in Christ's spiritual seed and thus have a godly disposition that will be expressed through conversion. Just as people sinned because Adam sinned, so too some people chose God because Christ chose God. This is probably why Edwards writes, "So Christ's election is the foundation of ours, as much as his justification and glorification are the foundation of ours."<sup>14</sup> Although Edwards was often vehement about the necessity of works as the fruit of salvation, this doctrine made a noticeable exception for infants, who clearly had no works to show. Instead, it is their future but unrealized works that will be credited to them.

While Edwards gives clear theological foundations for infant salvation, he also asserted

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>13</sup> Traditional Christianity asserts that only those who have faith in Christ will be saved. "Miscellanies No. 1129" suggests that Edwards believed infants are somehow saved by faith, although his answer is vague. He writes, "Although infants will not personally and actively have accepted of Christ as their Savior before they are in their state of reward, yet there will be enough to make it visible to angels and visible to the whole assembly of elect creatures that the reward is dependent on faith." Edwards also implies that a parent's faith plays some role in an infant's salvation, although he does not specify how this functions. See Jonathan Edwards, "Miscellanies No. 1129," in *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 20, *The "Miscellanies," 800-1152*, ed. Amy Plantinga Pauw (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 507.

<sup>14</sup> Jonathan Edwards, "Miscellanies No. 769," in *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 18, *The "Miscellanies," (Entry Nos. 501-832)*, ed. Eva Chamberlain (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 418.

the impossibility of knowing which deceased infants were regenerated. In fact, one could not really know *anyone* who was regenerated until they exhibited a distinct sign of conversion (and even then there remained uncertainty). It is worth recalling too that in Edwards' mind, unsaved people became more sinful with age. The older a person became, the more unlikely it was that they would experience conversion. Thus, Edwards sought to prepare people for conversion as early as possible. If God had planted a regenerative seed in someone's heart, it must find fertile ground in order to bear fruit. Edwards felt that this was his supreme duty as a pastor. Baptism was one way that this fertilization could occur. However, to Edwards, it was not the act that was important, but the heart behind the act.

Edwards believed that it was useless for unconverted parents to baptize their children. He recognized that in New England, baptism had become more associated with status than religion. As Marsden notes, "For a respectable family to have unbaptized children or grandchildren would be a stigma."<sup>15</sup> Edwards saw the detriment in this. If children grow up in irreligion, they would most likely prove to not be one of God's elect, "whether they are baptized or not."<sup>16</sup> Edwards asserted that children should be baptized by parents who had a genuine and lasting concern for their children's souls. The act of baptism was an indication of this concern, and was an outward sign that this concern would continue throughout life. Edwards writes, "So if a parent did sincerely and with his whole heart dedicate his child to God, he will afterward take thorough and effectual care in bringing up his children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, continuing in prayer and dependence on God for them."<sup>17</sup> Children were affected not by baptism, but by the

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<sup>15</sup> Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 355.

<sup>16</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *An Humble Inquiry into the Rules of the Word of God, Concerning the Qualifications Requisite to a Complete Standing and Full Communion in the Visible Christian Church (1749)*, in *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 12, *Ecclesiastical Writings*, ed. David D. Hall (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 318.

<sup>17</sup> Jonathan Edwards, "Miscellanies No. 595," in *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 18, *The "Miscellanies," (Entry Nos. 501-832)*, ed. Eva Chamberlain (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 129.

disposition of the parents who dedicated them.

Baptism showed that there was fertile ground for conversion. In this sense then, parents played a major role in determining the likelihood of a child's salvation. If the parents had great faith in God, they were preparing the child for conversion and the outward signs that accompanied it. Even if a child did not live to bear this fruit, God took into account the life they would have lived, had they not died young.<sup>18</sup> To Edwards, the more prepared someone was for conversion, the more likely it was that they were regenerated by God. Of course, preparation did not dictate God's election, but seemed to already show it. Edwards was careful in navigating these difficult waters. He wanted to provide hope of salvation for baptized infants, but not assurance. If godly parents had a child die in infancy, the most Edwards could say was that they had "good grounds to hope for its salvation."<sup>19</sup> Edwards saw the danger in giving too much credence to a sacramental act.

Since the time of Augustine, many Christians have viewed baptism as God's counter to original sin. It allowed the terrible effects of total depravity to be erased. Edwards did not see it this way. His proclamation was much more profound. He believed that it was *childhood* that was God's natural counter to original sin. He writes, "And God has so ordered it that we should have a free and convenient opportunity in the beginning of our lives so that we here may soon get out of that miserable condition in which we are born."<sup>20</sup> Childhood was specifically designed by God so that conversion could occur before hardness of heart increased. It was the best opportunity to reveal God's regeneration in a person's heart. This unique point of view shows the great importance of childhood to Edwards. To him, it was not an afterthought, but the central focus of

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<sup>18</sup> Edwards, "Miscellanies No. 1129," 507.

<sup>19</sup> Jonathan Edwards, "Miscellanies No. 577," in *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 18, *The "Miscellanies,"* (Entry Nos. 501-832), ed. Eva Chamberlain (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 115.

<sup>20</sup> Jonathan Edwards, "The Time of Youth is the Best Time to Be Improved for Religious Purposes," in *To the Rising Generation*, ed. Don Kistler (Lake Mary: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 2005), 15.

his thinking. As such, Edwards contemplated deeply as to how children could best be prepared for conversion. The loving concern of parents was one of these preparations. This once again shows ties to old Puritan thinking, in which discipline and instruction was the main focus. Still, there was another preparation that directly pertained to children, but had ties to Enlightenment ideology. Edwards believed that conversion occurred through *reason*, and that this should be the main focus for children.

As several historians have noted, the ideas of preparation for grace and rationality in conversion were not new to Puritan thinking, and were widely held by New Englanders in the seventeenth century. Although Calvin had explicitly denied the work of human preparation for divine grace, the threat of Antinomianism caused Puritans to actively pursue God in hopes that He would bestow His grace on them. The Puritan reaction in New England was heightened by the Massachusetts Free Grace Controversy that took place from 1636-1638. Historian Theodore Dwight Bozeman traces the source of Antinomian thinking in the Bay Colony to John Cotton, a Boston minister. Although Bozeman labels him a “semi-antinomian” and adherent to Puritan discipline, several of Cotton’s members were accused of Antinomian ideology. Most notable of these members was the zealous Anne Hutchinson, who was banned from the colony in a controversial trial. In the following years, New England ministers used Hutchinson’s example to caution against such thinking.<sup>21</sup>

Puritans saw danger in the carefree implications of emphasizing “free grace.” If people were to simply wait for conversion, there was no motivation for them to restrain themselves from

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<sup>21</sup> Theodore Dwight Bozeman, *Precisianist Strain: Disciplinary Religion and Antinomian Backlash in Puritanism to 1638* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 340.

sinful actions.<sup>22</sup> In this belief, the Puritans also exposed themselves to the dangerous claim of works-based salvation, one that they vigorously denied. They also believed that reason was a key in preparing for conversion.<sup>23</sup> Their pursuit of order, discipline, and education makes this clear. All of these ideas are visible in Edwards. Yet, the role of rationality is often referred to as an emphasis that is unique to the Enlightenment.<sup>24</sup> Thus, it seems that the difference between the Puritan concept of reason and the Enlightenment concept of reason finds significance in its application to children. Puritans saw instruction and obedience as the requirements of reason. Enlightenment thinkers saw reason as the requirement for instruction and obedience. Edwards used Calvinist doctrine and Puritan conceptions to show that there was validation in the Enlightenment idea that children could be reasoned with.

In Edwards' treatise on original sin, he clarifies this point. It is a person's sinful disposition and total depravity that give him a "propensity to act contrary to reason."<sup>25</sup> Edwards believed that a denial of the gospel is the epitome of irrationality, and proves that men are inherently depraved.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, if childhood is God's natural counter to original sin, and original sin is an aversion to reason, it makes sense that children should be most reasoned with. Since Edwards could not know who was regenerated or when conversion would take place, it made sense for him to reason with children almost as soon as they were born. His recounting of Phebe Bartlett showed that conversion could occur at a very young age, even as early as four years old.

Edwards' focus on rationality, however, seems to stand in direct contrast to his often

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<sup>22</sup> J. A. Passmore, "The Malleability of Man in the Eighteenth-Century Thought," in *Aspects of the Eighteenth-Century*, ed. Earl Wasserman (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1965), 26. For more on the roots of the Antinomian movement, see Bozeman, *Precisianist Strain*.

<sup>23</sup> W. M. Spellman, *John Locke and the Problem of Depravity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 33-34.

<sup>24</sup> Spellman, *John Locke and the Problem of Depravity*, 203-204.

<sup>25</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Original Sin*, in *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 3, ed. Clyde A. Holbrook (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 153.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.

perceived emotionalism. Philip Greven calls Edwards “the most eloquent defender of divine punishments, pain, and torment in American history.”<sup>27</sup> The listeners of his famous sermon “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God” reacted in emotional excess to the vivid descriptions of Hell, not even allowing Edwards to finish preaching.<sup>28</sup> Yet, just as vivid as his descriptions of Hell, were his descriptions of Heaven and the beauty of grace that always followed.<sup>29</sup> Edwards carefully and graphically articulated contrasting realities that were as far apart as he could make them. The suffering of Hell was directly proportional to the beauty of Heaven. Even Edwards’ descriptions fell short of accurately describing these extremes. However, it was this great contrast that made a conversion experience not only emotional, but more importantly, rational. Compared to the torments of Hell, choosing Christ was the most rational decision that any human could make. This is why Edwards did not shy away from using this imagery with children. Children were free from the lies and doubts of hardened men, and could accept this reality more easily.

The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries exhibited a widespread change in how parents began to view their children. Many came to conclude that discipline and instruction alone could not achieve the behavior that was desired. Instances such as the “Bad Book Case” reveal youth who appeared to be especially strong-willed. However, this perceived change in childhood triggered two different responses. Old Puritans asserted that youth were strong-willed because their wills had not adequately been broken in childhood. Their solution was more discipline. Newer Enlightenment thinking, on the other hand, asserted that youth were strong-willed because children had intelligent minds of their own, ones that were just being realized. Their

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<sup>27</sup> Philip Greven, *Spare the Child: The Religious Roots of Punishment and the Psychological Impact of Physical Abuse* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 57.

<sup>28</sup> Thomas S. Kidd, *The Great Awakening: The Roots of Evangelical Christianity in Colonial America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 104.

<sup>29</sup> Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 226.

solution was more rationality.<sup>30</sup> Edwards appears to have taken the more “Enlightened” approach to behavior modification. While he still held firmly to the traditional doctrine of original sin (and the necessity of discipline), he fully embraced the importance of rational choice in promoting godliness.

Jonathan Edwards may have been the first pastor to articulate this ideology with intricate theological language, but he was not the first to propose it. Tying rationality to childhood and conversion has a history that almost certainly influenced Edwards. Although Thomas Aquinas had a different conception of baptism than Edwards, it is clear through their mutual language of “infusion” that Edwards was likely influenced by him.<sup>31</sup> In *Summa Theologica*, Aquinas makes a distinction between natural reason and supernatural reason. Natural reason, Aquinas claims, “begins from sense,” and can go “as far as it can be led by sensible things.”<sup>32</sup> While people can know that God exists (and the logical implications) from this form of reason, they cannot know God’s essence and power. These can only be known through supernatural reason, which is only available through the infusion of God’s grace.<sup>33</sup> Edwards held to a similar idea, given the language of his natural and supernatural principles. To Edwards, supernatural principles, while including other things, also included the ability to rationally choose God. This was manifested at conversion but given during regeneration. Those who were regenerated would respond to the rational nature of the gospel that Edwards presented. The result would be a sign of conversion.

Edwards also appears to have drawn directly from more contemporary writers. He taught

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<sup>30</sup> Linda A. Pollock, *Forgotten Children: Parent-Child Relations from 1500 to 1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 107.

<sup>31</sup> In *Freedom of the Will*, Edwards expresses familiarity with Aquinas’ works. See Jonathan Edwards, *Freedom of the Will (1754)*, in *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 1, ed. Paul Ramsey (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), 228.

<sup>32</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, “Whether God can be known in this life by natural reason?”

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

children the *Assembly's Catechism*, a composition of simple Christian doctrine by Isaac Watts.<sup>34</sup> Watts, a Nonconformist theologian most known for his hymns, made significant contributions in religious instruction for children. He wrote numerous tracts not only for children, but on how to instruct them. Modeled after the *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, Watt's modified *Assembly's Catechism* laid out a series of questions for children to memorize and answer. What made his format unique was that he organized these questions based on the age of the child. These categories ranged from ages 12-14, 7-12, and under 7. Watts grasped what he saw to be important truths about childhood. His categories reveal that he believed all children were capable of reason and rationality, but in varying degrees. To him, children at three years old were expected to at least understand that God created them and obey the simple duties that He required.<sup>35</sup> Near the end of the catechism, Watts lists a series of sins that were common to children at the time. In addition to naming each sin, he also gives a rational argument against it. Watts sums up his ideas, "It is certain that we ought to teach Children and ignorant Persons the Knowledge of Religion in a rational Way, as far as they are capable of receiving it."<sup>36</sup> Duty and reason were taught by Watts simultaneously.

Edwards may well have viewed Watts' ideas as a standard model for instruction. However, like all standards, there were exceptions and abnormalities, ones that Edwards tried to push. Given Edwards' detailed language and sermons to children, it becomes apparent that he was willing to see how much information children could comprehend. This does not mean that he expected them to understand everything, or that he spoke the same to all children, but that he

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<sup>34</sup> Watt's fifth edition was printed in London in 1743. In June of 1756, Edwards wrote a letter to Joseph Bellamy, a Stockbridge missionary who instructed young Indian children. In it, Edwards recommends Bellamy teach them the "Assemblies Catechism."

<sup>35</sup> Isaac Watts, *The Assembly's Catechism with Notes: Or, the Shorter Catechism Composed by the Assembly of Divines at Westminster with a Brief Explication of the More Difficult Words and Phrases Contained in it, for the Instruction of Youth* (London: 1743), fifth Edition, 6, accessed August 7, 2015, Google Books.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

was eager to push the limits of their capability. It seemed to him that the only way to find out if there were more “Phebe Bartletts” in his congregation, was to test their ability to rationalize.

Another contemporary who had a large impact on Jonathan Edwards was English Nonconformist Philip Doddridge. Doddridge, like Watts, also wrote extensively on children. His most famous work on the topic, *Sermons on the Religious Education of Children*, reveals numerous similarities to both Watts and Edwards. In fact, Doddridge’s language about children appears so similar to Edwards, that it is not farfetched to assume Edwards derived many of his ideas from it. While this book by Doddridge is not explicitly mentioned by Edwards, it is easy to surmise that he read it and held it in high esteem. At one time, Edwards wrote a letter to Joseph Bellamy, giving his advice on how to best instruct Indian children. In it, Edwards tells Bellamy to bring a Doddridge book next time he visits (although it is not mentioned by name).<sup>37</sup> Given the context of the letter and the similarities in language, it is quite possible *Sermons on the Religious Education of Children* was the book he was referring to.

Doddridge, like Edwards, held on to old Puritan ideas while also adopting new strategies. He tells readers, “After explaining how much Jesus loves children, explain how quickly and justly he could strike them down.”<sup>38</sup> Doddridge sees the advantage of invoking fear in children in order to prevent complacency and indulgence. As will be shown later, this strategy was used consistently by Edwards in his sermons to children. This surprising notion that Jesus could “strike down” a child reveals an implicit affirmation of the Calvinist doctrine of original sin and total depravity. However, historian Françoise Deconinck-Brossard asserts that Doddridge believed God’s compassion would not allow Him to “pass a damnatory sentence on any child,

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<sup>37</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “Letter to Joseph Bellamy (1757),” in *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 16, *Letters and Personal Writings*, ed. George S. Claghorn (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 700.

<sup>38</sup> Philip Doddridge, *Sermons on the Religious Education of Children Preached at Northampton* (Amherst, 1793), 15, accessed September 7, 2015, <https://archive.org/stream/sermonsonreligio00doddiala#page/n3/mode/2up>.

who will automatically go to Paradise.”<sup>39</sup> If this assertion is true, it reveals a much more conflicted view of the fundamental nature of childhood than Edwards had. Edwards perhaps saw truth in Doddridge’s practical advice, but also saw theological inconsistencies that he himself tried to correct.

Regarding discipline, Doddridge took a balanced approach. He suggested that too much correction would “probably spoil much of the success,” while at the same time warning parents not to show an excess of affection.<sup>40</sup> Children must be instructed patiently and with great reverence. If they are not shown respect, they will not give respect in return.<sup>41</sup> Edwards too exhibited these qualities in conversing with his own children. Although it is most likely that he used some form of physical punishment in certain moments, the vast majority of evidence shows calm and controlled rational conversations with them.

Indeed, the key to all of Doddridge’s practical advice was rationality. He writes, “The religious education of children is a very rational method of engaging them to walk in the way in which they should go.”<sup>42</sup> Like Watts, Doddridge confirmed that godliness would come through rationality. However, it must also be noted that neither Doddridge nor Watts discuss rationality in terms of conversion or regeneration the way that Edwards does. Instead, they expounded upon the role that rationality played in religious education, a role that Edwards also acknowledged. Yet Edwards was unique from these two contemporaries in explicitly tracing rationality to the work of God. While Doddridge and Watts would most likely not deny this truth, the main difference lies in emphasis. Edwards’ main concern was not the education of children, but their

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<sup>39</sup> Françoise Deconinck-Brossard, “Representations of Children in the Sermons of Philip Doddridge,” in *The Church and Childhood*, ed. Diana Wood (Oxford: Ecclesiastical History Society, 1994), 383.

<sup>40</sup> Doddridge, *Sermons on the Religious Education*, 65. See also Deconinck-Brossard, “Representations of Children,” 388.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 58, 67.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, “Sermon 2.”

conversion. Watts and Doddridge bore out the practicality of a concept that had much deeper origins. The roots of this concept, for all of these men, lay in large part with John Locke, the famous seventeenth century English philosopher.

Locke is most frequently presented by historians as the founder of the “blank slate” concept of childhood and noteworthy opponent of original sin.<sup>43</sup> As scholar Diana Pasulka notes, “In Locke’s view, children were not inherently depraved but malleable.”<sup>44</sup> This natural malleability allowed children to be molded into virtuous and benevolent citizens through education.<sup>45</sup> Children did not have wills that should be broken, but instead persuaded.<sup>46</sup> Locke’s ideas were widespread in eighteenth century Europe and America, appearing in numerous periodicals and novels. His conception of childhood appeared so unique that many assumed he believed children were naturally good.<sup>47</sup>

Yet, despite accusations of unorthodoxy, Jonathan Edwards (and apparently Watts and Doddridge) found value in Locke’s ideas. Edwards first began to read Locke’s work while studying under his cousin Elisha Williams at Wethersfield in 1717. Two years later, he moved to New Haven and spent a great deal of time in the library’s Dummer collection. It was here that Edwards was exposed to a “whole treasure trove of modern writers.”<sup>48</sup> His continued fascination with Locke, however, was special. Edwards saw in Locke the framework through which

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<sup>43</sup> J.A. Passmore notes that Locke “reverts to an old heresy,” by suggesting that only physical death was transmitted through Adam, and that spiritual death is earned by one’s personal sin. See Passmore, “The Malleability of Man in the Eighteenth-Century Thought,” 22.

<sup>44</sup> Diana Pasulka, “A Somber Pedagogy: A History of the Child Death Bed Scene in Early American Children’s Religious Literature, 1674-1840,” *The Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 2, no. 2 (Spring 2009): 182, accessed July 24, 2015, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/226841349?pq-origsite=summon>.

<sup>45</sup> Passmore, “The Malleability of Man,” 26.

<sup>46</sup> Pasulka, “A Somber Pedagogy,” 182.

<sup>47</sup> John C. Sommerville, *The Rise and Fall of Childhood* (New York: Vintage, 1990), 123

<sup>48</sup> Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 63.

Puritanism could be affirmed for a new generation.<sup>49</sup> Samuel Hopkins, Edwards' first biographer, notes how Edwards read Locke with "more pleasure than the most greedy miser, when gathering up handfuls of silver and gold from some newly discovered treasure."<sup>50</sup>

Although Edwards voiced several theological disagreements, such as his interpretation of the Fall of Man, he nonetheless agreed with Locke on many fundamental principles.<sup>51</sup> Indeed, Edwards exhibited a large number of similarities to Locke's educational writings.

In *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, Locke suggests that children should be exposed to reason as early as possible, when they are "most tender, most easy to be bowed."<sup>52</sup> After all, he writes, "as he [the child] grows more towards a man, age shows his faults the more."<sup>53</sup> Edwards uses similar language in affirming the hardening hearts of men. In fact, he even refers to children as "white paper" who come into the world without "any judgment already formed or habit contracted."<sup>54</sup> Edwards apparently did not find any contradiction in Locke's *tabula rasa* concept with original sin and total depravity. He perceived this idea not in showing that children were innocent, but only that they were impressionable. He agreed with Locke in believing that reason was the best way to promote virtuous habits. Locke's support for this technique, he claims, is based on observation:

It will perhaps be wondered, that I mention reasoning with children: and yet I cannot but think that the true way of dealing with them. They understand it as early as they do language; and, if

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<sup>49</sup> Paul Helm, "A Forensic Dilemma: John Locke and Jonathan Edwards on Personal Identity," in *Jonathan Edwards: Philosophical Theologian*, ed. Paul Helm and Oliver D. Crisp (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2003), 45.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> See Helm, "A Forensic Dilemma." Helm discusses in great detail how Edwards' philosophical and theological understanding of conversion found support and enrichment in Locke's concept of simple ideas, namely that God provided new insight into reality that could not be known only through the five senses.

<sup>52</sup> John Locke, *The Educational Writings of John Locke*, ed. John William Adamson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922), 28, accessed September 3, 2015, <https://archive.org/stream/educationalwriti00lockrich#page/n9/mode/2up>.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>54</sup> Jonathan Edwards, "Don't Lead Others into Sin," in *To the Rising Generation*, ed. Don Kistler (Lake Mary: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 2005), 128.

I misobserve not, they love to be treated as rational creatures, sooner than is imagined. 'Tis a pride should be cherished in them, and, as much as can be, made the greatest instrument to turn them by.<sup>55</sup>

Locke believed that any instruction or desired action in children could be obtained through commonsensical reasoning. In other words, children could be convinced that what they needed to do was what was ultimately best for them.<sup>56</sup> Edwards took this idea and made it the heart of his rationale when speaking to young people. He believed that children are most happy when they are holy. Although people mistakenly seek pleasure in other things, they are truly most joyful when they dedicate themselves to God.

Hints of this theological conception can also be found in Locke. Locke asserts that reputation can be a preliminary motivation for virtue because of the positive feedback that is gained by it. While this is good for children at first, he nevertheless states that the true principle of virtue is “knowledge of a man’s duty, and the satisfaction it is to obey his Maker, in following the dictates of that light God has given him, with the hopes of acceptance and reward.”<sup>57</sup>

Locke’s point is that concerning children with mental pain and pleasure will make them more aware of the mind and spirituality. However, if physical punishment for children is the main focus, it will only make them more aware of fleshly things. This is why he emphasized “reputation” and “satisfaction” in obedience to God more than use of the rod, as did the older Puritans. To him, all people, children included, should learn to concentrate on the mind rather than body, spirit rather than flesh. Edwards saw the unrealized theological implications for this idea, and expanded upon them.

Locke was not as explicit in affirming the knowledge of God for children as Edwards

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<sup>55</sup> Locke, *The Educational Writings*, 64.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

was, although it is present in his works. He wrote that a “notion” of God “ought very early to be imprinted on his mind.”<sup>58</sup> However, he believed that children had different reasoning capabilities at each age, and should be conversed with accordingly.<sup>59</sup> He suggested that very young children should be mostly concerned with acts of devotion to God, and should not be distracted by thoughts about “His inscrutable essence and being.”<sup>60</sup> As with Watts, Edwards seems to have disagreed slightly with this idea. He continued to teach children about the nature and essence of God, but did so with simple and familiar language that they could understand.

It is interesting to conjecture as to why Jonathan Edwards found so much common ground with John Locke, especially on an issue as fundamental as the nature of children. John Locke was the “father of the Enlightenment.” Jonathan Edwards was a Puritan minister. While there may not be a definite answer to this conundrum, one viable suggestion is that Locke may not have been as original or unorthodox as he is often portrayed. As seen with John Earle, some form of a “blank slate” concept had already been expressed in Europe, and many of Locke’s child-rearing techniques fell in line with others who questioned the strictness of Calvinist teaching.<sup>61</sup> Locke was, however, the popularizer of these ideas, and the first to extensively articulate them.

Some scholars, such as W.M. Spellman, have also done a great deal to combat claims of Locke’s unorthodoxy. In his 1988 book *John Locke and the Problem of Depravity*, Spellman claims that the stigma which already existed regarding the nature of children led many to automatically assume the worst in Locke.<sup>62</sup> While he does not deny Locke’s importance and

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>61</sup> J. H. Plumb, “The New World of Children in Eighteenth Century England,” *Past and Present*, no. 67 (May 1975): 68, accessed July 24, 2015, [http://www.jstor.org/stable/650233?pq-origsite=summon&seq=1#page\\_scan\\_tab\\_contents](http://www.jstor.org/stable/650233?pq-origsite=summon&seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents).

<sup>62</sup> Spellman, *John Locke and the Problem of Depravity*, 5.

uniqueness, Spellman goes on to suggest that “Locke would have been somewhat surprised at various of the claims made on his behalf by many who followed him in the eighteenth century, and by some who wrote about him in the twentieth.”<sup>63</sup> Spellman shows that Locke took a middle ground between rationalist and voluntarist notions of human nature. He did not think, as rationalists did, that rationality alone could encourage people to do their Christian duty. He also did not think, as voluntarists (Puritans) did, that God’s reason was wholly unknowable.<sup>64</sup>

Spellman writes,

Thus, for Locke God’s majestic will stood as the formal cause of obligation while the facts of human nature, man’s rational powers, determined the specific content of that obligation. In this way he hoped to preserve the absolute sovereignty of God while enabling man to discover the content of the moral law outside the much-disputed ambit of Scripture.<sup>65</sup>

Locke viewed men as rationale creatures, but ones whose sinfulness did not always allow them to act rationally. While he believed that children were born without knowledge of principles and notions (other than sense perception), he nonetheless affirmed the existence of an absolute moral law. This moral law, he thought, could be discovered through exercises of reason and education. As a result, education became paramount.<sup>66</sup> Yet, as Spellman notes, by 1689, Locke came to question the notion that men would accept the moral law through its intrinsic reasonableness.<sup>67</sup> He saw that no matter how reasonable it could appear, some would still reject it. Instead, Locke asserted the previously mentioned notion that fully rational men were those who saw that their own happiness rested solely in obedience to God’s law. Eternal reward and

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 6-7.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 56-57.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 110, 112-113.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 120-121.

punishment became the focus.<sup>68</sup> While Locke may not have held to all of the traditional nuances in the doctrine of original sin, to say that he opposed it may not be accurate either. As Edwards saw, referring to children as blank slates does not necessarily undermine a sinful nature. Spellman points out that Locke's focus on moral education implies a depraved disposition.<sup>69</sup> If children were not choosing morality, then they were choosing sin.

Viewing Locke in this light shows a man more in line with orthodoxy than many people think. Whether Spellman's analysis of Locke is correct or not, it appears Jonathan Edwards could at least see traces of orthodoxy in his thinking. Locke's idea of happiness in obedience to God's law gave Edwards the grounds for constructing a Calvinist theology for rationality. He found truth in Locke's assertion that children are rational creatures and should be treated as such. Edwards, however, placed a greater emphasis on the role of regeneration and conversion, and detailed these notions more explicitly than Locke ever did. While rationality could and should be taught, it was only the infusion of God's grace that would ultimately give them the desire to obey His rational laws. People (including "blank slate" children) could prepare for this regeneration through reasonable instruction and a godly upbringing.

Examining the role of nurture for Edwards brings with it some theological difficulties. His sense of nurture as a preparatory act for conversion makes him liable to the same accusations that had befallen Puritans in the past – a works-based salvation. The intersection of works, faith, and election have remained somewhat of a theological paradox for Christians in almost every century. Edwards believed nurture to be essentially tied to a child's salvation. Since children were most malleable and naturally prepared to receive the gospel, it would be a great sin to fail in Christian nurture.

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 121.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 124.

However, many who came after Edwards failed to see the nuances in his theology of childhood. Most only viewed him as a strict Calvinist who emphasized the horrible doctrine of total depravity and infant damnation. Horace Bushnell, who wrote the famous *Christian Nurture* in 1847, combated what he saw to be the overemphasis of conversion in Edwards' works. He states of Edwards' doctrine,

The defect is, that it has cast a type of religious individualism, intense beyond any former example. It makes nothing of the family, and the church, and the organic powers God has constituted as vehicles of grace. It takes every man as if he had existed alone; presumes that he is unreconciled to God until he has undergone some sudden and explosive experience in adult years, or after the age of reason; demands that experience, and only when it is reached, allows the subject to be an heir of life.<sup>70</sup>

To him, Edwards' focus on election and conversion effectively nullified the need for strong family upbringing and the eternal effects of religious instruction. If Edwards had read Bushnell's book, he most likely would have accused him of minimizing the sovereignty of God and discounting His mysterious work in people's hearts. Perhaps Edwards' complicated view of the subject made him deserving of being misunderstood. A volume of his own on Christian nurture and the nature of children would have gone a long way in preventing some of these misconceptions.

It is unfortunate that Bushnell's book was passed down through the following years as the "anti-Edwards," when in reality Bushnell probably had Edwards to thank. While more will be mentioned on this later, the important point is that Edwards' concept of childhood and treatment of children were not as archaic and harsh as people have often assumed. This is not to say that he did not speak harshly to children, or use imagery that would horrify today's Christian parents, but rather that his understanding of childhood and youth was far more modern than traditional.

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<sup>70</sup> Horace Bushnell, *Christian Nurture*, original publication 1861, reprint (New York: Scribner, Armstrong, & Co., 1876), 188, accessed August 15, 2015, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bushnell/nurture.i.html>.

While still viewing children as sinful as “vipers,” Edwards recognized their malleability and potential for godliness. Edwards’ emphasis on conversion and theological support for rationality strengthened his stance as a bridge between Puritanism and the Enlightenment. Edwards believed in the depravity of children, but treated them as rational persons with misplaced desires instead of creatures with wills to be broken. Children were the focal point for Edwards in his role as a pastor – the most prominent role that he held. This position, and his fathering of eleven children, gave him numerous occasions in which he could practice this childhood theology.

## Chapter 3

### **“Begin Life with God”: Edwards’ Interaction with Children**

Childhood and youth held a prominent position in Puritan society, but one that increasingly became associated with moral decay. The combination of high fertility and high mortality produced an environment completely foreign to what modern readers are accustomed. With life expectancy no more than thirty years old, young people were the majority of the populace. In 1790 the median age of Americans was only sixteen.<sup>1</sup> As population increased and land become more available, young people moved out of their homes and out of the supervision of their parents. This is one factor that may have influenced pastors like Edwards to emphasize conversion at an earlier age.<sup>2</sup>

However, while this “moving out” was true early in Edwards’ career, it soon became less common. With the combination of Indian hostilities, consolidated land holdings, and political antagonisms, young men had no choice but to remain in their parents’ home for a longer amount of time.<sup>3</sup> This quick change had an important effect on how men like Edwards viewed childhood and youth. While he continued to advocate for early conversion, Edwards nevertheless saw “youth” as extending until the termination of parental dependency. Although he still classified

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<sup>1</sup> David Hackett Fischer, *Growing Old in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 26-28. It should be noted that life expectancy statistics such as this are often misleading because they include infant deaths, which brings down the overall number significantly. If a person made it past childhood, it was not abnormal to have a long life.

<sup>2</sup> Harry S. Stout, *The New England Soul: Preaching and Religious Culture in Colonial New England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 181.

<sup>3</sup> George M. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 150-151, 300. As a result, the average age of marriage rose by three years, making it twenty-eight or twenty-nine for men, and twenty-five for women. With this came a continued suppression in knowledge of sensuality. Men who were in their early to mid-twenties had the same information as fourteen year old boys. According to George Marsden, this was the reason for sexual immorality in the “Bad Book Case” that Edwards dealt with later in his career. Although behaving like children, most of these men were in their early to mid-twenties.

children as roughly 4-14 years old (and infants under 4), the category of “young persons” now ranged from 15-25, a rather odd age given the low life expectancy.<sup>4</sup>

On top of this extension of youth came an increase in their immoral behavior. Men such as Cotton Mather, preaching at the end of the seventeenth century could already detect these changes, and issued stern words to his young people. “Unto a Burning Hell are you Posting every Hour, ye Ungodly Children,” he warned. “But why so fast? I say, why so fast? Let me freely and fairly warn you, of This; The Godliness of your Parents, will not Save you, from the Everlasting Destruction, which the Presence of the Lord, shall bring upon them that Obey not the Gospel.”<sup>5</sup> By the time Jonathan Edwards became preacher at Northampton in 1727, these fears had already been realized.

Young people in Northampton especially took advantage of the old age and failing health of then-lead minister Solomon Stoddard. Their lack of respect for authority and loose behavior impassioned the young Edwards when he replaced Stoddard in 1729.<sup>6</sup> Among other things, the most noticeable sign of immorality was sexual activity. One reason for this may have been the practice of bundling, in which two lovers would spend a night together, supposedly confined to their own side of the bed. While intended to familiarize partners without partaking in sexual intimacy, it proved to be counter-productive. By 1790, almost one third of New England brides

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<sup>4</sup> Kenneth P. Minkema, “Old Age and Religion in the Writings and Life of Jonathan Edwards,” *Church History* 70, no. 2 (December 2001): 674, accessed July 21, 2015, [http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.liberty.edu:2048/stable/3654545?loginSuccess=true&seq=1#page\\_scan\\_tab\\_contents](http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.liberty.edu:2048/stable/3654545?loginSuccess=true&seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents).

<sup>5</sup> Cotton Mather, *Help for Distressed Parents, Or, Counsels & Comforts for Godly Parents Afflicted with Ungodly Children; and Warnings Unto Children to Beware of All Those Evil Courses, Which Would Be Afflictive Unto Their Parents* (Boston, 1694), 53, Evans Early American Imprint Collection, University of Michigan, accessed September 1, 2015, <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/evans/N00593.0001.001/1:2?rgn=div1;view=fulltext>.

<sup>6</sup> Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 126, 150.

were pregnant at marriage.<sup>7</sup> Edwards was appalled at sexual sin and other forms of immorality, doing everything that he could to curb the wayward tendencies of youth from an early age.

First and foremost, Edwards sought revival among young people. He knew that God was capable of a large work that could halt corrupting society. Youth were the key to this revival. Yet, despite his optimism during the Northampton revival in the early 1730's, Edwards remained largely disappointed with youth. After revival waned, he noted how many people who once appeared converted went back to ungodly activities.<sup>8</sup> Throughout his career, Edwards became all too familiar with the shortcomings of youth. He was destined to pray for conversion among his young people as long as he was a pastor. In addition to his push for childhood conversion, Edwards unleashed a series of sermons to parents in hopes of restoring the decaying family unit.<sup>9</sup> He urged them to take their duty seriously, and sought to awaken them to the consequences of their "loose reigns." Perhaps even more noteworthy, Edwards also preached a large number of sermons to children and youth, directly warning them about their behavior, and reasoning with them for change.

Edwards' emphasis on child conversions lined up with his broader congregational ministry. This may help to explain some of his contrasting rhetoric, and accounts for the overwhelming sense of urgency and desperation in many of his sermons. As Edwards reflected in one of his lessons, "It is my duty now to earnestly seek your salvation. I am your pastor, and Christ has committed the care of your souls to me. Christ commands His ministers to feed the

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<sup>7</sup> Kathryn Kish Sklar, "Culture versus Economics: A Case of Fornication in Northampton in the 1740's," *The University of Michigan Papers in Women's Studies*, (October 1977): 40, accessed March 23, 2015, <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/mfs/acp0359.0003.001/37:5?rgn=main;view=image>.

<sup>8</sup> Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 168.

<sup>9</sup> William J. Scheick, *The Writings of Jonathan Edwards: Theme, Motif, and Style* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1975), 41-42.

lambs of His flock.”<sup>10</sup> Edwards believed that he had a special responsibility to bring children to godliness. In fact, it was Christ himself who would hold him accountable for losing any “precious and immortal souls” to Hell.<sup>11</sup> It seems probable that Edwards became frustrated with unconverted and ambivalent youth, causing him to use a variety of rhetorical tactics. Consequently, his lessons were often filled with cries of desperation and helplessness. “I can but exhort and beseech you;” he wrote, “’tis not in my power to save you; that is reserved for God alone. I can but set your necessity plainly before you. There are and will be some who will not regard what I have said.”<sup>12</sup> As a Calvinist, Edwards understood that it was God who ultimately awakened hearts to Him, and that there was only so much that he could do to curb the sinful behavior of his young people.

While recognizing the struggles and imperfections of youth, Edwards still held to a romanticized perception of an ideal childhood. He saw childhood as a time designed by God for great joy, full of hopes and promises.<sup>13</sup> Using captivating imagery, Edwards suggested that young people are like flowers in full bloom. It is a time of great beauty and wonder, he said, “when persons are want most to rejoice in the good things of the world.”<sup>14</sup> Edwards’ picture of a flower seems to be especially helpful, not only because of his explicit analogy to beauty, but also his implicit analogy to fragility and delicacy. Indeed, Edwards did see youth as highly impressionable. He believed that the habits and lifestyle they developed were largely determined by the society around them, and were often hard to erase later in life. Therefore, children must be taught to seek salvation and pursue holiness from the moment that they are born. While this may

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<sup>10</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “God is Very Angry at the Sins of Children,” in *To the Rising Generation*, Ed. Don Kistler (Lake Mary: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 2005), 60.

<sup>11</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “The Time of Youth is the Best Time to Be Improved for Religious Purposes,” in *To the Rising Generation*, Ed. Don Kistler (Lake Mary: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 2005), 21.

<sup>12</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “A Flower Cut Down,” in *To the Rising Generation*, Ed. Don Kistler (Lake Mary: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 2005), 97.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

seem like a paradox given the depravity inherited by original sin, Edwards did not think that a good upbringing would rid children of sinful tendencies. Instead, he believed being surrounded by a godly society would cause them to sin *less*, and more importantly, increase their chances for salvation.<sup>15</sup> Unsurprisingly, Edwards then went on to claim that parents should be held most accountable for their children's behavior and conversion.<sup>16</sup>

Edwards' romanticized version of childhood also showed a loving relationship among family members. While asserting that Christ should be loved above all else, Edwards recognized that children were very commonly the dearest objects of parents' love, and vice versa.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, while Christ is most worthy to be loved, there remains a special type of affection between parents and children. From this evidence, it appears that Jonathan Edwards had a picture in his mind as to what childhood should be. Characterized by joy, hope, love, and faith, it is no wonder that Edwards felt a need to address his observations of youth that seemed to stray so far from this ideal.

Edwards' close relationship with the youth of his town, and his belief in early conversion also opened him up to criticism regarding the family unit. He insisted upon private meetings only for youth, and often attended them himself.<sup>18</sup> This practice was met with some disagreement from parents in his congregation who believed, as traditional Puritans did, that they alone should exert control over their children's lives.<sup>19</sup> Edwards' encouragement of these meetings and implicit suggestion that Jesus (and Edwards as Christ's representative) should be loved more

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<sup>15</sup> Jonathan Edwards, "Don't Lead Others into Sin," in *To the Rising Generation*, ed. Don Kistler (Lake Mary: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 2005), 128.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.

<sup>17</sup> Jonathan Edwards, "Children Ought to Love the Lord Jesus Above All Things in this World," in *To the Rising Generation*, Ed. Don Kistler (Lake Mary: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 2005), 64.

<sup>18</sup> Minkema, "Old Age and Religion," 697.

<sup>19</sup> Philip Greven, *The Protestant Temperament: Patters of Child-rearing, Religious Experience, and the Self in Early America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 25.

than parents, seemed to undermine the family hierarchy that was held so dear.<sup>20</sup> In addition, Edwards' emphasis on childhood conversion during the revivals gave an implied power to children that appeared to contradict elderly authority.

Timothy Cutler, a staunch opponent of the awakening, recalled a story when a boy was commanded by his father to go into the woods and replenish the family's supply of firewood. However, the boy disobeyed the command and began to argue vehemently. Finally, he went into the barn and began to make "hideous mourning and noise" that disturbed the neighbors. Unable to calm him, the parents called in Edwards for advice. Believing that the boy was under the influence of the Spirit, Edwards told the parents to forget the demand. He saw the boy's hysterics as a sign that he was on his way to conversion.<sup>21</sup> In his actions, Edwards added his own heap of proverbial firewood to the already kindling generation conflict in New England. Many, such as Cutler, believed that Edwards allowed the importance of childhood conversion to undermine the hierarchical system.

Edwards' voluntarist leanings caused him to support religious affections of the will. While he discouraged their excess, Edwards' stance nevertheless stood in stark contrast to men such as Charles Chauncy, junior pastor at Boston's First Church, who believed that all affections needed to be restrained to the faculty of reason. Unlike Edwards, Chauncy believed that all reason was knowable apart from God's prevenient grace.<sup>22</sup> Displays of emotion and affection were animalistic and sinful. Even more, their overriding of parental authority was deplorable. Chauncy recounted a story told to him by a friend about a fifteen year old girl who was

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<sup>20</sup> Minkema, "Old Age and Religion," 697.

<sup>21</sup> Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 158. As Marsden notes, Cutler recalled this story four years after it occurred, during a time when he eagerly sought to portray the awakening in a negative light. As such, the accuracy of the account may be questionable. Also noteworthy is the fact that the parents called Edwards to examine their disobedient child. Perhaps this reveals that Edwards was known to be effective with children. It also may signify that the parents themselves saw spiritual significance in the boy's actions, and thus needed pastoral evaluation.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 281-283.

converted and began to exhort her parents. She could see the “Image of the Devil” in the face of her father and declared that he “was going Post-haste down to Hell” and that all his prayers had been an “Abomination” to God.<sup>23</sup> Such instances threatened to overthrow the hierarchical structure that held together Puritan society.

Chauncy’s strong adherence to rationality caused him to discredit all conversions that included an emotional response. He even dismissed Phebe Bartlett’s miraculous conversion by claiming it as behavioral imitation, which he said “is natural to Children.”<sup>24</sup> Chauncy’s attack on the Great Awakening caused a growing division among the Congregational clergy. Despite these accusations, Edwards remained firm in upholding his doctrine and defending the revival. He responded to Chauncy and other opponents by publishing *Some Thoughts Concerning the Present Revival of Religion* (1742).<sup>25</sup> It was in this context that Edwards called children “vipers” and “heirs of hell.”<sup>26</sup> He stressed their depravity in order to defend the necessity of their emotional conversions. Still, Chauncy did not give up and continued to publish anti-awakening letters that were read widely in New England. Many original supporters of the revival came to have second thoughts about its validity. Chauncy and other “Old Lights” viewed themselves as the upholders of traditional Puritanism, charging Edwards with radicalism and liberal doctrine. In the end, Chauncy’s accusations proved ironic, as it was he, not Edwards, who adopted the doctrine of Universalism after the American Revolution.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Charles Chauncy, *Seasonable Thoughts on the State of Religion in New England*, originally published 1743, reprint (New York: Regina Press, 1975), 169, accessed September 3, 2015, <https://archive.org/stream/seasonablethough00chau#page/n5/mode/2up>.

<sup>24</sup> Perry Miller, *Jonathan Edwards* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press Publishers, 1949), 174.

<sup>25</sup> Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 273.

<sup>26</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “Some Thoughts Concerning the Revival: Ten Criticisms Answered (1742),” in *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 4, *The Great Awakening*, ed. C. C. Goen (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 394.

<sup>27</sup> Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 273-274.

Edwards' observations of youth show that he knew his audience. What makes his observations special, however, is the fact that he saw through outward behaviors and tendencies of youth, to the ultimate longings and truths that motivated them. As a result, Edwards sought to redirect these longings to what he believed would be most beneficial. It is here that Edwards employed the measures implied by John Locke, suggesting that spiritual joy could be obtained through holy living. While Edwards is by far the most explicit in these sentiments when compared to his contemporaries, there were hints of this thinking in others before him.

Thomas White, in his 1702 piece *A Little Book for Children*, noted the tendency of children to swear and speak harshly to one another.<sup>28</sup> Rather than advocating only punishment for these actions, White attempted to redirect their wills by writing that their words were best suited singing Psalms and other songs to God.<sup>29</sup> Edwards employed the same concept when noting the profanity among youth. He too tried to redirect them to God. Thomas Boston, a Scottish theologian, was another minister who developed this idea during the early eighteenth century. Writing, "Happiness is the result of holiness," Boston may have been an influence for Edwards, who used almost identical phraseology.<sup>30</sup> Still, Edwards was unique in both his detail and plethora of observations. He expanded upon the thoughts of writers who came before him, and applied them to a new time and generation.

One of the first observations that Jonathan Edwards made about youth was that they were carefree. He saw that young people did not have to worry about many of the same

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<sup>28</sup> White was a Presbyterian minister in England who preached at various locations and was known as a general scholar.

<sup>29</sup> Thomas White, *A Little Book for Little Children* (London: 1672), reprint (Boston: 1702), 5, accessed July 26, 2015, Google Books.

<sup>30</sup> Thomas Boston, *Human Nature in its Fourfold State*, (London: 1720), Reprint (New York: Evert Duyckinck, 1811), 25, accessed July 15, 2015, <https://archive.org/stream/humannatureinit03bostgoog#page/n10/mode/2up>. It should be recalled that Locke implied a similar idea. He believed children could be convinced that what they needed to do was what was ultimately best for them.

responsibilities as adults, and therefore they tended to take salvation less seriously. It was becoming more common for children to use their age as an excuse for inappropriate behavior, and they often spent their time doing “sinful” things. Edwards once reflected, “Indeed, some young persons seem to be so inconsiderate and careless that they scarcely think or care anything about it. They seem as if they never had any serious thoughts about their salvation, and the necessity of turning to God in order to obtain it... Their minds are on other things; they are taken up with vanity.”<sup>31</sup> In light of this observation, Edwards developed a fascinating response. Rather than condemning the children for being carefree, he instead highlighted the wrong response of their hearts. In fact, he asserted that God designed childhood to be carefree so that children could more easily seek conversion, rather than pursue vanity.<sup>32</sup> This lack of responsibility at an early age was specifically ordered by God, so that young people would have an opportunity for early conversion. As already mentioned, it offered a built-in counter to original sin, given by the grace of God.<sup>33</sup>

Edwards went on to write that not only does God offer the opportunity for conversion at a young age, but He expects it. He said that early piety is especially acceptable to God because it gives the children more time to mature and grow in grace. As a result, God is more ready to bestow grace on “young seekers.”<sup>34</sup> In addition, Edwards asserted that reformation is easier for youth. “It is easier plucking up the tree by the roots while it is still in a little bush,” he wrote, “than after it has stood a long time and has sent forth its roots deep into the earth.”<sup>35</sup> If children continued to spend their time in sin, then God may abandon them to their own hardness of heart,

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<sup>31</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “The Sins of Youth Go with Them to Eternity,” in *To the Rising Generation*, ed. Don Kistler (Lake Mary: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 2005), 29.

<sup>32</sup> Edwards, “The Time of Youth,” 15.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>34</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “Early Piety is Especially Acceptable to God,” in *To the Rising Generation*, Ed. Don Kistler (Lake Mary: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 2005), 4.

<sup>35</sup> Edwards, “The Time of Youth,” 18.

making their chances of conversion later in life very slim. Therefore, it is without a doubt most suitable to begin life with God, not only because He designed it that way, but also because it is most beneficial to the child.<sup>36</sup>

Edwards also observed that youth purposefully “put off” conversion. They had the notion that religion was for the elderly, and that there was plenty of time for salvation.

They put off the great concern of their souls. They seem, many of them, to think that religion better fits older persons than them. They look upon religion as a dull, melancholy sort of thing. They can see no pleasure that is to be had in it. It seems to them to have a tendency only to make their lives uncomfortable; and though they may design sometime or other to mind the concern of their souls and to seek their salvation, yet they think this work is more suitable for men when they begin to grow old, if they think anything about it at all.<sup>37</sup>

From this passage, it is clear that Edwards understood the thinking of youth, as well as the strengths and weaknesses of their reasoning. The young people using this argument seemed to understand that there is indeed a benefit to religion, but were dismissive about the urgency that it demanded. Therefore, to show this necessity, Edwards reminded the children that their sins go with them into eternity, and the guilt of their youthful sins does not wear out.<sup>38</sup> While the youth themselves may have understood this on an ideological level, their ambivalence shows that they did not fully comprehend that they would go to Hell when they died. As mentioned earlier, their carefree and dismissive demeanor caused Edwards to resort to harsher language. In one sermon, Edwards called them “naturally wicked,” and the “devil’s children.” He later went on to say that God abhors the devil’s children, and that they deserved to “burn in Hell forever.”<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Edwards, “Early Piety,” 4.

<sup>37</sup> Edwards, “The Sins of Youth,” 29.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>39</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “God is Very Angry at the Sins of Children,” in *To the Rising Generation*, ed. Don Kistler (Lake Mary: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 2005), 57.

Edwards spoke of a topic that is rarely mentioned to children in Western society today: death. In order to help focus youth on eternal matters, he had to show them that eternity loomed over them at every moment. In Edwards' most famous sermon, *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*, he illustrated with vivid imagery the idea that all people (who remain unconverted) are helplessly and continuously held in the hand of God over the fires of Hell.<sup>40</sup> The only thing keeping them alive and away from Hell is the common grace of God. Edwards made this idea even more real and personal by pointing out the early death of a young boy in Northampton. He appealed to the children at an intimate level, saying that this boy was "just like you," and that nobody could see signs of his approaching death. He comforted them by saying that this young man had been concerned with the salvation of his soul and is now in heaven, but at the same time told them that they had only been spared because God was warning them.<sup>41</sup> Therefore, they should "make haste to come to God," because they could die at any time. He pointed out the frailty of mankind, and asked them how they should like to appear before God.<sup>42</sup> Edwards recognized the effectiveness of striking fear into children. In one instance, he took young people in the town to view the remains of a house fire that took the lives of two girls.<sup>43</sup>

While Edwards' language of death and damnation to youth is horrifying to modern audiences, it was not unheard of during the time. In fact, language of judgment and damnation was common to the Puritan way of thinking, prompting them, as David Hackett Fischer notes, "to adopt some of the more lugubrious deathlore which human ingenuity has invented."<sup>44</sup>

Children were not spared from this imagery, but were forced to stare it in the face. Michael

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<sup>40</sup> Jonathan Edwards, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" in *A Jonathan Edwards Reader*, ed. John E. Smith, Harry S. Stout, and Kenneth P. Minkema (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 95

<sup>41</sup> Jonathan Edwards, "A Flower Cut Down," in *To the Rising Generation*, ed. Don Kistler (Lake Mary: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 2005), 94.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

<sup>43</sup> Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 321.

<sup>44</sup> Fischer, *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989),

Wigglesworth's 1662 poetical jeremiad, *The Day of Doom*, sold out its 1,800 prints the day it was published.<sup>45</sup> Almost one in twenty five New Englanders purchased a copy, and it was a favorite book for children.<sup>46</sup> In it, the eccentric Wigglesworth gave one of the most vivid descriptions of judgment and Hell ever depicted. He spoke against the frivolous pleasures of youth, saying that at judgment day it would be too late for them to repent. Even unconverted infants would be condemned, though they would be given "The easiest room in Hell."<sup>47</sup>

In 1701 Samuel Moodey used similarly harsh language, writing, "The Lord may come unlook'd for, and surpriz Young Ones in the midst of their Carnal Mirth and Jollity, before they are aware, to cut them asunder, and appoint them their Portion with Hypocrites, who shall for ever weep, wail, and gnash their teeth."<sup>48</sup> While there were some ministers who took after church father John Chrysostom in asserting that children should not hear of hell until "fifteen years old or older," the majority of Puritan children were well aware of the consequences of their sin.<sup>49</sup> Whether disagreeable or not, Edwards was only evoking imagery that had long been part of the Puritan tradition, but was perhaps becoming less common with new concepts of infant innocence. Edwards however, combined the imagery of Hell with the imagery of Heaven in order to depict a rational option for his audience. Harry S. Stout notes how Edwards "taught a generation of evangelical ministers how to articulate their extemporaneous sermons in glowing

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<sup>45</sup> Bruce C. Daniels, *Puritans at Play: Leisure and Recreation in Colonial New England* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), 38.

<sup>46</sup> Gillian Avery, *Behold the Child: American Children and Their Books, 1621-1922*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 23.

<sup>47</sup> Michael Wigglesworth, *The Day of Doom: Or, A Poetical Description of the Great and Last Judgement* (1662) (New York: American News Company, 1867), 72, accessed July 20, 2015, Google Books.

<sup>48</sup> Samuel Moodey, *The Vain Youth Summoned* (Boston: 1663), Evans Early American Imprint Collection, University of Michigan, 9, accessed August 14, 2015, <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/evans/N00045.0001.001/1:5?rgn=div1;view=fulltext>.

<sup>49</sup> Vigen Guroian, "The Ecclesial Family: John Chrysostom on Parenthood and Children," in *The Child in Christian Thought*, ed. Marcia J. Bunge (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), 76, 70. Chrysostom's belief most likely came from his assertion that infants were without sin. Contemporaries of Edwards who also spoke out against the harsh language to children most likely asserted infant innocence as well.

terms that warmed the hearts of their listeners.”<sup>50</sup> The extreme language that Edwards used when discussing Hell, damnation, wrath, and human depravity, were used not just as fear devices, but more importantly were derived from his belief in the extreme goodness of God.

By stressing the fear of those who were not Christians, Edwards made even clearer the comfort of conversion and God’s free grace. By diminishing sin, he would also be diminishing grace. In a personal reflection, Edwards wrote, “I am convinced that hell torments will be eternal from one great good the wisdom of God proposes by them, which is, by the sight of them to exalt the happiness, the love, and joyful thanksgivings of the angels and men that are saved; which it tends exceedingly to do.”<sup>51</sup> Therefore, while his imagery of hell and tactics of terror may seem harsh for children, Edwards believed that they were necessary in order for children to repent and willingly turn to God. He struck fear into his listeners in order to make the comfort of the gospel more appealing. Edwards’ tactics appear to have worked. From 1734-1735 he admitted over twenty children under the age of fourteen to full communion. As historian Catherine A. Brekus notes, allowing children to partake in the sacrament was “one of the most remarkable innovations of the revivals.”<sup>52</sup> However, as Edwards observed the backsliding of religious behavior in the following years, he became more hesitant to do so.

When mentioning Edwards’ rhetoric and urgency surrounding the death of children, it is also important to consider that one of Edwards’ own children died in her youth after reaching conversion. Her name was Jerusha Edwards, only seventeen years old at the time.<sup>53</sup> According to Edwards, Jerusha’s life had been one completely devoted to God – a prime example for young

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<sup>50</sup> Stout, *The New England Soul*, 231.

<sup>51</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “Miscellanies” in *A Jonathan Edwards Reader*, ed. John E. Smith, Harry S. Stout, and Kenneth P. Minkema (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 43.

<sup>52</sup> Catherine A. Brekus, “Children of Wrath, Children of Grace: Jonathan Edwards and the Puritan Culture of Child-Rearing,” in *The Child in Christian Thought*, ed. Marcia J. Bunge (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), 318.

<sup>53</sup> Edwards, “A Flower Cut Down,” 99.

people. She died of acute fever after only a week of illness. Her sudden passing saddened and inspired Edwards. Giving the eulogy at her funeral, Edwards used the opportunity to emphasize the brevity of life to his congregation. He was confident in the salvation of Jerusha's soul, and urged his listeners to mind their own salvation and the salvation of their children. It would be unbearable, he conjectured, to part with an unsaved child.<sup>54</sup> Undoubtedly, this contributed to the intensity of Edwards' rhetoric, because he was speaking from personal experience. Perhaps the striking commonality and vividness of death in Edwards' sermons to both adults and children is most easily explained because death was an all too frequent reality.

The tendency for young people to continuously seek after pleasure was another observation that Edwards wrote extensively about.

This is what they aim at: to spend their youth pleasantly. And they think that if they forsake sin and youthful vanity, and take upon themselves a religious course of life, it will hinder them in their pursuit. They look upon religion as a very dull, melancholy thing and think that, if they embrace it, they will, in a great measure, be done with pleasures.<sup>55</sup>

Edwards analyzed the behaviors of youth, and placed their longings in a larger context. He believed that the tendency of youth to seek after pleasures was not only natural, but good. However, he affirmed that true pleasure could be found ultimately in God. Edwards wrote that eternal souls could only be satisfied with eternal substance. The quick and temporary earthly pleasures that youth desired were therefore not good enough.<sup>56</sup> Only in Jesus Christ could they find everlasting companionship and intimacy, infinite love, and eternal joy.<sup>57</sup> They could be filled with hope in the happiness of their salvation, because they no longer had to fear death.

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<sup>54</sup> Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 327-328.

<sup>55</sup> Jonathan Edwards, "The Most Direct Way to Happiness," in *To the Rising Generation*, ed. Don Kistler (Lake Mary: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 2005), 54.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 46-47.

Because of Jesus, they were promised God's spiritual blessing, as well as a crown of life for eternity. If they loved Christ, they would be protected by angels and kept safe from the devil.<sup>58</sup> It should also be mentioned, that while Edwards urged youth to pursue the pleasures of God above all else, he did not condemn the use of earthly enjoyments. Rather, he stated, "Religion doesn't forbid the use of outward enjoyments, but only the abuse of them."<sup>59</sup> He went on to write that these earthly enjoyments were created by God and are to be received with thanksgiving. In fact, he wrote, "Vice destroys the sweetness of outward enjoyments."<sup>60</sup> Therefore, there is even more enjoyment in store for youth when God's gifts are used correctly in their proper context.

Edwards' concept of finding ultimate pleasure in God, and the rationale that lay behind it, was at the heart of how he viewed a child's "will." Since the late sixteenth century, Protestants came to believe that young children lacked self-control and proper structure in their lives. As a result, Puritans advocated the corporal punishment of their children in order to conform them to their desired principles. While this sometimes led to abuse, it was most common to strike them on the buttocks, an area "specially created by God to receive just correction."<sup>61</sup> Throughout time, "breaking the will" became the common language used for child-rearing among Protestants, especially in New England.<sup>62</sup>

John Wesley was among the popularizers of this language, urging parents to, "Break their will, that you may save their soul."<sup>63</sup> He believed that the lust of their flesh had to be conquered

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<sup>58</sup> Edwards, "Children Ought to Love," 74-75.

<sup>59</sup> Edwards, "The Most Direct Way to Happiness," 47.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>61</sup> Anthony Fletcher, "Prescription and Practice: Protestantism and the Upbringing of Children, 1560-1700," in *The Church and Childhood*, ed. Diana Wood (Oxford: Ecclesiastical History Society, 1994), 330.

<sup>62</sup> Fischer, *Albion's Seed*, 98-99. Fischer notes how this terminology was not exclusive to New Englanders, but was common among clergy east of England and Calvinists from the Netherlands to Hungary.

<sup>63</sup> John Wesley, "Sermon 96: On Obedience to Parents," in *The Works of John Wesley: The Bicentennial Edition*, Ministry Matters, accessed September 9, 2015, <http://www.ministrymatters.com.ezproxy.liberty.edu:2048/library/#/000wjw-new/8a07f11faa8a6b1079682999aac13106/on-obedience-to-parents.html>.

before children could understand their sin. These thoughts reflect the 1628 writings of John Robinson, who also believed that children first had to be “beaten and broken down” before one could establish the “foundation of their education.”<sup>64</sup> Yet, at the beginning of the eighteenth century there appeared to be a change among a few New England ministers such as Cotton Mather, who asserts, “I would never come, to give a child a Blow; except in Case of Obstinacy; or some gross Enormity.”<sup>65</sup> Edwards seems to have been a further progression of Mather’s way of thinking. While he certainly did not condemn the notion of physical punishment as a tool for instruction, he differed from previous thinkers in their priority. Edwards took more after Locke in seeing that a will first and foremost had to be redirected, not broken. The desires that children and youth had were not bad, but sinfully misplaced.

Jonathan Edwards also frequently noted his observations of profanity among youth. He wrote about how many young people spoke lightly of religion, often discussing it in a derisive tone. In addition, he believed youths spoke foul-mouthed words in order to gain the admiration of peers for the boldness of their unwholesome talk. Many would also take pride in mocking and laughing at the faults of others during conversation.<sup>66</sup>

Once again, Edwards used rhetoric that showed his deep understanding of young people’s inclinations. He wrote that the intricacies of conversation and the ability to speak itself, illustrate key factors that separate humans from animals.<sup>67</sup> However, this gift of God should be used for the benefit of all people, because their souls are of infinitely greater concern. Edwards wrote, “It would make your company and conversation much more pleasant than to fill it up with vanity,

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<sup>64</sup> John Robinson, “Of Children and their Education (1628)” in *Childrearing Concepts, 1628-1861*, ed. Philip Greven (Itasca, Ill.: 1973), 13.

<sup>65</sup> Cotton Mather, “Some Special Points, Relating to the Education of my Children (1706),” in *Diary of Cotton Mather, 1681-1724*, vol. 1, ed. Chauncy Ford Worthington (Boston: 1911-1912), accessed September 2, 2015, [http://college.cengage.com/history/primary\\_sources/us/cotton\\_mather.htm](http://college.cengage.com/history/primary_sources/us/cotton_mather.htm).

<sup>66</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “Corrupt Communication,” in *To the Rising Generation*, Ed. Don Kistler (Lake Mary: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 2005), 77-81.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

with foolish and lewd jesting, talking against others, spending away the time in that which serves no purpose but to take the heart off from everything that is good.” Rather than profanity, youths should use innocent and virtuous language, speaking of things that “kindle warm, holy affections in each other’s souls.”<sup>68</sup> By doing this, young people will promote one another’s profit and pleasure, and will receive the blessing of God with a clear conscience.<sup>69</sup> In addition, Edwards suggests that their company will be greatly improved, because Christ himself would be among them.<sup>70</sup>

Jonathan Edwards had an insightful understanding of youth during his ministry, as well as a definite picture for what it should ideally look like. Edwards’ practical advice and specific calls to children, however, often appeared at the end of his sermons, as he spoke to them directly and personally. Despite the wide range of topics that he addressed, the practical applications for children were normally the same. One of the most common pieces of advice that Edwards gave was for children to stop going into company directly after sermons. He wrote, “Has it not been the case that you have been somewhat moved and affected by something that you have heard in the preaching; and as soon as it is over you go into company, which diverts your minds and takes away the impressions that were left there?”<sup>71</sup> Rather, Edwards suggests that they instead spend time after the sermons in personal reflection and individual prayer.

Edwards also urged the young people in attendance to stop keeping company with those who were irreligious. He feared that they would be corrupted by the vile and unholy conversation and actions of such people. He quoted Proverbs 13:20, which states, “He that walketh with wise

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 84.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Edwards, “The Time of Youth,” 24.

men will be wise, but the companion of fools will be destroyed.”<sup>72</sup> Instead, youths should converse with those who are godly, and should host private religious meetings from time to time. This would lead youths to greater acts of holiness and cause them to fix their minds on salvation more often.<sup>73</sup>

Lastly, Edwards admonished his listeners to “diligently attend to the preaching of the Word.”<sup>74</sup> This was of upmost importance because he believed it to be God’s great means of appointing instruction, warning, and awakening to all who willingly heeded. There could be no spiritual growth, and ultimately no conversion without this vital practice.

While Edwards’ love and concern for children is evident through his rhetoric, it is his role as a parent that perhaps most clearly displays his heart. Despite beliefs in original sin and “breaking the will,” showing love to children was in fact common among Puritans. Cotton Mather fathered many children and spoke of them with great tenderness.<sup>75</sup> Mather, like Edwards, also had several of them die during his lifetime. The frequency of childhood death presents an interesting dynamic that is rare in modern society. For pastors like Mather and Edwards, childhood death heightened their awareness of original sin. Death itself was a product of the Fall of Man, and could happen to anyone at any time because all were sinners. However, this also provoked a deep love toward children due to their frailty. It seemed that to some Puritans, those who were most vulnerable to the consequences of sin were most worthy of love. As a result, children held a special place in parents’ hearts. A popular poem during the seventeenth century was Ann Bradstreet’s “I Had Eight Birds Hatcht in One Nest.” In it, she expresses the love of a mother to her children. She writes,

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>75</sup> Avery, *Behold the Child*, 17.

You had a Dam that lov'd you well,  
That did what could be done for young,  
And nurst you up till you were strong,  
And 'fore she once would let you fly,  
She shew'd you joy and misery;<sup>76</sup>

Although no longer living in her household, Bradstreet still had great concern for her children's well-being. Her careful and heartfelt words show a great parental love that must have resonated with many contemporaries and later with Puritans of Edwards' day.

The family unit itself was important in displaying the love, discipline, and education that most Puritans desired to see in their children. Compared to many other religious sects, Puritans were especially unique in their concentration on household religion. Both parents shared responsibility in praying with their children, reading them the Bible, and explaining religious matters.<sup>77</sup> Sometimes these good intentions became muddled with other societal rules and regulations. Hierarchy and respect for authority were two principles that loomed large over family interaction.

Rules were created in order to show adequate deference to these beliefs, such as bowing in the presence of parents.<sup>78</sup> These regulations sometimes wavered between being the framework of a family unit, and being its substance. Eleazer Moodey's *School of Good Manners* (1754) gives some insight into how this sensitive balance may have been exploited. Moodey includes numerous rules for children that might be considered unrealistic by modern society, such as "laugh not, but silently smile upon any occasion."<sup>79</sup> It is significant too that among the long list

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<sup>76</sup> Ann Bradstreet, "I Had Eight Birds Hatcht in One Nest (1659)," accessed August 22, 2015, <http://www.readbookonline.net/readOnline/12077/>.

<sup>77</sup> Steven Mintz, *Huck's Raft: A History of American Childhood* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 17.

<sup>78</sup> Fischer, *Albion's Seed*, 101.

<sup>79</sup> Eleazer Moodey, *School of Good Manners* (1754), reprint (Windsor, VT: Jesse Cochran, 1815), 17, accessed August 17, 2015, <https://archive.org/stream/schoolofgoodmann00wind#page/n1/mode/2up>.

of instructions, Moodey does not provide rational explanations. His book bore the fruits of a society that raised their children mostly with rules rather than reason.

With regulations so specific and unexplained, it is easy to see how they could become obsessive in some households, leading to fear and depression among the youth. Therefore, the specific administration of these rules depended largely on individual families, creating noteworthy variance in Puritan childhood experiences. Some overindulged their children, and had little discipline, while some disciplined their children but showed little affection. Some, no doubt, found a balanced combination of the two extremes.

Jonathan Edwards appears to have found that delicate balance. He at once showed great love to his children while also exercising great order. Edwards' adherence to discipline, even in his own personal life, was influenced by his father Timothy Edwards. Timothy, a preacher himself, is described by historian George Marsden as a "perfectionist, a worrier about details, a firm authoritarian who was nonetheless capable of good humor and warm affections toward his family."<sup>80</sup> Although some methods and ideology were most likely different, Jonathan inherited the same passion for order and instruction that had been exacted upon him as a child. This passion lays as the framework for how he raised his own children.

The most detailed account of Jonathan Edwards' family life comes from Samuel Hopkins' biography of him. Hopkins, a student of Edwards who lived with the family for several years, showed reverence and admiration for the household. For this reason, and in an attempt to preserve Edwards' legacy, there may be some bias and exaggeration in his words. However, given the reputation of Edwards' children, as well as the rhetoric used in sermons to youth, Hopkins' observations are insightful.

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<sup>80</sup> Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 21-22.

Hopkins notes how early every morning Edwards led his family in prayer and Bible reading, sometimes even by candlelight. Following the reading, he would ask his children questions “according to their age and capacity” before explaining the answer to them himself.<sup>81</sup> Edwards also held strict rules for the Sabbath, instructing his family to end “secular business” at sunset the day before. He then called them together and had the family pray and sing a psalm in order to sanctify the day of rest.<sup>82</sup>

Hopkins marveled at the “careful and thorough” government of Edwards’ children, and how they consequently “reverenced, esteemed, and loved him.”<sup>83</sup> When a child misbehaved, Edwards quickly “brought them to submit.”<sup>84</sup> Hopkins notes how “such prudent thorough discipline, exercised with the greatest calmness, and commonly without striking a blow, being repeated once or twice, was generally sufficient for that child; and effectually established his parental authority, and produced a cheerful obedience ever after.”<sup>85</sup> It must be noted, however, that the loving and obedient demeanor of Edwards’ children cannot be solely attributed to him. Jonathan’s wife Sarah, of whom Hopkins spoke glowingly, also exhibited a firm but affectionate spirit towards her children. In fact, Jonathan’s role as a father was, at best, inconsistent. Due to preaching engagements in other towns, personal dedication to study, and a general resistance to “worldly cares,” Sarah was left as the main caretaker of the family.<sup>86</sup> While the frequency of Edwards’ interaction with his own children may be questioned, it seems apparent that the time he did spend with them, he did with great care.

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<sup>81</sup> Samuel Hopkins. *The Life and Writings of the Late Reverend, Learned, and Pious, Mr. Jonathan Edwards, President of the College of New Jersey* (Boston, 1756), Reprint (Northampton: Andrew Wright, 1804), 46, accessed August 3, 2015, Google Books.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>86</sup> Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 251-252.

According to Hopkins' account, Edwards maintained the discipline mentality of old Puritanism in that he acted swiftly to squelch any signs of sinfulness in his children. However, the calmness in which this was done, combined with his reluctance for physical punishment, allowed him to exhibit a great deal of affection to his children that was apparently reciprocated. It seems almost certain that in this "thorough discipline," Edwards spent a great deal of time reasoning with his children and explaining to them not only why their actions were wrong, but also how they could be improved. Hopkins describes how Edwards kept a careful eye over his children, admonishing them for each wayward step, but also directing them in the right way.<sup>87</sup> Hopkins writes, "He took opportunities to treat with them in his study, singly and particularly, about their own soul's concerns; and to give them warning, exhortation, and direction, as he saw occasion."<sup>88</sup> Using the *Assembly's Shorter Catechism* as a guide, Edwards put forth great effort in teaching his children religious doctrine, making certain that they not only had knowledge of it, but truly understood it.<sup>89</sup>

This nuance for instruction was extremely important to Edwards. He reasoned with children so they could come to a true understanding of the state of their souls. Edwards recognized the desires of young people and sought to redirect them to godly behavior. His concern for them was displayed through sermons and actions that invoked both fear and love. Edwards exhibited great passion and affection toward children in bringing about conversion. This was his main focus. However, if conversion was not possible without rationality, rationality was not possible without personal understanding. In other words, mere head knowledge and memorization were only one aspect of what it meant to be truly rational. True rationality came

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<sup>87</sup> Hopkins, *The Life and Writings*, 47.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

through a deep personal belief in what was being taught. The implications that this had for formal education were numerous, and Edwards was not shy in expressing them.

## Chapter 4

### **“The Easiest Way of Reforming a People”: Edwards and Education**

Formal education for children and youth in colonial America contained a great deal of variance by region. Most middle and southern colonies focused their efforts on planting and military defense.<sup>1</sup> Strong educational systems in these areas did not develop until after the eighteenth century. New England, however, was an exception. As seen with Edwards and other Puritans, education was an important aspect of child-rearing. As historian Steven Mintz notes, “The Puritan family was not only a little church; it was also a little school.”<sup>2</sup> Parents, especially mothers, took great care in teaching their children to read and write from an early age.<sup>3</sup> They saw education as being the heart of a truly productive society.

During the seventeenth century, many New Englanders came to believe that parents were no longer adequately instructing their children.<sup>4</sup> Since education could not be fully relied upon from the home, a greater emphasis was placed on the community. A local minister or layperson often taught at newly developed private schools.<sup>5</sup> Mothers still frequently played a leading role, holding classes and giving instruction to those not old enough for formal schooling.<sup>6</sup> Unlike typical southern societies, New England was structured around close-knit communities. These “compact villages” allowed for the unparalleled success of their school systems.<sup>7</sup> Laws were enacted that required the establishment of an elementary school for any town with over fifty

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<sup>1</sup> Monica Kiefer, *American Children Through Their Books, 1700-1835* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1948), 106.

<sup>2</sup> Steven Mintz, *Huck's Raft: A History of American Childhood* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 21.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Kiefer, *American Children*, 110.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 109.

families and the establishment of an English grammar school for any town with over one-hundred families.<sup>8</sup>

With roots in the church and home, it is unsurprising that the main emphasis of New England education was religion. Qualifications for instruction depended more upon knowledge of the Bible than it did intellectual acumen.<sup>9</sup> As the education system developed, religion continued to hold the most prominent position. In fact, education in general was seen to be a religious undertaking. Knowledge of the world contributed to one's knowledge of God.<sup>10</sup> Private schools, Sunday sermons, and family instruction all combined to promote a full, intellectually stimulating, Christian view of the world.

The framework of New England schools was modeled after grammar schools and universities in England. The New England population itself had been highly educated in these areas since the establishment of the colony. By 1646, more than 130 men came to New England who had been students in English universities, with many others trained in English grammar schools.<sup>11</sup> From these traditions came a belief in education strongly grounded in classical reading and catechismal instruction. Children and youth were expected to memorize and recite aspects of Christian doctrine and be familiar with numerous literary texts. Many of these texts were in Latin, a language that characterized scholarly status.<sup>12</sup> The English educational system, however, also had a more unfortunate influence on New England. Women were largely

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<sup>8</sup> Kenneth P. Minkema, "Informing of the Child's Understanding, Influencing His Heart, and Directing its Practice": Jonathan Edwards on Education," *Acta Theologica* 2 (2011): 160, accessed July 15, 2015, <http://www.ajol.info/index.php/actat/article/view/72860>.

<sup>9</sup> Kiefer, *American Children*, 110.

<sup>10</sup> Sanford Fleming, *Children and Puritanism: The Place of Children in the Life and Thought of the New England Churches* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1933), 105.

<sup>11</sup> Gillian Avery, *Behold the Child: American Children and Their Books, 1621-1922*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 22.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

disregarded from higher education.<sup>13</sup> Many did not think that they were fit for intellectual vigor. Yet, the education of girls and young women at the primary level exceeded the norm for the rest of the colonies, and even much of the rest of the world.

Books were the primary means of education in school and at home. Poetry was a popular genre among many New Englanders, who read the likes of Spenser, Herrick, Cowley, and Cleveland. History too was a favorite. Many were familiar with Josephus, Plutarch, and Raleigh's *History of the World*.<sup>14</sup> Young children, however, did not have many options. Children's books, as a category, were sparse until the later part of the eighteenth century. A few were made popular, such as Janeway's *A Token for Children* and Wigglesworth's *The Day of Doom*. Most children were limited to the Bible and catechisms.<sup>15</sup> Whatever children did read (or had read to them) dealt with Calvinist doctrine and the necessity of conversion. It was not until the early nineteenth century that books were used as entertainment. Much of this change had to do with a growing emotional reaction to the strictness of Calvinist doctrine. With the influence of Enlightenment thinking, many people came to believe that the "morbid tone" of Puritan literature was harmful and detrimental to a child's well-being.<sup>16</sup> These books included stories of adventure and practical living, with an emphasis on virtue and piety.<sup>17</sup>

The coming of the Enlightenment had a large effect not only on children's books, but on education as a whole. As demonstrated by John Locke, education became paramount – even more so than it already was. Intellectual prowess soon began to override conversion as the most desired occurrence in one's life. With this change came the introduction of a wider range of

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<sup>13</sup> Kiefer, *American Children*, 107-108.

<sup>14</sup> Avery, *Behold the Child*, 23.

<sup>15</sup> William Sloane, *Children's Books in England and America in the Seventeenth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955), 14.

<sup>16</sup> Kiefer, *American Children*, 25.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 11-13.

human interests into the educational system. Narrow theological perspectives were less satisfying. This does not mean that religion was discarded or that Christianity was not a central component of instruction, but that the range of teaching was broadened to encompass more points of view.<sup>18</sup> However, the schools did become secularized in the sense that they were more public than private. There was a closer association with the state than with the church.<sup>19</sup>

Jonathan Edwards found himself in the middle of this important educational shift, as he was with so many other issues. His ties to Puritanism can be seen through his emphasis on conversion and use of catechisms for children. However, Edwards was also a participant in the Enlightenment. A man of many talents, Edwards saw the value in learning a variety of disciplines and points of view. He consistently remained up to date on the latest scholarship and theories, often reading books by less than orthodox men, such as John Taylor. In this sense, Edwards was on par with the newer educational trends that had begun to take shape.

Once again, it seems that Edwards tried to bridge the gap between these two different ideologies. Puritan and Enlightenment concepts of education did not have to be contradictory. In Edwards' mind, conversion could only be brought about through reason, and catechisms were only useful if understood by the intellect. He also saw the danger, as older Puritans did, in presenting young people with a plethora of ideas before they were securely rooted in Calvinist orthodoxy. Teaching Arminianism, for example, would only be useful if shown why it was false. This is why he grew concerned when traces of its teaching were rumored at Harvard College during the 1720's.<sup>20</sup>

On the other hand, Edwards realized that mere indoctrination served no real purpose. Young people could memorize all the minutia of orthodoxy but still have no real understanding.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 117.

<sup>19</sup> Fleming, *Children and Puritanism*, 105-107.

<sup>20</sup> George M. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 140.

Their intellect had to be activated, and this could only be done through a proactive teaching method and exposure to a variety of academic disciplines. Edwards himself had extensive knowledge in philosophy, science, and medicine. To Edwards, the breadth of one's knowledge not only enriched thinking, but enriched theology. His typological theory caused him to believe that all things knowable and discoverable through observation of the world also point to a deeper spiritual truth. When knowledge of the world spread horizontally, knowledge of God deepened vertically.<sup>21</sup>

Jonathan Edwards' own education began very early, under the tutelage of his father. When he was only eight years old, Jonathan is mentioned in a letter from his father Timothy to his mother Esther. In it, Timothy, who was away travelling, tells his wife to make sure Jonathan knows the "propria Quae moribus by heart."<sup>22</sup> He also instructs Jonathan to increase his amount of writing and help his sisters with their grammar.<sup>23</sup> Timothy Edwards' forceful training of his son was most likely due to his own role as a teacher in a Latin grammar school. In fact, his school developed such a strong reputation, that its students were not required to take the normal examinations before entering college.<sup>24</sup>

The vigorous academic regimen that Jonathan maintained as a child clearly helped him in his pursuit of a higher education. At only age thirteen, Jonathan attended Collegiate School, a college in Connecticut that was founded in 1701.<sup>25</sup> Teaching at the school was based off of the

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<sup>21</sup> Michael J. McClymond and Gerald R. McDermott, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 118.

<sup>22</sup> Timothy Edwards, "Timothy Edwards to Esther Edwards, August 7, 1711," in *Jonathan Edwards, 1703-1758: A Biography* by Ola Elizabeth Winslow (New York: Octagon Books, 1979), 40. This most likely refers to a segment on Latin grammar that was popular for young boys to memorize during the time period.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 40-41.

<sup>24</sup> Minkema, "Informing of the Child," 160-161.

<sup>25</sup> Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 35. While younger than most, attending college at the age of thirteen was not unheard of during the time. In fact, the average age to attend college was close to sixteen.

medieval model of quadrivium and trivium.<sup>26</sup> Students began by learning a plethora of languages during their first few years, including Hebrew, Greek, and Latin. In the following years, they concentrated on a variety of subjects, such as mathematics and metaphysics.<sup>27</sup> During Edwards' third year of school, the college moved to New Haven, where it was named after English merchant Elihu Yale. Edwards continued to pursue his degree, graduating as the valedictorian of his class.<sup>28</sup>

At the age of sixteen, Edwards decided to pursue an M.A. degree from Yale. His intense study habits and intellectual acumen often prevented him from becoming close with other students. He engaged in several disagreements with his peers and had an ugly falling out with his cousin Elisha Mix during the first year of his program. Historian George Marsden suggests that much of Edwards' tension with others may have had to do with an intense spiritual struggle that overwhelmed him during the time. He could not fully accept or understand the total sovereignty of God that lay at the heart of Calvinist teaching – a shocking fact given Edwards' later fame. However, Edwards soon had a spiritual (and intellectual) breakthrough.<sup>29</sup>

Edwards claims that he suddenly and without logical explanation became convinced that all of God's sovereign acts, including the eternal damnation of some people, were good. He had an overwhelming sense of God's justice and control over the universe. Edwards attributed this feeling to an "extraordinary influence of God's Spirit."<sup>30</sup> He came into a clear understanding of all that he had been taught since he was a child. Finally, he not only knew that he was created to "glorify and enjoy" God, but also desired it in his heart. Edwards describes a change in his own

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<sup>26</sup> Minkema, "Informing of the Child," 161. Quadrivium included the learning of algebra, geometry, astronomy, and music, while trivium included the learning of grammar, logic, and rhetoric.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 35-36.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 40-41.

<sup>30</sup> Jonathan Edwards, "Personal Narrative," in *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 16, *Letters and Personal Writings*, ed. George S. Claghorn (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 792.

countenance and demeanor that was far different than any previous “God-inspired” experience that he had ever felt. Everywhere that he turned, Edwards could now see the beauty of Christ and the “inward sweet sense” of his love.<sup>31</sup>

After talking to his father about this experience, he ventured out into the fields to further contemplate what had happened. As he stood alone, surrounded by nature, Edwards became once again enveloped in a sense of God’s profound mystery. He viewed God as “in a sweet conjunction: majesty and meekness joined together: it was a sweet and gentle, and holy majesty; and also a majestic meekness; an awful sweetness; a high, and great, and holy gentleness.”<sup>32</sup> This view of God most clearly explains the change in Edwards’ position of God’s sovereignty. No longer was God viewed in the image of a man who ruled the earth with an iron fist, but instead God became a beautiful and loving being who was beyond all human understanding. It was this vision of God that influenced all of Edwards’ later theological works. It allowed him to trust God, even when theological implications remained questionable.<sup>33</sup>

It is intriguing that Edwards’ spiritual experience occurred during the most vigorous academic portion of his life, when he was just over sixteen years old. When viewed in light of what is known about Edwards’ theology of childhood, it appears to make sense. The “extraordinary influence of God’s Spirit” that Edwards claims, as well as his subsequent change in demeanor, sounds almost identical to what he would later label “conversion.” While Edwards certainly did not display any type of aversion to Christianity earlier in life, he did lack a tangible experience such as this. Perhaps, in Edwards mind, this conversion at age sixteen was only the outward manifestation of the regeneration that had already taken place in his heart. Marsden notes how Edwards was quick to deny this experience as influenced solely by the new

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<sup>31</sup> Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 41.

<sup>32</sup> Edwards, “Personal Narrative,” 793.

<sup>33</sup> Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 42-43.

acquisition of human reason through his studies.<sup>34</sup> Edwards believed that conversion and the assent to God's higher form of reasoning could only be influenced by the Holy Spirit, an occurrence as miraculous and sudden as opening the eyes of the blind.

On the other hand, it seems more than coincidental that this conversion took place during the height of Edwards' academic studies. It does not appear that this truth was lost on Edwards either. Based on what has already been described as Edwards' theology of regeneration and conversion, it is likely that Edwards' own experience influenced his thinking. Conversion could only be brought about by the sovereign work of God in a sinner's heart. It was played out in a person's life through a supernatural experience and change of demeanor. However, the use of reason and the intellect almost always surrounded this occurrence. They helped to fertilize the soil. After all, Edwards' experience in the field occurred directly after conversing about God with his father. While it is unknown exactly what was said between them, it seems possible that a rational and intellectual conversation about God fostered grounds for such an experience. Like Edwards at age sixteen, the soil would be most fertile, and a person's heart most malleable, during the early years of life. This formula held true for Edwards, and there is little doubt that he believed it would hold true for others as well. The chances of conversion were increased by the use of reason, and the use of reason could best be realized through proper education. Edwards wrote it in his doctrine and practiced it in his life.

After temporarily serving as a pastor for a church in New York City, and later Bolton, Connecticut, Edwards then accepted a position as a tutor at Yale College in June 1724. Edwards the student became Edwards the teacher. When he arrived at Yale, however, things were in disarray. Students, although training for ministry, exhibited a number of behavioral problems. Drinking and rowdiness were growing problems. The structured and disciplined Edwards found

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 41.

it difficult to keep his pupils in line. Already awkward around others, there seemed to be a real disconnect as he tried to enforce upon them an array of rules.<sup>35</sup>

Just as taxing as the disorderly students was Edwards' teaching schedule. Teaching two classes, Edwards was forced to find preparation in his own time since the days were strictly regimented. Each day began at 6 A.M. and included all day recitations with only a brief lunch break. Four to five P.M. was for prayer, and the lights had to be out at night by eleven. Still, Edwards attempted to not only complete his duties as a tutor, but also find time to engage in his own academic pursuits. However, Edwards remained unhappy and distressed for most of his time at the school.<sup>36</sup> He had grown accustomed to the vigor of academia, but could never come to terms with what he saw to be the moral decay of his students. Edwards' frustrations as a tutor and later engagement to Sarah Pierpont signaled a need for change. In 1727 he accepted a position as assistant pastor to his grandfather Solomon Stoddard in Northampton.<sup>37</sup>

Edwards' time as a tutor at Yale most likely had a large impact on his later view of childhood. His teaching gave him experience speaking to young people, a practice that he continued to employ throughout his pastorate. Edwards' frustration with the youth at Yale also seems to have motivated his later thinking. He developed a complete disgust and repugnance toward the type of immoral behavior that he was constantly forced to correct. Perhaps this is why he was so adamant about eliminating any signs of this during his time at Northampton. His scarring experience provided the grounds from which he would focus on teaching and instructing godliness in children at an early age. He sought their conversion before such immoral actions could take hold. This (not hell and damnation, as Greven suggests) was his true obsession. It was during his Northampton tenure that Edwards oversaw massive religious revivals among young

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 110.

people. From 1734-1735, Edwards succeeded in “transforming the youth culture of Northampton.”<sup>38</sup> Children willingly gave up frolicking and sexual immorality, and instead held prayer meetings every Thursday evening. His emphasis on conversion led to over three-hundred new members in only a three month span.<sup>39</sup> However, the Awakening eventually caused a generational conflict that Edwards could not endure. As revival waned, his congregation became increasingly unsatisfied.

After being dismissed from his Northampton pastorate, Edwards continued to look for opportunities to impact children. In 1751 he became a pastor and missionary to Indians in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, where he also worked to develop the schooling of Indian children.<sup>40</sup> His thoughts regarding the instruction of these students are of special note, because Native Americans during the time were considered the antithesis of education and civilization.<sup>41</sup> In order to provide grounds for a hopeful conversion, Edwards would have to start at the metaphorical “square one.” Indians were both unconverted and had very little knowledge of English learning. In a letter to Joseph Bellamy in June 1756, Edwards advises him to teach the children the *Assembly’s Catechism* as well as proper prayer, arithmetic, and English.<sup>42</sup> In his refinement of Indian schools, English, interestingly enough, is where Edwards decided to begin. He noticed what he believed to be a major problem in the teaching of English not only to Indians, but to people in general.

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 155.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 160.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., xiv.

<sup>41</sup> R. Todd Romero, “Colonizing Childhood: Religion, Gender, and Indian Children in Southern New England, 1620-1720,” in *Children in Colonial America*, ed. James Marten (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 40-43. Romero describes how Puritan logic influenced missionary programs in asserting that Indians needed to be civilized before they could become Christian. It is interesting to note also, that even after conversion, many Indian men and women still maintained aspects of their old religion. They did not necessarily see Christianity as contradicting their long-held belief in spirits and the supernatural.

<sup>42</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “A217: Letter to Joseph Bellamy (1756),” in *Works of Jonathan Edwards Online*, vol. 32, *Correspondence by, to, and about Edwards and His Family*, ed. Jonathan Edwards Center (New Haven: Yale University Press), accessed August 15, 2015.

Edwards observed that as young people began to learn the English language, they made quick progress in emulating the sounds of certain marks, and soon learned to identify words and speak full sentences. However, there often appeared to be a disconnect between speaking English and understanding it. He writes, “the children learn to read, to make such sounds on the sight of such marks; but know nothing what they say, and have neither profit nor entertainment by what they read, they neglect it when they leave school, and quickly lose [it].”<sup>43</sup> This lack of understanding, Edwards claimed, undermined the whole point of learning a language. He had always felt that simple rote education was counterproductive.<sup>44</sup>

Indeed, the principles that Edwards saw regarding the learning of English extended to all of education. Instruction in general seemed to focus mostly on memorization and recitation. The problem with this was that children could be raised in sound Christian doctrine, and think themselves converted, but never come to a real heartfelt understanding of the truths learned. In this sense, education would not help conversion, but hinder it.

When examining the writings of people who lived during the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, this seems to be the case for many of them. John Barnard, a Massachusetts Congregationalist minister, is a primary example of this, writing, “My good father also instructed me, and made a little closet for me to retire to for my morning and evening devotion. But, alas! How childish and hypocritical were all my pretensions to piety, there being little or no serious thoughts of God and religion in me.”<sup>45</sup> Barnard’s education and piety, although diligent, lacked initial effectiveness in reaching his heart. Barnard eventually reached conversion, but his

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<sup>43</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “Letter to Speaker Thomas Hubbard (1751),” in *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 16, *Letters and Personal Writings*, ed. George S. Claghorn (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 404.

<sup>44</sup> Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 389.

<sup>45</sup> John Barnard, *The Autobiography of John Barnard* (Boston: J. H. Eastburn, 1836), 179, Hathi Trust Digital Library, accessed July 27, 2015, <http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015003305235;view=1up;seq=1;size=75>.

ambivalence during childhood was exactly what Edwards tried to prevent in his own parish. He believed everything should be done to promote conversion as early as possible. Edwards recognized that in order to promote conversion, education had to appeal to reason. He concludes, “the child should be taught to understand *things*, as well as *words*.”<sup>46</sup> To Edwards, words were only symbols for much deeper realities.

Edwards’ use of the term “understanding” is also of special note. Historian Kenneth P. Minkema writes, “In his [Edwards’] treatises, particularly that on freedom of will, he identified understanding as the chief cognitive faculty over against will. Understanding for him was the faculty whereby a person judged, discerned, and speculated.”<sup>47</sup> However, in Edwards’ concept of “understanding,” the place of reason becomes confused. Edwards identifies understanding as “the whole faculty of perception or apprehension, and not merely what is called reason or judgment.”<sup>48</sup> In this sense, understanding appears to be of a higher faculty than reason, although reason is a vital aspect of it. Yet, Edwards also suggested that when a child comes to an understanding of something, his “learning will be rendered pleasant, entertaining and profitable, as his mind will gradually open and expand with knowledge, and his capacity for reasoning improved.”<sup>49</sup> Here, understanding appears to contribute to greater reasoning.

Regardless of the nuances that Edwards may articulate, the clear point exhibited by Edwards is that the two are intertwined. In a sense, appeals to reason inform the understanding, and a greater understanding leads to higher reasoning. Each contributes to, and is essential for the other. The goal of education, in Edwards’ mind, was to give students a deep and profound

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<sup>46</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “Letter to William Pepperrell (1751),” in *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 16, *Letters and Personal Writings*, ed. George S. Claghorn (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 408.

<sup>47</sup> Minkema, “Informing of the Child,” 165.

<sup>48</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Freedom of the Will (1754)*, in *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 1, ed. Paul Ramsey (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), 148.

<sup>49</sup> Edwards, “Letter to William Pepperrell (1751),” 408.

awareness of truth in the world around them, as well as a conviction to act. He sums this idea up by simply stating, “The easiest way of reforming a people in the world . . . is by education.”<sup>50</sup> For this purpose, reason and understanding were paramount.

Edwards placed the onus of this understanding on the teacher. It is ultimately up to the instructor to make sure that students truly comprehend what they are being taught. To do this, Edwards suggested that teachers not only explain the meaning of things, but engage students in conversation about them. They should partake in dialogue that promotes the exchange of questions.<sup>51</sup> In his letter to Joseph Bellamy, Edwards also suggested providing the students with a map of Canaan, so that they could visualize the Bible stories that they read.<sup>52</sup> In the *Miscellanies*, Edwards describes an instance where he tried to convince a boy that a block two inches square was eight times as big as a block one inch square. When the boy did not believe him, Edwards demonstrated the concept by building the structure in a woodshed.<sup>53</sup> In these two cases, Edwards reveals himself as an early advocate for multiple learning styles. Memorization, lecturing, conversational dialogue, and visual learning were all tools that should be used by a teacher to promote understanding in students.

In employing these techniques, the instructor would “accustom the child, from its infancy, to think and reflect, and to beget in it an early taste for knowledge, and a regularly increasing appetite for it.”<sup>54</sup> This statement by Edwards reveals how important he believed it was to engage children in education from an early age. In “thinking and reflecting” Edwards had in mind an opportunity for young people to consider the reasonableness of their acquired

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<sup>50</sup> Minkema, “Informing of the Child,” 163. Minkema cites this reference from Edwards’ sermon notes on educating children.

<sup>51</sup> Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 389-390.

<sup>52</sup> Edwards, “A217: Letter to Joseph Bellamy (1756).”

<sup>53</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “Miscellanies No. 652,” in *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 18, *The "Miscellanies,"* (Entry Nos. 501-832), ed. Eva Chamberlain (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 192. See Minkema, “Informing of the Child,” 159-160.

<sup>54</sup> Edwards, “Letter to William Pepperrell (1751),” 408.

knowledge in light of God's sovereignty. Edwards saw reflection as the catalyst for reason, and reason as the grounds for conversion. To him, conversion was the purpose of education.

Regarding the education of Indian children, he writes to William Pepperrell,

In order to promote the salvation of the children, which is the main design of the whole Indian establishment at this place, I think that, beside their attending public worship on the sabbath, and the daily worship of the family, and catechizing in the school, and frequent counsels and warnings given them, when all together, by their teachers; each child should, from time to time, be dealt with singly, particularly and closely, about the state and concerns of his soul; and particular care should be taken to teach and direct each child, concerning the duty of secret prayer, and the duty pressed and enforced on every one; and care should be taken, that all may have proper opportunity and convenience for it.<sup>55</sup>

Edwards, just as he did with his own children, emphasized the delicate care of children's souls.

This was the passion of Edwards' heart more than any type of emphasis on knowledge or intellectual prestige.

Jonathan Edwards was not the only pastor and theologian to advocate for better education during the eighteenth century. Edwards' frustration with memorization and lack of understanding in children were perhaps influenced by Isaac Watts. In his *Assembly's Catechism*, Watts stresses that catechisms are only effective if the children understand what they are saying. If they are merely reciting words, the catechism is useless.<sup>56</sup> In addition, he thought that it may be necessary to use more familiar forms of speech to children, rather than the difficult language expressed in the Bible.<sup>57</sup> This use of simple language would increase the likelihood that children were not only familiar with Bible stories, but really comprehended them. These ideas were also clearly

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<sup>55</sup> Edwards, "Letter to William Pepperrell (1751)," 411-412.

<sup>56</sup> Isaac Watts, *The Assembly's Catechism with Notes: Or, the Shorter Catechism Composed by the Assembly of Divines at Westminster with a Brief Explication of the More Difficult Words and Phrases Contained in it, for the Instruction of Youth* (London: 1743), fifth Edition, 25, accessed August 7, 2015, Google Books.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

reflected in Edwards, who spoke plainly to children and used Watt's *Catechism* as his primary tool for childhood education.

John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, also saw value in restoring rationality through learning. He writes, "But as sickness and diseases have created the necessity of medicines and physicians, so the disorders of our rational nature have introduced the necessity of education and tutors."<sup>58</sup> Wesley believed that Christianity was just as important in general education as it was in "the doctrines of religion."<sup>59</sup> Wesley, like Edwards, was heavily influenced by the Enlightenment. His connection between "rational nature" and the "necessity of education" shows a strong influence from John Locke, whom he read.

What separates Wesley from Edwards and others, however, was the former's continued adherence to the "breaking of the will." Wesley warned parents not to praise their children or give them anything that they cry for. Children should be commended "exceeding sparingly" and only "with the utmost caution."<sup>60</sup> Wesley believed that rationality played a role in education, but did not continue this line of thinking through to the implications of child-rearing. His advocacy for harsh discipline and lack of affection shows a disconnect with an appeal to rational thought. Punishment was more important than talking rationally to children about sin and bad behavior. Wesley's child-rearing methods were most likely derived from his parents, who governed their children strictly. His mother Susanna later advised him, "To inform the understanding is a work of time ... but the subjecting the will is a thing that must be done at once, and the sooner the

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<sup>58</sup> John Wesley, "Sermon 96: On the Education of Children," in *The Works of John Wesley: The Bicentennial Edition*, Ministry Matters, pg., accessed September 9, 2015, <http://www.ministrymatters.com.ezproxy.liberty.edu:2048/library/#/000wjw-new/7b98116986c09e7e5e31bb1748929a27/on-the-education-of-children.html>.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

better.”<sup>61</sup> Wesley grew up as one of nineteen siblings, with only nine living to adulthood.<sup>62</sup> Given the large number of children, tight order and discipline was necessary. In addition, his family’s experience with childhood death most likely led him to treat children more impersonally.

For Edwards, rationality as a means to conversion was at the heart of both child-rearing and education. Approaches to the two could not be separated. He spoke to very young children on a personal level, and believed that education would also curb their behavior. However, in order to be effective in this, education had to appeal to children’s rationality and understanding. Edwards saw that this was unfortunately not the case for most grammar schools.

Traditional English grammar schools were modeled after Felix Krynngston’s 1627 treatise, *Ludus Literarius*. In this work, Krynngston makes the case that the arts are the key to “perfection of knowledge.”<sup>63</sup> However, it is grammar that is the perfection of arts. He writes, “Man differs but in speech and reason (that is, Grammar and Logicke) from beasts: whereof reason is of Nature; speech (in respect of the present variation) is of humane institution.”<sup>64</sup> Therefore, since people are capable of reason through nature, speech is the most necessary aspect of education, since it is impossible to acquire “without a guide.”<sup>65</sup>

This form of thinking was the basis for schools in England and New England throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It explains why there was such an emphasis on grammar and the learning of languages. However, as Edwards came to see, this emphasis on grammar did not pay adequate attention to reason. In a sense, Krynngston had the formula

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<sup>61</sup> Susanna Wesley, in Philip Greven, *The Protestant Temperament: Patters of Child-rearing, Religious Experience, and the Self in Early America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 38.

<sup>62</sup> Stephen Tomkins, *John Wesley: A Biography* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 10.

<sup>63</sup> Felix Krynngston, *Ludus Literarius; or the Grammar School* (London, 1627), reprint in *Ludus Literarius or the Grammar School*, ed. E. T. Campagnac (London: Constable & Co. LTD, 1917), ix, accessed August 14, 2015, <https://archive.org/stream/ludusliterarius00campgoog#page/n46/mode/2up>.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, ix-x.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, x.

backwards. If education did not first appeal to reason, all other knowledge would be useless. Edwards' recognition of this reveals his break with traditional teaching and adherence to new Enlightenment ways of thinking. The primary role that reason played in Edwards' theology impacted his view of the educational system. To him, the English grammar school was no longer the best model.

The most extensive study of Edwards and education is an article by Kenneth P. Minkema in which he shows that Edwards criticized the type of teaching practiced in English grammar schools. Minkema notes that Edwards "defined a 'successful' system largely as anything that schools among the English were not."<sup>66</sup> This is a striking fact, because it also means that he rejected the style of instruction that he had been taught by his own father. Edwards' renunciation of a system that is typically seen as "Puritan" shows the strong influence of Enlightenment ideals. Once again, Edwards may be reflecting the implications of John Locke. While Locke affirmed the general usefulness of memorization and recitation, he also saw its limitations. "But I fear this faculty of the mind is not capable of much help and amendment in general, by any exercise or endeavor of ours, at least not by that used upon this pretence in grammar-schools."<sup>67</sup> Locke's early expression of doubt toward the English grammar schools most likely either confirmed Edwards' suspicions, or made him more aware of the school's shortcomings.

Minkema claims that Edwards' own pedagogical episteme combined a variety of methods. As mentioned earlier, Edwards advocated for a Socratic style of instruction, in which dialogue and questioning were emphasized. This intimate interaction between student and

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<sup>66</sup> Minkema, "Informing of the Child," 164.

<sup>67</sup> John Locke, *The Educational Writings of John Locke*, ed. John William Adamson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922), 121, accessed September 3, 2015, <https://archive.org/stream/educationalwriti00lockrich#page/n9/mode/2up>.

teacher, he believed, was the best way to promote reason and understanding.<sup>68</sup> Minkema mentions that while Edwards was “no advocate of an open classroom” by modern standards, his ideas promoted an openness between teacher and student that was anything but traditional.<sup>69</sup> This concept appears to be reflected in Edwards’ own child-rearing practices, where he would speak individually to children about the state of their souls, tell them stories to benefit their learning, and ask them questions pertaining to their salvation.

According to Minkema, the other method that Edwards encouraged was medieval scholastic disputation.<sup>70</sup> This was a form of debate designed to show theological or scientific truth without necessarily relying on Scripture-proofs. Edwards employed this method in his M.A. *Quaestio*, in which he argued exclusively from the “mutual consistency of God’s attributes” and the logical laws of non-contradiction.<sup>71</sup> While certainly not a new method, it was one that made rote education nearly impossible. When made to rely on a variety of faculties for argumentation, students would almost certainly come to a strong understanding of the topic.

Edwards’ ideas for education were also unique in another sense. Edwards appears to have been a rare, early supporter of co-education. While girls were often given a basic primary education in New England, they rarely received anything more. If they did, it usually included only domestic skills, such as embroidery, painting, and sewing.<sup>72</sup> Edwards, however, wanted girls to be free from “the gross defects of the ordinary method of teaching among the English,” and instead instructed the same way as the boys.<sup>73</sup> Minkema suggests that Edwards’ thinking in this regard may have been influenced by his own childhood experience with “ten well-educated

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<sup>68</sup> Minkema, “Informing of the Child,” 164.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 165.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 164.

<sup>71</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *MA Quaestio*, in *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 14, *Sermons and Discourses, 1743-1758*, ed. Kenneth P. Minkema (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 60-61.

<sup>72</sup> Minkema, “Informing of the Child,” 166.

<sup>73</sup> Edwards, “Letter to William Pepperrell (1751),” 407.

sisters.” He also curiously notes that it may have been a common view among “provincial gentry culture.”<sup>74</sup> While these influences could be true, it might also be the case that Edwards’ concept of co-education was influenced by his theology. If he in fact believed that rationality and education paved the way for conversion, then it should not be limited by gender or ethnicity. Girls too needed to show signs of conversion and development in godliness, and education was a key factor in promoting that goal.

Edwards’ ideas of co-education also did not stop with gender. He pushed for the mixing of both English and Indian students in the classrooms at Stockbridge – a unique approach for the time. He believed that this combination would at once promote the understanding of the English language among the Indians, and also the understanding of Indian languages among the English. In effect, he could kill two birds with one stone. Indians could be civilized, and the English could become missionaries.<sup>75</sup> This concept reemphasizes two important things about Edwards. First, it shows his innovation in learning. Students could learn best not when memorizing facts, but when actively engaged and exposed to them. Secondly, it again shows his educational ties to conversion. Indians had to become civilized in order to be converted, and English children had to learn other languages in order to convert native people groups.

The specific educational curriculum that Edwards advocated for children and young people was a combination of disciplines. He believed that music was an important part of education by enriching knowledge and providing praise to God. Minkema notes how it was centrally connected to his philosophical theology as well. Edwards often used musical terms to speak of the Trinity and associated harmony with God’s divine beauty and creation.<sup>76</sup> In his

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<sup>74</sup> Minkema, “Informing of the Child,” 166.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid. Minkema also here points out that this notion shows Edwards to be a man of his time. He viewed native peoples not simply as culturally different, but also as barbaric and brutish in regards to civility.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 167.

article, Minkema also expounds upon a number of books that Edwards listed as suggestions for various subjects. These included several books on the English language, such as Thomas Dyche's *The Spelling Dictionary*, as well as books on philosophy, science, world culture, geography, British history, and gospel history.<sup>77</sup> He also included books related to Christian apologetics, such as *A defence of natural and revealed religion* by Gilbert Burnet and *The divine legation of Moses* by William Warburton.<sup>78</sup> While all of these books were known for their scholarly acumen, Edwards also viewed them with an eye towards religion. Since Edwards' main purpose in education was conversion, these books, he believed, could serve a specific purpose in revealing God's truth and beauty.

While Edwards was against the rote learning of catechisms, he was not against catechisms altogether. He believed that catechisms, even memorization, was useful for instruction as long as the student understood the context. As mentioned, Edwards used Watts *Assembly's Catechism* when teaching children, and recommended its use at the Stockbridge Indian School as well.<sup>79</sup> Edwards also developed his own series of questions that he believed were essential for understanding. These can be found in several of his works, including "Questions on Theological Subjects" and "Questions for Young People."<sup>80</sup> These questions ranged in difficulty and covered a variety of subjects. In general, Edwards wanted students to know the chronology of the Bible, geography of the Middle East, history of the Church, and connections between the Old and New Testaments.<sup>81</sup> Those who became proficient in these areas could move on to more challenging questions, such as identifying "the biggest slaughter in one

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 168.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 169.

<sup>79</sup> Edwards, "A217: Letter to Joseph Bellamy (1756)."

<sup>80</sup> Minkema, "Informing of the Child," 176.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 166.

battle that we read of in Scripture history,” and other seemingly obscure facts.<sup>82</sup> Edwards desired for students to immerse themselves in the Bible, so that they could not only understand *it*, but understand everything *through* it.

According to Minkema, the educational tradition employed by Jonathan Edwards was loosely passed down through subsequent generations. The New Divinity, led by Samuel Hopkins and Jonathan Edwards Jr., promoted Edwards’ theological ideas through academic writing and the formation of new schools. The teaching of these schools continued to spread and provided the underpinnings for more religious awakenings in the nineteenth century.<sup>83</sup> The importance of rationality in his theology led Edwards to emphasize “understanding” in education. He was unsatisfied with what he believed were dry and unproductive teaching methods. In this respect, Edwards significantly impacted the American educational system. His theology, or at least versions of it, remains a prominent aspect of religious education even today. However, while Edwards’ theological impact on education is clear, his pedagogical impact receives much less attention. In fact, in many cases, Edwards’ remembered legacy is much different.

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<sup>82</sup> Jonathan Edwards, “Questions on Theological Subjects,” in *Works of Jonathan Edwards Online*, vol. 39, *Church and Pastoral Documents*, ed. Jonathan Edwards Center (New Haven: Yale University Press), accessed July 20, 2015.

<sup>83</sup> Minkema, “Informing of the Child,” 183-185.

## Conclusion

### **A Complex Character: Edwards' Childhood Legacy**

In 1890 Oliver Wendell Holmes classified the teachings of Jonathan Edwards as “Ancient barbarism.”<sup>1</sup> Edwards had been dead for well over a century, yet his theology of childhood remained an object of critique. Men like Holmes were abhorred by Edwards’ harsh language and notions of hell, which they saw as standing in stark contrast to the common knowledge of childhood beauty, helplessness, and ignorance. However, Edwards was also respected and revered. Holmes labeled him as “a reasoner who knew what he was talking about” and as a man who “was involved in the premises of the faith he accepted.”<sup>2</sup> This apparent paradox presented by Holmes is clarified in his mind by simply labeling Edwards a man of his time. He writes, “If Jonathan Edwards had lived long enough, I have no doubt his creed would have softened into a kindly, humanized belief.”<sup>3</sup> To Holmes and many others, Edwards was a brilliant theologian and philosopher who was restrained by ideology that had not yet evolved into modernity. Edwards’ view of childhood was old and outdated. He had no relevance to the new “Enlightened” perspective.

Holmes may indeed be correct in suggesting that Edwards’ view of childhood would change if he lived in a more modern era. From a historical perspective, however, it is impossible to place Edwards in any other context than his own. Historical analysis reveals him as a man too complex for cursory moral judgments, such as the ones imposed by Holmes. Instead, it shows Edwards to be an important precursor to more modern ideas of childhood and child-rearing.

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<sup>1</sup> Oliver Wendell Holmes, *The Writings of Oliver Wendell Holmes: Over the Teacups: 1895*, vol. 4 (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, and Company, 1899), 40, accessed July 28, 2015, Google Books.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 252.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

According to historian David Bebbington, Edwards' theological teachings persisted among certain groups well into the nineteenth century. He notes that these ideas became increasingly difficult "to persuade minds affected by the fresh currents of thought."<sup>4</sup> The problem, however, at least regarding his views on childhood, was not that his ideas were unconvincing, but that they were misunderstood. Edwards' complex and nuanced view of the subject made it easily susceptible to incorrect or exaggerated interpretation. He was most commonly seen as the antithesis to the modern view of childhood, rather than a contributor to it. Yet, as a bridge between Puritan Calvinism and Enlightenment thinking, Edwards' view of childhood was unique for his time. The growing repugnance toward Calvinist teaching in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries caused many to dismiss Edwards all together.

Holmes seems to encompass the general perception of Edwards in regards to natural depravity and infant damnation, which were discussed in chapter one. Most people during the nineteenth and later centuries saw Edwards as nothing more than a preacher of fire and brimstone. Holmes expressed frustration with Edwards' adherence to original sin. He does not understand how a child could be "punished for what he could not help."<sup>5</sup> He also quotes John Morley in confirming that the notion of eternal torment is the "most frightful idea that has ever corroded human character."<sup>6</sup> The growing concept of infant innocence during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries seems to have fueled these statements and added to the harsh characterization of Edwards. Holmes and others certainly are accurate in recognizing that Edwards did hold to these views, but their portrayal is not a complete representation.

Edwards also spoke of regeneration before signs of conversion, alluding to the idea that

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<sup>4</sup> David W. Bebbington, "Remembered Around the World: The International Scope of Edwards's Legacy," in *Jonathan Edwards at Home and Abroad*, ed. David W. Kling and Douglas Sweeney (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), 188-190.

<sup>5</sup> Holmes, *Over the Teacups*, 252.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 253.

infants could receive salvation. Men such as Lyman Beecher, who wrote in 1828, sought to clarify much of the writings surrounding Edwards. He asserted that Edwards never actually believed infants are punished, only that they are deserving of punishment. Instead, he writes, “All those that die in infancy, man (for aught we know,) belong to the election of grace; and be predestinated to the adoption of children.”<sup>7</sup> A form of this idea was quietly adopted by members of the New Divinity, such as Timothy Dwight who asserts, “Multitudes, there is every reason to suppose, die so soon after believing, as to render it impossible for them to perform any acts of obedience whatever.”<sup>8</sup> While Edwards is very seldom given credit for his influence of these ideas, it seems plausible that the later belief that God’s grace could somehow mysteriously cover infants at death may indeed owe much of its detail to him.

As mentioned in chapter two, men such as Horace Bushnell also attacked Edwards in regards to childhood nurture. Bushnell contended that Edwards’ emphasis on conversion and individualism caused him to make “nothing of the family, and the church, and the organic powers God has constituted as vehicles of grace.”<sup>9</sup> In this sense, Edwards’ fame for revivalism worked against him. His role in the “great work of God” at Northampton, in which hundreds of young people showed signs of conversion, detracted from the numerous sermons that he gave on family and child-rearing. Bushnell stood opposed to Edwards by asserting that children could be developed into Christians through proper nurture. He did not believe that children needed a

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<sup>7</sup> Lyman Beecher, “Future Punishment of Infants Not a Doctrine of Calvinism,” in *Spirit of the Pilgrims* 1, no.1 (January 1828): 50, accessed July 21, 2015, [https://archive.org/stream/spiritofpilgrims\\_01bost#](https://archive.org/stream/spiritofpilgrims_01bost#).

<sup>8</sup> Timothy Dwight, *Theology Explained and Defended in a Series of Sermons* (New Haven: T. Dwight & Son, 1839), 339, accessed September 6, 2015, <https://archive.org/stream/theologyexplain23dwiggooog#page/n5/mode/2up>.

<sup>9</sup> Horace Bushnell, *Christian Nurture*, original publication 1861, reprint (New York: Scribner, Armstrong, & Co., 1876), 188, accessed August 15, 2015, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/bushnell/nurture.i.html>.

specific sign of conversion to be saved.<sup>10</sup>

It is interesting, however, that in combating the notions of Edwards, Bushnell actually typifies him. In trying to show that children can become Christians without a sign of conversion, he writes, “for it is conceivable that regenerate character may exist, long before it is fully and formally developed.”<sup>11</sup> In this phrase, Bushnell sounds almost identical to Edwards in proposing that regeneration can occur before conversion. Bushnell also argues that baptism has no real effect if it is done by non-Christian parents. He suggests that in baptism, the regeneration of the child is not actual, but “presumptive,” based on the idea that the parent’s “own faith and character will be reproduced in the child, and grow up in his growth, and that thus the propriety of the rite as a seal of faith will not be violated.”<sup>12</sup> Again, Edwards’ thoughts on baptism reflect this exact same principle. The hope for regeneration and conversion in children is most often directly correlated to the faith and disposition of their parents. In fact, Edwards specifically abolished the Half-Way Covenant in order to promote the baptism of children with more godly parents.

Bushnell’s *Christian Nurture*, while controversial at first, gained wide popularity several years after its publication in 1847. Historian David Sims suggests that his book initiated the beginning of modern Protestant education.<sup>13</sup> Sandford Ford goes so far as to say that with Bushnell’s writings, “The child was once more put where Jesus placed him, and the church was called back to her noblest task.”<sup>14</sup> Bushnell’s “rescue” of Christian childhood has had a large impact on modern Christian conceptions. However, Edwards’ positive influence on the work is

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<sup>10</sup> David Sims, *The Child in American Evangelicalism and the Problem of Affluence: A Theological Anthropology of the Affluent American Evangelical Child in Late Modernity* (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2009), 35-38.

<sup>11</sup> Bushnell, *Christian Nurture*, 10.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 46-47.

<sup>13</sup> Sims, *The Child in American Evangelicalism and the Problem of Affluence*, 36.

<sup>14</sup> Sandford Fleming, *Children and Puritanism: The Place of Children in the Life and Thought of the New England Churches* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1933), 207.

almost never mentioned. Yet, it seems unlikely that such similarities between the two men, as shown above, are mere coincidence. Ironically, Bushnell himself gives credit to Samuel Hopkins as a strong inspiration for his ideas. This acknowledgement of Hopkins provides a direct connection to Edwards. Even still, many of the unorthodox notions expressed by Bushnell have seemingly made adherents to Edwards hesitant to admit such a link.

Edwards' harsh language to children, discussed in chapter three, has also come to characterize his legacy. Edwards is seen as a man who labeled children as "vipers" and frequently used the rod for punishment. Both Bushnell and Holmes expressed this view of Edwards.<sup>15</sup> Remnants of it are still seen with historians such as Philip Greven, who highlights Edwards' use of fear in rhetoric to children.<sup>16</sup> Holmes narrates an imagined conversation between Edwards and one of his young sons, in which his son cries, "Papa, nurse tells me that you say God hates me worse than He hates one of those horrid ugly snakes that crawl all round. Does God hate me so?"<sup>17</sup> Edwards coldheartedly responds, "Alas! My child, it is but too true. So long as you are out of Christ you are as a viper, and worse than a viper, in his sight."<sup>18</sup> To Holmes and most others during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Edwards represented everything that had been wrong with Puritan child-rearing.

While Edwards was most known for his harsh language, his promotion of childhood happiness was rarely acknowledged. However, it appears that Edwards may have had at least a subtle influence in this regard. In John Witherspoon's 1797 *Letters on Education*, he emphasizes

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<sup>15</sup> Sims, *The Child in American Evangelicalism and the Problem of Affluence*, 56.

<sup>16</sup> Philip Greven, *Spare the Child: The Religious Roots of Punishment and the Psychological Impact of Physical Abuse* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 64.

<sup>17</sup> Holmes, *Over the Teacups*, 249.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 249.

the importance of religion for the “eternal happiness and salvation of children.”<sup>19</sup> The idea that children can be happy through godly activity shows a strong connection to Edwardsean thinking. Over twenty years later, Samuel Spring, an American Revolutionary War chaplain, delivered a series of sermons to young people. In them, Spring uses language strikingly similar to Edwards. He believed that children are “capable of receiving some of the most important truths of the gospel when they are easily connected, and plainly expressed.”<sup>20</sup> In addition, he wrote, “I shall shew children, what it is to obey their parents in the Lord: and secondly in what respect, it is right or beautiful.”<sup>21</sup> Each of these statements by Spring reveal concepts advocated by Edwards. Like Spring, Edwards spoke rationally to children and taught gospel truth to them at very early ages.

It may be questioned whether or not both Witherspoon and Spring were influenced by Edwards, or simply by other Enlightenment thinkers. An assertive stance in either direction would be mere conjecture. However, Spring’s notion that obedience to parents is “beautiful” indicates a possible Edwardsean inspiration. Beauty and happiness in obeying God’s law was a notion that Edwards articulated in more detail than any other preacher during his time. Spring also spoke multiple times of “lovely dispositions,” a phrase that Edwards used frequently.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, it seems likely that Edwards had at least an indirect influence on the language used by men such as Witherspoon, Spring, and others throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The legacy of Jonathan Edwards and education, mentioned in chapter four, is mostly associated with the establishment of the New Divinity. Through men such as Samuel Hopkins,

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<sup>19</sup> John Witherspoon, *Letters on the Education of Children and On Marriage*, reprint (Andover: Plagg and Goul, 1901), 22, accessed September 19, 2015, <https://archive.org/stream/lettersoneducat00withgoog#page/n4/mode/2up>.

<sup>20</sup> Samuel Spring, *Three Sermons to Little Children: On the Nature and Beauty of the Dutiful Tempter* (1819), Evans Early American Imprint Collection, University of Michigan, 3, accessed August 14, 2015, <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/evans/N14361.0001.001/1:2?rgn=div1;view=fulltext>.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

Jonathan Edwards Jr., and Timothy Dwight, many of Jonathan Edwards' teachings were preserved and passed on to the following generations. However, his impact on Christian education as a whole has received almost no attention. Edwards is commonly listed as another adherent to the Puritan idea of Biblical and catechismal instruction.<sup>23</sup> The Sunday School movement, first begun by English printer Robert Raikes in the 1780's, continued with this method through the early nineteenth century. The purpose of the Sunday School was to enhance church teaching and prepare young people for church membership.<sup>24</sup>

By the mid-nineteenth century, there was a noticeable shift in the educational method of the schools. Influenced by the Enlightenment, it seems that the Sunday School movement came to deny any negative notions regarding the capabilities of children and rejected the teaching of catechisms. They, like other Christian thinkers during the time, situated themselves as the anti-Edwards. They recognized a need to disassociate themselves from a man who believed in children's natural depravity and catechisms for instruction.

An 1845 Sunday School tract by Unitarian minister William Ellery Channing asserted that "A catechism is a skeleton, a dead letter, a petrification. Wanting life, it can give none. A cold abstraction, it cannot but make religion repulsive to pupils whose age demands that truth should be embodied, set before their eyes, bound up with real life."<sup>25</sup> Channing saw the detriment in teaching bland doctrine to children. However, in doing so, he shows himself more an adherent to Edwards than a cynic. Channing rejected catechisms on the same grounds that Edwards called for school reform. Both were influenced by the Enlightenment and saw that knowledge without understanding was useless.

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<sup>23</sup> Fleming, *Children and Puritanism*, 110.

<sup>24</sup> Gillian Avery, *Behold the Child: American Children and Their Books, 1621-1922*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 96-97.

<sup>25</sup> William Ellery Channing, "The Sunday School," in the *Works of William E. Channing* (Boston: James Monroe, 1845), 450, accessed August 14, 2015, Google Books.

Channing continues, “Christ is to be taught; and by this I mean, not any mystical doctrine about his nature, not the doctrine of the Trinity, but the spirit of Christ, breathing forth in all that he said and all that he did. We should seek that the child should know his heavenly friend and Saviour with the distinctness with which he knows an earthly friend;”<sup>26</sup> Edwards would certainly disagree with Channing on several points here.<sup>27</sup> However, the concept of Jesus as a “friend” to children is one that echoes many of Edwards’ sermons. In his appeal to children not to keep company with irreligious people, Edwards suggested that they should instead keep company with Christ. In effect, Christ would be a better “friend” than any of their peers. Although the connections between Edwards and the Sunday School movement as a whole are inconclusive, there are at least a few likely connections between Edwards and some of the movement’s adherents. It is not implausible to suggest that the implications of Edwards’ educational ideas were subtly passed on throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Edwards’ influenced the broader publication of nineteenth century children’s literature. Historian Sharon Y. Kim points out Edwards’ possible connection to Susan Warner’s 1850 best-selling book *The Wide, Wide World*. Although books for children were uncommon and mostly rejected by Puritans in previous generations, the nineteenth century showed a strong change. Books were published for children’s entertainment that included notions of morality and piety.<sup>28</sup> While this is often seen as a movement in opposition to Edwards, this too may show seeds of Edwardsean influence. Warner’s book, for example, contained implicit Calvinist doctrine. Pursuing conversion, the main character (a child), “earnestly asked the Saviour she sought, to

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 452.

<sup>27</sup> Unitarians asserted the unity of God and rejected the doctrine of the Trinity. Interestingly, Perry Miller’s *Errand into the Wilderness* shows a strong connection between Edwards and later Unitarian and Transcendentalist ideology. If Miller is correct, it is possible that the implications of Edwards’ theology influenced Channing as well. See Perry Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1956), 195-197.

<sup>28</sup> William Sloane, *Children’s Books in England and America in the Seventeenth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955), 27, 42.

make her and keep her his child.”<sup>29</sup> Kim traces these underpinnings to Warner’s reading of Edwards. She owned his *A History of the Work of Redemption* (1739) and *Some Thoughts Concerning the Present Revival of Religion in New England* (1742).<sup>30</sup> In a more general sense, there may also be a connection between Edwards and childhood stories. As Minkema notes, Edwards exhibited a pedagogical shift by telling stories to children, both privately and in his sermons.<sup>31</sup> It seems possible that this emphasis on stories influenced or contributed to their growing commonality in the following years.

Defining the exact legacy of Edwards and childhood is difficult, because it can be thought of in two ways. The first is how Edwards’ notions of childhood are remembered. In this sense, his legacy is disconnected from the modern era, because it views Edwards mostly as a harsh adherent to “outdated” ways of thinking. The second, however, views Edwards’ notions of childhood in terms of their actual continuity with more contemporary ideas. In this regard, Edwards shows numerous connections to modern views. Perhaps the difficulty in reconciling these definitions of his legacy can only be explained by labeling him as a complex character. Edwards was very much a man stretched in two directions, one pulling toward Calvinist orthodoxy, the other toward Enlightenment modernity. As George Marsden notes, Edwards was a key transitional figure in American history because he applied the premise that “God was the creator and sustainer of reality” to a “vastly expanded Newtonian universe.”<sup>32</sup> Edwards’ conception of God matched the Enlightenment universe of “constant actions and changing

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<sup>29</sup> Susan Warner, *The Wide, Wide World* (1819), reprint (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company), chapter 9, accessed August 17, 2015, <http://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/warner-susan/wide/wide.html#ch01>.

<sup>30</sup> Sharon Y. Kim, “Beyond the Men in Black: Jonathan Edwards and Nineteenth-Century Woman’s Fiction,” in *Jonathan Edwards at Home and Abroad*, ed. David W. Kling and Douglas Sweeney (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), pg. 139.

<sup>31</sup> Kenneth P. Minkema, “‘Informing of the Child’s Understanding, Influencing His Heart, and Directing its Practice’: Jonathan Edwards on Education,” *Acta Theologica* 2 (2011): 165, accessed July 15, 2015, <http://www.ajol.info/index.php/actat/article/view/72860>.

<sup>32</sup> George M. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 504.

relationships.”<sup>33</sup> While his ideas were often flawed and sometimes inconsistent, Edwards maintained his ground. His early death might even be seen by some as “divine” timing, before the polarity of forces became too strong.

There is still much more that can be learned from Edwards and Puritan childhood. He was one of the most important men in one of the most important centuries of childhood history. His views will continue to be researched and debated by scholars in numerous disciplines for years to come. The connections between his childhood theology and history of revivalism are particularly intriguing. Nevertheless, it remains clear that Edwards had a strong impact on childhood conceptions as they crossed from an old era into a new one. His status as a transitional figure is one that cannot be overlooked. Perhaps as more studies are done on this important time in American childhood history, much of the importance will be attributed to the famous Northampton preacher Jonathan Edwards, who in response would likely be content in “leaving it with God to take care of the credit of His own work.”<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *A Faithful Narrative (1737)*, in *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 4, *The Great Awakening*, ed. C. C. Goen (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 160.

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