JONATHAN EDWARDS IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

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It is hard to imagine that anyone interested in Jonathan Edwards, the great eighteenth-century American theologian, revivalist, and missionary, did not know that 2003 was the 300th anniversary of his birth. This milestone was marked by numerous commemorative conferences, symposia, lecture series, and other events across the country, accompanied by a wealth of publications, including scholarly and popular monographs, special editions of Edwards’s writings, collected essays, reference works, commemorative catalogues, and a magisterial biography.1 However, scholars of Edwards are not unaccustomed to large and diverse amounts of publications on him; indeed, they are spoiled, or glutted, depending on your point of view. The surge in Edwards studies over the past generation has been referred to as a “renaissance” that shows no signs of abating. But the road to that renaissance has been long and circuitous, and is itself a source of some fascination.

This article examines interpretation and appraisal of Edwards primarily within the “academy” over the twentieth century. The “academy” is identified with the rise of professional scholarship as a cultural and class phenomenon and with the modern research university as it emerged in the very late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. I also include under this rubric

theological schools and seminaries, many of which predated the advent of the modern “academy” but which, to a greater or lesser degree, have adopted its standards. As such, pastors and other religious writers, products and associates of these theological institutions, also figure here. We can locate the beginning of the appraisal of Edwards within this professional academic culture, thus broadly defined, with the first dissertation done on Edwards in 1899 at the University of Halle, followed closely by the first American dissertation on Edwards written in 1904 at Boston University.2

Table 1 tracks commentary and secondary works on Edwards over the twentieth century. I have registered items devoted wholly or in part to Edwards: books, articles, book chapters or respectable portions thereof, introductions to edited materials, pamphlets, and dissertations; I have excluded book reviews, entries in reference works, newspaper articles, passing references, and reprinted works (though I do digress to take notice of reprints at a couple of points in the discussion below). Some items are category-busters because of their range; in cases like this, I have had to look at factors such as the writer’s discipline, or department, or the place of publication, along with other criteria, before assigning a designation. Table 2 breaks out dissertations on Edwards, and utilizes the same categories in order to allow for comparison with Table 1.3 First, I shall unpack some of the information in these tables, then briefly discuss some current topics in Edwards studies, and finish with a reflection on the relationship of the academy and the church in this endeavor.

I. GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

From the beginning of the century through the 1930s, the rate of scholarship on Edwards was, frankly, pitiful. These were the decades of the Progressive Era, the Jazz Age, and the Scopes trial, when the stock of things Puritan and Edwardsean was about as low as it has ever been. One writer in 1918 stated that Edwards “believed in the worst God, preached the worst sermons, and had the worst religion of any human being who ever lived on this continent.”4 What is more, no one emerged to gainsay this estimation. Edwards was set up as the straw man of repression and snobbery, a medieval relic that had no place in modern America. Culturally, figures such as H. L.


Mencken and Clarence Darrow vied against superstition and ignorance as personified in the pious hypocrisy of Puritanism. Academically, it was the Calvinist-denigrating work of Vernon Parrington that prevailed, in which Edwards was an “anachronism.” However, a change was in the wind even in the 1920s as Harvard historians Kenneth Murdock and Samuel Eliot

![Table 1. Secondary Literature on Jonathan Edwards, 1901–2000](#)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Homiletics</th>
<th>Revivalism/Great Awakening</th>
<th>Missiology</th>
<th>Ethics/Aesthetics</th>
<th>Literature/Cultural Criticism</th>
<th>Philosophy/Psychology</th>
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<tr>
<td>1901–10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>(n=41)</td>
<td>(12.2%)</td>
<td>(17.0)</td>
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<td>(4.9)</td>
<td>(34.1)</td>
<td>(9.8)</td>
<td>(22.0)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1911–20</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>(n=22)</td>
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<td>(4.5)</td>
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<td>(22.8)</td>
<td>(31.8)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1921–30</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>(n=28)</td>
<td>(14.3%)</td>
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<td>(3.6)</td>
<td>(14.3)</td>
<td>(35.7)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1931–40</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>9</td>
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<td>(n=54)</td>
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<td>(7.4)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>(16.7)</td>
<td>(25.9)</td>
<td>(18.5)</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>11</td>
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<td>(20.4)</td>
<td>(23.7)</td>
<td>(19.1)</td>
<td>(22.4)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1971–80</td>
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<td>23</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
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<td>(17.4)</td>
<td>(16.6)</td>
<td>(26.6)</td>
<td>(22.8)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1981–90</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>41</td>
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<td>69</td>
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<tr>
<td>(n=291)</td>
<td>(3.1%)</td>
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<td>(3.1)</td>
<td>(8.9)</td>
<td>(15.8)</td>
<td>(14.1)</td>
<td>(27.8)</td>
<td>(23.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=353)</td>
<td>(4.5%)</td>
<td>(5.7)</td>
<td>(3.4)</td>
<td>(4.2)</td>
<td>(10.5)</td>
<td>(10.2)</td>
<td>(28.6)</td>
<td>(32.9)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Includes books, articles, book chapters (or portions of at least 5 pp.), introductions to primary materials, pamphlets, and dissertations (see Table 2). Excludes book reviews, reprints, dictionary/encyclopedia entries, newspaper articles, and passing references.

b Incomplete data for this decade.

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Morison began rehabilitating the Puritans, followed, of course, by Perry Miller with his *New England Mind* and 1949 biography of Edwards.  


6 Kenneth Murdock, *Increase Mather, the Foremost American Puritan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1925), and *Handkerchiefs from Paul*, being pious and consolatory verses of Puritan
other valley of inactivity was the early 1940s, not because of a lack of interest in Edwards but because of the interruption presented by World War II and its aftermath. Here, the microcosm of Edwards studies reflected scholarship in the humanities as a whole.

II. HOMILETICS

Now we can turn to discussing each of the categories, beginning with Homiletics, by which I intend studies on Edwards’s preaching style, on specific sermons, or on his sermons as a whole. The late eighteenth and the nineteenth century saw a small though consistent number of pieces on the nature of pulpit oratory, the American clergy, and American sermonic literature that either focused on Edwards or in which he figured significantly. As the twentieth century moved on, there was some overlap between this category and others, particularly Literature. More recently, we have seen an upswing caused, by the increasing availability of sermons in the Edwards Works and elsewhere. Literary scholars—especially Wilson Kimnach and Helen Westra—have shown the way in mining Edwards’s sermons, whether dealing with Edwards’s theory of preaching or using sermons as a source for plumbing his thoughts on a particular practice or topic.

I cannot consider preaching without bringing in Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God. Studies of “the most famous sermon in American history” form a sub-industry. If we look for new editions of the text itself as well as commentary on it in the first half of the century, we find only occasional reprints, from places like Paducah, Kentucky, or Fort Worth, Texas. Then,
Edwin Cady published his “Artistry of Jonathan Edwards” in the *New England Quarterly* in 1949,9 the same year as Miller’s biography. While Miller downplayed *Sinners* because he wanted to suppress the popular fire-and-brimstone image of Edwards, Cady centered on the sermon to show how Edwards masterfully combined images of suspension and suppression. The article was the standard statement for more than two decades.

By the 1960s, *Sinners* was the proxy for Edwards in high school and college textbooks and anthologies. In more recent textbooks, *Sinners* is printed alongside “sweeter” texts, such as *Personal Narrative* or *A Divine and Supernatural Light*. In fact, the newest version of the *Norton Anthology of American Literature* contains precisely these three texts. Carla Mulford’s *Early American Writings* has *Sinners*, *Personal Narrative*, and an excerpt from *Distinguishing Marks*, while Andrew Delbanco, in *Writing New England*, keeps *Personal Narrative* but replaces *Sinners* with *The Spider Letter*—apparently we cannot wholly do without Edwards’s spiders.10

In the wider field of publishing, it was not until the beginning of the 1970s that we find a notable increase in the reproduction of *Sinners*, with ten reprints and commentaries. The number rose to nineteen in the 1980s, and in the last decade rose still further to at least two dozen,11 as small religious presses issued reprints and recommendations, though with some concessions to new generations, as in the “made easier to read” version printed in 1996. But that’s a practice that goes back to at least 1826.12

### III. REVIVALISM

Recommendations and studies of Edwards on Revivalism, on his involvement in the Great Awakening, and on his influence on revivals in subsequent history populate the next category, which, like Homiletics, stretches back to the late eighteenth century. While there was an interesting rise in the number of pieces on this topic in the 1950s and ’60s, the ’70s saw a doubling of occurrences. We can speculate that the Bicentennial of 1976 was a spur for work in this area, as studies appeared linking the revolution and religion.13 Also, we should note the publication of the fourth volume, *The Great Awakening*, in the Edwards Edition in 1972, which both spurred and reflected

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work in this category. (Incidentally, volumes relating to revival, both *The Great Awakening* and volume 2, *Religious Affections*, together remain the best-selling in the Edition.) Books by historians such as Edwin Gaustad, Cedric Cowing, J. M. Bumsted and John De Wetering, David Lovejoy, and David Harlan, among others, created something of a heyday for studies of the Great Awakening.\(^{14}\) These more historical approaches to the role of religion in the formation of America were juxtaposed by a smaller, avowedly religious literature recommending Edwards’s thought and example as the basis for a new revival, as in magazines such as *Christianity Today* and *Moody Monthly*, and in books and articles by Iain Murray, Martin Lloyd-Jones, and Richard Lovelace.\(^{15}\)

IV. MISSIOLOGY

Studies of Edwards and Missiology—most often relating to his acquaintance with David Brainerd and the publication of his journals—lay dormant for a number of decades. But while *The Life of David Brainerd* has never gone out of print, commentary certainly did. This inactivity stretched back to the 1830s, when hundreds of male and female seminarians flocked to domestic and foreign mission fields, with Edwards and Brainerd as inspirations. Starting in the 1940s, though, there were signs of life, apparently caused by renewed interest in the connection between revivalism and the missionary movement; by the bicentenary in 1948 and 1949, respectively, of the publications of the *Humble Attempt* and *The Life of David Brainerd*; and by a new biography of Brainerd with the titillating title, *Flagellant on Horseback*.\(^{16}\) Such pieces formed a more traditional counterpoint to the “modern” Edwards of Miller’s biography or Cady’s essay. Over the past two decades Missiology has attracted increasing attention, due to a number of factors, including Joseph Conforti and Norman Pettit’s work on Brainerd and on Edwards’s


publication of his journals; Iain Murray’s biography of Edwards, first serialized in *The Banner of Truth*; and Ronald Davies’s dissertation on Edwards’s missiological thought, the first of its kind. 17

V. ETHICS

When considering studies of Edwards’s Ethics and Aesthetics, we initially have the same story as Missiology: goose eggs up through 1940, then a slow rise afterwards with, notably, Clyde Holbrook’s dissertation in the 1940s, and Roland Delattre’s dissertation and pivotal book, *Beauty and Sensibility in the Thought of Jonathan Edwards*, in the 1960s. 18 In the 1980s came a threefold increase that represented the highest occurrence since the 1850s, which had featured the Yale-Princeton debate over *The Nature of True Virtue* and commentary on the newly published *Charity and Its Fruits*. 19 The 1980s, for its part, featured essays exploring Edwards’s aesthetics that picked up on Delattre, such as Terence Erdt’s book on *Edwards, Art and the Sense of the Heart*; comparisons of Edwards’s ethics with that of Augustine and Niebuhr; and dissertations by Stephen Crocco on Joseph Haroutunian’s *Piety vs. Moralism*, a Neo-orthodox study of the rise and decline of the New Divin-

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ity, and by Virginia Peacock on problems in interpreting Edwards on true virtue.20

Despite this level of productivity, the 1990s saw a significant drop in this category, for reasons not altogether clear at this close range. Nearly half of the studies on Edwards’s ethics and aesthetics completed in this decade were dissertations, the number of which has held constant for three decades. This is usually an indicator of a good showing in the coming decade. Another good indicator has been the interest in Edwards’s ethics in connection with the tercentenary: for example, several conference sessions on the theme; the recent issue of the *Journal of Religious Ethics*, devoted entirely to Edwards; and the impending completion of Stephen Wilson’s book, *Virtue Reformed: Re-reading Edwards’s Ethics*.21 Also, as instanced in Louis Mitchell’s 1995 Harvard dissertation and in selections in Paul Helm and Oliver Crisp’s newly edited collection, *Jonathan Edwards, Philosophical Theologian*,22 the concept of beauty, with implications for aesthetics and ecology, seems to be a topic continuing to attract attention.

VI. LITERARY AND CULTURAL CRITICISM

In Literature, Edwards studies suffered the same degradation as other areas through the 1930s, while in Cultural Criticism Edwards figured as a bogeyman, blamed, among other things, for the violent gangsterism of the

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Prohibition Era. Nonetheless, Edwards remained a constant in overviews of American literature, and comparison with Benjamin Franklin was a sub-theme stretching back to Carl Van Doren and Van Wyck Brooks. But there were important literary scholars renovating Edwards's reputation, including Thomas H. Johnson, who completed his dissertation during the '30s and, with Clarence Faust, published Representative Selections of the Writings of Jonathan Edwards, the anthology that was the standard for six decades. Through the 1940s and '50s, the Harvard group dominated Puritan and Edwards studies, through Miller, with Images and Shadows of Divine Things, and then his students, such as Edmund S. Morgan and Alan Heimert, the latter completing his dissertation in 1960.

For literary scholars, the 1960s were a boom time. The number of studies in this category increased sixfold over the previous decade, and the relative percentage was never higher. The poetry of Edward Taylor was published; a new journal, Early American Literature, was begun; and it was the golden age of the study of typology. Heimert published his monumental, and monumentally misunderstood book, Religion and the American Mind, while dissertators such as Daniel Shea, Mason Lowance, and Thomas Davis focused on Edwards in their considerations of American self-disclosure, millennialism, and typology. In the 1970s, the number of dissertations on Edwards in this area peaked as students followed their mentors into the Edwards vineyard. However, new literary theorists, structuralists, post-structuralists, and deconstructionists have found less appeal in Edwards; significantly, it took a philosopher, Stephen Daniel, to bring Foucault and Derrida to Edwards.

By the 1980s, literary scholars were treating Edwards as a cultural icon. Donald Weber and David Laurence published essays on his literary reputation over the previous two centuries, while Max Lesser compiled the first of

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his two bibliographies. Many recent literary studies on Edwards examine
him as a spiritual biographer and autobiographer (particularly as reflected
in the *Personal Narrative*). We also see some crossover between Literature
and Homiletics, especially, again, with *Sinners*; for instance, the June 2000
issue of the *New England Quarterly* contained two articles on the one ser-
mon. Over the past three decades, Literary and Cultural Criticism of Ed-
wards had been slowly languishing, and there is little indication this trend
will reverse anytime soon.

VII. PHILOSOPHY

After the customary doldrums of the 1910s and '20s, philosophical consid-
eration of Edwards rose and remained dominant in Edwards studies (though
not by much) from the 1930s to the 1960s. The effort to treat Edwards philo-
sophically stemmed very much from the attitude of leading lights in Edwards
studies, such as Miller, to win respect for Edwards by downplaying his Chris-
tianity, to detach his philosophy from his theology, and make him appear more
modern. Miller, as the founding general editor of the *Works of Jonathan Ed-
wards*, was against publishing Edwards's sermons and scriptural commentary
in favor of the philosophical treatises. Besides Miller, with his paradigm-
setting essays such as “From Edwards to Emerson,” key figures in this area
were Rufus Suter treating Edwards on morality and on the “problem of evil”;
Harvey Townsend and his *Philosophy of Edwards*, the first work to make
wide use of the “Miscellanies,” Edwards's private notebooks; Clarence Faust
on Edwards and human nature; John E. Smith, linking Edwards to pragma-
ticism; and Douglas Elwood, who published *The Philosophical Theology of Jona-
than Edwards* in 1960, at the turning of the tide. Numerically, studies in

University, 1978); Weber, “The Figure of Jonathan Edwards,” *American Quarterly* 35 (Winter
1983) 556–64; David Laurence, “Jonathan Edwards as a Figure in Literary History,” in Nathan O.
Hatch and Harry S. Stout, eds., *Jonathan Edwards and the American Experience* (New York: Ox-

and Christopher Lukasik, “Felling the Force of Certainty: The Divine Science, Newtonianism, and
Jonathan Edwards’s ‘Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God,’” *New England Quarterly* 73 (June

30 Miller, “From Edwards to Emerson,” *New England Quarterly* 13 (Dec. 1940) 589–617; Rufus
O. Suter, Jr., “The Philosophy of Jonathan Edwards” (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1932); Suter,
338–42; Harvey G. Townsend, ed., *The Philosophy of Jonathan Edwards from His Private Note-
books* (Eugene: Oregon University Press, 1955); Clarence H. Faust, “Jonathan Edwards's View of
Edwards, volume 2, Religious Affections* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959); Douglas J.
philosophy have been going up slightly since then, with a bit of a tailing off in 1990s. However, the relative percentage of this category has fallen from one quarter of the field in the 1950s to only one-tenth in the last decade.

VIII. HISTORY

The precipitous drop in Philosophy leads us to our final categories. It is clear that the two disciplinary groups that are dominating Edwards in the academy today are History and Theology. I characterize historical commentary by a secular or undisclosed religious approach to Edwards that considers him strictly in context, with an intended audience of other professional historians and scholars in related fields, usually applying a historical method or typology, most often traditional intellectual history or some form of social history, but also extending to studies of Edwards from post-modern perspectives such as feminist studies or body theory. Theology takes in the constructive, polemical, pastoral, and ecclesiological, usually with an obvious presentist or commendatory approach or disclosed religious intent, aimed primarily though not exclusively at religious or churchly audiences. Some works in this category are based on criteria such as the writer’s educational background, institutional and denominational affiliation, or the issuing journal or press. There is obviously some overlap, some cross-fertilization, between these two categories, which is encouraging because it is the relationship between these two groups, I gather, that will set the course of Edwards Studies for the near future.

For historical interpretation of Edwards, the 1960s was a period of doubled numerical growth over the previous decade. But the most significant increase was from the ’60s to the ’70s, when historiography for the first time outpaced Theology and Philosophy, climbing from one-fifth in relative percentage to over one quarter. The historiographical juggernaut was fueled by revolutionary, revisionist methods: the New Social history, family studies, ethnography, cliometrics, and the long train of hyphenated histories. The 1980s continued this trend, with the publication of landmark books such as Patricia Tracy’s *Jonathan Edwards, Pastor* and Norman Fiering’s *Jonathan Edwards’s Moral Thought and Its British Context*.31 This period also saw a spate of dissertations and monographs on a range of Edwardsean and neo Edwardsean topics by Ava Chamberlain, Allen Guelzo, Jack Fitzmier, Mark Valeri,32 and a generation


of younger scholars who have been pumping out books and articles on an ever-increasing range of topics and disciplines, from ethnicity and race to gender and sexual mores to the life cycle and speech patterns.

Influences on Edwards are an important topic among historians, but not as important as Edwards’s legacies. Since the 1980s and the work of Mark Noll, William Breitenbach, and Joseph Conforti, an interest in reassessing the nature and evolution of the New Divinity through the nineteenth century has led to a burgeoning literature that includes Conforti’s more recent work; Bruce Kuklick’s New-Divinity centered canon of American philosophy from Edwards to Dewey; Genevieve McCoy on the Oregon Mission; David Kling on Edwardsean and Hopkinsian revivals in northwestern Connecticut; Amanda Porterfield on Mary Lyon and Mt. Holyoke Seminary; and Douglas Sweeney on Nathaniel William Taylor.

IX. THEOLOGY

Even during the height of Philosophy in the 1930s, there were significant Neo-orthodox theological works that used Edwards, such as H. Richard Niebuhr’s *Kingdom of God in America*, or Haroutunian’s on the “ossification”


of the New Divinity. Yet theological considerations of Edwards languished over the next two decades as the philosophers continued to dominate. In the 1970s, Theology finally overtook Philosophy and continued to increase, second only to History.

But behold the 1990s when there was nearly double the output over the previous decade, surpassing even History for the first time in thirty years. One major influential study to come out in the late 1980s, which helped to spur this movement, was Sang Hyun Lee’s *Philosophical Theology of Edwards*, with its identification of Edwards’s dispositional ontology. Another important figure in the study of Edwards’s theology produced on a grand scale during this period: John Gerstner published his three-volume *Rational Biblical Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, culminating a string of articles and small books. Scholars and religious leaders who benefited from works like these, and from the increasing availability of Edwards’s own writings, included Michael McClymond, Gerry McDermott, Anri Morimoto, Amy Plantinga Pauw, John Piper, and Richard Sproul. Meanwhile, comparative studies returned: familiar couplings like Edwards and Wesley or Berkeley, but also Edwards and Loyola, Bonaventura, van Balthazar, and Schleiermacher that ranged over time, topic, and theological tradition. Semi-systematic studies and considerations of single doctrines, such as the Trinity, justification, atonement, and hell, figured significantly—continued today, for example, in Steve Nichols’s dissertation-cum-monograph on Edwards on the Holy

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Spirit. And studies of Edwards on the nature of the church—ecclesiology, sacraments, and psalmody—were also evident as never before.

In the late 1980s and through the 1990s, Edwards was “appropriated” for constructive theology and church growth on an unprecedented scale. Robert Jenson’s America’s Theologian of 1988 was suggestively subtitled A Recommendation of Jonathan Edwards—a recommendation from a Lutheran, no less. A sampling of more recent titles will further illustrate the point: one dissertation claimed him “as a resource for current evangelical discussion,” the author of an article looked to him for lessons for “the future of Reformed theology,” while a 1996 conference in Philadelphia and the ensuing book of essays was entitled Edwards in Our Time. Th.Ds, Ph.Ds, articles, and handbooks, oriented to pastor and church leaders, treat Edwards as a model for preaching, as an expert on the signs of grace and revival, on delineating gender roles in the church, on family issues, and on Christian education.


Relatedly, polemical use of Edwards returned in a way not seen since the nineteenth century, as leaders of charismatic movements such as the Toronto Blessing used Edwards to legitimate their claims, while critics used Edwards to discredit them.44

X. RECENT AREAS OF INTEREST AND AREAS TO BE ENCOURAGED

Next, I would like to touch on just a few topics that seem to be attracting attention today. I have already attempted a prognosis for ethics. A salient topic is Edwards’s trinitarianism, epitomized by Amy Plantinga Pauw’s 2002 monograph, *The Supreme Harmony of One*, really the first full-length consideration of Edwards on the Trinity since the days of George Park Fisher. Virtually coincident with the appearance of this book, however, were no less than three new dissertations on the same theme, as well as an article in the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*.45 This concentration of studies, along with related research, seems to presage interest in Edwards’s doctrine of God.

Another area is Edwards’s view of “history,” or teleology, as enunciated especially in *A History of the Work of Redemption*. Robert E. Brown’s *Jonathan Edwards and the Bible*, despite the title, is very much about Edwards’s engagement with historical criticism. Avi Zakai, of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, has written a monograph on *Edwards’s Philosophy of History* that treats Edwards’s views of time and space. In the introduction to volume 22 of the Edwards *Works*, and in a collection of essays on *The Legacy of Edwards*, Harry Stout has pointed to the *History of the Work of Redemption* as

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Edwards’s intended *magnum opus* in which he would have thrown systematic theology into the form of a “tri-world” narrative. And at conferences this year Michael McClymond and Sang Hyun Lee addressed related themes.\[46\]

Still another area is exegesis or scriptural commentary. In 2001 alone, at least two seminary students completed their dissertations on some aspect of Edwards’s exegetical method.\[47\] Here we need to mention Bob Brown’s excellent book again, as well as Douglas Sweeney’s new work-in-progress on “Edwards the Exegete.” The spring 2003 conference at Princeton included a session on exegesis featuring Brown, Sweeney, and of course Stephen J. Stein, who has done the most to make Edwards’s body of commentary available. Not only has he edited “Notes on the Apocalypse” and “Notes on Scripture,” but he has just completed the draft of the “Interleaved Bible” that amounts to almost 2,500 pages in typescript—a huge repository of largely untapped scriptural exposition.\[48\]

There are also a couple of areas that beg further exploration. The first is Edwards’s sojourn at Stockbridge, his efforts to make the mission succeed, and his interaction with the Mahicans, Mohawks, and Iroquois.\[49\] With the publication of Edwards’s collected letters in the Edwards *Works*, the increasing availability of sermons, and the growing number of studies in the larger field, this period of Edwards’s career can be approached in different ways. Most recently, the surge of interest in Euro-Indian contact, negotiated identity, and geographical and cultural “middle grounds” has helped to draw scholars to Edwards, for example, in studies of the missiology of the “Interleaved Bible” and on Edwardsean spirituality in the nineteenth-century mission to


the Nez Perce. Rachel Wheeler, in her Yale dissertation comparing the English and Moravian missions, for the first time systematically utilized Edwards’s Indian sermons; she has since set Edwards’s treatise on Original Sin in relation to his labors with native peoples. Finally, in his new biography George Marsden has utilized Edwards’s extant letters—some two-thirds of which date from the Stockbridge period—to give us a fuller picture.

But there is still much to be done with the Stockbridge period, as with other periods. In this vein, let us consider sermons a little further. The sixth and last sermon volume in the Edwards Works, soon to be completed, will include Indian sermons as well as, for example, military sermons and a number of ordination sermons that, as editor Wilson Kimnach describes them, show Edwards forming a “heroic” view of the ministry. Other sermons on the ministry can be found in Salvation of Souls, edited by Richard Bailey and Gregory Wills. This collection is but one among several new collections of Edwards sermons, many previously unpublished, that have come out over the past couple of years, such as the ones edited by Bill Nichols, Michael McMullen, and Don Kistler. Together, these promise a continuing interest in Edwards the preacher. But there’s more. Even as dozens of sermons have become available in print, the Edwards Works is moving into a new phase to produce an online, comprehensive edition of Edwards’s writings, including the texts of the letterpress series and all of our unpublished transcripts, the bulk of which are the rest of Edwards’s 1,250 extant sermons.

XI. HISTORY VS. THEOLOGY, HISTORY AND THEOLOGY

In closing, I would like to return to the two current leaders of the pack, Theology and History, or, to use my somewhat clumsy working terms, the


“theologizers” and the “historicists.” There are many constituents of the two groups who have a foot in both camps, but between others at the extremes there is a divide. Some historicists look down on theologizers as partisan apologists, hagiographers, even whitewashers; some theologizers resent historicists for secularizing Edwards, for reducing him to a tool in their “humanist agendas.” Both of these views are caricatures, but caricatures that endure.

Evangelical scholars, seminarians, pastors, and religious leaders have taken up Edwards as a theologian, preacher, and revivalist in a way not seen since before the Civil War. During the ’90s, fully one-third of all printed commentary on Edwards was theological in nature, the highest in more than a century. Even more, over half of these theological considerations of Edwards appeared in evangelical publications. Until recently, major theological pieces on Edwards had been confined largely to mainline journals like the Harvard Theological Review, Bibliotheca Sacra, or the Journal of Religion. Now, however, interpretive essays are regularly found in the Southern Baptist Theological Journal, Evangelical Quarterly, Fides et Historia, Reformation and Revival, Trinity Journal, Westminster Theological Journal, or the Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society. Likewise, religious presses of all sizes have been churning out new editions of Edwards’s writings as well as monographs: from large houses such as InterVarsity and the Dutch trinity of Eerdmans, Baker, and Zondervan, to smaller ones like Banner of Truth, Bethany House, Crossway, Presbyterian and Reformed, and Soli Deo Gloria. Reformed, evangelicals, and charismatics—the “new evangelicals” from across a broad (white) spectrum—have embraced Edwards like never before.

Historicists, meanwhile, continue the search for the “historical Edwards,” primarily seeking to situate and understand him as a product and reflection of his time. For historians, Edwards’s “modernity” is now not as much a concern as are his Puritan heritage and his New England and Enlightenment contexts. But something interesting has emerged from this turn away from Edwards’s supposed “modernity,” the notion that thrived at mid-century that Edwards was actually a proto-naturalist, or a Lockean empiricist, or a promising scientist forced to settle on a clerical career. Edwards undeniably had time-bound beliefs and practices that make him alien to today in many respects. But as Doug Sweeney writes in the latest issue of Books and Culture, the Edwards of history, the Edwards that the historicists have been painstakingly uncovering for some time now, is proving to be a supernaturalist, a thoroughgoing theist, a tireless student of Scripture, a parish pastor with an evangelical passion. Yet, Sweeney continues, Edwards’s genius for

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55 For example, a survey of journal articles on Edwards published during the 1990s shows, of 105 articles tallied, the following breakdown among types of journals: Evangelical: 64 (61.0%); Mainline: 7 (6.7%); Non-religious: 34 (32.3%). An indication that this trend will continue is that, of 32 dissertations on Edwards from 2001–2003, 14 were completed at state or secular private universities, while 18 were completed at seminaries, schools of theology, or religiously affiliated institutions. Within this latter group, it is interesting to note that the two institutions supporting the most graduate work on Edwards (3 dissertations each) within these three years were Westminster Theological Seminary (Presbyterian) and Marquette University (Jesuit).
yesterday and today “is best understood in relation to that very context” in which he lived and worked.\(^56\)

It seems that, ironically and unawares, many historicists and theologizers, while eyeing each other suspiciously and perhaps condescendingly, have been working towards similar ends for some time. The motives and audiences may be different, but the pictures that are emerging from each side are remarkably similar. I might also add that the very porosity of the boundaries between historical and theological considerations of Edwards is another indication of the similarity of perspectives and approaches among a core group of writers in these two groups. Another thing they share in common is that, whereas scholars in categories in decline, such as Literature and Philosophy, tend to rely on traditional texts, writers in History and Theology are making best use of the wealth of new texts that have become available. No one subgroup may ever be able to “claim” Edwards. But, given what we know about the ebb and flow of interest in Edwards within different circles over the past 100 years, that may be a good thing.

Last year a conference held in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, was entitled “Edwards and the Future of Evangelicalism: A Conference Bringing Together the Church and the Academy.” Not Church vs. Academy, but Church and Academy. That’s the kind of conjunction we need to see more often, because it recognizes that scholars and practitioners in the two spheres can and should learn from each other. The number of secondary publications on Edwards fast approaches 4,000, making him one of the most studied figures in Christian thought and the most studied American intellectual figure before 1800. Those who would do serious, responsible interpretation on him face the increasingly daunting but necessary task of navigating that literature. The recent tomes by Noll on America’s God: From Edwards to Lincoln, or Brooks Holifield’s Theology in America\(^57\)—in which Edwards is the only figure who warrants his own chapter—not to mention Marsden’s synthetic new biography of Edwards, provide different, commendable models for approaching Edwards. Commentators need to combine a rigor in and sensitivity to the disciplines and nuances of both history and theology, and to strive to present a judicious, rounded view of the positive and negative aspects of Edwards’s life, thought, and legacy—an Edwards for the twenty-first century.

XII. BIBLIOGRAPHY

The titles provided below are by no means an exhaustive bibliography of primary and secondary publications on Edwards, but are meant as an entrée into the literature. Titles are grouped under headings, though readers should be aware that many works partake of different disciplines.


Biographies

Collected Essays

Editions and Anthologies


**Reference Works**


**Sermons and the Ministry**


**Revivalism**


**Missiology**


**Ethics and Aesthetics**


**Literary and Cultural Criticism**


**Philosophy**


**Historical**


Theological and Exegetical


