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Lessons from the Past – The Discernment of Signs: Jonathan Edwards and the Toronto Blessing

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A paper given to the Evangelical Theology Society in Philadelphia on 17 November 1995

Much of American, British, and European evangelicalism has been gripped by the phenomenon called the Toronto Blessing. Reports of a supernatural outpouring of the Holy Spirit of God on the Toronto Vineyard Church, beginning in January 1994, and subsequently on churches across America and around the world, have captured headlines not only in such notable journals as *Christianity Today*, but in the secular press as well. Nationally syndicated television programmes have turned their cameras to meetings marked by the phenomena giving this movement its particular designation as the ‘laughing revival’. Books, articles, videos and other material have been produced, as debate has arisen as to whether or not this particular movement is a genuine and authentic revival. Various denominations have even produced statements regarding the ‘revival’ so as to help control or in some cases sustain its emphases in their congregations.¹ The amount of material as well as some of the sharpness of debate regarding the movement shows that for many the Toronto Blessing is no laughing matter.

The focus of much of the concern regarding the Toronto Blessing centres on the authenticity of the physical and emotional phenomena which highlight its meetings. One first hand testimony describes the scene at the Toronto venue on first arrival there:

People were lying all over the floor, in various positions. Some had their feet in the air, laughing uncontrollably. Intermingled among the laughing was roaring like lions. I observed one growling man, on all fours, facing a woman who was pointing at him and laughing

1 For example the Baptists in Germany issued a statement in February 1995 cautioning their churches about elements within the Toronto movement.

uncontrollably. Stepping around the bodies, I saw several who were jerking and violently shaking.²

On first reading of or viewing the various features of the Blessing, one is immediately reminded of the emotional and physical phenomena that were a part of the frontier side of the Second Great Awakening of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In that case what were usually called 'exercises' overtook the various revival participants and expressed themselves in uncontrollable rolling, barking and jerking. In other instances, those affected may have fallen comatose for prolonged periods. Various religions or cults have also had evidenced similar manifestations in their midst.³ The First Great Awakening and, indeed, the Second Awakening as it occurred in New England and along the East Coast of America witnessed far fewer phenomena. There were occasions, as shall be noted, of people crying out often under joyful and seemingly uncontrollable impressions, fainting occurred – once again, and groaning as well. In the main, however, epiphenomena were apparently far less frequent and physical than in the Kentucky and Tennessee awakenings.⁴

Because such phenomena have occurred occasionally in revivals, the question of their legitimacy and place in such movements is not simply a twentieth century issue. They have attracted the attention both of detractors of Christian revivals and proponents, advocates and antagonists. The most notable promoter of revival was the New England Puritan divine Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758). Certainly there was not a more thorough or thoughtful theologian of revivals than he. Nor is there one who experienced more regularly or profoundly in his public ministry or private life the refreshing touch of 'God's surprising work', as he called it. He experienced revival while pastor in Northampton, Massachusetts and later served in Stockbridge, Massachusetts and for a brief time just prior to his death as President of Princeton College.

Because Edwards so vigorously pursued, preached about, prayed for and reflected on awakening, his insights are generally considered authoritative; furthermore his logic for analysis was tied to complete and utter dependence on biblical authority. His works on the topic were voluminous. The fourth volume of the Yale University series *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, entitled *The Great Awakening*, and edited by C C Goen contains with index 595 pages. It includes among other works, his most renowned,

- 2 Home Missions Board of the Southern Baptist Convention 'Special Report' Issue No 1 Winter 1995 p 1
- 3 *The Spiritual Counterfeits Project Newsletter* issued autumn 1994, volume 19:2, chronicled similar manifestations in other religions. See p 14.
- 4 John Boles *The Great Revival 1787-1805* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky 1972) pp 67-72

A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God in the Conversion of Many Hundred Souls in Northampton, and the Neighboring Towns and Villages of the County of Hampshire, in the Province of the Massachusetts Bay in New England (1736) as well as two other important pieces *Some Thoughts Concerning the present Revival of Religion in New England, And the Way in which it ought to be acknowledged and promoted* (1742) as well as the pivotal treatise, *The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God. Applied to that uncommon Operation that has lately appeared on the Minds of many of the People of this Land; With a particular Consideration of the extraordinary Circumstances with which this work is attended* (1741).

Because of both his zeal for revival and spiritual renewal and his strong emphasis on the rightful place of 'affections' (ie emotions) in the Christian religion, Edwards has often been cited as an advocate for 'enthusiasm', to use the eighteenth century term, or even for emotio-physical phenomena as a centre piece of God's sovereign work in renewal. Consequently, several books in critiquing or advocating the Toronto Blessing have called on Edwards, sometimes in *ad hominem* fashion, to endorse the movement. For example Guy Chevreux in writing one of the Toronto Blessing's major apologetics *Catch the Fire* (1993) dedicates an entire chapter covering seventy-five pages to Edwards. It is entitled *A Well-Traveled Path: Jonathan Edwards and the Experiences of the Great Awakening*. Chevreux quotes exclusively from the works of Edwards mentioned above and paints, for the most part, a picture of Edwards as a balanced evaluator of spiritual phenomena who would probably have supported the spread of the Toronto Experience.

This paper will attempt to take the critique further and to provide deeper analysis of Edwards' understanding of the cause and course of revival manifestations. It will suggest two points at which Edwards would probably have agreed with certain elements within the Toronto experience. Then it will suggest other factors which distinguish Edwards as applying a different emphasis.

First of all, let it be said, and I think, in full agreement with the Toronto movement, that Edwards understood clearly that emotions, or 'affections' as he called them, had a significant and indispensable place in genuine Christianity. For him Christian experience without emotion would have been as unthinkable and illogical as a banquet without food. This was particularly the case for Edwards in reference to the act of conversion; he was not in favour of dry-eyed converts. He sensed that if salvation were truly experienced, emotion ought to be evidenced! In commenting on the Great Awakening in New England, he wrote:

It was very wonderful to see after what manner persons' affections were sometimes moved and wrought upon, when God did suddenly open their eyes and let into their minds a sense of his grace ... their joyful surprise has caused their hearts ... to leap; tears issuing like a flood, intermingled with their joy...⁵

Edwards' monumental work entitled *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections* had as its thesis that **true religion, in great part, consists in holy affections** (Edwards' emphasis). Among those true emotions encouraged by Edwards are zeal, holy desire, love of Christ, religious sorrow, mourning and brokenness of heart, as well as joy in Christ. The last attribute particularly as emphasized by Edwards was to be 'full of glory'. Notably there was nothing that he more despised in himself or others than deadness and dryness in religion. In this regard he identified 'zeal' 'as a very essential part of the religion of true saints'.⁶

Secondly Edwards would clearly have agreed that affections or emotions can and often do generate emotio-physical phenomena. In his piece *The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God*, Edwards elucidated elements by which one may not condemn a work as not being of God. In doing so he was remonstrating against many of the Great Awakening's detractors, particularly the Rev Charles Chauncey (1705-1787) of Boston, pastor of the First Congregational Church. In a dozen or more published letters, sermons, and critiques Chauncey had criticized the revival viciously and had accused it of revealing nothing but pure fanaticism because of what he interpreted as 'distempered' emotionalism. He was both the revival's and Edwards' most energetic antagonist. It was because of his diatribes against the awakening that Edwards spent so much of his energy and writing in defending the emotive elements of the revival. For instance:

'Tis no wonder that when the thoughts are so fixed, and the affections so strong, and the whole soul so engaged and ravished ... that all other parts of the body are so affected as to be deprived of their strength, and the whole frame ready to dissolve...⁷

So it may be easily accounted for, that a true sense of the glorious excellency of the Lord Jesus Christ, and of his wonderful dying love and the exercise of a truly spiritual love and joy, should be such as

5 C C Goen ed *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* vol 4 *The Great Awakening* (New Haven CT: Yale University Press 1972) p 125 (hereafter Goen)

6 Goen p 239

7 Goen p 237. For Chauncey's position, see also Charles Chauncey *Seasonable Thoughts on the State of Religion in New England* reprint edition (Hicksville NY: The Regina Press 1975).

very much to overcome the bodily strength. We are all ready to own that no man can see God and live ... therefore 'tis not at all strange that God should sometimes give his saints such fortastes of heaven as to diminish their bodily strength...⁸

and so on.

Edwards made a case for genuine religious emotion so that in his *Distinguishing Marks* piece, his second proposition for not discounting a work of God was:

A work is not to be judged of by any effects on the bodies of men; such as tears, trembling, groans, loud outcries, agonies of body, or the failing of bodily strength.⁹

He went on to reason that physical responses were easy to account for:

from the consideration of the nature of divine and eternal things, and the nature of man, and the laws of the union between soul and body, how a right influence, a true and proper sense of things, should have such effects on the body, even those that are of the most extraordinary kind; such as taking away the bodily strength, or throwing the body into great agonies, and extorting loud outcries.¹⁰

In other words, humans being psycho-somatic creatures may well evidence emotio-physical outbursts, even eccentric ones, if a true sense of either the joy of their salvation or the fear of damnation should overwhelm them.

Edwards further qualifies the situation by stating that few seemingly lost consciousness and that this was generally due to physical weakness:

The instances of those that have been deprived of reason have been so very few, and those, perhaps all of them, persons under the peculiar disadvantage of a weak, vapory habit of body. A merciful and careful divine hand is very manifest in it, that in so many instances where the ship has begun to sink, yet it has been upheld ... The instances of such as have been deprived of reason are so few that certainly they are not enough to cause us to be in any fright ...¹¹

Further, Edwards would not discount 'great ado, and a great deal of noise about religion' or 'great impressions on ... imaginations', 'great

8 Goen p 232. See also, for example, pp 125, 183, 189, 194-5, 237.

9 Goen p 230

10 Goen p 231

11 Goen p 304

imprudences and irregularities in ... conduct', 'many errors in judgment, and some delusions of Satan, intermixed with the work', or even 'gross errors or scandalous practices' in and of themselves as discounting a true movement of God.¹² In fact, such irregularities or eccentricities might be expected. The greater and more powerful the work of the Spirit, and the more dead and dull the state of the subjects of his work, the more powerful may be the phenomena accompanying true awakening.

Having made the case for at least two points of commonality between Edwards and many of the exponents of the Toronto Blessing, the remainder of this paper will elucidate where Edwards would have departed company with elements of the Toronto Experience and some of its proponents.

First of all, while Edwards would have been careful not to have condemned many elements of emotional phenomena neither would he have been quick to endorse them. While emotional expressions were often the product of the impact of God's Spirit, they may also be, in his opinion, the product of the influence of the devil himself or one's own emotional make-up and mistaken zeal. The devil, he believed, would take full advantage of spiritual re-invigoration by overlaying 'a revival of religion, when he finds he can keep men quiet and secure no longer', with emotional excess which would 'drive 'em to excesses and extravagances'.¹³ Further he said, 'The errors of the friends of the work of God, and especially of the great promoters of it, give vast advantage to the enemies of such a work'.¹⁴

Zeal was, in fact, in his words, the most likely to corrupt. 'There is nothing that belongs to Christian experience that is more liable to a corrupt mixture than zeal.'¹⁵

The great danger of zeal is that it is potentially a response that can be manufactured not only from the Holy Spirit but from both the devil and from 'creative passion'. Even if it is the case that such responses are truly provoked by the Spirit of God, it may also be that the experience itself is more often than not mixed with 'human, or natural affection and passion; impressions on the imagination; and a degree of self-righteousness or spiritual pride'.¹⁶

Consequently the self-assumption of perfection may creep in so that

12 Goen pp 301-304

13 Goen p 410

14 Goen p 411

15 Goen p 460

16 Goen p 459

among other developments ministers, especially because they speak as Christ's ambassadors, 'may assume the same style and speak as with the same authority that the prophets of old did, yea, that Jesus Christ himself did'.¹⁷

In the context of emotional excitement, Edwards also warned that human presumption 'often disposes persons to singularity in external appearance, to affect a singular way of speaking, to use a different sort of dialect from others, or to be singular in voice, or air of countenance or behavior'.¹⁸ Because man was a fallen creature, and tainted by sin even in a redeemed state, human response even to spiritual stimuli could not be fully trusted.

These are the reasons why Edwards saw no validation for revival in emotio-physical phenomena. They were in his opinion secondary and ancillary at best. The only lasting validation of genuine revival was what he termed the 'Distinguishing Marks' based on his exposition of 1 John 4.¹⁹

The five characteristics he highlighted in *Distinguishing Marks* were (1) the person and claims of Jesus Christ and the truth of the Gospel concerning him are confirmed and established;²⁰ (2) 'when the spirit that is at work operates against the interest of Satan's kingdom, which lies in encouraging and establishing sin';²¹ (3) when 'that spirit operates in such a manner, as to cause in men a greater regard to the Holy Scriptures, and establishes them more in their truth and divinity';²² (4) when the spirit at work leads 'persons to truth, convincing them'²³ of those things that are true'; (5) when 'the spirit that is at work among a people operates as a spirit of love to God and man'.²⁴

Simultaneously the reason for Edwards' strong advocacy of the Great Awakening, in spite of several confessed abuses, was because he was convinced by the evidences of true holiness and genuine conversions at work not only in Northampton but throughout many parts of New England. The 'distinguishing marks' and not certain phenomena comprised the proof of God's validation of the Great Awakening:

From what has been said, I will venture to draw this inference, viz.

- 17 Goen p 457
- 18 Goen p 421
- 19 Goen p 249
- 20 Goen p 249
- 21 Goen p 250
- 22 Goen p 253
- 23 Goen p 254
- 24 Goen p 255

that that extraordinary influence that has lately appeared on the minds of the people abroad in this land, causing in them an uncommon concern and engagedness of mind about the things of religion, is undoubtedly, in the general, from the Spirit of God.²⁵ As to this work that has lately been carried on in the land, there are many things concerning it that are notorious, and known by everybody ... that unless the Apostle John was out in his rules, are sufficient to determine it to be in general, the work of God.²⁶

The last qualification 'to be in general, the work of God' is important. Because phenomena could not often be proved to be of one source or another, he never implied a blanket approbation of all 'revivals', so to speak, nor of all that happens in revival – even in his case of all that happened in the First Great Awakening.

Following this same line of logic, Edwards was quick to differentiate between what he termed the ordinary and the extraordinary graces of the Spirit. Extraordinary graces took the nature of 'immediate significations from heaven to them of something that should come to pass, or something that it was the mind and will of God that they should do ... which was not signified in the Bible'. They were, in short, 'inspiration and miraculous gifts'.²⁷

There were some, Edwards argued, who wished extraordinary graces to be restored to the church. Edwards believed that, for the most part, they had died with the New Testament era. 'The former', the ordinary graces of graciousness, charity, and godly character, Edwards postulated 'are by far the most excellent and glorious'. This was because 'God communicates himself in his nature more to the soul' in ordinary grace 'than in all miraculous gifts'.²⁸

In concluding our first point of differentiation regarding Edwards and influences at work during the Great Awakening and now within the Toronto Experience movement, it would be easy to draw the conclusion from the above that Edwards would have had difficulty identifying with a 'revival movement' that was named after its emphasis on emotional phenomenon such as the Toronto Blessing. More importantly it is reasonable that he would have eschewed encouraging such manifestations or especially praying with participants that they might experience them, or in general to participate in any activity that would highlight various phenomena over the general convicting and 'ordinary' work of the Spirit.

25 Goen p 260

26 Goen p 261

27 Goen p 278

28 Goen p 278

A second general and important departure from certain elements within the Toronto Experience marked the thinking of Jonathan Edwards. He discerned and advocated clear elements of interpreting what were legitimate causes and catalysts of certain emotional phenomena, especially that of joy. As a rule in order for any emotion to be legitimate it had to be precipitated by the proclamation and application of biblical truth, if not in private devotion then in the context of biblical exposition:

Therefore the thing to be inquired into is whether the application or notions of divine and eternal things, that are raised in people's minds by these affectionate preachers, whence their affections are excited, be apprehensions that are agreeable to truth, or whether they are mistakes. If the former, then the affections are raised the way they should be, viz. by informing the mind, or conveying light to the understanding.²⁹

Emotion without cause, or emotion caused because of the wrong stimulus, was in Edwards' view mere 'enthusiasm', which was definitely not a compliment for eighteenth century preachers. It was emotionalism and unhealthy if it did not stem *directly* from the convicting preaching of the Word of God. In this regard, Edwards was completely consistent with his Calvinistic and Reformed heritage which bound him to the Bible and its truth as the only legitimate source for true worship and spiritual experience.³⁰

If stimulus came from the impartation of the truth of the Bible then the emotion experienced was a genuine and welcomed response to truth:

I should think myself in the way of my duty to raise the affections of my hearers as high as possibly I can, provided that they are affected with nothing but truth, and with affections that are not disagreeable to the nature of what they are affected with.³¹

Lack of space prevents full discussion of a complementary and important element in Edwards' thought related to Scripture and experience, and that is the important role of the conviction of sin. As biblical light brought truth to bear upon a recipient of God's grace, the first great emotion which resulted was conviction and sorrow for sin:

As to the manner of persons being wrought upon, there is a vast variety, yet in many things there is a great analogy in all. Persons are

29 Goen p 386

30 For a helpful summary of this theme and its reformed roots see Timothy George *The Theology of the Reformers* (Nashville TN: Broadman Press 1988) pp 314-317.

31 Goen p 387

first awakened with a sense of their miserable condition by nature, and the danger they are in of perishing eternally... then consciences are suddenly smitten as if their hearts were pierced through with a dart... their awakenings have increased, till a sense of their misery has taken fast hold on them.³²

Before any measure of joy (and certainly hilarity!) may be experienced, it would have been unthinkable for Edwards that conviction of and for sin would not have precipitated repentance, which in turn would have produced trust in Christ, the cleansing work of the Holy Spirit and joy as a concomitant result.

Narratives regarding the Great Awakening reveal that most of the public outbursts of emotion occurred under a sense of strong conviction such as happened in 1741 at Enfield, Connecticut when Edwards preached his renowned sermon 'Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God'.³³

Edwards' logical progression followed the pattern that the light of God's Word produced conviction of sin for both saint and sinner. On exercising faith in Christ and/or repentance towards God, the witness of the Spirit produced assurance which gave way to joy. Then and only then were the 'distinguishing marks' to be seen in the life of God's people. As I have just said, it would have been unthinkable for Edwards that joy or hilarity would have preceded conviction or occurred without obvious spiritual caution.

It was for this reason that Edwards found himself not only defending the Great Awakening from the sterile and sceptical rationalism of Charles Chauncey, but also from the emotive but thoughtless exhortations of James Davenport. Davenport's practice in his preaching of denouncing pastors as unconverted because they would not support his eccentricities, his extremely loud preaching and the mark of it as a sign, in his estimation, of God's Spirit, as well as other actions such the burning of 'worldly things' on a wharf at New London, Connecticut accompanied by a dervish like dance around the pyre while shouting 'Hallelujah', caused Edwards to write criticisms of various excesses.³⁴ It was the groundless emotionalism of such actions that concerned the Puritan divine. Although Edwards avoided mention of Davenport's name in print, it is clear that in his opinion such actions should be restrained.

Problems of such nature arose by 'not taking the Holy Scriptures as an whole, and in itself a sufficient rule to judge of such things by'.³⁵

32 Goen p 122

33 For details on the congregational response see Ian H Murray *Jonathan Edwards: A New Biography* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust 1987) pp 168-9.

34 Goen pp 60-3

35 Goen p 296

Additionally:

... the Scripture speaks of the Word of God as the principal means of carrying on God's work; for the Word of God is the principal means nevertheless, as that is the means by which other means operate, and are made effectual.³⁶

At the heart of much of the emotional display of the Great Awakening was not only the joy of salvation and the glory of God but also concern for the salvation of the lost:

There is one particular kind of exercise and concern of mind that many have been overpowered by, that has been especially stumbling to some; and that is the deep concern and distress that they have been in for the souls of others.³⁷

In other words, there were biblical and theological reasons for the faintings of some. They were not groundless inexplicable experiences. These phenomena were caused by an elevation of truth and its significance, not the lack of it.³⁸

In the same way, while joy was often the expression of many in the Great Awakening – yes even rapturous exaltation – it was never groundless or mindless. As a rule, joy came in response to either an experience of salvation or of the assurance of salvation. They were experiences founded on biblical light and truth so therefore with a discernible cause. Concurrently, they were never synonymous in Edwards' experience with uncontrollable laughter.

Speaking of his wife Sarah's experience, he said:

This great rejoicing has been a rejoicing with trembling, ie attended with a deep and lively sense of the greatness and majesty of God, and the person's own exceeding littleness and vileness: spiritual joys in this person never were attended, either formerly or lately, with the least appearance of any laughter or lightness of countenance, or manner of speaking; but with a peculiar abhorrence of such appearances in spiritual rejoicings, especially since joys have been greatest of all. These high transports when they have been past, have had abiding effects in the increase of the sweetness, rest, and humility that they have left upon the soul.³⁹

36 Goen p 240

37 Goen p 305

38 Goen p 305

39 Goen pp 333, 334

Such a view of laughter would be consistent with a Puritan who had once made a resolution never to encourage laughter on Sunday.⁴⁰

In England at about the same time John Wesley had similar attitudes about laughing phenomena:

Friday, May 9, 1740. I was a little surprised at some who were buffeted of Satan in an unusual manner, by such a spirit of laughter as they could in no wise resist, though it was pain and grief unto them. I could scarce have believed the account they gave me, had I not known the same thing ten or eleven years ago. Part of Sunday my brother and I then used to spend in walking in the meadows and singing psalms. But one day, just as we were beginning to sing, he burst out into a loud laughter. I asked him if he was distracted and began to be very angry, and presently after to laugh as loud as he. Nor could we possibly refrain, though we were ready to tear ourselves in pieces, but were forced to go home, without singing another line.⁴¹

Wed. 21. In the evening such a spirit of laughter was among us that many were much offended. But the attention of all was soon fixed on poor L[ucreti]a S[mith], whom we all knew to be no dissembler. One so violently and variously torn of the evil one did I never see before. Sometimes she laughed till almost strangled; then broke out into cursing and blaspheming; then stamped and struggled with incredible strength, so that four or five could scarce hold her, then cried out, 'O eternity, eternity! O that I had no soul! O that I had never been born!' At last she faintly called on Christ to help her. And the violence of her pangs ceased.

Most of our brethren and sisters were now fully convinced that those who were under this strange temptation could not help it. Only E[lizabe]th B[rown] and Anne H[olto]n were of another mind; being still sure, 'Anyone might help laughing if she would.' This they declared to many on Thursday; but on Friday 23 God suffered Satan to teach them better. Both of them were suddenly seized in the same manner as the rest, and laughed whether they would or no, almost without ceasing. Thus they continued for two days a spectacle to all; and were then, upon prayer made for them, delivered in a moment.

Mon. 26. S[usann]a H[ardin]g, after she had calmly rejoiced several

40 J Edwards *Works* vol 1 (Carlisle PA: Banner of Truth 1984) p 236. Edwards' resolutions #38 stated: 'Never to utter anything that is sportive or matter of laughter, on a Lord's day'.

41 *The Works of John Wesley* vol 19 *Journal and Diaries* vol II W Reginald Ward and Richard P Heitzenrater edd (Nashville: Abingdon Press 1990) pp 148-9

days in the midst of violent pain, found at once a return of ease and health and strength; and arose and went to her common business.⁴²

It can be stated *categorically* therefore that when Jonathan Edwards speaks of ‘holy joy, as a great part of true religion’, as he does in *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*, he is not referring to anything akin to the laughing experience of the ‘Toronto Blessing’.⁴³ Once again, in speaking of his wife, he expresses the restraint she exercised while under the influence of joy: These transporting views and rapturous affections are not attended with any enthusiastic disposition to follow impulses, or any supposed prophetic revelations.⁴⁴

Based on his wife’s experience as the prototype of a balanced and biblical blend of truth precipitating affections and emotion, he remarked about similar experiences:

Therefore, though it would be very unreasonable and prejudicial to the interest of religion to frown upon all these extraordinary eternal effects and manifestations of great religious affections, (for a measure of them is natural, necessary, and beautiful, and the effect is no wise disproportional to the spiritual cause, and is of great benefit to promote religion); yet I think they greatly err who think that these things should be wholly unlimited, and that all should be encouraged in going in these things to the utmost length that they feel themselves inclined to the consequence of this will be very bad. There ought to be a gentle restraint held upon these things, and there should be a prudent care taken of persons in such extraordinary circumstances, and they should be moderately advised at proper seasons, not to make more ado than there is need of, but rather to hold a restraint upon their inclinations; otherwise extraordinary outward effects will grow upon them, they will be more and more natural and unavoidable, and the extraordinary outward show will increase, without any increase of the internal cause; persons will find themselves under a kind of necessity of making a great ado, with less and less affection of soul, till at length almost any slight emotion will set them going, and they will be more and more violent and boisterous, and will grow louder and louder, till their actions and behavior becomes indeed very absurd. These things experience proves.⁴⁵

42 *The Works of John Wesley* vol 19 *Journal and Diaries* vol II W Reginald Ward and Richard P Heitzenrater edd (Nashville: Abingdon Press 1990) pp 149-150

43 *J Edwards Works* vol I (Carlisle PA: Banner of Truth 1984) p 239

44 Goen p 335

45 Goen p 473

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In conclusion, it would be straining credulity to argue that Edwards would have been happy where preaching was not the central focus of worship, and especially where emotional phenomena occurred outside the immediate and convicting power of the Spirit of God as a result of the proclamation of the Word of God. Even at that, when such manifestations occurred, Edwards would have been among the first to have encouraged restraint and self-control.

It would be my hearty recommendation to the people of God to apply the following principles learned from the teachings of Edwards and his biblical base:

- 1 We must distinguish clearly between the necessary confirming signs of revival – the ‘distinguishing marks’ of renewal as seen in Edwards’ exposition and the peripheral and secondary exhibitions of them. Emotional elements and manifestations and other phenomena are clearly ancillary and subsidiary to true revival. The gracious and essential elements of the work of the Holy Spirit are primary and necessary. Among the essential elements are: love of Christ, love of and obedience to Holy Scripture, holiness, devotion to truth and love of God and man. The occurrence of emotional displays among other religious movements, cults and aberrant groups verifies and underscores the necessity of following this principle.
- 2 We must link clearly cause with effect in the display of phenomena. What has caused emotional outbursts? Is it conviction of sin, joy over salvation, or assurance on the restoration of fellowship with Christ? If so, then emotion and other phenomena may be legitimate. If there is no distinguishable cause, then the utmost caution should be exercised and constraint practised. The devil can and does play havoc in people’s lives to confuse and distort experience. Care must be exercised here.
- 3 When emotion does occur and even when it is from a seemingly legitimate cause, it should and must be restrained with sensitivity. Bizarre and gross behaviour should be controlled and inhibited. Eccentricities may hinder evangelism, create confusion in the lives of people and disorder in the church if godly and discerning wisdom are not utilized.
- 4 Revival should be sought. It should be a revival, if it is truly God’s work, stemming from the preaching of the word of God and the evangelization of the lost as a result of the renewing of the people of God. Those were the features that marked most clearly the first Great Awakening and ought to characterize any future revivals that touch our land and cross our world.

Edwards' heart beat for revival and for an ever wider and deepening work of God but always within the context of biblical authority and self-control, the fruit of the Spirit. The same posture and spirit that dominated Edwards' heart and mind must so control God's people today if revival is to be expected. As Edwards expressed it:

Thus I have (I hope, by the help of God) finished what I proposed. I have taken the more pains in it because it appears to me that now God is giving us the most happy season to attempt an universal reformation, that ever was given in New England. And 'tis a thousand pities that we should fail of that which could be so glorious, for want of being sensible of our opportunity, or being aware of these things that tend to hinder it, or our taking improper courses to obtain it, or not being sensible in what way God expects we should seek it. If it should please God to bless any means for the convincing the country of His hand in this work, and bringing them fully and freely to acknowledge His glorious power and grace in it, and engage with one heart and soul, and by due methods, to endeavor to promote it, it would be a dispensation of divine providence that would have a most glorious aspect, happily signifying the approach of great and glorious things to the church of God, and justly causing us to hope that Christ would speedily come to set up His kingdom of light, holiness, peace, and joy on earth as is foretold in His Word. 'Amen: even so, come, Lord Jesus!'⁴⁶

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