

IMMEDIATE AND PROGRESSIVE DIVINE AGENCY:
JONATHAN EDWARDS' RHETORIC OF HISTORY

by

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Finally, authors who are not quoted or named in the pages below, like John Piper or J. I. Packer, must be mentioned and acknowledged as responsible for my one decade long interest in the Puritans. They have sought to bring Jonathan Edwards' works to bear on their lives, their preaching and their pastoral ministry. They are consequently not quoted very often in scholarly writings since their work seems to lie outside the context of academia. However, present-day Edwardsean studies are undoubtedly indebted to them in more ways than we can tell, and such pastors/theologians are probably more deeply immersed in the essence of what Jonathan Edwards wrote and taught than many renowned scholars.

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CONTENTS

Introduction	pp. i-xi
• Chapter 1: THE SETTING FOR JONATHAN EDWARDS' RHETORIC OF HISTORY.....	pp. 1-41
1. 1. The Great Awakening	pp. 1-18
1. 1. a. Revival of Old Doctrines; Rise of New Movements ...	p. 2
1. 1. b. Expectations and Controversy in the Colonies	p. 6
1. 1. c. From Theological Controversy to Revolutionary Implications	p. 13
1. 2. Jonathan Edwards: Biographical and Contextual Keys	pp. 19-30
1. 2. a. Edwards the Thinker	p. 20
1. 2. b. Edwards the Convert	p. 24
1. 2. c. Edwards the Minister	p. 26
1. 3. The Northampton Revival	pp. 30-41
1. 3. a. Deep Anxieties Leading to the Height of Revival	p. 31
1. 3. b. Decline and the Scene for the Redemption Discourse ...	p. 36
• Chapter 2: RHETORIC OF HISTORY & DIVINE AGENCY	pp. 42-136
2. 1. Edwards vs. Winthrop: Love, Community and History	p. 43
2. 2. Edwards vs. Cotton: God's Kingdom on Earth	p. 57
2. 3. Edwards vs. Shepard: The Visibility of God's Work in the Saints	p. 72
2. 4. Edwards vs. Mather : The Operations of Providence in History	pp. 91-136
2. 4. a. Providence and Nature	p. 92
2. 4. b. Providence and Sacred History	p. 108
2. 4. c. Worldly Affairs, Secular History and God's Absolute Sovereignty	p. 120

- Chapter 3: PROGRESSIVE DIVINE AGENCY: THE RHETORIC OF PIETY
..... pp. 137-209
 - 3. 1. God’s Building pp. 147-177
 - 3. 1. a. Moral Decay and the Ruins of Satan’s Kingdom
..... p. 147
 - 3. 1. b. The Solid Structure of Piety
..... p. 156
 - 3. 2 Modern Science and Mechanics in Nature.....pp. 177-209
 - 3. 2. a. Cyclical History and Mechanical Providence. p. 178
 - 3. 2. b. Nature, Natural Cycles and the Goal of the Universe. p. 194
- Chapter 4: IMMEDIATE DIVINE AGENCY: THE RHETORIC OF REVIVAL
..... pp. 210-247
 - 4. 1. The ‘Hub’ of Historical Progress: The Purchase of Redemption p. 211
 - 4. 2. Of the Sun’s Dawning and the Spirit’s Outpourings pp. 216-247
 - 4. 2. a. The Paradigmatic Case of Pentecost p. 217
 - 4. 2. b. Ancient, Biblical Revivals p. 222
 - 4. 2. c. Revivals Outside the Scriptures: The Protestant Reformation
..... p. 231
- Chapter 5: CONCLUDING REMARKS & FURTHER PERSPECTIVES:
EDWARDS AT THE CROSSROADS OF AMERICAN HISTORY
..... pp. 248-258
- Works Cited pp. 259-268

IMMEDIATE AND PROGRESSIVE DIVINE AGENCY: JONATHAN EDWARDS' RHETORIC OF HISTORY

INTRODUCTION

The research leading to this dissertation began as an attempt to understand the ways in which Puritanism had a long-term influence on colonial American culture. Since Jonathan Edwards came across as a critical and pivotal figure in American thought and history in several major works by intellectual and literary historians like Perry Miller or Sacvan Bercovitch, I read through Edwards' major treatises in search of the reasons why he might have been, as it were, singled out by such notable authors. His skill as a rhetorician and logician was clear from the very beginning although it was not until I carefully read some of his homiletic works (other than the famous revival sermon "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God") that I started to view this New England theologian as first a pastor-preacher, and only secondarily a philosopher or thinker. In gauging the oratorical value of Edwards' extant sermons one is drawn to analyze his use of metaphorical language, logical argumentation and other stylistic traits that may have contributed to the impact his pulpit delivery had during the revivals. My specific inquiry into Edwards' historical thought and discourse is not unconnected to the consideration that he was, first and foremost, an orator. What later became an influential book among evangelicals in the United States and abroad, *A History of the Work of Redemption*, had first been conceived as a sermon series that the Northampton minister preached to his congregation little before the Great Awakening. This series, delivered in 1739, was not published in its original form until 1989, when it came out as volume nine of Yale's 26-volume edition of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (New Haven, 1957-2008).

A few years before this authoritative edition of Edwards' writings was completed, professor Avihu Zakai published *Jonathan Edwards's Philosophy of History: The Reenchantment of the World in the Age of Enlightenment* (Princeton, 2003). His comprehensive analysis of the colonial minister's philosophy of history goes beyond the 1739 series although Zakai does emphasize the importance of the 1730s in Edwards' intellectual development, especially as regards his "redemptive mode of historical thought". One point the author makes, which definitively determined the trajectory of this study, is that Edwards developed a "singular rhetoric of history" during the years of revival in New England (275). This dissertation, therefore, owes much to Zakai's work (and not just this one book) and, more specifically, to the insights he provides regarding the colonial author's vision and understanding of the historical process. But since his book focuses mainly on thought, not discursive modes, and covers a wide range of writings, not just those delivered in the sermonic form, the issue of Edwards' "singular rhetoric of history" is by no means exhausted. It remains to be determined how his rhetorical originality and historical imagination were fleshed out from the Northampton pulpit in the oratorical endeavor of 1739. What characterized Edwardsean revivalistic homiletics during the six months devoted to the exposition of salvation history in particular, and during the 1730s in general?

In order to establish what the distinguishing features of Edwards' discursive modes and rhetoric exactly were when he expounded the history of the Work of Redemption, I first needed to have a grasp of colonial American historical discourse in my author's literary and ideological setting. The immediate context for his construction of a singular rhetoric of history was the Great Awakening and his apocalyptic belief that

God's kingdom had to be manifestly set up in the world before the final conflagration. Since these latter elements had been present in colonial Puritan theology and discourse for more than three generations, I chose to compare Edwards' concept of *divine agency* and his ideas about how God specifically intervened in history with the same tenets in the writings of other relevant colonial American authors (chapter two). To carry out the intended study, some primary texts from the canon of pre-Revolutionary American literature were looked into in a preliminary survey. Such were the local histories of colonial Puritans like Cotton Mather, William Bradford or John Winthrop. Likewise, and since sermonic literature and oratory were to be my main focus, a wide range of homiletic texts had to be surveyed as well. John Winthrop's famous "A Model of Christian Charity" preached on board the *Arbella* in 1630 was an obvious sermon to start with (2. 1. below), and the texts of other New England clerical orators such as John Cotton, Thomas Shepard and, again, Cotton Mather fell naturally into place as I became familiar with their writings and understood their relevance and their relation to Edwards' ideological context and literary activity. The sermons of some of Jonathan Edwards' own contemporaries, like George Whitefield, John Wesley or Gilbert Tennent, were also studied and taken into account, especially to set the wider scene of revivals in the American colonies and Europe. As to the bibliographical starting point for secondary sources, the perusal of certain 'milestones' in connection with Puritanism (both European and colonial) and its cultural legacy was crucial. Such were *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century* (Perry Miller), *The Rise of Puritanism* (William Haller) or more recent works like *The Language of Canaan* (Mason Lowance) and *The Rites of Assent* (Sacvan Bercovitch). Other less well-known but equally valuable works that provided me

with the necessary background in Puritan pulpit oratory, eschatology and symbolism were Harry Stout's *The New England Soul*, Richard Bauckham's *Tudor Apocalypse* and Avihu Zakai's *Exile and Kingdom*.

The general aims of my doctoral research were thus articulated and the method of inquiry, partly triggered and informed by the foundational readings named above, was established along the following lines. The immediate religious and social context of the Great Awakening had to be examined closely and Edwards' own life and preaching activity explained within the revival setting. Thus, his most authoritative biography, George Marsden's *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven, 2003), and the most recent and comprehensive study of the years where Edwards' sermon series is framed, Thomas Kidd's *The Great Awakening* (New Haven, 2007), constituted the backbone of the first chapter of this dissertation. At the theological and ideological levels, the same could be said about Mark Noll's *America's God* (Oxford, 2002). But as someone who was already familiar with Edwards' sermonic artistry and with his 1739 series in particular, I set out to distinctly identify the reasons for Jonathan Edwards' effective and compelling articulation of divine agency in history not just in the context of colonial revivals but against the backdrop of the Enlightenment. By analyzing the thirty sermons that made up Edwards' redemptive-historical exposition with literary criteria and in search of discursive modes and figurative patterns, his theology of the deity's very essence as well as his philosophy of history emerge in what is a cohesive hermeneutic of the scriptural God and a symbolic understanding of reality that, while challenging modern modes of thought and slightly deviating from traditional ones, shrewdly draws on both of them.

As Zakai has sufficiently proved, it was *revival* that constituted the concrete agent of God's work in the order of time. However, my own findings and original thesis more specifically indicate that the ability to encompass sacred history (which began with the biblical narrative but chronologically went beyond it), secular events, his listeners' own experience and unfulfilled future prophecy lay in Edwards' conception of divine intervention in terms of both *immediate* and *progressive* activity in time and space. The revivalist preacher construed a cohesive rhetorical system where imagery and other forms of figurative language (like biblical typology) interacted with the very ontology of the deity to convey a sense that divine agency was observable in slow, gradual historical developments as much as in the miraculous and manifest acts of God. To be sure, his notions regarding the essence of God as a dynamic being were rooted in Trinitarian orthodoxy. Nevertheless, the way he envisioned and articulated the instrumentality of the Third Person of the Trinity in the progress of God's kingdom through 'outpourings of the Spirit' and the centrality of Christ's role in bringing about every immanent manifestation of the utterly transcendent deity were quite unparalleled by his Puritan predecessors or his contemporary fellow ministers. It was precisely in his treatment of issues related to the Holy Spirit's work (in conversion, spiritual awakening, etc.) that Edwards departed from some of the mainstream ideas that had been handed down in New England since the arrival of the Pilgrim Fathers in America.

So, as has already been anticipated, the first chapter of this dissertation begins precisely by setting a scene in which evoking the Spirit's work and presence was no mere theological abstraction but a powerful oratorical strategy in terms of the audience's potential response, since in 1734-35 Northamptonites had experienced what most of them

viewed as a spiritual revival ultimately brought about by God Himself. Together with other communities of the Connecticut River Valley, they experienced what has often been termed the ‘little awakening’. These deeply religious and emotionally charged events and experiences would later be considered a foretaste of and a preparation for the Great Awakening, which barely half a decade later ignited the souls of thousands of colonists from Georgia to Massachusetts. Apart from a due consideration of Edwards’ personal trajectory and the local context of his early ministry, the first chapter is concerned with defining the main features of this movement of spiritual renewal among Protestant churches, how it affected society at large and the various innovations in preaching and religious organization that derived from it.

The following chapter attempts, through the comparative study previously alluded to (p. iii above), to deal with all the theological tenets that had become essential in New England thought and tradition in relation to the idea of God’s presence within individuals and among communities. In other words, in chapter two I seek to define ‘divine agency’ and what Edwards and his Puritan predecessors understood to be the essence of divine activity in history, whether blessing His elect, judging sinners or sovereignly ruling over nations and creation. Different outlooks on providence, church and civil government or the Spirit’s work in human souls are traced through numerous historical and homiletic writings of John Winthrop, John Cotton, Thomas Shepard and Cotton Mather. By comparing these to Edwards’ own historical vision and discourse (mainly in his sermonic writings of the 1730s) and in connection with the concept of divine agency or God’s intervention in the order of time, the reader is prepared for the detailed study of the sermon series that constitutes the main object of this dissertation.

The analysis of the thirty sermons preached during 1739 is divided into the third and fourth chapters, the first of which deals with the ‘progressive mode’ of divine agency. In chapter three, therefore, I identify the different rhetorical strategies through which Edwards effectively conveys the idea of a deity that is at work through secondary or indirect means and that gradually builds His kingdom throughout history. There are a number of literary figures and discursive patterns that are analyzed in this regard, ultimately demonstrating that the preacher intended to provide from the pulpit a means of spiritual edification and assurance for believers. By dwelling on the slow but relentless motion of divine activity and contemplating the very dynamics of the Spirit throughout the biblical narrative and church history, Edwards hoped to inspire his listeners to seek a spiritual experience that would follow the same patterns found in God’s interventions through the ages. It was not necessarily a remarkable revival-like experience that he had in mind at this stage in his pastorate but, rather, a growth in personal piety attained through means like the sober collective act of reflecting on the Work of Redemption.

As a complement to this ‘rhetoric of piety’ that sought to inculcate a certain kind of spirituality in the congregation, the Edwardsean construal of cosmic history also included the ‘immediate mode’ of divine agency. In retelling the grand historical narrative “from the fall of man to the end of the world”, this Calvinist orator could not limit divine activity to a series of observable and predictable patterns that materialized in progressive dispensations of grace throughout human history. By contrast, he retained the essence of the transcendent and sovereign God by incorporating into his prolonged exposition of the Work of Redemption the ‘rhetoric of revival’, whereby he emphasized the arbitrary and unpredictable character of certain kinds of divine irruptions within the

historical process. These were ‘outpourings of the Spirit’ like the one experienced by the church during Pentecost and Edwards developed an original and creative exegetical method that allowed him to weave together the biblical story and the audience’s own experience of conversion and revival. Moreover, he extended, as it were, this exegesis to the interpretation of recent historical events, like the Protestant Reformation or other instances of spiritual renewal across denominations, achieving a sense that this manner of progress of the divine plan transcended time and space. In this rhetorical mode God was envisioned as acting immediately upon the minds and hearts of humankind although the fruit resulting from such awakenings was to be reaped much in the same manner that the preacher implied through the progressive discursive mode. Although the *immediate* and *progressive* discursive modes, which correspond roughly to the ideas of divine transcendence and immanence respectively, are analyzed separately for the sake of clarity and for a due distinction of certain categories, in Edwards’ rhetoric of history there is but one God at work in all and through all.

The fifth and last chapter briefly puts forward some reflections with regard to the legacy of Edwardsean philosophy and rhetoric of history. It is suggested that some connections which have recurrently been explored and hinted at by scholars in the past (between Edwards’ typological innovations and later American Transcendentalism or between his postmillennialism and the impulse that the American Revolution received from patriotic ministers who drew heavily on his theology) need to be addressed keeping in mind the historical thought that underlies the Northampton pastor’s strategies unpacked throughout the pages below. His alleged progressivism must be qualified, to say the least, by rediscovering his relentless commitment to the Scriptures as an all-

encompassing source of knowledge, including political theory. Similarly, his understanding of nature as a source of revelation and as bearing the mark of divine immanence must not blind Jonathan Edwards scholars to the fact that the Son of God revealed in the gospel was for him the ultimate, comprehensive and only saving divine communication to a naturally corrupt humanity and fallen creation.

1. THE SETTING FOR JONATHAN EDWARDS' RHETORIC OF HISTORY.

Any serious approach to the figure of Jonathan Edwards and any comprehensive analysis of his sermons' influence must begin by setting the scene in that period of social turmoil and theological controversy known as the Great Awakening (1740-1742). Edwards' commitment to the revivalist cause and his prominent role in defending and promoting it make it essential to pay close attention to this religious phenomenon. Although the sermon series that will constitute the main object of this study, namely, the Redemption Discourse,¹ was preached to the Northampton (Massachusetts) congregation during the year 1739, I have considered it appropriate to begin by describing the wider context of the colonies. After the Great Awakening has been sufficiently defined and clarified for our present purpose, I will go back in time to sketch out the more particular scene of Northampton, where Edwards' pulpit oratory flourished during the 1730s and 1740s.

1.1. *The Great Awakening.*

It would be impossible to deal here with all the different interpretations of this movement that literary scholars and American historians have come up with in the last century alone. Nevertheless, there are some basic facts about the Great Awakening that must be unpacked in order to understand its immediate effect on a still deeply religious

¹ The only edition of Edwards' actual manuscripts of these sermons (he never prepared them for publication as a sermon series) is found in John F. Wilson, ed. *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Vol. 9. Following Wilson's criteria (9: 1, 2, n. 1), I will refer to this sermon series as the 'Redemption Discourse' to distinguish it from the more famous version published posthumously as a theological treatise in 1774 under the title *A History of the Work of Redemption*. (*Works*, I, 532-619). All quotations from Jonathan Edwards' writings will, unless otherwise indicated, be from the 26 volume Yale edition of his works. Hickman's two-volume nineteenth century edition will be quoted as *Works*, followed by 'I' or 'II' and page number.

society, as New England was, and the consequences and wider implications it had for the generation of colonial Americans that witnessed the birth of the United States. Both of these aspects may be summed up in Hugh Brogan's words when he says that the Great Awakening not only "saved souls, but it split churches; indeed, its emphasis on the importance of individual experience may be said to have democratized American Religion" (91). In a similar vein, Carroll and Noble assert that "a pluralistic approach to matters of religion became possible" as a consequence of the "major intellectual war" which followed the awakening (68).

1. 1. a. Revival of Old Doctrines; Rise of New Movements.

As the terms 'awakening' and 'revival' are often used interchangeably, it may reasonably be asked what it was that was being *revived* during the Great Awakening. This religious movement was not the result of the introduction of any foreign doctrine or new fashion but, rather, it drew heavily on Puritan and Reformation heritage. Whether Anglican, Presbyterian or Congregational, revivalist preachers (Jonathan Edwards among them) emphasized "the importance of a personally felt conversion experience –a tenet that had been central to the seventeenth-century church in New England" (Marcus & Sollors, 82). The awakening was thoroughly Calvinistic, particularly in New England, as it was marked by "the old Puritan concern" with sin, the new birth and "the necessity of conversion" (Brogan, 91). While some historians will go no further than to say that "[i]n some respects the Great Awakening was a return to the old belief in salvation through faith and God's saving grace" (Middleton, 263), others reckon that the period of colonial revivals from 1735 to 1745 was "similar to the situation under the Puritans" (Noll, *America's God*, 75).

A fairly solid piece of evidence in favor of the opinion that this was essentially a rediscovery of seventeenth-century Puritan doctrine and that revival preachers were not misinterpreting their forefathers' teaching, or presenting it in a biased or inaccurate manner, is the fact that the demand for religious writings, particularly Puritan classics, rose significantly during this period. One example will suffice to illustrate this. Following the departure of Gilbert Tennent (an influential Presbyterian itinerant preacher from the Middle Colonies), the prominent Boston minister Thomas Prince explained that

The people [from the Boston area] seemed to have a renewed taste for those old pious and experimental writers, Mr. Hooker, Shepard, Gurnal, William Guthrie, Joseph Alein, Isaac Ambrose, Dr. Owen, and others [...] The evangelical writings of these deceased authors, as well as others alive [...] were now read with singular pleasure; some of them reprinted and in great numbers quickly bought and studied. And the more experimental our preaching was, like theirs, the more it was relished. (Gaustad, 34)

Thus, we see that the content of those sermons which so many people swarmed to hear was no new doctrine. Nevertheless, the Great Awakening did become closely linked to the emergence of new movements.

One of these was Methodism, which emerged within the Church of England as a movement of spiritual renewal. Methodism began to spread during the decade of the 1730s, precisely when the first signs of revival in the colonies became apparent. The term 'Methodist' was first applied in Oxford to the Wesley brothers, John and Charles, and to their followers because of their holy, disciplined ('methodic') principles and lifestyle ("Methodism"). In the present study, however, the figure we are most concerned with is George Whitefield. Like the Wesleys, Whitefield experienced a radical conversion during his years at Pembroke College (Oxford) and placed great

emphasis on holy living² (Dallimore, I, 70-77). Unlike the Wesleys, though, he came to strictly Calvinist convictions. This would be a key factor for Whitefield to play such a prominent role in the revival of the colonies, since the established churches of New England and the Middle Colonies still held fast to Calvinism and saw Arminianism,³ with its denial of God's absolute sovereignty, as a threat. Whether it is historically accurate to call George Whitefield "The Founder of Methodism" or not, it is undeniable that he became the leading figure of the movement in colonial America and, most significantly, he introduced the practice of open-air itinerant preaching, later followed by John Wesley (Dallimore, II, 531). More will be said on the relevance of the itinerant preaching style below.

Returning to the issue of 'old doctrine' and the novelty or alleged innovations of the Great Awakening, it might be claimed (as some historians have) that since there was "no serious declension in religious belief" in churches in the colonies during the years preceding the revival, only the introduction of new elements or forces can account for such social turmoil and for the shaking of the religious establishment, especially in New England. The other side of the story, however, is that there was an increasingly complacent and relaxed membership in these churches who were "adopting a more rational approach" to Christian faith and principles, which undermined the essence of belief in a supernatural rebirth of the soul. As for the clergy's role in the decline of

² Apart from an emphasis on conversion and the study and meditation of the Bible, they promoted the doing of good to orphans, slaves and other distinct groups within communities. Likewise, "an intense devotion to hymnody" was developed in Methodism (Noll, *Rise*, 64).

³ Arminian doctrine was a reaction against the deterministic implications of a Calvinistic understanding of predestination and it affirmed the key role of free will in the process of salvation. It was named after the Dutch Reformed theologian Jacobus Arminius, whose doctrinal legacy was set forth one year after his death in the 'Remonstrance' of 1610 ("Arminianism").

experiential (or ‘heart’) religion, their sermons had lately become “more theoretical and philosophical in content” (Middleton, 262, 263). Furthermore, there had taken place a “taming” of the sovereign God “as two generations of Puritan ministers had tried to evade the classic Calvinist dilemmas of enforcing moral behavior when it could not earn salvation and saving men from despair when there was no earthly certainty of being among the elect”. The development of the so-called ‘federal theology’⁴ had come to convey the idea “that God would elect those who behaved as though they were saints” within the community. This tendency in New England religious thought had found a source and a doctrinal sanction in the tradition of the ‘preparationist’ model of conversion which could be traced back to the Pilgrim Fathers.⁵ This vein of colonial Puritanism established a number of ‘steps’ which were deemed essential for reaching the status of true convert and saint. It emphasized the “use of means” (the practice of moral duties) “such as prayer, ordinances [and] sincere moral reform” so as to imply “that God would reward those who prepared” (Tracy, 25, 204 n. 19). Thus, the way was paved for a moralistic religious formalism that departed essentially from the experiential concept of Christian living. This concept emphasized the genuineness of motivations and the role of the affections in conversion as well as the need to lead a pious and religious life.

There was likewise an international front where pure Reformed and Puritan ideals of religious experience were quickly losing ground in the first half of the

⁴ Regarding this theological development in New England and the above mentioned implication, see Miller, *Errand*, 89-98.

⁵ Thomas Hooker is the major first-generation colonial figure which represents the beginning of this “departure from the experiential tradition” of Puritanism (Goen, 4: 12). An interesting study comparing his doctrine of spiritual ‘preparation’ to that of John Cotton is found in Habegger, “Preparing the Soul for Christ: The Contrasting Sermon Forms of John Cotton and Thomas Hooker” (1969).

eighteenth century. Colonial clergy looked to their European brethren for guidance and new inspiration, and in doing so they found (to name one significant example) Irish and Scottish Presbyterians being “influenced by the spread of Enlightenment opinions that undercut the force of traditional Calvinism” (Noll, *Rise*, 45). For the revivalists of the Great Awakening, the abandonment or the distortion of sound doctrine were as deadly for ‘true religion’ as indifference toward or coldness in spiritual matters. Genuine conversion should not simply be a heartfelt experience, but had to proceed from a rightly informed mind. Without the backbone of theology, churchgoers’ piety would not flow from a godly motivation and religion could only be expected to degenerate into hypocrisy and formalism. Thus, the main grievance brought forth by evangelical⁶ preachers was not in principle against the ecclesiastical establishment itself or what it represented but, rather, they viewed themselves as fighting a “battle against deadness and formality in the churches”, whether on the clergy’s or the laity’s part (Dallimore, I, 433).

1. 1. b. Expectations and Controversy in the Colonies.

The momentous arrival in America of the English Methodist preacher George Whitefield at the end of the year 1739 may be said to have marked the beginning of the Great Awakening. Although there were some preachers from the colonies, like Gilbert Tennent or Jonathan Edwards himself, who would play no small role in firing up the flames of revival, Whitefield was undoubtedly “the most important figure in fomenting

⁶ The way the term ‘evangelical’ will be used in the present study basically coincides with the definition of “evangelicalism” provided by Noll: “The form of modern Protestantism characterized by a stress on conversion, the Bible as supreme authority, activism manifest especially in efforts to spread the Christian message, and a focus on the cross as the defining reality of Christian faith” (*America’s God*, 564-565).

the massive awakenings of the 1740s” (Kidd, 40). Tens of thousands gathered around the charismatic preacher and there was hardly any place in the colonies where the winds of revival did not blow. His thundering voice, which, according to the testimony of Benjamin Franklin, could reach an assembly of no less than 30,000 people out in the open air (Dallimore, I, 439),⁷ announced the urgent need for the new birth and exhorted everyone to flee from religious formalism as well as from wrath to come.

The idea of and the longing for a general ‘revival of true religion’ had been passed down by some key New England figures of the previous generation, like Solomon Stoddard or Cotton Mather (Kidd, 8). Although Whitefield, ordained in the Church of England and beginning his preaching ministry there, might seem an “unlikely vessel” for the advancement of this expected revival, Jonathan Edwards and a great part of New England were willing to look through the corruption that the Anglican Church was normally associated with, to see in this ‘Grand Itinerant’⁸ a divine instrument which had been raised up “to revive the mysterious, spiritual, despised, and exploded doctrines of the gospel” and was “full of a spirit of zeal for the promotion of real vital piety” (Marsden, *A Life*, 204).

Expectations at Whitefield’s arrival were probably lower but also existed in other parts of colonial America like New Jersey (where the Presbyterian Church, and therefore Calvinism, was well established), South Carolina or Georgia (Kidd, 75). Apart from this preacher’s undoubted charisma and the direct impact of his sermons (which were read by many even before they had seen or heard him), a great part of his tours’

⁷ Arnold Dallimore refers to a personal account where Franklin explained that hearing Whitefield preach live in the open air and carrying out some estimates of the radius within which he might be heard, “reconciled [him] to the newspaper accounts of his having preached to twenty-five thousand people in the fields” (I, 439).

⁸ George Whitefield was commonly known by this name (Marcus & Sollors, 81).

success and attraction in the colonies was due to newspaper publicity and the publication of his own journals (Kidd, 45, 47). Benjamin Franklin, having no evangelical convictions himself but seeing the great potential in the figure of the Grand Itinerant and having felt the power of his oratory, became his admirer and one of his most cooperative publishers. He published a considerable number of Whitefield's writings from his printing firm in Philadelphia and established a long-term personal, as well as financial, relationship with him (Noll, *Rise*, 106).

Whitefield was, like Edwards, thoroughly Calvinistic in his theology and they both helped to revive "the old Puritan concern with the conviction of sin, the necessity of conversion, and the certainty of salvation". It is no exaggeration to say that "[s]pectacular results were achieved" (Brogan, 91). The old message, nevertheless, acquired new force when preached "extemporaneously" (using no sermon notes) and in highly emotional dramatizations like those of Whitefield. His sermons were not just oral but visual spectacles (Marcus & Sollors, 80). Harry Stout quotes an instance of a memorable preaching moment as Whitefield's early biographer, John Gillies, described it:

"See here!" said he, pointing to the lightning [a thunder storm was passing nearby], which played on the corner of the pulpit—"Tis a glance from the angry eye of Jehovah! Hark!" continued he, raising his finger in a listening attitude, as the distant thunder grew louder and louder, and broke in one tremendous crash over the building. "It was the voice of the Almighty as he passed by in his anger!" As the sound died away he covered his face with his hands, and knelt beside his pulpit [...] Rising and pointing to the beautiful object, he exclaimed, "Look upon the rainbow..."

Whitefield's preaching method, especially his improvisation without notes, "had never been practiced by Congregational ministers or taught at the colleges" (Stout, *Soul*, 190-

192). The impact and influence of the new homiletic method may be summed up in Mark Noll's words:

Forthright preaching of repentance, the redemptive work of Christ, the necessity of faith and the privileges of holy living were Whitefield's sermonic stock in trade. But because he usually dispensed with a written-out sermon text, because he preached intentionally for emotional as well as intellectual effect, and because he called on individuals to respond *as individuals* to his message, these traits also became characteristic of evangelical preaching in general. (*Rise*, 132; author's italics)

It was impossible for anyone in a society so religious as New England's to remain neutral before such powerful and compelling preaching.

Although controversy would completely take over towards the end of the Great Awakening, there was an overwhelming majority who welcomed the fresh message delivered by itinerant preachers and numerous local ministers favored the movement. The content of what was preached from New England pulpits and the longings of congregations were pervasively affected by the arrival of Whitefield before bitter disputes began to tear the Congregational establishment apart. Under the influence of Whitefield, "weekday lectures and sabbath sermons were given over entirely to the subject of the new birth". Even in Boston, where religious formalism might be expected to have taken deeper root, there was a demand for "affective preaching" (Stout, *Soul*, 195, 196). While some have assumed that revivalist preachers were "particularly effective in reaching people in vulnerable places" (Carroll & Noble, 67), Edwin Gaustad seems to have provided enough evidence to prove that at least in New England the awakening "knew no boundaries, social or geographical, that it was both urban and

rural, and that it reached both lower and upper classes” (42).⁹ Furthermore, there was a considerable increase in the number of communicants in churches throughout the land, young people being the most heavily represented group (Stout, *Soul*, 197). Whether the religious movement be considered as a “pouring out of the Spirit of God” or a phenomenon where “multitudes were seriously, soberly and solemnly out of their wits” (Gaustad, 135), the Great Awakening had an astounding influence on colonial spiritual life at least during the early 1740s. The level of expectation and the general welcome to news and symptoms of revival on the part of ministers and congregations favored this early success.

Those ministers who were in favor of revival and against the dry intellectualism of Harvard and Yale began to be labeled “New Lights”.¹⁰ The traditionalist Congregational clergy of New England, who (in principle) were also Calvinists, came to be called “Old Lights” in opposition to the incipient doctrinal school, and advocated for a more rationalistic interpretation of the Scriptures. The latter caricatured the former as “enthusiasts” and were, in turn, accused of being spiritually dead and “unconverted” (Stout, *Soul*, 194, 199). The following generation of Americans would witness both the “shattering of the Congregational establishment in New England” (Goen, *Revivalism*, ix) as many churches turned Unitarian or Arminian and the number and size of congregations waned notably in relative terms, and the dramatic expansion of those denominations which were imbued with the theology of the revivalist, New Divinity

⁹ For a detailed survey of the revival’s extent, see the whole chapter entitled “The Flood, 1741-1742” (Gaustad, 42-60). Richard Middleton (264, 265) provides a bibliographical note (n. 6) on the various perspectives which have existed regarding the possible socio-economic causes behind the revival’s success and opposition.

¹⁰ For a brief explanation of the movement and its link to Edwards and to revivalism in general, see Marsden, “Biography”, 27-28 and Sweeney, “Evangelical Tradition in America”, 218-220.

school.¹¹ This movement would become associated with resistance to British rule during the revolutionary age as religious sentiment and ideals permeated the politics of independents and patriots (Stout, *Soul*, 263, 286).¹² But the seed of a theology “of, by and for the people” (Noll, *America’s God*, 145), and therefore the idea of a God who was closer to individuals than to institutions or structures, had been sown during the awakening of the 1740s.

The issue of how and where the preaching of the Word was to take place, and (most importantly) *who* had the authority to perform it, soon became a cause of division among pro-revival clergy. Old lights used the fact that “lay exhorters” were being encouraged to preach by some revivalists to attack the movement as a whole and lay forward accusations of both social and ecclesiastical “great disorder” (Stout, *Soul*, 204). Since many settled ministers who looked favorably upon the awakening thought that having lay Christians preach the gospel authoritatively was a threat to their position and role in society, the unity of the pro-revivalist party started to break down (Stout, *Soul*, 198). Jonathan Edwards was one of those moderates who, while essentially supporting the revival, could not approve of untrained laity being sent out to minister the Word to multitudes or even to small ‘societies’.¹³

¹¹ Figures showing the relative decline of the Congregational Church and the notable growth of evangelical churches are found in Noll, *America’s God*, 162-169.

¹² For further analysis of the different ways in which the New Divinity movement and patriotism during the Revolution were linked in New England, see Weber, *Rhetoric and History*. A more general but equally valuable discussion is found in Bercovitch, *Jeremiad*, 93-131.

¹³ Edwards, nevertheless, had been one of the first ministers in New England to encourage religious meetings apart from the established Sabbath services and weekday lectures, especially among the youth. Yet, it probably seemed right to Edwards that such meetings of “social religion” should take place only because it had been him who “proposed it to the young people”. Under the minister’s supervision and sanctioned by him, it was “accordingly

At the same time, “recently graduated itinerants discovered that much of what they had learned in college had to be unlearned” if they wanted to bear the fruit of the Grand Itinerant (Stout, *Soul*, 200). Edwards himself may have tried to emulate Whitefield by preaching without relying so much on sermon notes, after being deeply impressed by the Methodist’s extemporaneous style (Kinnach, 10: 122). Learning to write and read sermons was part of a minister’s training in New England and such practice was now, like so many other things, being challenged by revivalists. While the usefulness and worth of traditional training for ministry was implicitly called into question, Whitefield openly criticized Yale and Harvard colleges (Stout, *Soul*, 202) and Gilbert Tennent targeted the clergy in his famous sermon on *The Danger of an Unconverted Ministry* (1740). The social tension and the weakening of the clergy that arose from these controversies is illustrated by the fact that “[n]ever before in New England’s religious history were so many ministers censured by their congregations or removed from office” (Stout, *Soul*, 208).

When the Grand Itinerant was not allowed to preach in meetinghouses, he would go out on the common or the fields, as he had done in Britain, and would herald his message achieving even greater results among the spiritually thirsty multitudes. The fact that he was not welcome in every parish and town did not discourage him but, rather, was interpreted as a sign that he was delivering the pure gospel, which inevitably resulted in opposition and contention. This “opposition” he turned into “a tool of promotion and publicity” (Mahaffey, 38). Eventually, the very genuineness of the revival would be called into question and become the centre of controversy in New England. Itinerancy, lay preaching (which was being encouraged by radical revivalists

done” and this practice was even “imitated by elder people” in Northampton, continuing right up to the late 1730s (*Faithful Narrative*, 4: 148). On how this became a model for other towns near Northampton, see Kidd, 17, 18.

like James Davenport) and the “censorious spirit” which Whitefield and Tennent sometimes showed by rashly accusing other ministers of being unconverted, were some of the issues that made tensions rise and left any genuine desire for orderly piety and spiritual reformation in the background of the debate.

1. 1. c. From Theological Controversy to Revolutionary Implications.

Although caution must be taken when establishing a connection between the Great Awakening of the 1740s and the revolution carried out by the following generation¹⁴, it seems undeniable that revivalism (especially as Jonathan Edwards articulated it) somehow became “a force toward independence” (Bercovitch, *Jeremiad*, 105; *Rites*, 153). It is reasonable, anyhow, to assert that the religious revival brought revolutionary changes to colonial life and society in more ways than one. Edwin Gaustad sums up some of the experiential and social implications of New Light theology for New England society:

Those to whom religion in the 1740’s had suddenly become meaningful knew that the kingdom of God was within them; their private divine vocation, be it called new light, inner light, or sense of the heart, was their ultimate and occasionally their only appeal. To them only one covenant was of pressing significance: the covenant of grace. The church covenant was important, but secondary. Mediation was unnecessary, priesthood was universal. The civil covenant was obsolete, and society was shattered, but into members not classes.

¹⁴ The clearest, and perhaps most controversial, attempt to link this religious phenomenon with political developments toward independence was made by Alan Heimert in *Religion and the American Mind*. See also n. 12 above.

This “religious democratization”,¹⁵ together with the “breaking up of the prevailing parish system”, further weakened the established church and “promoted greater individual freedom from ecclesiastical control” (113). It gradually became more common, especially among young people, for church members to change congregation or attend different churches and ‘societies’¹⁶ simultaneously. This atmosphere of freedom accompanied the phenomenon of itinerancy, which, according to Timothy D. Hall, “came to symbolize an openness to the work of God’s free spirit in a mobile, expansive world”. This, in turn, paralleled “the explosion of the century’s revolution in commerce, and the unprecedented human mobility throughout the empire” (130, 131).

Whitefield’s impact in New England was only the “trigger” of those developments which eventually resulted in a “more democratic configuration” of both church and society (Stout, *Soul*, 185).¹⁷ Demographic growth and expansion, economic development and toleration laws favoring the existence and growth of other Protestant denominations (most notably Baptists and Anglicans), were only some of the factors that accompanied this major change in the structure of society (186, 356 n. 4). As separatism grew and more people joined churches and groups of dissenters, the issue of taxes for the support of the Congregational establishment also became controversial. As was explained above, clerical authority was being weakened and the spirituality (and therefore the legitimacy) of Harvard and Yale colleges was questioned in an “uprising of the common people” against intellectualism and rationalism (Miller, *Errand*, 157). Moreover, the authority of the clergy could not stand long, considering the wide variety

¹⁵ For a comprehensive study of this development in relation to colonial revivalism and in later American Evangelicalism, see Nathan O. Hatch’s *The Democratization of American Christianity*.

¹⁶ On these ‘societies’, see n. 13 above.

¹⁷ In this paragraph I am following the arguments set forth by Stout in the chapter entitled “Awakening” (185-211).

of opinions about the revival that had become apparent by 1743. For some ministers, like Charles Chauncy of Boston's First Church, it was a social blight or mere enthusiasm at best, while moderate supporters, like Jonathan Edwards, recognized the hand of God in it even if there were some excesses to be regretted and censured.

Colonial family structures did not remain unaffected in the midst of these divisions and controversies. According to Mark Noll, "[t]he Awakening also contributed to the general breakup of family cohesion that increasingly characterized eighteenth-century colonial life". The kind of emphasis made by revivalists on the crucial (even transcendental) role of the individual was an implicit departure from "inherited structures", and more particularly from the "ecclesiastical order" that had been a pillar of social cohesion for more than a century (*America's God*, 106). Whitefield's message and attitude "combined an extraordinary disregard for inherited church traditions with a breathtaking entrepreneurial spirit" (Noll, *Rise*, 107). Land shortages and increasing opportunities for social and financial advancement in the West, together with this social dimension and implications of revivalism, led to a gradual change of lifestyle and mentality in the younger sectors of the population. It was precisely among the uprooted youth that mass revivals flourished best (Stout, *Soul*, 196).

The historian and anthropologist may ascribe more or less value to the religious element within the social change and turmoil that took place during this period and the following decades, or he may even dismiss any real positive influence of the old doctrines that were rediscovered. Carroll and Noble, for example, seem to assume that only a "growing secularization" (as opposed to the outdated Reformed and evangelical ideals preached by revivalists and embraced by thousands during the pre-Revolutionary period) would ultimately contribute to bring about a more democratic and modern model of society. This process of secularization would be given "institutional validity"

after 1776 with the definitive Church-State separation enshrined in the First Amendment (68). But this is only a half-truth. The Great Awakening, viewed essentially as a religious and experiential event, probably enabled society to “move in more democratic directions” (Stout, *Soul*, 207) by doing more than just shattering the ecclesiastical establishment and anticipating pluralistic relativism, as Carroll and Noble suggest. In one sense, it may be said to have “hastened the collapse of orthodoxy” in New England (Gaustad, 82), but it is no less true that the recovery of Puritan practical theology which took place during this period also inspired and empowered members of society to initiate changes which became increasingly important for the coming of age of American democracy.

If the “leveling effects” (Kidd, 155) of New Light divinity had a great impact within the ecclesiastical sphere, they were similarly felt at the social level through the action of some revivalists who crossed the boundaries of social strata in revolutionary, or at least challenging, ways. They did so, for instance, by getting involved in evangelism with African-Americans and even making them partakers of the ministry of the Word (Kidd, 214, 227). Whitefield’s efforts to educate slaves and his famous letter¹⁸ denouncing abuses against slaves as he perceived them in the southern colonies “led him to be blamed for ‘encourag[ing] the negroes’ during the New York slave conspiracy of 1741” (Marcus & Sollors, 81). Although Whitefield did not challenge the institution of slavery as such, “his influence was exerted for the welfare of the black man” in the form of several educational and charity projects for slaves (Dallimore, I, 509). These were not isolated initiatives by some extraordinary or particularly pious men, but they

¹⁸ “A Letter to the Inhabitants of Maryland, Virginia, and North and South Carolina Concerning their Negroes” (Whitefield, *Three Letters*, 13-16). The letter was published by Benjamin Franklin in Philadelphia and circulated widely throughout the colonies (Dallimore, I, 495, 496).

were practical instances which evinced the reality that “Evangelical Christianity [...] held the message of liberation and equality at its core” (Kidd, 214).

With regard to the implications of revivalist theology for the abolitionist cause, it is worth mentioning that Edwards had an *indirect* mid- and long-term influence on the battle against slavery through his son, Jonathan Edwards, Jr., and especially through one of his theological disciples and his first biographer, Samuel Hopkins. Both of them “sought the cessation of not only the institution [of slavery] but the trade as well” (Piper & Taylor, 154). Hopkins, together with Joseph Bellamy, was responsible for handing down the legacy of Edwardsean theology to later generations, and would become a precursor of the abolitionist movement through his participation in antislavery activism as early as the 1770s (Kidd, 230-232). Although Jonathan Edwards had owned slaves himself and his view on slavery was that of any “social conservative” (Marsden, *A Life*, 259), it was precisely the “[m]embers of the New Divinity school” who were “among the first Americans to publish against the slave trade and slavery” (Saillant, 83). The sphere of social activism was one and the same with theology for men like Hopkins, who in the year 1776 would warn Congress “that the wrath of heaven would fall upon a nation which, claiming for itself the rights of liberty, refused to grant them to the slaves” (Niebuhr, 159).

The gospel message should have always gone hand in hand with the cause of freedom, but it seems that sometimes those men who were most busy preaching the depths of the former, like Edwards or Whitefield, were blinded as to the fruits the latter could bear in this world. Their audiences and readers were eventually granted the sight to discern the spiritual evil that lay, not only in being a slave to sin, but in the enslavement of any human being to his neighbor. Writing a poem “On the Death of the Rev. Mr. George Whitefield”, Phillis Wheatley (who could testify to the experience of

deliverance from both human and spiritual slavery) reflected on the “Impartial Saviour” she had heard the Methodist itinerant preach about in and out of season. If God’s Word was true, this savior would make “sons and kings, and Priests to God” (51) out of African- as well as Anglo-Americans. It was only natural that Wheatley’s republican odes, composed during the Revolution, should be brimming with commonplace evangelical doctrines, like Christ’s atonement on the cross or eternal punishment, as well as with the themes of freedom and liberty (Noll, *America’s God*, 147). Thus, personal and collective religious experience during the revival of the 1740s and New Light (revivalist) theology became a significant contribution to change through the manifold social and ideological ramifications of the Great Awakening.

The role and place of the Great Awakening in the history of American thought also deserves a brief comment at this point. Mark Noll considers Jonathan Edwards and the Anglican minister Samuel Johnson to be “America’s two most important Christian thinkers at midcentury” (*America’s God*, 102). Edwards, therefore, stands as the foremost representative of the eventual intellectual and philosophical developments associated with the revival, which Noll’s words succinctly describe:

A great social transformation lay behind the shift in ethical axioms. That shift began in the religious and domestic circumstances of the 1730s and 1740s before it took political shape a generation later. The colonial revivalists, who were conservative in doctrine, nonetheless helped create the social conditions in which a new intellectual perspective could flourish. The revival compromised the traditional importance of inherited structures by placing more emphasis on the individual’s reception of God’s grace than on the individual’s place in an inherited ecclesiastical order. Its ideal of the pure church hastened a sectarian fragmentation of the traditionally inclusive state churches. Its

fervent millennialism encouraged a negative opinion of the theological past. (*America's God*, 106)

The latter aspect (i.e., revivalist millennialism) will be given special attention in due course and is particularly relevant to this study as it is closely linked to the issue of 'history' in Edwards' thought and sermons. But the main conclusion is that (paradoxical though it may seem) revivalism, which was essentially a renewal of the Reformation and Puritanism (Noll, *America's God*, 95), paved the way for a kind of republican and modern thought which, in turn, was wedded to Enlightenment moral philosophy. Edwards probably would not have approved of the way evangelicalism and republicanism became mutually adapted¹⁹ but, ironically, his prominent role in and his relentless defense of the revival in the colonies played a crucial part in that development.

1. 2. *Jonathan Edwards: Biographical and Contextual Factors*

Since my purpose in this introduction is to eventually arrive at the scene that constituted Edwards' stage for action as a revivalist preacher and orator (namely, the Northampton pulpit from the mid 1730s to the early 1740s), this second section will not yet deal with the local awakening of 1734-35 but will simply attempt to sketch out a biographical portrait, focusing on some key factors. A detailed description of the Northampton revival will be provided in the third (1. 3) and closing section of the present introductory chapter. The most comprehensive biography of Edwards to date is George Marsden's *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven, 2003), upon which the following account largely depends.

¹⁹ See Noll, *America's God*, 82-87 for a description of this 'mutual adaptation'.

1. 2. a. Edwards the Thinker.

One key to the rhetoric and art of any orator or literary author surely lies in the intellect behind the ideas expressed. Therefore, it seems appropriate to begin with some details about Jonathan Edwards' education and intellectual life. Being the only male child of the Edwards household, his schooling was given high priority by his father, Timothy, who was a minister in East Windsor, Connecticut. Edwards and his sisters received a solid education from their parents at home and were sent to Boston to finish school (Marsden, *A Life*, 17-19). In the fall of 1716, having just turned thirteen, he left home for Wethersfield, near Hartford, to begin college at Connecticut's Collegiate School.

There were at this time three competing branches of the college, one of which was located in New Haven. Through the mediation of Cotton Mather, the newly born institution had received a substantial donation from an English merchant called Elihu Yale, which the college trustees employed to build a fine building in New Haven. Eventually, this branch of the college prevailed and all students, the young Edwards among them, had to move to the new premises. However, the coming together of all three branches of the college only became possible after the controversy over the unorthodox beliefs of a tutor had been settled. The tutor was the Arminian theologian Samuel Johnson, who, after being removed from Yale College, would "defect to the great Puritan nemesis, Anglicanism" (Marsden, *A Life*, 35). Thus, by 1719, the fledgling academic institution already seemed to show its determination to be the guardian of orthodoxy in New England.

The new college was considered necessary by many in New England since Harvard College had, from the early eighteenth century, "begun to adopt more liberal attitudes in religious matters, reflecting the growth of Arminian views" (Middleton,

270). Modern thought had already found its way into the college's curriculum during the second half of the seventeenth century, as is shown by the fact that its graduates were familiar with, and to some degree influenced by, the thought of key contemporary philosophers like Descartes (Miller, *Mind*, 121, 512 n. 15). Solomon Stoddard (Edwards' maternal grandfather), for instance, owned a copy of Descartes' works as early as the 1660s, when he was still a student at Harvard College. Although some medieval assumptions about education were still made at Harvard in the eighteenth century, the new trends of "natural philosophy" (i.e., natural science) became increasingly influential and were eventually introduced as part of the curriculum (Marsden, *A Life*, 61). It is clear that in the early 1700s Yale was "far behind Harvard in the assimilation of modern learning" (Fiering, 29).

During Edwards' student years, the college of New Haven still stood for orthodoxy. However, by 1760 there was no substantial difference between the two colleges (Middleton, 270). Despite belonging to a class and social circle that in some respects resisted modern thought and new theological notions, the young student was clearly affected by the prevailing concern "with staying current" that existed among New England clergy. His "exhilarating reading of Locke, Newton, and a host of other modern thinkers convinced him that he stood at a pivotal point in New England's history". As Edwards' notebooks from this period show, he was well aware of his intellectual abilities and was quite determined to become an international figure. Though his ambition included the advancement of the *heavenly cause* in the souls of men through the preaching of the gospel, he also hoped to "play a role in promoting God's *earthly kingdom* at a crucial moment in the history of redemption" by partaking in the spread of Christian knowledge through "plain reason and demonstration, deduced from the Word of God" (Marsden, *A Life*, 60- 63; my italics).

In its struggle to fit the mould of the Enlightenment and modernity, American society received a considerable impulse from the Calvinism which permeated the Great Awakening and which Edwards so loyally defended. However, in general terms and internationally speaking, “the spread of Enlightenment opinions undercut the force of traditional Calvinism” (Noll, *Rise*, 45). Edwards played a significant role in his day due to his arduous intellectual efforts to commend a declining set of Reformed doctrines. He may be said to have been “both the last of the Puritans and the first of the evangelicals” in a modern sense (*America’s God*, 258).²⁰ The Northampton pastor was not, as he has sometimes been made out to be, a provincial or archaic thinker. As Norman Fiering has shown, there may not have been any substantial difference between the quality of the education he received at Yale and that imparted in Harvard during the same period (28-31). Edwards was familiar with the latest influential philosophers and was eager to enter into dialogue with contemporary thought. He had the ability to use the ideas and language of Enlightenment philosophy as a means to advance his own arguments and cause:

Edwards in a sense reversed the ongoing process [of the secularization of thought] by assimilating the moral philosophy of his time and converting it back into the language of religious thought and experience [...] [H]is progressivism must be seen not so much as a vision of a radically different future for society, but as a remarkable receptivity to the philosophical speculation of his own era insofar as it bore on the well-being of religion (Fiering, 60).

²⁰ See n. 6 above for a definition of the term ‘evangelical’.

Although after his conversion Edwards adopted an essentially ‘heavenly’ and ‘otherworldly’ mindset,²¹ this did not mean that the intellectual disciplines of study and keeping in touch with contemporary culture and thought were neglected.

Edwards’ quality and stature as a philosopher has generally been measured by the depth and skill he displayed as logician and polemicist in his late treatises on *Original Sin*, *Freedom of the Will*, *The Nature of True Virtue* and *God’s End in Creation*. These were written during the Stockbridge period (1751-1758), after being dismissed from Northampton, when pastoral cares were not so intense and less time and energy were devoted to sermon making. Avihu Zakai, however, has significantly noted that between 1735 and 1739 Edwards “immersed himself in his private notes in the effort to incorporate the New England awakening in the context of providential history”. His painstaking effort to “define God’s end in creation and to grasp the relationship between divine activity and history”, together with “the development of his apocalyptic interpretation” of both secular and sacred historical events, render this period crucial and pivotal in Edwards’ intellectual trajectory (Zakai, *History*, 211, 212). It was precisely after preaching his Redemption Discourse²² sermon series in 1739 that he changed his mind as to the “method” he should follow in writing what he intended to be an all-encompassing masterwork where he would “vindicate the faith against its detractors” (Marsden, *A Life*, 482).

One last moment in Edwards’ intellectual life must be highlighted in order to grasp the relevance of these latter considerations regarding his view of divine activity in history and his greatest literary ambition. Not without much reluctance, in 1758 Edwards had finally accepted the call from the trustees of the College at Princeton to

²¹ As he himself expressed it in his *Personal Narrative* (16: 793-795).

²² See n. 1 above.

become president of the young institution. In 1757 he had replied to the trustees' offer by listing his personal and scholarly disqualifications. After explaining these, he wrote: "Beside these, I have had on my mind and heart, (which I long ago began, not with any view to publication) a great work, which I call a *History of the Work of Redemption*, a body of divinity in an entire new method, being thrown into the form of a history" (Miller, *Edwards*, 307). Jonathan Edwards was not able to complete this ambitious work as he died after being inoculated and contracting smallpox the same year he went to take his position as president of Princeton College. We know, however, that the seminal work for the "great" project he envisioned at the time of his death had been conceived, written and preached in the context of arduous study and in the pastor's homiletic zenith of the late 1730s (Kinnach, 10: 91).

1. 2. b. Edwards the Convert.

The moments and aspects which have been highlighted above as relevant and decisive for the shaping of Edwards' thought would undoubtedly be considered by him to be lacking *the* most important of all, namely, his conversion. What could be more critical for his worldview than receiving the "sense of divine things" that would lead to the transformation of the "appearance of *everything*"? (16: 793; my italics)

Edwards grew up in a religious culture where children from an early age "learned that in their natural state they deserved the flames of hell". Edwards' father, Timothy, who no doubt exerted great influence on his view of spirituality, emphasized one step of conversion in particular: "Potential converts not only had to recognize their guilt deserving eternal flames, but be 'truly humbled' by a total sense of their unworthiness" (Marsden, *A Life*, 27, 28). Some of his son's earliest memories of

religious experiences were linked to Timothy Edwards' ministry in East Windsor, as he first became concerned about spiritual matters

some years before I went to college, at a time of remarkable awakening in my father's congregation. I was then very much affected for many months, and concerned about the things of religion, and my soul's salvation; and was abundant in duties. I used to pray five times a day in secret, and to spend much time in religious talk with other boys; and used to meet with them to pray together. I experienced I know not what kind of delight in religion. My mind was much engaged in it, and had much self-righteous pleasure [...] But in process of time, my convictions and affections wore off; and I entirely lost all those affections and delights, and left off secret prayer [...] and went on in ways of sin. (16: 790, 791)

Later, during his college years, there was another moment of spiritual awareness when "it pleased God [...] to seize me with a pleurisy; in which he brought me nigh to the grave, and shook me over the pit of hell". However, Edwards tells us, "I fell again into my old ways of sin" (16: 791).

The third and definitive instance of personal awakening Edwards recalls in his *Personal Narrative* came when he was eighteen, during his final period at Yale, and was also linked to the figure of his father. While staying at home for vacation in the spring of 1721, Edwards talked to his father about a recent breakthrough that was accompanied by an "overwhelming spiritual manifestation" (Marsden, *A Life*, 41, 42):

Not long after I first began to experience these things, I gave an account to my father, of some things that had passed in my mind. I was pretty much affected by the discourse we had together. And when the discourse was ended, I walked abroad alone, in a solitary place in my father's pasture, for contemplation. And as I was walking there, and looked up on the sky and clouds; there came into my mind, a sweet sense of the glorious majesty and grace of God, that I know not how to express [...] After this my sense of

divine things gradually increased, and became more and more lively, and had more of that inward sweetness. The appearance of everything was altered: there seemed to be, as it were, a calm, sweet cast, or appearance of divine glory, in almost everything. (16: 793)

We must assume that the self-righteousness of his youth had been replaced by a duly humbled spiritual disposition. Edwards' experience of conversion, however, is expressed in strikingly positive terms and enveloped in the language of glory rather than in Thomas Hooker's language of humiliation.²³ Perhaps for this reason the young candidate for the ministry, being imbued with the New England Puritan tradition, had not thought at first "that there was anything spiritual, or of a saving nature in this" (16: 793).

1. 2. c. Edwards the Minister.

Whereas the figure of his father is almost pervasive in the tracing of Edwards' journey towards a consolidated conversion, his first steps in the pastoral and preaching ministry took place far away from parental oversight. In August 1722, the young Yale M. A. graduate set off to New York as an unordained assistant, or "supply", pastor at a Presbyterian church (Marsden, *A Life*, 46). There, the intensity of his personal awakening did not wane as he continued with his "eager pursuit after more holiness". His keenness and intent on making the most of the time lying ahead was fueled by "reflections on my past life, considering how late it was, before I began to be truly religious". On the 12th of January 1723, Edwards writes, "I made a solemn dedication of myself to God [...] giving up myself, and all that I had to God; to be for the future in no respect my own" (16: 795, 796). The young minister combined an essentially

²³ Avihu Zakai makes this same observation about the "morphology of Edwards's conversion", quoting Yarbrough and Adams (7): "What is absent from Edwards's conversion is 'the experience of "legal fear,"', or terror, which constituted 'a key element in most [Puritan] morphologies' (*History*, 66, 69, 70). The same issue is dealt with in Marsden's biography (*A Life*, 57, 58).

contemplative and ‘otherworldly’ mindset, matching his rather melancholy character, with a keen interest in “anything that happened in any part of the world”. He was “earnest to read public newsletters [...] to see if I could not find some news favorable to the interest of religion in the world”, and at the same time “frequently used to retire into a solitary place, on the banks of Hudson’s River, at some distance from the city, for contemplation on divine things, and secret converse with God”. When he found the time to socialize with Mr. John Smith, with whom he lived, their “conversation used much to turn on the advancement of Christ’s kingdom in the world, and the glorious things that God would accomplish for his church in the latter days” (16: 797).

It is crucial to understand, before dealing with Edwards’ homiletics in the Redemption Discourse of 1739, that in his eschatological scheme the course of universal history was closely tied to God’s action in and through “his church”. What went on at the pulpit and the pew was as decisive as governments’ policies, military strategies or overseas commercial developments. His apocalyptic interpretation of sacred and secular history, together with his sermonic and exegetical strategies, constituted, according to Sacvan Bercovitch, one of his major contributions to furthering colonial Puritan nationalistic thought (*Jeremiad*, 98, 99). The inevitable conclusion resulting from Edwards’ premises was that revivals and ministers of the Word (and hence himself) were at the centre of historical climax and prophetic fulfillment (Stout, *Soul*, 204). Whether one considers this view of the importance of the preaching office a delirious exaggeration or not, the moment was drawing near when Edwards would take up an objectively relevant position in the social and religious scene of New England. In coming years, he would be called to take the place of his reputable grandfather, Solomon Stoddard, as leader of the Connecticut River Valley congregation at Northampton.

The church at Northampton had sat under the teaching and exhortation of Solomon Stoddard for almost six decades when Edwards was called to assist him in the pastoral ministry. The influence of this figure on the congregation and the life of the town, therefore, can hardly be overstated. He stands out among his contemporary fellow clergymen in several respects. C. C. Goen explains how Stoddard “startled traditionalists” by “discarding the distinction between full and halfway” church members (4: 15). Such distinction had been inherited in New England as a consequence of the ‘Halfway Covenant’ (adopted in 1662), which denied church membership to “persons who could not qualify for full membership under the terms of the original ecclesiastical constitution” while allowing their children to be baptized (4: 12, 13). Such people became ‘halfway’ church members. Stoddard rejected this distinction and considered it sufficient for church members to profess what early Puritans called “historical faith” (assenting to the creed and basic Christian doctrines) and not to live in any scandalous sin. In this respect, Goen considers Stoddardism to represent “a major break with the experiential tradition” since his practice of opening the communion table to those who had not made “a relation of the work of God’s Spirit upon their hearts” meant that the profession made by Northampton church members “had nothing to say about inward religious experience” (4: 15, 16).

Jonathan Edwards’ maternal grandfather’s labors and character were also remarkable in view of the strong influence he exerted not just in his town but “throughout the Connecticut River Valley”, where few churches practiced a church polity different from his (Goen, 4: 15). Indeed, Stoddard was “one of the most influential clergymen in all of New England” and was even called the “Congregational Pope” by some (Tracy, 14, 50). Despite his more relaxed demands for admission to communion and full church membership, he must not be thought of as having lowered

moral standards and requirements among his people and town. Quite on the contrary, he “was famous for bringing his flock to renown for both ‘good order’ and ‘heart religion’” (Tracy, 50). He was a thoroughly “conversionist” as well as a Calvinist preacher (Goen, 4: 16), and in his emphasis on ‘heart religion’ he stood against the prevailing and “increasing rationalism”²⁴ of New England. Stoddard experienced several instances of ministerial success and orchestrated up to five “harvests”, or revivals, during his pastorate in Northampton, the youth being particularly affected by his powerful evangelistic message (Tracy, 31). In one aspect, however, the long-term and lasting effects of his ministry may not have differed substantially from other New England towns. According to Goen, “by insisting on what unregenerate men can and must do to prepare²⁵ themselves for conversion [...] he unwittingly encouraged the idea that God somehow could be bound to reward the more active doers of them” (4: 16). There may have been a moralistic tendency in the people of Northampton as a consequence of Solomon Stoddard’s emphasis on ‘duties’.

Thus, after returning to Windsor and spending two years as a tutor at Yale, Edwards gladly faced the daunting task of preaching to such a renowned audience and standing behind the same pulpit as a widely recognized spiritual patriarch. His religious zeal and delight would providentially return to him after undergoing a state of slight depression during the period as tutor in New Haven: “I sunk in religion; my mind being diverted from my eager and violent pursuits after holiness, by some affairs that greatly perplexed and distracted my mind”. The “temporal concerns” that continued to divert Edwards’ mind while at Yale (16: 798, 799) may have had something to do with a certain young woman, Sarah Pierpont, who would soon become his wife. The marriage

²⁴ On this spread of rationalism and the formalism that often derived from it, see pp. 4 and 5 above.

²⁵ See p. 5 above.

conveniently took place shortly after he began to assist Stoddard in 1726, and it signaled “the young assistant’s transition to adult and authoritative status” (Marsden, *A Life*, 123). As the only-son of a New England minister, Edwards had always been intended, and had shown to be made, for the pulpit; it was only a matter of time that he should be granted the full rights and authority of pastor and preacher. In 1729, being a married man and already a father, the death of his venerated grandfather naturally led him to become full pastor of the church at Northampton.

The anxiety and weight of being “responsible for the spiritual and moral oversight of perhaps thirteen hundred people” were accompanied by, or possibly were the cause of, a weak physical condition as Edwards “was struck down [...] and could not preach for about a month”. George Marsden notes that he may have been suffering from “the strain of too much work” because in addition to all the new circumstances (being a father, pastoral duties, etc.) he was “also working on a number of ambitious writing projects” (*A Life*, 127). And so, standing at the threshold of the decade of revival, we find the able and spiritually-minded minister mustering all the strength he could, trying to overcome physical impediment, and still sharpening his acumen through the ongoing cultivation of intellectual discipline.

1. 3. *The Northampton Revival.*

The Northampton spiritual awakening of the mid 1730s would eventually become “the most influential revival in the history of evangelicalism” (Kidd, 13). Although one reason for this success was undoubtedly the way it was publicized among sympathizers during the years after it took place,²⁶ in this section the attempt will be

²⁶ The main means in spreading the news of revival was Edwards’ own account of the events of the winter and spring of 1734-35, which he first wrote as a letter to the respected Boston minister Benjamin Colman, who, in turn,

made to explain what events and realities led to and constituted the local awakening, assuming the view that it was in fact remarkable in its immediate effects as well as in spiritual intensity. In the *Faithful Narrative* of conversions and of the surprising work of God among the Northamptonites, Edwards noted the “quickness” of the events and described the changes in people’s lives as “sudden” (4: 107, 159). However, there are traceable events and factors that seem to have gradually paved the way for the revival which Jonathan Edwards monitored and which so notably affected western Massachusetts, beginning in the fall of 1734.

1. 3. a. Deep Anxieties Leading to the Height of Revival.

During the early 1730s, the young pastor had observed that parental control over the youth was far from what it ought to be, and he had accordingly used the pulpit to exhort parents to take up the responsibility of ruling over their families. He particularly addressed fathers as the “heads of households” to deal with and put an end to the custom of turning Sabbath-day nights and lecture days into “times of diversion and company-keeping”. Early in 1734, Edwards actually had some measure of success as the youth yielded to his exhortation, giving up those practices which their minister had shown to be incompatible with the Christian profession and character. Edwards must have been satisfied to some extent with the youth’s mindfulness of their moral conduct, but surely his ultimate purpose was to have them consider their spiritual state and the eternal

encouraged him to extend the account and have it published. After a long process of editing and rewriting, it was published in London in 1737 through the mediation of the reputable English dissenter and hymn-writer Isaac Watts. Edwards’ *Faithful Narrative* (4: 97-212) had an astonishing influence during the Great Awakening (Goen, 4: 32-46). The account of the Northampton revival made a deep impression on the great English Methodist itinerant evangelist John Wesley, and was translated into several languages soon after its publication. The text’s influence stretched into the nineteenth century, during which it became even more popular among American evangelicals (Kidd, 22, 23).

matters of the soul. It was at this stage that a “dramatic turning point” came in the process of Northampton’s awakening. The sudden death of a young man (“seized with a pleurisy”) shook the town, and especially the young people, who were unable to escape the questions about the eternity everyone must face after death (Marsden, *A Life*, 152, 153).

Just as condemnation might come upon men immediately through death, so spiritual life and salvation had to be imparted to the soul “immediately”, through the light of the gospel. This was the essential message that Edwards had synthesized and expounded in a sermon he had preached to the Northampton congregation the year before having it published in 1734.²⁷ In *A Divine and Supernatural Light*, a “constitution” for genuine awakening was established, as the sermon argued, in keeping with Calvinist orthodoxy, that “God communicates to humans” by bestowing a “new spiritual sense” on those who are truly converted, enabling them to “apprehend the things of God” (Marsden, *A Life*, 157). This was the case whether one or thousands came to the knowledge of God, and divine initiative and sovereignty were thus established as the ultimate source of revival. Edwards was determined to convey the message of both a powerful and an unpredictable deity to his congregation, and thus exploit “even the deepest anxieties” of his listeners (165). A deep sense of dependence on God was fostered not just with regard to judgment (of course, nothing but the hands of an angry God were keeping sinners from sliding into the pit of hell), but regarding salvation there had to be a similarly anxious expectancy about how and when the

²⁷ The full title was “A Divine and Supernatural Light Immediately Imparted to the Soul by the Spirit of God, shown to be both a Scriptural and Rational Doctrine” (17: 408-425).

blessing of eternal life might be brought upon and wrought within the elect. What would it look like when it should please God to bestow such blessings?

Before the end of the year, “the awakening took a dramatic upturn” as a result of the conversion of a “previously coarse-mouthed and flirtatious young woman” (Marsden, *A Life*, 159). After having gone to Edwards for counsel, the young woman related her experience and “the news of it seemed to be almost like a flash of lightening, upon the hearts of young people all over the town, and upon many others” (4: 149). People who had hung out “at the taverns or frolics” and might not have been likely to hear the words delivered from the pulpit on Sundays could not avoid receiving the message from their former friends who were now part of a broadening “stream of converts”. Within a three month period, some three hundred townspeople were converted and the religious phenomenon could, by the spring of 1735, be considered virtually universal. Whereas Solomon Stoddard’s ‘harvests’ in Northampton had “reached almost only young people”, this time “sober and vicious, high and low, rich and poor” were awakened alike. Edwards considered that “several Negroes” seemed to be “truly born again” and he pointed out that for the first time “as many men were converted as women” (Marsden, *A Life*, 159, 160).

Apart from the religious and spiritual concerns of Northamptonites, there are some rather ‘material’ aspects which must not be overlooked in our analysis. There were particular social and economic conditions in western New England that may have contributed to the emotional intensity of the awakening. After the land distributed in the seventeenth century for coming generations had become insufficient, economic differences between the more and less prosperous landowners began to increase. It was difficult for young people to marry and become independent as they did not have the opportunities for entrepreneurial initiative of later generations. As a result, there were

many more people in their mid and late twenties living with their parents than in previous generations. At the geopolitical level, there were recurrent Indian hostilities in settlements near the border, which would certainly have caused social unrest (Marsden, *A Life*, 150-152). Jonathan Edwards would make the most of every earthly anxiety for the advancement of God's kingdom. Nevertheless, this anxiety was not an end in itself but the means for realizing one's absolute dependence on God and, ultimately, for experiencing the new birth. As George Marsden has expressed it: "The travail of the new birth might be excruciating, but that was God's way of working" (*A Life*, 164, 165).

The direct social impact on the town's life was considerable even if their pastor tended to magnify some aspects when he wrote about the revival retrospectively. His own life and relationships with his relatively new flock were certainly affected as his parishioners, Marsden explains, daily "filled his home, waiting to see him for counseling". Under his influence, "the spiritual fervor of the town seems to have gone beyond what anyone had previously seen" and the people seemed to follow their "worldly business" only as an inevitable part of their duty, for they infinitely preferred to be occupied in the "immediate exercise of religion" than in pursuing worldly gain. Prayer meetings, bimonthly communion services where dozens of new converts were received, private meetings (or 'societies') where hymns were sung for the first time;²⁸ all these communal experiences made up the atmosphere that attracted numerous visitors to Northampton and caused much controversy over "enthusiasm" in New England. Whether sympathetic or skeptical, there seemed to be no question among observers about the fact that the town was undergoing an "extraordinary transformation" (Marsden, *A Life*, 156-161).

²⁸ In most Calvinist churches since the Reformation only psalms were sung in meetings, and almost exclusively during formal public worship.

Many of the traits of the Northampton awakening (religious ‘societies’ in particular)²⁹ became a model for other towns in the Connecticut River Valley where revivals had begun around the same time. The latter was obviously interpreted as providential by many who looked on the movement with a friendly eye. It must not be forgotten, however, that while Jonathan Edwards was a revivalist and a great advocate of preaching to move the affections, he also “deplored the hysteria” and represented the moderate position in the controversies that followed the Great Awakening (Tracy, 137, 138). Probably due to his first-hand experience before the prevalent, intercolonial revival of the 1740s, he was wary of excesses and fanaticism. For Edwards, as soon as the work of God’s Spirit began in the lives of a people, Satan should be expected to be working against it and imitating the genuine fruits of revival. Spiritual visions or ecstatic experiences were precisely the sort of work that Satan could easily imitate and, therefore, these should never be considered definitive signs or ‘marks’ of a true conversion or genuine awakening. The most important fruit of true piety and revival was “communal holiness” (Tracy, 123). For this reason Edwards’ preaching shifted from the intense and urgent call to repentance and faith (at the height of the revival), to an emphasis on growth in holiness during the second half of the decade (Murray, *New Biography*, 150, 151).

The picture of the ‘hellfire preacher’ making superstitious people terrified that has so often been handed down in history is clearly unwarranted. Of course, the severity and emphases of revivalist preachers now seem to belong to another era. But Edwards, while being keen on exploiting people’s anxieties (as I have argued above), was well aware that some of his hearers “often suffered many needless distresses of thought, in which Satan probably [had] a great hand, to entangle them and block up their way” to

²⁹ See n. 13 above.

conversion and spiritual comfort (4: 162). Such was the case of Edwards' own uncle, Joseph Hawley, who was a successful merchant and a congregant at Northampton's church. At the height of the awakening he had become "despairing and unable to sleep" due to a deep concern over "the state of his soul". A depression and his unwillingness to "listen to reason or take advice" finally led him to commit suicide by slitting his own throat on the Sabbath morning of 1 June 1735 (Marsden, *A Life*, 163, 164). Although this event has often been taken to mark the beginning of the awakening's decline, Edwards observed that by "the latter part of May, it began to be very sensible that the Spirit of God was gradually withdrawing from us, and after this time Satan seemed to be more let loose, and raged in a dreadful manner. The first instance wherein it appeared was a person's putting an end to his own life, by cutting his throat" (4: 206). And so the events seemed to be providentially in sync with the beginning of decline just as they had accompanied the hopeful early stages of the revival.

1. 3. b. Decline and the Scene for the Redemption Discourse.

Since the present study must gradually move on from the biographical to more rhetorical and literary considerations, this last point of the introductory section will focus particularly on what different scholars have gathered from their careful analysis of Edwards' homiletics and preaching ministry during the second half of the 1730s. Nevertheless, some observations have already been made previously regarding the intellectual significance of these years (p. 22 above) and a couple of contextual details will still be pointed out.

In his introduction to volume 19 of the Yale edition of Edwards' works, M. X. Lesser observes that among the sermons from the period going from 1734 to 1738 the theme which stands out is "conversion and declension" (19: 4). From the pulpit,

Edwards had sought to reverse “dullness” and immorality in “degenerate times” and he relentlessly fought against what he perceived as an Arminian tide threatening New England (Lesser, 19: 9-13). When the fruits of revival began to be felt, Edwards combined “technical mastery [of the sermon] with great optimism concerning what could be accomplished through pastoral preaching” (Lesser, 19: xii).³⁰ He was not, however, so naïve as to think that the intensity and level of emotion experienced during the winter and spring of 1734-35 could be maintained indefinitely. As Harry Stout observes regarding the late 1730s, “in each mark of vitality he saw signs of decay and approaching judgment” (22: 3).

Though Edwards is sure to have been disappointed after the general decline of religious zeal (Marsden, *A Life*, 159), he conveniently developed a view whereby “decline” was, together with “revival”, incorporated into the “historical structure and pattern of the redemptive process”. Edwards was thus able to combine a rhetoric of urgency, insinuating potentially imminent changes, with a vision of God’s action in history as “gradual” (Zakai, *History*, 250) and, consequently, he could call his congregation (and himself) to persevere patiently. Again, the overarching doctrine of divine sovereignty provided assurance and the comfort that the “sudden surge and fall” of Northampton’s “little revival” did not escape God’s purpose of bringing glory to himself (Zakai, *History*, 211). The waxing and waning of the Spirit’s presence, as perceived and felt by men, were both part of the unfolding of God’s predetermined plan for the church and the world.

Even if the waning of the town’s spiritual fervor had to some extent been a humbling experience for their leader, the years 1736 to 1739 would see the publication

³⁰ These words are actually from the general editor of the ‘Sermons and Discourses’ volumes, Wilson Kinnach, in his ‘Note to the Reader’.

and wide circulation of the *Faithful Narrative*³¹ and the first and only sermon compilation published during Edwards' lifetime, *Discourses on Various Important Subjects* (Boston, 1738). In the wider scene, his leadership was being strengthened despite temporal appearances of defeat. While many local concerns kept him busy in his demanding pastoral office, at the individual and personal level Jonathan Edwards may have been quite satisfied and hopeful, as it was during this time that he "won international attention as a preacher" (Kimmach, 10: 91).

It was precisely the English editors of the *Faithful Narrative*, Isaac Watts and John Guyse, who were first in integrating the Northampton awakening within the universal framework of salvation history (Zakai, *History*, 208, 209). In reply to the Boston minister Benjamin Colman, who had sent them a draft of the account of conversions, Isaac Watts wrote: "We are of [the] opinion that so strange and surprising work of God that we have not heard anything like it since the Reformation, nor perhaps since the days of the apostles, should be published..." (Goen, 4: 36). The allusion to the "days of the apostles" evinces the level of excitement and expectations after receiving the news of revival in the American colonies. Edwards himself had not minimized the matter and had "constructed the revival as an intercolonial event" (Kidd, 18). During the late 1730s, the Northampton minister tried to make sense of something as real, tangible, and with so many pastoral implications as the recent revival, while at the same time he began to show "a more speculative preoccupation with history", both historiographical and mythic (Stout, 22: 4, 9). Envisioning the grand-scale implications of the recent past and pondering the potential of the present, Edwards "found breathing room for big thoughts and substantial reading" while he went on with the duties of weekly sermon making (Stout, 22: 10).

³¹ See n. 26 above.

General editor of Edwards' 'Sermons and Discourses'³² Wilson Kinnach points out that in the sermons produced and preached during this decade there was a growing complexity that finally made the "sermon series" the only suitable form for setting forth his thoughts and reflections:

[A] most notable development in this period is the inevitable breaking up of long and complex sermons into true series. Thus, there is the series of three sermons on John 16:8 (1730), the series of five sermons on 2 Corinthians 13:5 (1735), the series of sixteen sermons (1738) later published as *Charity and its Fruits*, the series of thirty sermons (1739) later published as *A History of the Work of Redemption*, the series of six sermons on the parable of the sower [...] Indeed, it seems obvious that, at least from 1735, there is an increased tendency to preach treatises from the pulpit. Study of the "History of Redemption" sermon series manuscripts reveals that much of the series was written in the manner of a treatise. (10: 105)

Sermon series were part of the homiletic tradition handed down from Puritanism but what made the Redemption Discourse a "different kind of project" was the fact that Edwards was basing thirty sermons on a single verse of Scripture (Wilson, 9: 5).

Apart from the religious 'pulse' of Jonathan Edwards' congregation and his intellectual and homiletic developments, some details concerning the state of Northampton have to be mentioned at this stage. Although Edwards had by now secured his position as the successor of Solomon Stoddard, the social and economic evolution of the town after 1735 made the people grow "away from the ability or the desire to participate" in what had become their pastor's "ideal vision of community life" (Tracy, 122). The series he preached on love (or 'charity') during 1738 was aimed at establishing and strengthening the bonds of the community, and it was not unconnected

³² The Yale edition has a total of seven volumes (out of twenty-six) consisting of sermons only.

to the following year's dissertation on history, since Edwards had found, Marsden argues, that "Christ's redemptive love was the key to all history" (*A Life*, 193). The Puritan ideal for a Christian commonwealth continued to be the one that John Winthrop had spelled out in "A Model of Christian Charity" a century earlier but, as we shall see in chapter 2, Edwards had significant and innovative contributions to make.

Northamptonites had lately busied themselves with practical concerns such as the building of a new meetinghouse and a "town house for secular meetings". The former was finished in 1737 and the latter in 1739 (Tracy, 130). For the first time in the town's history, "ecclesiastical and governmental functions" were physically separated. Taken symbolically, this "segregation" was a threat to the New England tradition of clerical authority and Edwards, who may have perceived it as such, was hence all the more keen to "assert the importance of religion". The new and larger church building was a suitable "stage" for the ingenious theologian's expository and apologetic enterprise of the Redemption Discourse (Wilson, 9: 3, 4). If "the minister's proper sphere was [now] clearly separate from the business of everyday life" (Tracy, 130), he would make it his business to endow Sabbath and lecture days³³ with solemn importance.

While Jonathan Edwards' loss of empathy or his being out of touch with his people during these years may be harder to trace³⁴, the loss of power, or the struggle to maintain it, as the town's minister is manifestly seen in at least two facts. First, he was significantly left out of the committee (of which his grandfather Stoddard had always been a member) that was to decide over the assignment of seats in the new

³³ The Redemption Discourse was preached (at least partly) on Thursday evenings, which were the appointed days for lectures in Northampton and elsewhere.

³⁴ Obviously, by the mid and late 1740s we can find clear signs of the distance there was between Edwards and his people in general, which finally resulted in his dismissal from the Northampton pastorate in 1750.

meetinghouse. These decisions were highly controversial in the town during the two years preceding Edwards' delivery of the history of redemption series (Tracy, 125, 126). The second fact showing tensions between pastor and church members were the ongoing quarrels over his salary. In the year 1744, Edwards agreed to have an amount fixed permanently because he was weary of "the annual struggle for an adequate salary" (Claghorn, 16: 149). We may assume that this struggle³⁵ had been going on for several years, including 1739.

In March 1739, therefore, Edwards set out to share his reflections on the history of redemption with the church of Northampton from a position of growing prestige throughout the colonies and abroad but a less flattering one at the local level. It was also a time of high expectations in the colonies as George Whitefield's first tour was to start toward the end of that same year. And although Edwards partook in the enthusiasm caused by the latter event, his most immediate pastoral worries were those concerning the establishing of his people in the truth and the consolidation of a congregation who had experienced revival recently enough to still be mindful of spiritual matters, but too long ago to not be taking a new step in spiritual growth and to not be considering the deeper implications of their conversion, which was "not an end in itself" in their pastor's view (Murray, *New Biography*, 151).

³⁵ Edwards did not hesitate to address the issue of ministers' salaries from the pulpit as far back as 1741, in the middle of the Great Awakening. See his sermon "Pastor and People Must Look to God" in *The Salvation of Souls* (145, 146).

2. RHETORIC OF HISTORY AND DIVINE AGENCY

In the present chapter I set out to search for the main keys in Jonathan Edwards' *rhetoric of history* and in his concept of *divine agency*. Before I actually analyze the Redemption Discourse closely (chapters 3 and 4), it is essential to know where Edwards was simply following a traditional approach to history and where and how he was departing from New England and Puritan legacy. In order to make a comprehensive approach to his historical discourse, the scope of this section will go from the most particular observations about his vision of history to the most general, seeking to understand and analyze how each aspect relates to the different strands of Edwardsean rhetoric. A 'particular' observation could be, for instance, the mere finding that in his historiography, as opposed to all other English and American Puritan historians, Edwards did not exalt any political figure since he refused "to accord earthly rulers a role in providential history" (Zakai, *History*, 251). More general observations (again, regarding historical discourse) will need to be made and explained, as, for example, the acknowledged fact that Jonathan Edwards envisioned history as progressive, in contrast with the Augustinian concept of unresolved and ongoing conflict between the heavenly and earthly cities (Augustine, *The City of God*, passim.; cf. Lee, *Theology*, 214, 215; Marsden, *A Life*, 197).

The method I have chosen to help me spell out these 'keys' in Edwards' rhetoric of history is to compare his *concept of divine agency* in history (whether past, present or future), in relation to several theological tenets of the Protestant faith, with that developed by preceding representative colonial figures. Four New English authors will serve this purpose, three belonging to the first generation of American Puritans (John Winthrop, John Cotton and Thomas Shepard) and one to the third (Cotton Mather). The latter will be particularly helpful in setting the New England philosophical/theological

scene at the turn of the century. Furthermore, since Mather's *Magnalia Christi Americana* was deliberately written as a historical work, it will serve to close up on some of the most relevant aspects to this dissertation, such as the use of historical narrative in colonial oratory, the role of historical considerations in sermons,¹ or 'providence' as a key to God's intervention in history. By sketching out the evolution of these Puritans' theological notions, how they relate to colonial historical thought, and American society's simultaneous transition from the seventeenth to the eighteenth century, it will become much clearer why and how Jonathan Edwards developed "a singular rhetoric of history" (Zakai, *History*, 275). It must also be pointed out that while at this stage I am still drawing most of the material for analysis from sermons and works other than the Redemption Discourse, special attention is paid to the chronology of all sources due to the relevance of their connection with the events, already laid out in chapter 1, preceding and following the 1739 sermon series.

2. 1. *Edwards vs. Winthrop: Love, Community and History*

John Winthrop's² vision of the church, individual Christians and God's means of ruling over a people or community must be framed in the context of the "theocratic universe" of seventeenth century Puritanism. Moreover, in the context of the migration and the setting up of the New England colonies, the background for "A Model of

¹ Several sermons, most by Mather himself, are inserted throughout his eclectic work.

² Before immigrating to and establishing the colony of Massachusetts, where he was to be governor, John Winthrop was justice of peace in the English town of Groton. A Cambridge graduate, like most Puritans, Winthrop's motivation for migrating during the reign of Charles I seems to have been mostly religious since, humanly and financially speaking, he "still had so much to lose at Groton" when he left (Middleton, 73-75). He has been accorded a place in colonial American literature due to the preaching of "A Model of Christian Charity" on board the *Arbella* (Heimert & Delbanco, 81ff).

Christian Charity” was the “endeavor to reconstitute all dimensions of human life upon the sacred”. In this quest for a God-ruled society, “every sphere of human life would be regulated by the sacred word of God” (Zakai, *Exile*, 210). In the language of Winthrop himself, it was right “for the work [the first New Englanders had] in hand [...] to seek out a place of cohabitation and consortship under a due form of government both civil and ecclesiastical” (“A Model”, 89). For the first generation of New England Puritans, the idea of God being present among them was inevitably dependent on how faithfully they, as a people, would be subject to divine ‘ordinances’; namely (or at least mainly), the sacraments and the ministry of the Word. God’s intervention within the history of a community as a result of His being pleased or displeased with it, was inextricably related to the appropriateness of the ‘model’ according to which that society was built.

The title of John Winthrop’s celebrated sermon, “A Model of Christian Charity”, places “charity” at the heart of what was meant to become the pattern for any godly Christian commonwealth like Massachusetts or, by extension, New England. Bearing in mind the difference in socio-ecclesiastical context and in the prospective goals of their communities, it comes as no surprise that Edwards’ and Winthrop’s ideals of love (or “charity”) should differ considerably. While they both articulated and viewed this “principle” as “the fruit of the new birth” (“A Model”, 87; cf. *Charity and Its Fruits*, 8: 387), Winthrop’s ideal of love, in line with seventeenth century Puritanism, seems to be ultimately demonstrated in the individual’s and the community’s strict obedience to a set rule and by their following the way of duty. Therefore, though love is accorded a central role in Christianity, Winthrop might not have gone so far as to say that “a great part of true religion lies in the affections”, as Edwards would later put it (2: 95).

It may, however, be objected that Winthrop's famous sermon does appeal to the essential role of the affections or emotions in producing fruits of love. Regarding mercy, for example, he concludes:

So the way to draw men to works of mercy is not by force of argument from the goodness or necessity of the work; for though this course may enforce a rational mind to some present act of mercy, as is frequent in experience, yet it cannot work such a habit in a soul, but by framing these affections of love in the heart which will as natively bring forth the other, as any cause doth produce effect. ("A Model", 86)

Though at first sight these words are not too different from an Edwardsean explanation of how suitable affections must always come before or accompany any act of genuine obedience, a mere glance at the preceding paragraphs makes the difference in focus become apparent. The amount of ink devoted to defining the "rule" that must be observed when exercising the "*duty* of mercy" strikes us as excessive, especially considering that the appeal to the affections quoted above is meant to work as an overarching principle for every action Christians are called to carry out. Winthrop asks up to four times the question "What *rule* must we *observe*?" and provides a specific and practical answer (following the Puritan homiletic pattern) in order to lay forward for his hearers the way "[t]his *duty* of mercy is exercised" ("A Model", 84, 85; my italics). On the other hand, in the already mentioned sermon series *Charity and Its Fruits*, preached in 1738, Edwards went to great lengths to provide an exhaustive definition of the *principle* of love or charity and devoted comparatively little time and space to giving particular examples of how to exercise the principle through specific rules or duties.³

³ Although the proportionally small amount of space devoted to 'application' in this series may be due to the fact that it was delivered on Thursday lectures (which were generally more doctrinal and less practical than Sunday or occasional sermons), it is true that Edwards was more keen on providing his hearers with the essence of doctrines for them to act accordingly than on setting a moral rule for them to follow. Biographer Ola E. Winslow rightly observed

For the Northampton minister “love appear[ed] to be the sum of all that virtue and duty which God requires of us” (8: 139).

Returning to the issue of divine government, for both Winthrop and Edwards love, as the “bond of perfection” (“A Model”, 86) or the “sum” of all virtue, was instrumental in God’s dealing with, and ruling over, His church and was therefore crucial to the course of human history.⁴ For Edwards, divine agency and sovereignty could be patently observed wherever a ‘pouring out of the Spirit’ took place. In his framework, revivals were the “immediate effect” of God’s action in pouring out his Spirit, and the “concrete agent” of God’s “will and power in the order of time” (Zakai, *History*, 235, 248). At the same time, the love of God being “shed abroad in [the Christian’s] heart by the Holy Ghost which is given [him]” at conversion (Romans 5:5) implied that love was more than simply the bond which united or ‘knitted’ a Christian community. Both love to God and to neighbor depended for Edwards on God’s prior intervention in each regenerate individual, the result of which was his or her conversion. Conversion undoubtedly implied a calling to strict obedience, but all commandments for the Christian were summed up in love to God and neighbor. Lacking a theology of revival, Edwards’ Puritan predecessors (Winthrop among them) did not envision God’s

that “Jonathan Edwards’ power to present ideas in pictures might lead one to expect lurid exposure of community sins; but except on a very few occasions the exact opposite was true [...] He dealt with springs of action [...] Jonathan Edwards invited the young people who did not agree with his arguments and were unwilling to give up the amusements he denounced to bring satisfying answers to the arguments he had presented. ‘I don’t desire’, he said, ‘that young People should be abridg’d of any lawful and proper Liberties’. This is completely typical of his governance in his own family. The liberties permitted to his daughters are startling in the light of eighteenth century proprieties: the long journeys, the unchaperoned comings and goings while they were still in their teens. His admonitions in letters to them have no reference to behavior whatever, only to the principles which underlie it” (148, 149).

⁴ For an explanation of Edwards’ high view of the Church’s place in world history, see Lee, *Theology*, 222, 223.

action as being so immediate and crucial in bringing about the foundational principle of love. Rather, for New England's forebears the pursuit of God's presence with a community, who were to be "knit[ted] together by this bond of love" ("A Model", 89), and the hope of witnessing His blessing upon them, were based on the enforcement of a civil and ecclesiastical code. As Sacvan Bercovitch observes, second and third generation Puritans conceived of a "union of the personal and the communal" which developed into a "visionary correspondence between the saint's life and the progress of New England society" according to the theocratic ideal (*Rites*, 139-141). Thus, in Edwards' generation, there was a high view of spirituality at the collective level but an individual's life was seen as contributing to the bigger picture of redemption essentially in terms of the observance of rules and duties, which in turn rendered communal spiritual experience more transcendental than subjective, personal conversion. Likewise, a potential for formalism (if not legalism) was deeply embedded in this colonial mode of religious and social thought.

Edwards replaced this emphasis on the people's need to comply with duty and with a theocratically inspired law, by rooting love to God (and to others by implication) in mere delight in His beauty. Obedience was thus viewed as a by-product and a completely logical "expression" of that love or delight:

And how happy is that love, in which there is an eternal *progress* in all these things [expressions of love]; wherein new beauties are continually discovered, and more and more loveliness, and in which we shall forever increase in beauty ourselves; where we shall be made capable of finding out and *giving, and shall receive*, more and more endearing expressions of love forever: our *union* will become more close, and *communion* more intimate. (13: 336, 337; my italics)

It is notable that there is a ‘reciprocal’ aspect to the Edwardsean dynamics of love.⁵ Love simply could not be conceived of as being manifested primarily through ‘duty’ because duty always goes in a single direction: the creature owes God something (say, obedience) but, by definition, that same thing cannot be owed to the creature in return. Love as a ‘bond’ or ‘union’ had a bearing on John Winthrop’s as well as Edwards’ view of the gradual advance or “progress” of divine purposes in and through his Church (God’s community *par excellence*), but the consideration that a divinely originated love was immediately present in a Christian’s conversion,⁶ and that it would “forever increase” in him, contributed decisively to the Edwardsean rhetorical mode analyzed below, which so effectively combined the concepts of immediate and progressive divine agency.

Although Winthrop and other Puritans expressed their view of conversion in similar terms to those of Edwards, they did not find a formula which could compellingly encompass the idea of God’s immediate government over, and his presence with, individual souls as well as communities in history. For Edwards this formula was revival. Winthrop preached that in a person’s conversion “Christ comes and takes possession of the soul and infuseth another principle, love to God and our brother”. However, once he moved on to show historical examples in which this principle was

⁵ In this paragraph I am following the somewhat complex notions of Edwardsean ontology as expounded by Sang Hyun Lee in *The Philosophical Theology of Jonathan Edwards*. Explaining God’s relationship to the world through regenerate beings (those who have been given a divine “disposition”), Lee writes: “The dispositions of created beings, as was seen, are not triggered into operations on their own [...] The dynamic nature of the created existence is ultimately grounded in God’s own activity [...] Creatures are participants in God’s own ongoing activity of moving the world from its virtuality to actuality” (107). In this dissertation the relevance of these philosophical complexities lies in how they relate to history. This is also explained in Lee’s work (214ff) and will be fully developed in chapters 3 and 4 below.

⁶ See chapter 1 above, pp. 32, 33.

manifested, his focus was exclusively on communities, countries, or churches considered collectively: “The like we shall find in the histories of the church in all ages, the sweet sympathy of affections which was in the members of this body one towards another...” (“A Model”, 87).⁷ Searching for a specific historical example to exhort the pilgrims aboard the *Arbella* to “live in the exercise” of the principle of love, Winthrop chose the Waldenses, a twelfth century French proto-Protestant sect. Curiously enough, Edwards himself makes a reference to the Waldenses in his Redemption Discourse as an example of how Christ’s church was preserved through the darkest of times. But whereas Winthrop simply refers to the sect in general, as a group of people (89), Edwards lists them along with other “particular persons” throughout Christendom: “Many of them were private persons, and many of them ministers, and some magistrates, and persons of great distinction” (9: 418, 419). This focus on individuals within the community⁸ as being dealt with by God in history stands in sharp contrast to Winthrop’s (and to some extent to New England’s traditional) view of God’s relationship with communities.

In the aftermath of the settlement of Massachusetts, governor Winthrop, as did William Bradford while ruling Plymouth colony, spiritualized public and political life, regarding all events and situations primarily, if not exclusively, as collective and in relation to the commonwealth’s wellbeing (Miller, *Mind*, 229). So much so that (to take just one instance) Winthrop tried to prevent or at least control westward migration by

⁷ In *Authorizing The Past*, Stephen Carl Arch makes the same remark in relation to this sermon and its bearing on Winthrop’s rhetoric of history: “What Calvinism says of the individual—that he or she cannot act out of truly holy impulses without what Jonathan Edwards would later term the “divine supernatural light” imparted by God—Winthrop applies here to society as a whole”. He “blur[s] the distinction between individual salvation and communal success” (13, 16).

⁸ See n. 30 below.

predicting divine judgment as a consequence of the excessively individualistic spirit that was driving some within the community (Heimert & Delbanco, 98, 99). The very congregation that was addressed on board the *Arbella* in 1630 may have been seen as a potential prey of the same spiritual malady that ruling Puritans perceived in the entrepreneurial tendencies of migrants. In contrast with this perspective, for Edwards “the true mark of sacred, ecclesiastical history was not the social and political event but the religious revival, whereby the Spirit transformed the human condition”. Though his “historiography” includes “earthly occurrences” (natural phenomena, political or military conflicts, etc.), the “history of God’s work of redemption concerns primarily the saving acts of God in time and does not depend on worldly affairs” (Zakai, *History*, 180, 181). In colonial Puritan or ‘covenantal’⁹ thought, the individual’s spiritual experience was not distinctly incorporated into their vision of God’s intervention within the historical process (especially when viewing events taking place in their own immediate context) but, rather, divine agency was mainly considered within the dimension of a community’s relation to a somewhat distant but predictable deity.

Perry Miller discovered some key factors in his comprehensive study of the ‘New England mind’ which are pertinent for this present study. He found that in first-generation, orthodox Puritanism the divine “activities” of “everyday providence” and “grace” were kept “on separate planes” (*Mind*, 33). The divine activities of grace (which concerned only the elect) included coming to faith, achieving certainty of one’s new birth, or experiencing fellowship with God through prayer, reading or listening to the

⁹ ‘Covenant thought’ is used here to refer to the view of God and society which derived from ‘federal theology’, and it alludes to national, church or other collective covenants (see chap. 1, p. 5, n. 4 above). Although it has been argued that Edwards’ theological framework was in no way different from this inherited one in this respect (Stout, “The Puritans and Edwards”), it seems to me, as I explain, that there were fundamental ways in which his philosophy of history led him to modify the way he conceived of God’s relationship with individuals and communities.

Word. These things, which were demonstrations of divine initiative and His faithfulness to the “Covenant of Grace”, and their application to the individual belonged to the inscrutable dimension of God’s sovereign decrees, while the collective covenant had “articles” which “were to be fulfilled in time” and its rewards and punishments “were to be tangible and immediate”.¹⁰ God’s dealings with a people or nation implied his potential presence “here and now” whereas individual fellowship with the Spirit remained within the sphere of the invisible. By conferring such significance on the substance of church and other collective social covenants, which (considered on the spiritual scale) should have been second to the covenant of grace, New England society eventually lost sight of the transcendence of the latter, taking it for granted and mixing it with the social covenant derived from ‘federal theology’ (see n. 8 above):

By 1700 the ministers were speaking familiarly of the Covenant of Grace, by which they meant the secret transaction of the individual and God, of the covenant of baptism, which pledged the children of saints to the church on the assumption that they were included in the Covenant of Grace, of the church covenant, of the social and political covenant, and lastly of this national covenant.

At one level New England had developed the idea that they were an exceptional case, as the Jewish nation in Old Testament times, and therefore “lifted out of the flux of nature” and made to be “an exception to the cycles of history”. Consequently, God’s “special presence” and the potential for immediate divine intervention remained (in theory) unpredictable. Nevertheless, the theological and social tendency of this colonial covenantal thought was generally¹¹ to “put restraints upon the absolute sovereignty of Jehovah” at both the collective and individual levels. A “good covenanted society”

¹⁰ See chap. 1 p. 13 for how the ‘covenant of grace’ took precedence over collective covenants during colonial revivals.

¹¹ Cf. chap. 1 above, pp. 4, 5.

would prosper in this world and “a bad one” would get what it deserved; thus, the potential for a ‘mechanistic’ or cyclical vision of history was in the very fabric of New England thought (Miller, *Mind*, 478-484).

As we saw in the preceding chapter¹² regarding Edwards’ conversion, he can be said to have departed substantially from New England’s ‘preparationist’ tradition, whereby certain steps (including a high degree, and a prolonged process, of contrition) were to be undergone by any would-be convert. The mechanistic potential of this imposed pattern of conversion was radically different from the conviction Edwards came to through his own experience and theological discoveries. He saw his immediately and sovereignly bestowed ‘sense’¹³ (as opposed to one received gradually through preparation for grace) as crucial in being made fit to perceive glory and discern God’s creative and redemptive activity. By claiming that the “appearance of everything was altered” as a result of conversion, Edwards was conferring an objective value on a highly subjective experience since his newly acquired “sweet sense of the glorious majesty and grace of God” (16: 793) enabled him to perceive ultimate reality and not just secondary causes behind it (Lee, *Theology*, 82).¹⁴ Nothing was more glorious than God’s immediate presence with humans or creation, and hence it would seem inconceivable to find Edwards saying what Winthrop affirms in the opening lines of “A Model of Christian Charity”:

¹² See pp. 24-26 above, especially n. 23.

¹³ See pp. 32, 33 above.

¹⁴ Lee points out that this idea of a God-given ‘sense’ does not imply that such “perfecting of vision” is to be achieved “through a spiritual ascent that totally transcends the earthly ideas of sensation but rather by setting those very ideas side by side—ultimately, side by side with the meaning of the whole reality as manifested in God’s history of redemption. Any mysticism that would abrogate the essential place of time and history in cognition is fundamentally incompatible with Edwards’ conception of the imagination” (*Theology*, 131).

God Almighty in his most holy and wise providence hath so disposed of the condition of mankind [...] to hold conformity with the rest of his works, being delighted to show forth the glory of his wisdom in the variety and difference of the creatures; and the glory of his power, in ordering all these differences for the preservation and good of the whole; and the glory of his greatness, that as it is the glory of princes to have many officers, so this great king will have many stewards, *counting himself more honored in dispensing his gifts to man by man, than if he did it by his own immediate hands.* (83, my italics)

Not that Edwards did not delight to see and explain the divine wisdom shown in setting up the world in such a way that secondary ‘means’ were appointed to order and bring about events; on the contrary, much of his vision of history analyzed in this dissertation is particularly concerned with this very dynamics in redemptive history (Schweitzer, 115, 116). But Edwards considered God to be glorified first and foremost in man’s utter and direct dependence on him,¹⁵ whether considered individually or collectively.

Insofar as Winthrop’s text quoted above is referring to the created order or ‘common grace’,¹⁶ and not to the dispensation of saving grace or the Spirit, it may be thought that Edwards could have expressed himself in a similar way. Nevertheless, in his more sophisticated and mature thought (see n. 5 above), the concepts of contingency and divine agency were developed in a way that makes it difficult to establish different

¹⁵ See his early sermon *God Glorified in Man’s Dependence* (17: 200-212), the full title of which was “God Glorified in the Work of Redemption, by the Greatness of Man’s Dependence upon Him in the Whole of It” (*Works*, II, 2). Regarding the significance of Edwards’ view of conversion as articulated in this sermon, and its relation to his historical thought, see Zakai, *History*, 64, 198, 199.

¹⁶ ‘Common grace’ is the Calvinistic doctrine which serves to distinguish between the grace which Christians are exclusively the objects of and that which society at large benefits from, as, for example, through the restraint of gross sin by means of government and rules of decency, or through the achievements of art and science (“Common Grace”).

‘degrees’ of immediacy or directness in God’s involvement in history and creation’s dependence on his constant activity: “The Puritans, of course, commonly believed the universe to be dependent upon God for its existence. But as Edwards makes plain, though he assumes this he intends to go beyond it; he is not thinking of God just ‘upholding’ the world, but constantly recreating it” (Moody, 101).¹⁷ As Miller’s conclusions have shown, New England covenant thought unwittingly led to, as it were, the taming of the sovereign God, and the categories of ‘providence’ in the general sense and divine ‘decrees’ became muddled, thus losing the potential for subjecting both collective and individual experiences to the “hidden God” that was originally the essence of Puritanism (*Errand*, 94; *Mind*, 21). Edwards’ rejection of this inherited theological development and his innovative idea that God is, as it were, constantly recreating the cosmos and regenerate souls in particular (6: 204; 3: 385, 401) made it possible to restore John Calvin’s doctrine of divine sovereignty to its preeminent role of encompassing all spiritual experience (Miller, *Errand*, 98). This is why the opening lines of Winthrop’s famous sermon (“A Model”, 82, 83) seem once again markedly applicable only to a collective whole, and there is no compelling argument for his

¹⁷ See Sang Hyun Lee, *Theology*, 70-72 for a detailed explanation of how Edwards maintained the “integrity” of the created order and natural laws while actually holding a radical view of God’s “immediate involvement in the cosmos” (72). The individual’s status as a relatively independent agent in Edwardsean ontology was nevertheless quite effectively and coherently articulated within this scheme of unquestionable divine sovereignty. The singularity of “perceiving beings” (i.e., individuals) was accounted for in that Edwards viewed “the position of human beings as both continuous with and also transcending nature. Intelligent beings as well as matter are all governed by similar principles—namely, laws [...] As God creates, sustains, and works through the laws that govern human beings, he is acting without making use of certain other laws (i. e., the laws of material existence). God’s involvement in the existence and operation of intelligent creatures, then, is more immediate and direct than his relationship with the material realm” (73-75). Confer the same author’s discussion in his “Editor’s Introduction” to Yale’s edition of the works of Jonathan Edwards (Lee, 21: 53ff).

listeners to interpret what is being said as establishing an essential nexus between their own regeneration and the subsistence of the community whose foundations are allegedly being laid. Winthrop's address, historic and momentous in many ways, does not bring together effectively the vital matters of the individual's fellowship with God and fellowship with the community although these issues are, in fact, addressed in his text.

In New England's covenant tradition God appeared as an enemy or friend of the community with little or no reference to the individual's ability to deal directly with or perceive that deity. A convert's rebirth or his continued fellowship with God (to name just two instances of what was supposed to be an effect of immediate divine activity) were left out of what was considered tangible spiritual experience and consigned to the realm of inscrutable divine decrees. Visible worldly events or natural phenomena were given, by contrast, a spiritual status and were easily and consistently interpreted, in colonial literature at large, as major manifestations of the divine purpose in the community's history. Edwards, on the other hand, was able to address the broadest subjects from the pulpit, like 'universal history' in the Redemption Discourse, without leaving out the individual's experience, thus showing "his aim to bring the transcendent into the immanent" (Moody, 23).¹⁸ In an explanatory note on how he presented his congregation with God's inescapable "objectivity" or transcendence and his immediate presence, Josh Moody writes:

Edwards builds on his metaphysical understanding of the presence of God to preach the presence of God to both sinners and saints. Sinners should be awakened by the "amazing Consideration to think that they live and move in God who is angry with them

¹⁸ So much so, that William Scheick believes Edwards "treats history as an allegory of the conversion experience" (178).

every moment he is not an enemy at a distance from them nor is he only near to them he is in them and they in him ...,” and also, “it should be of Great Comfort to saints that he that is their friend and father is alwaies present with them and In them...” (117, n. 137)¹⁹

Jonathan Edwards built his thought on New England’s heritage, and yet departed from its rhetorical and theological tradition in more than one respect. Apart from the general aspect of ‘collective’ or ‘communal’ culture enshrined in John Winthrop’s sermon that I have briefly touched on, there is still another point regarding Edwards’ vision of his congregation and of communal (ecclesiastical) life that is more concretely linked to the issue of God’s presence and agency in time and space: the administration of the sacrament of communion (or the Lord’s Supper) and the ordinance of the Word. The former had been, for a whole century before the time of the Great Awakening, an essential element of “heart religion” in European Reformed circles as well as in the American colonies. In fact, some of the revivalist preachers of Edwards’ own time considered “communion seasons” to be “a critical means to revival” (Kidd, 30-31, 35; Noll, *Rise*, 14, 15). As for the preaching of God’s Word, it was obviously considered by colonial Puritans (and evangelical churches at large) the main means by which the divine made itself present through the Spirit’s conviction of sinners, leading them to repent and be converted, and through its agency in instructing and edifying the saints. Although Winthrop implicitly refers to communion and preaching when he mentions “ordinances” (“A Model”, 89), it will be much more helpful for our purposes to analyze the issue of church government through, and the presence of God in, ordinances by comparing Edwards with the figure and thought of John Cotton.

¹⁹ Moody is quoting from an unpublished sermon manuscript; hence the lack of punctuation and the odd capitalization.

2. 2. *Edwards vs. Cotton: God's Kingdom on Earth*

H. R. Niebuhr insightfully noted that the revivalism of the 18th century did not identify divine rule with the prosperity and stability of the ecclesiastical or the “institutional”. The ‘kingdom of God’, therefore, was not to be seen as progressing primarily through the well-being and advancement of the “visible church”²⁰ but, rather, “the reign of Christ was above all a rule of knowledge in the minds of men” (104, 105). At the time of, and during the run-up to, the Great Awakening in America, the idea of God’s presence among His people and the issues of church government (membership, ordinances, etc.) were becoming increasingly dissociated in converts’ and, more significantly, in some ministers’ minds. The general weakening of the New England ecclesiastical establishment during these years caused many to question the traditional role of clergymen as the only heralds of God’s message. Due to the popularity of lay and itinerant preaching and of religious societies, which constituted an alternative to one’s parish church, a lot of people (especially the youth) left their original congregations. The traditional criteria for regulating church membership or participation in communion simply became impracticable and doctrinal diversity grew rapidly due to the burgeoning of churches outside the tax-supported Congregational church (see pp. 9-15 above). Thus, not only professing Christians but some of the most zealous ones in

²⁰ The distinction between the visible and invisible church has existed at least since Saint Augustine but acquired particular importance during the English Reformation and later in Puritanism. It basically points to the impossibility of a pure church on earth and, therefore, to the assumption that there is a body of people (local congregations or organized denominations at the national, regional levels) who make up a professing Christian church but who are not literally the Church, or the body of true believers. For a succinct explanation of these ideas and their relevance in early colonial America, see the first chapter of Edmund Morgan’s *Visible Saints: The History of a Puritan Idea* (1-32).

the land had no doubt of God being at work in and around them while they no longer considered traditional ordinances to be essential for their communion with the divine.

Jonathan Edwards' and John Cotton's views on communion and church membership evolved in somewhat opposite directions. A notably skilled orator and a natural leader, Cotton's early ministry in Old Boston, England, had been marked by controversy over the "treatment of the sacraments" and the exclusion "from full church membership" of some people in his congregation since he "maintained the highest standards of admission" to communion and membership (Heimert & Delbanco, 27-28, 93). However, during the 1640s, more than a decade after his migration to the colonies, the Boston senior minister's stance during the controversy with Roger Williams²¹ showed an evolution towards a more moderate (or lax) position regarding the issue of who should be welcome to join or remain in the ecclesiastical establishment (see pp. 60-63 below).

As for Edwards, his increasingly strict opinion on admission to the Lord's Table and church membership was precisely the reason why he was confronted by his congregation in the late 1740s and finally dismissed from Northampton church in 1750.²² After the Great Awakening had died out, Edwards began to consider that his grandfather's practice of keeping communion open to any who merely professed the

²¹ Having been trained for the ministry in England, Roger Williams arrived in Massachusetts in 1631. His concern for Christian purity and his ideas about the need to separate church and state led him to hold separatist views which were most unwelcome in Massachusetts. He lived for two years in Plymouth and William Bradford himself said that he was "godly and zealous ... but very unsettled in judgement". After a few but intense years of controversy and of denying the authority of the general court in spiritual matters, Williams was banished in 1635 and he settled in Rhode Island (Middleton, 79, 80). Controversy with John Cotton, however, continued during the 1640s through an exchange of letters and essays refuting each other's views on civil and ecclesiastical government (Heimert & Delbanco, 196-199).

²² For a detailed account of this episode, see Marsden, *A Life*, 345-365.

Christian faith and did not lead a scandalous life was not biblical. He unsuccessfully tried to convince Northamptonites that his predecessor had been wrong in considering the Lord's Supper a means of conversion and he held that any candidate for communicant member of the church should, from then on, provide (orally or in writing) a heartfelt and convincing narrative of his or her conversion. Although the exact moment of Edwards' change of mind is not easy to trace, it seems clear that it was not until the decline of the Great Awakening that he began to seriously question the church policy he had inherited from his grandfather, Solomon Stoddard (Hall, 12: 53-62). The way John Cotton's view of church and society evolved, which eventually determined the model passed down to eighteenth century New England, is closely linked to his view of divine agency through the establishment of Christ's kingdom on earth and in history. Likewise, the fact that Edwards could see no flaw in the inherited socio-ecclesiastical model by the end of the 1730s is linked to what his expectations were concerning revival, which he viewed as the concrete form of divine intervention in the order of time.

John Cotton conceived of the Puritan 'errand' in the American colonies as a climactic, apocalyptic²³ event, and he gradually came to endow his own way (the 'congregational way') of church government with historical significance: "Rejoicing at the Wilderness-Exile state of the Church in New England, where Puritans could fashion their congregational way, Cotton was more than confident that here the way was open not only for the realization of the Kingdom of Christ but even for the imminent coming of the New Jerusalem as foretold in the Apocalypse". His model, according to which the

²³ Avihu Zakai explains in *Exile*, 184-190 how John Cotton's vision of the eventual consummation of history was "based upon the course and progress of Congregationalism in sacred history". The key work in this intellectual development was a "revolutionary exposition" of chapter 13 of the book of Revelation (188, 189).

ecclesiastical and the historical were “inextricably tied”, continued to influence the generations of New England Puritans that followed (Zakai, *Exile*, 195-197). So elevated was his view of what came to be established as ‘the New England Way’ that

according to Cotton, the Congregationalist church was the Kingdom of Christ because it holds “the keys of the kingdom of heaven,” or the keys of “the kingdom of grace.” These keys were necessary means instituted by Christ in his Church in order to reach salvation and redemption. “The keys of the kingdom” of Heaven or Grace, continued Cotton, “are the ordinances which Christ hath instituted, to be administered in his church.” (Zakai, *Exile*, 189)

Cotton’s idea of God’s ordinances as transcendental, or at least as having “moral value” (Lowance, 129), and as a means of divine intervention in dealing with a particular community (for instance, keeping his true Church pure throughout history) was present in his thought even before he fully developed the apocalyptic scheme referred to in the above quotations. Still in England, he writes to Winthrop’s company in Massachusetts, exhorting them to

Have special care that you ever have the ordinances planted amongst you, or else never look for security. As soon as God’s ordinances cease, your security ceaseth likewise; But if God plant his ordinances among you, fear not, he will maintain them...

Secondly, have a care to be implanted into the ordinances, that the word may be ingrafted into you, and you into it: if you take rooting in the ordinances, [...] the Lord will keep you. (“God’s Promise”, 79)

This text shows how the individual, intimate experience of God’s presence was contemplated within the collective experience of a congregation drawing near to God through the preaching of the Word and communion. Just after crossing the Atlantic, Cotton continued to hold the view that the integrity and success of the new

establishment depended on scrupulous observance of each and every rule of worship: “It hath been no small inducement to us to choose rather to move hither than to stay there [i.e., in England], that we might enjoy the liberty, not of some ordinances of God, but of all, and all in purity” (“Letter”, 96).

As opposed to his apocalyptic scheme, there was nothing innovative about John Cotton’s idea of divine agency or presence through the sacraments *per se*. English Puritanism would hold the same view throughout the seventeenth century.²⁴ What made New England’s ecclesiastical polity so unique in its immediate and long-term consequences was the fact that it inevitably (and tragically) became intertwined with civil power and social structures. Fueled by “millennial expectations”,

Puritans set out to establish congregational churches as specified in the prophecies of Revelation [...] One must not assume, however, that the great Puritan migration to New England was directed solely toward the establishment of Congregationalism [...] New England was to be the site for the true Christian Commonwealth in which Christ would rule over his saints. (Zakai, *Exile*, 231, 232)

The question that would continue to be debated by coming generations was “whether the Kingdom of God would be brought to earth through the salvation of individuals merely or by way of institutional development” (Heimert & Delbanco, 202).

²⁴ John Owen, in his treatise on communion with God, explains that even though God’s appointed “private and public means [may] fail” to bring the individual into contact with the divine, “Christ often manifests himself immediately, and out of his ordinances, to them that wait for him *in them* [...] Though he will meet men unexpectedly in his way, yet he *will not meet them at all out of it*” (131, my italics). Thus, while it is not held that God is immediately present in sacraments and ordinances (to do so would be too similar to what Protestantism considered the papist heresy of transubstantiation), it is clear that God can hardly be expected to show up through his Spirit outside the instituted church. Owen also had Congregationalist convictions. The work and influence of Owen has often been overlooked in colonial studies. Edwards himself quotes him several times in his major treatise on *Religious Affections* (2: 250-251, 372-373). In any case, I consider that, due to the scope and wide circulation of his works (also in New England; see chap. 1 above, p. 3), he is a good example of what orthodox English Puritanism looked like in the mid and late 1600s.

Although John Cotton had to concede that “[t]he church and the commonwealth are still distinct kingdoms”, having heavenly and earthly origins respectively, in the end the distinction became muddled since “both of them [were considered to be] from Christ; unto whom the Father hath committed all judgment”. But, was it simply the churches’ peace and well-being in general that civil power should try to ensure? Or should it intervene in more explicitly spiritual matters? For Cotton, “the good estate of the church, *and* the well-ordering of the *ordinances* of God therein, should concern the civil good of the commonwealth” (204, 205; my italics). Communion with the church and church membership became deeply political issues as the “radical linkage between the civil covenant and the church covenant served to exclude those who were not saints, not only from the church but also from political power” (Zakai, *Exile*, 235). Herein may lie at least part of the answer to why Cotton’s views evolved as they did regarding the strictly ecclesiastical. That is, seeing that a person’s being (or not) in good standing with the church entailed serious social consequences, how meticulous could the system be in separating the visible and the invisible church without putting an unbearable strain on society? Would the authorities show themselves impartial in judging rich and poor, high and low, alike?

As a clergyman in Anglican England, John Cotton had shown great zeal in trying to maintain purity within his congregations through a tight control of admission to the Lord’s Supper and full membership, since a wider reformation of society’s morality and spiritual condition probably seemed unattainable. However, while he was the pastor of Boston’s First Church, and having a unique opportunity to establish not just a pure church but a pure society, a decision about church discipline was eventually taken, whether consciously or not. It seemed that both “political and ecclesiastical compromises” became “inevitable” in the long run (Ziff, 147, 148). The case of Robert

Keayne, a prosperous merchant who had been found guilty and fined for overcharging customers but was otherwise a respectable citizen, may illustrate the point. Even though his “covetous and corrupt heart” was acknowledged to be the root of his unjust manner of trading, and despite the aggravating factor that he was “an ancient professor of the gospel”,²⁵ he would not be excommunicated and would remain in good standing with Boston’s First Church until his death, upon which he generously “bequeathed his collection [of religious books] to the town” (Middleton, 273). It was due to episodes such as these that Roger Williams feared “Cotton had abandoned his earlier ideals in a desire for precedence and respectability” (Heimert & Delbanco, 197).

Separatists²⁶ showed great zeal over the issue of purging the “tares” from the “wheatfields of the Church” in the colonies, and withholding communion from unworthy members of society was viewed by them as the appointed means to achieve the ideal of ecclesiastical purity. And even though this may have been desirable for Congregational Puritans at a purely theoretical and theological level, at a more practical one, the “liberal contributions” of some unregenerate church members (even “hypocrites”, Cotton admitted openly) who “follow[ed] their callings” diligently posed a dilemma for the ruling classes. A compromise inevitably followed: the possibility of a perfect church in New England was forfeited while the alleged “perfection of its institutions”, civil and ecclesiastical, would be maintained even if it required banishing

²⁵ The details of the case can be found in Winthrop, *History*, I: 377-382.

²⁶ During the 17th century in New England the term ‘separatist’ may be applied to anyone whose ideas differed, as did those of Roger Williams, from what the Congregational establishment imposed (e.g., Baptist convictions, advocating for church-state separation, etc.). Applied to Edwards’ times, when groups holding these views were tolerated and had their own congregations, the term is strictly used to refer to those who remained Congregationalist in their ecclesiology but were radical as to the necessity of separating church and civil power (Noll, *America’s God*, 145, 146; see also p. 14 above).

godly members of society like Roger Williams. The propagation of ideas that undermined the establishment itself was met with excommunication and banishment while communion was not ultimately withheld from some who, like Robert Keayne, did not quite show the evidence of having been born again (Heimert & Delbanco, 201, 202). Although at the start of the migration to, and settlement of, the New English colonies the emphasis of Cotton and others had been essentially on the system of church-government and they had even stigmatized the existence of any official church, whether “national, provincial, or diocesan” (Zakai, *Exile*, 186), the first generation of Puritans eventually mixed the roles and functions of civil and church authorities due to the notion that they were both “instituted by Christ”. The “exalted ideal of identifying the visible and the invisible church” and the system of church discipline it entailed in Puritan logic were gradually left behind (or at least the “emphasis on this high spirituality was visibly lessened”) since they no longer made sense as a “protest against the formalism of an established church” (Miller, *Errand*, 31). The assumption became that civil and church governments worked jointly to keep social and spiritual order, both of which finally came to be viewed as one and the same.

New Englanders in Edwards’ time did not match the Pilgrim Fathers in zeal for social order, but the latter’s conviction had become a social assumption in the eighteenth century, namely, that there was something of a spiritual nature in social as well as ecclesiastical order. Therefore, the way to keep up spiritually with the church’s requirements also had to do with leading a reasonably ordered and apparently respectable life. Though this social reality may have led indirectly to a break with a trait of Puritan experiential tradition in some parts of New England (namely, that which sought to restrict church membership and demand that Christians testify to a heartfelt

conversion),²⁷ it was directly derived from the Pilgrims' social and ecclesiastical heritage. Perry Miller was thus able to explain the weight of Old Light arguments against revivalism during the controversial aftermath of the Great Awakening: "The opponents [i.e. Old Lights] scored most heavily by denying that the Awakening, with its "enthusiasm" and "bodily effects," resembled the sober, controlled spirituality of the founders, which even in its most ravishing moments had always held firm to the vision of an ordered, disciplined society" ("Sociology", 50). For conservatives such as Charles Chauncy, religion was spiritually sanctioned if it bore this 'external mark' of restraint. Miller's insight regarding the connection between Edwards as a revivalist and New England's Puritan legacy is worth quoting at length:

In the seventeenth century the issues of personal conversion could not have been so separated from the external system. The founders sought, in their ecclesiastical and political structure, to institutionalize phases of the inner life. The forms of the church and the procedures of the state, the very layout of the town fields, were arranged to accommodate the processes of the spirit. Theologians, Hooker and Shepard no less than Cotton and Norton, always came from their psychological analyses, through the stages of preparation, justification, exaltation, and sanctification, to a social program which for them was inherent in the stuff of divine grace [...] In Edwards, social theory seems conspicuous by its absence. For him the only problem that concerned mankind seemed to be the "distinguishing marks" of a work of grace. (51)

Miller goes on to argue that Edwards' attitude toward society was one of "detachment or downright indifference" (51, 52; cf. p. 125 below), but for our purposes it is enough to note that during his local revival, the Great Awakening and the years in between (when he preached the Redemption Discourse) the Northampton pastor's ideal of piety

²⁷ See chap. 1 above, pp. 28, 29.

and church life, always related to revival, was not essentially dependent on ordinances, social order or any other external aspects.

The limited influence of John Cotton's works and social theory on Edwards (Miller, "Sociology", 50) may account for the striking detachment there is between the essence of spirituality and church ordinances for the Northampton revivalist. In one of his sermon series preached during the particularly significant inter-revival period (Minkema, Neele & McCarthy, ix), just over a year before beginning the Redemption Discourse, Edwards observed that the reason why "false professors" of Christianity abounded in the church was that "[t]hose that are indeed members of the mystical body of Christ, they can't look into others' hearts, and certainly determine who are of their society and who are not, so as to refuse to admit or receive any to be of their company, or to partake with them in their external privileges". Regarding an individual's reception into the visible church, "officers and rulers of the church, they are none of them searchers of men's hearts. And though some of them may be well-skilled in experimental religion and soul concerns, yet Christ has not seen fit to make their private judgment of the state of men's souls, their rule in admission of members into the church" (*Parables*, I, 69). External ordinances and appearances are not just secondary in the spiritual order; they are so unconnected to the real essence of God's presence²⁸ with a people that the unregenerate may "abound" in the visible church without disturbing church order or conditioning the administration of the sacraments. However, the implications of this observation take the argument (in a typically Edwardsean fashion) one step further: if an apparently healthy façade does not necessarily determine that 'all

²⁸ Edwards' view would be different by the end of the 1740s regarding the reality of God's presence with his people in communion (Marsden, *A Life*, 353, 354), but in the present study I am examining the views and rhetoric of the revivalist during the second half of the 1730s and early 1740s.

is well' in a congregation, neither does a declining, apparently dead, stage in the Church's journey through history automatically rule out the reality of God's hand and presence upon it.

Edwards wanted his hearers to envision divine activity in their own hearts and in history as one and the same; as proceeding from the transcendent God who had made himself so manifest in their recent local revival (providentially synchronized with other colonial awakenings),²⁹ and whose unremitting love could be immanently experienced by the elect despite the appearance of present circumstances. In order to drive home the message of the parable of the ten virgins in Matthew 25, Edwards identified the moment when the ten virgins "began to grow drowsy and fall asleep" as a period which

may represent the times that commonly follow remarkable outpourings of the Spirit of God, viz., times of deadness in religion, and the prevailing of sin.

Christ, in this part of this parable, doubtless means to teach us the same things as he teaches the disciples in the foregoing chapter, at the 12th verse: "and because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold." Christ is there speaking how it would be amongst his professing people before his coming, and so it is in this parable.

When iniquity abounds, and it is a time of general decay of religion, the love of many waxes cold, i.e., totally ceases. Though they seemed to have their affections much warmed for a while, and when they heard the Word, even with joy received it; yet their goodness proves as the "morning cloud, and the early dew that passeth away" [Hos. 13:3]. And the love of true Christians in a sense waxes cold; as it ceases, its liveliness and the exercises of it do greatly fail, though it don't totally cease in their hearts.

(Parables, I, 93)

In the Edwardsean scheme, the principle of love (as we observed when comparing it with Winthrop's 'charity' in 2. 1.) is an active, dynamic force which communicates

²⁹ See chap. 1 p. 38 above.

God's immediate presence at conversion and is bound to continue gradually working in any person or community that has received it.³⁰ This progressive aspect of God's activity does not exclude a measure of divine agency in redemptive history through the very pattern of rise and fall of love, zeal or revival. There is, on the one hand, the assurance that divine love "don't *totally* cease" in the elect's hearts, so that there is a relentless progressive aspect to God's intervention. On the other hand, an awakening or the Spirit's outpouring "in an exceptional way [would happen] only when the welfare of his church was gravely threatened, or when a desperate state of sin and degeneration prevailed among his chosen, or during a sad decline of interest in religion in the world as a whole" (Zakai, *History*, 250, 256). The issue of the intrinsic inefficiency of external ordinances is not wholly absent from the cited passage, as in Edwards' interpretation of the parable some people "heard the Word" but finally proved to be out of touch with the divine. Being under the ordinance of the Word, even under the teaching of sound doctrine, was not seen ultimately by Edwards as a guarantee that a people were the object of positive divine activity, nor did it mean that those ministers preaching were being used as 'means' in the advancement of God's work.

³⁰ It is significant that in a time of growing individualism like the 18th century Edwards should define the individual as an essentially 'relational' being: "The regenerate person is nothing less than a dynamic force that would seek out and know and love an unending number of beings in an unending number of circumstances [...] The regenerate minds and hearts participate in God's never-ending activity of self-communication" (Lee, *Theology*, 113). Though this principle was eternal in its essence and therefore transcended history, it was nevertheless inserted and had its fruition *within* the historical process and the immediate social context. For Edwards, then, the certainty of having partaken in a genuine revival (where a number of people are known to have been born again at a given time) is cause enough to be confident that there are outward effects to be expected, not only from each individual who is assured of his salvation and seeks to bear fruits in keeping with his profession, but in relationships which inevitably follow the undergoing of "a renewed experience of the presence of God" (Moody, 21).

Before moving onto another representative, and comparatively more important, text regarding Edwards' view of ordinances, and of the Word in particular, it is interesting to note that just after a conventionally structured and delivered passage like the one above,³¹ we find a clear example of an effort on the preacher's part to "forge" in his people "a new historical consciousness"³² apart from exhorting them to piety and self-examination in the 'application' of the text (*Parables*, I, 96-101), as was the custom. He tells Northamptonites that the "insensibility that there [is] in sleep, does consist in forgetting what is past, and in being insensible of what is present, and inconsiderate of what is to come". Edwards then breaks each of these temporal considerations into three different heads, backing each one of them with Old Testament verses. The underlying hortatory tone of this section, and especially of the verse from Deuteronomy used to reinforce the point that some are "unmindful of what is future", is somewhat striking as the sermon has not yet reached the moment for application (93, 94; see Deut. 32:29). This evinces, it would seem, a keen interest on the preacher's part to have his hearers apply themselves to a historically-oriented meditation and due reflection on the doctrine.

To illustrate how clearly revival had become, in Edwards' framework and rhetoric of history, the 'concrete agent' of divine agency, as opposed to John Cotton's

³¹ Edwards is simply carrying out an exegesis of the Matt. 25 passage. He predictably takes the immediate context into account in his reference to "the 12th verse" of the "foregoing chapter", and establishes connections with Old Testament prophecy (prophet Hosea) which, regarding the eschatological nature of the Matthean text, would be expected by his audience.

³² Zakai, *History*, 275. Avihu Zakai and Harry Stout (22: 9, 14) both make the same observation, namely, that Edwards' own growing interest in various historical issues and their relation to the work of redemption conditioned not just his own thought but the way he addressed his congregation during the years of revival, especially the late 1730s and early 1740s (cf. 1. 3. b. above, especially pp. 36 and 37).

apocalyptic vision (and that of his successors) whereby the realization of the Kingdom of God and his direct rule over a people was achieved through the establishment of Congregationalist church-government (Zakai, *Exile*, 196-198), a close look at his most important text on the Great Awakening will suffice. In *Some Thoughts Concerning the Revival* (Boston, 1743), where revivalism is moderately defended against religious formalism and the detractors of the movement, we find Edwards solemnly claiming that God's awakening in the colonies is no less than the "day of his power" and will prove to be the day of his "wrath" for those who oppose the work. When he writes that ministers must "acquaint themselves with things pertaining to the Kingdom of God", he clearly means not just supporting but carrying out revival. To be sure, the gospel ministry consists in the "administration of God's word and ordinances", as these are the "principal means" appointed to work "on the souls of men". So far, Edwards seems to be in line with standard New England ecclesiastical legacy. However, he makes his mind known to his readers by asserting that if "ministers preach never so good doctrine, and are never so painful and laborious in their work, yet if at such a day as this, they show to their people that they are not well affected to this work [...] they will be very likely to do their people a great deal more hurt than good" (4: 371, 374, 375). There is no doubt that for Edwards no considerations of church order or ministerial prerogatives, like preaching or the administering of ordinances, could be placed higher on the spiritual scale than the work of revival, which was at this time so manifest across the land.

However, it may be argued from one of the above-quoted assertions that the "principal means" in the internal and lasting work of the Spirit "on the souls of men" was still found in church "ordinances" for Edwards (4: 374), as it had been for New England Puritans. And surely this internal action in the heart was more ultimate than

any apparent, external signs of ‘religious affections’, however genuine. So it has been argued in this very section. But though Edwards’ own logic might seem to support this objection, his use of the phrase “principal means” in yet another passage from *Some Thoughts* betrays his intention of maintaining revival as the most immediate and definite form of divine government and intervention in the order of time. Among the many revival practices denounced by Old Lights as contravening the rules of church order, there was that of

keeping persons together that have been under great affections, which have appeared in such extraordinary *outward* manifestations. Many think this promotes confusion [...] and that when any in a congregation are [so] strongly seized that they can't forbear outward manifestations of it, they should be removed [...] But I can't but think that those that thus object go upon quite wrong notions of things: for though persons ought to take heed that they don't make an ado without necessity, for this will be the way, in time, to have such appearances lose all their effect; yet the unavoidable manifestations of strong religious affections tend to an happy influence on the minds of bystanders, and are found by experience to have an excellent and durable effect; and so to contrive and order things, that others may have opportunity and advantage to observe them, has been found to be blessed as a *great means to promote the work of God*; and to prevent their being in the way of observation, is to prevent the effect of that which God makes use of as a *principal means* of carrying on his work at such an extraordinary time, viz. example. (4: 400; my italics)

Whereas Winthrop, Cotton and other representative New England Puritans developed a philosophy of history which eventually led colonial Americans to view “sacred space” (i.e., their own colony) as that which made them an exceptional people in God’s eyes (Zakai, *Exile*, 120-155), for Edwards it is the event (not a place) of revival which calls for exceptional considerations. The overturning of social and ecclesiastical order was

justifiable in terms of the “extraordinary time” the colonies were facing and undergoing. The administration of traditional ordinances and instituted church practices made it possible to observe only the “visible church”, providing no tangible evidence of what God was doing in the hearts of individuals; however, “outward” or external manifestations, insofar as they were the “effect” of “strong religious affections”, must not be hidden from the public eye since they were the immediate effect of divine intervention. What was little less than repulsive for Old Lights was for Jonathan Edwards “blessed as a great means” or, rather, “principal means” in the cause-effect chain wherein the unfolding of God’s providential plan could be discerned.

There is still more to be said on the visibility of the effects of God’s gracious work in a people, and the role this played in both New England thought and Jonathan Edwards’ philosophy, and consequently his rhetoric, of history. Was it possible to establish some ‘marks’ whereby the real members of Christ’s invisible and mystical body might be distinguished from the rest, thus enabling the keenest observer to discern God’s gracious activity more accurately? This point, however, will be dealt with in the next section as we compare Edwards to Thomas Shepard. The latter, as opposed to John Cotton, received ample consideration from and greatly influenced the Northampton pastor.

2. 3. Edwards vs. Shepard: The Visibility of God’s Work in The Saints

Thomas Shepard, together with John Cotton and others, belonged to that first generation of colonial Puritans whose eschatology established that the advancement of the “Kingdom and Government of Christ in his Churches” largely depended on

successfully implementing and enforcing the congregational way (Zakai, *Exile*, 191).³³ Shepard's persistent use of the word "Churches" in the plural form betrays the idea that the establishing of particular congregations according to this rule was in a way tantamount to making Christ's Kingdom concrete and, in a way, visible. Even before the migration took place, the concern for holiness in the saints' lives meant for Shepard and other English Puritans that those who would "keep their covenant with God" must "withdraw into godly covenanted societies" as a way of making the true Church visible in this world. If God's work was to be discerned in a moment of historical climax, like the one migrating Puritans felt they were living in, it must be done by distinguishing between those who were the real subjects of God's work and those who were not. The ecclesiastical means for implementing this ideal was to exclude the ungodly from communion (Zakai, *Exile*, 214, 215). A further means for separating the wheat from the tares, a rhetorical one, would be pursued by Thomas Shepard after settling as pastor in Cambridge, Massachusetts: the preaching of a sermon series where he set out to establish what the marks of a true believer were.

This sermon series, which unfolds and applies the parable of the ten virgins (Matthew 25), deserves particular attention from anyone who wishes to understand Jonathan Edwards' thought with regard to this issue of the true Christian's marks or fruits. In his major treatise on *Religious Affections* (Boston, 1746), he quoted "more from Shepard than from any other writer, depending chiefly upon *The Parable of the Ten Virgins*" (Smith, 2: 54). Edwards' own expository effort on the same biblical passage,³⁴ though much shorter, shows a similar approach and concern to that of Shepard, namely, "the distinction between true and false Christians" (Minkema, Neele

³³ Zakai is quoting from the preface in Allin & Shepard, 28-32.

³⁴ Already referred to above (pp. 66-69).

& McCarthy, 33). Recognizing divine agency within and God's government over history was for both preachers linked to the issue of the new birth and, in Edwards' case, to the doctrine of assurance.³⁵ Moreover, the historical transcendence of the matter for him lay in the notion that in perceiving the direct result of real conversions (or even just *one* conversion), a Christian could be said to be witnessing, whether in himself or in others, an event "more glorious [...] than the creation of the whole material universe". Indeed,

[i]t is spoken of in Scripture as that which shews the exceeding greatness of God's power, and the glory and riches of divine grace, and wherein Christ has the most glorious triumph over his enemies, and wherein God is mightily exalted: and it is a work above all others glorious, as it concerns the happiness of mankind; more happiness, and a greater benefit to man, is the fruit of each single drop of such a shower, than all the temporal good of the most happy revolution in a land or nation amounts to, or all that a people could gain by the conquest of the world. (4: 344, 345)

Such an elevated view of God's work of redemption explains Edwards' long-lasting concern about the 'marks' of true Christianity, his increasingly strict and exhaustive 'tests' of assurance and the appeal of Shepard's *Parable*.

Before continuing with the consideration of Shepard's influence on Edwards' view of the importance of the 'visibility' of the saints, it is worth noting that in the Redemption Discourse the idea of God's work being beheld by men, or its appearing before the eyes of heavenly and earthly creatures, becomes crucial for the preacher's rhetoric of history. The visibility of divine intervention in history may not be, as one might suspect, proportional to how sudden it is and how quickly its effects appear or spread. Edwards provides one historical example (that of the Roman empire being set

³⁵ 'Assurance' is the "question of whether certainty of ultimate salvation is possible in this life" ("Assurance").

up after the Greek) which for him showed that an “overturning of the world” being brought about “gradually” in no way meant that it was less radical or impressive; on the contrary, such providential changes could far exceed others in greatness and have more lasting, if temporary, effects (9: 276). Such logic provided a rationale for what I am calling ‘progressive’ divine agency in this dissertation. Edwards envisioned God as acting *immediately* first and foremost in revival and conversion (see p. 31 above and chap. 4 below). At the same time, providential divine activity could be expected to be *progressive*, as events were directed and chained in sequences to bring about God-appointed ends. Though providence and the internal saving work of the Spirit had traditionally been considered as eminently secret and inscrutable, Edwards seemed particularly interested in unveiling not just the motives or ends in specific historical instances of the advancement of God’s kingdom, but the divine dynamics implicit in all ‘providences’, whether in the dispensation of saving grace or in the accomplishment of ‘temporal’ purposes (e.g. the downfall of an empire, a defeat or victory in a battle, etc.).

Having laid out what he understood to be the biblical doctrine of the fall or “destruction of Antichrist” (which, following the Reformed tradition, primarily meant the loss of power and influence by the Roman Catholic Church),³⁶ Edwards reflected on how tangible and manifest divine agency was in history:

I must also briefly answer to an inquiry, viz. why the setting up of Christ’s kingdom after his humiliation should be so gradual, by so many steps that are so long in accomplishment, when God could easily have finished it at once. Though it would be presumption in us to pretend to declare all God’s ends in this, yet doubtless much of the wisdom of God may be *seen* in it by us [...] In this way the glory of God’s wisdom in

³⁶ Though Edwards held this view in broad terms, ‘revival’ came to replace the struggle between Protestantism and the Roman Catholic Church as the central eschatological event (Zakai, *History*, 181).

the manner of doing this is more *visible* to the creature's *observation*. If it were done at once, in an instant or in a very short time, there would not be opportunity for the creature to *perceive and observe* all the particular steps of divine wisdom, as when the work is gradually accomplished and one effect of his wisdom is held forth to *observation* after another. 'Tis wisely determined of God to accomplish his great design by a wonderful and long series of events, that the glory of his wisdom may be *displayed* in the whole series and that the glory of his perfections may be *seen as appearing*, as it were, by parts and in particular successive manifestations. For if all that glory that appears in all these events should be manifested at once, it would be too much for us and more than we at once could take notice of; it would *dazzle our eyes* and be too much for our *sight*. (9: 355, 356; my italics)

How this 'progressive' or gradual aspect of the work of God in history finds a parallel in the Edwardsean conception of the Spirit's work in the Christian's life, and why it is crucial for the issue of assurance, will be explained below in this same section. For now, it is enough to note that the visibility of God's work in the order of time was paramount in Edwards' effort to lay before his people the grand picture of redemptive history.

In the aftermath of the Great Awakening Edwards would preach a sermon series which he later turned into a treatise, culminating his efforts toward establishing what the marks of a true Christian were. In *Religious Affections*, a definite rule was given whereby "Christian practice" (i.e., good deeds, works of love, etc.) was established not as the only but as the most easily verifiable sign of a person's being truly regenerate (2: 383ff). Even if Edwards did not intend these marks to be thought of as an infallible guide for Christians to "make a full and clear separation between sheep and goats" (since this was God's "prerogative" [2: 193]), the Northampton pastor did become increasingly concerned about how ministers were to tell if a potential church member had really been born again. Moreover, there is an undeniable connection between this

development and the subsequent conflict with his congregation in the late 1740s. But, had Edwards sought assurance in the same way a decade earlier? Did he then seek to establish his own and his congregation's conviction that God was at work in their midst by placing such emphasis on outward manifestations of the Spirit's internal activity? Where did his rhetorical efforts to exhort a people to strive spiritually and to examine themselves coincide with or differ from those of Thomas Shepard?

For the 17th century pastor, the parable of the ten virgins taught the same basic reality that it did for Edwards: among those who professed the Christian faith there were hypocrites and real, born-again children of God. Out of those who were true Christians some may not have been convinced (or had 'assurance') of their eternal condition. One crucial issue, therefore, in the application of this parable was for listeners to examine their lives and consciences in order to stand firm in the faith and begin or continue on the path of individual and collective spiritual growth. However, while the prevailing tendency in Shepard's application of the parable and the issue of assurance was to promote introspection among his hearers, Edwards' view of conversion as "an essential part of providential history" and his placing revival at a "sacred historical moment" were intended to achieve a response in his audience that combined quiet and private self-examination with a dynamic exercise of self-forgetfulness. The picture he painted for his hearers was aimed at bringing them out of their small and limited reality, even out of thinking that their 'little awakening' had been a particularly important one, in order to contemplate the bigger picture in terms both of the historical and the transcendental. Indeed, their very response to the message merely "revealed God's decree of salvation and damnation", which was in itself an anticipation of the great eschatological event of the last judgment. This article of Christian historical faith Edwards never shrank from proclaiming during the years of revival. He did not do so in

order to convey a static idea of God's decrees of "salvation and damnation" as being fixed from eternity, thus leaving sinners in desperation and inaction. On the contrary, the "close association he made between history and conversion during the revival reinforced Edwards's argument that the present dispensation offered an existential choice to the unconverted". The eschatological significance ascribed to the Great Awakening served as a pointer to eternity, but the sense of urgency, the transcendence of the 'here and now', expressed in Edwards' revival preaching made his audiences feel that their response was inserted in yet another "new stage in the drama of salvation" (Zakai, *History*, 285, 286). History in Edwardsean homiletics provided a fresh dynamism to the intended response of self-examination or testing oneself for assurance, so often associated with quietness and stillness.

Curiously enough, Shepard's *Parable* is not lacking in eschatological and historical considerations. In fact, the Cambridge pastor frames the coming of the "awakening cry" which woke up the ten virgins in a time "a little before" the Second Coming of Christ (13, 14, 370). Following this interpretation, Shepard understood several elements in the parable (e.g. the foolish virgins' request for oil) to be representing a short period of future revival and spiritual concern among the visible church. Edwards, who had most probably read Shepard's work by the winter of 1737-38³⁷ and was familiar with his exegesis, interpreted the "amazing cry" in the middle of the night as the expression of "dreadful horror" felt by many at "the last judgment" (*Parables*, I, 116). Northamptonites were, therefore, given a historical frame to understand this parable which viewed them as *already within* the apocalyptic setting, that is to say, within a setting of revival. Though the parable showed a truth that could be applied to "the times of the greatest popish darkness" when God kept "a holy seed in

³⁷ The time during which he preached his own series on this parable (Minkema, Neele & McCarthy, 19).

his visible church” despite the prevailing decay of true religion, Edwards depicted a different scene of the present by affirming that even though “false professors” commonly “make the far greater part” of the church,

sometimes the proportion of true professors to false ones in the visible church, is much greater than others. Sometimes religion is in much more flourishing circumstances in the church than at others, and then the number of true saints is great [...] True piety greatly flourished under the preaching of the apostles [...] in the time of the first Reformation from popery [...] But yet, even in the most flourishing circumstances of the church, there are many false Christians with the true; as we know it was in the apostles’ times. (66, 67)

By implication, true saints (even if not visibly identifiable) at the present time in Northampton in all likelihood outnumbered false Christians.³⁸ Parallelisms between New England’s recent revivals and “the apostles’ times” had already been made in the preface to Edwards’ *Faithful Narrative*, published in London in 1737 (Goen, 4: 36), and he himself would establish plenty of scriptural and eschatological parallelisms in the Redemption Discourse (see 4. 2. below) all of which tended to heighten the sense that the present season was a unique opportunity to observe, as well as to be a subject of, God’s wondrous works.

Shepard’s sense of historical climax is also present in his *Parable*, but he is reliant on the *here* more than on the *now* to express his confidence in God’s presence with his people. As Avihu Zakai has clearly shown in *Exile and Kingdom*, the generation of the Puritan migration came to develop a sense of “sacred space” which gave the community a sense of purpose and of being exceptionally blessed by God

³⁸ In a sermon preached just over a year before this (and a year after the end of the Northampton revival) Edwards expressed his hope that the “greater numbers of them were holy” and “that many of you are the children of God” (19: 542, 558).

(120-155). In what he calls the “Exodus type of religious migration” (as opposed to the “Genesis type”), Zakai portrays Shepard and others as holding the view that the solution to the apocalyptic crisis their exile constituted had to come “through God’s divine providence acting directly and immediately within history” (62-66). In the *Parable* we find Shepard using precisely the kind of references and images that point to this mindset in the preacher and, presumably, in the audience. The most obvious one is the parallelism between the crossing of the Atlantic and the Israelites’ deliverance from Egypt (e.g. 72, 375),³⁹ which inevitably led New Englanders to look back and be thankful for having reached the Promised Land: “O, now love him when he exalts thee to glory, to give the kingdom of heaven on earth with peace and quietness. When Germany lies in blood, and eastern churches slain by the dragon, devoured by the Turk, when England’s lamps are going out...” (92). As was said above, the key for early colonial Puritanism is not so much the *now*, since God’s judgment upon Europe was simultaneous to New England’s unspeakable blessing, but rather the spatial ‘setting apart’ of a visible Christian community.

It is no wonder, then, that “New England’s peace and plenty of means breeds strange security” and leads people to forsake basic spiritual duties (*Parable*, 170). Even if Shepard’s conviction was that there were undoubtedly hypocrites and unregenerate people among them (188), by placing (in a figurative sense) the fulfillment of a redemptive act so definitive as deliverance from Egyptian bondage in the past, a major incentive for striving forward in spiritual growth was removed. His congregants, filled with the conviction that they were on the safe side of the Red Sea or the River Jordan, would understandably be prone to lukewarmness in experiential religion and to

³⁹ Christ himself, the epitome of deliverance and redemption, is represented not just as the sun (a commonplace metaphor in biblical and Christian literature) but as the sea (*Parable*, 165, 488).

overconfidence in those “means” which were so plentiful and so purely instituted in the land which the Lord their God had given them. The pastor at Cambridge, Massachusetts, faced the daunting challenge of exhorting a people whose “greatest sin” was to take “ordinances” for granted, “despising” them, and having the tendency to busy themselves with “many employments in the world” (169). Shepard’s congregation ran the danger of being too confident in the privileged space where they dwelt, while Edwards’ listeners could become excessively proud of the season of revival they were living in and the extraordinary (and by now internationally publicized) awakening that had been so fruitful among them. For both preachers the doctrine of assurance was to become instrumental in the work of stirring up their respective churches to action. But, for the reasons briefly stated below, it was critical for Edwards to effectively bring together and articulate as one-and-the-same both the work of redemption as discerned in one’s soul and as carried out throughout history.

For Shepard, as for John Cotton, there would always be an implicit conviction that the visible church in New England could almost be equated with Christ’s mystical body, so long as the Congregational Way was implemented. Outward conformity to the colonial Puritan ideal gave visibility to a body and would have made it easier for the minister and observer to remain optimistic when piety declined. Shepard could, so to speak, afford to remain skeptical about every outward manifestation of the revival sort of affections, as he did not need any more tangible evidence of God’s faithfulness to his Church than what he already observed in his people’s compliance with Congregational church and social order. He repeatedly expresses his distrust of “violent affections and pangs”, and any “sudden work” is for him suspicious of being “superficial” (*Parable*, 234, 606, 346). For Shepard, and later for Solomon Stoddard, assurance of one’s salvation was to be sought through introspection and found in a “work in you that no

hypocrite under heaven has” (219). But since religious enthusiasm and an excessive show of affections was a definite sign of hypocrisy (234), the internal work which had to be identified in order to attain assurance was more like a quiet “revealing” of the Spirit or an inwardly confirmed “word of promise” (213, 215).⁴⁰ All in all, there was little ‘tangibility’ in this internal mark of the true believer. If genuine divine activity was to be thus discerned and measured, how could Edwards, who did not ascribe to conformity to ordinances the transcendence that his Puritan forefathers did, be satisfied in his keen observation of spiritual phenomena around him?

In Edwards’ scheme, revival and the contemplation of God and his work of redemption stayed at the centre of assurance, keeping him optimistic about the genuineness of God’s work in and around him throughout the inter-revival period which mainly concerns this study. Though it is known that he eventually rejected any ‘methods’ whereby Christians might be led to rely on “momentary experience for assurance”, we must not assume that by the late 1730s he had already elaborated the doctrine in such a way that the believer was exclusively, or even mainly, encouraged to “find his hopes of heaven in the evidence of his holy life”. This was the method of self-examination, enshrined in *Religious Affections*, which Edwards developed after many personal and collective experiences, disappointment not being the least of them. However, there is one trait of his mature thought regarding assurance which can be seen in the post-revival⁴¹ years preceding the preaching of the Redemption Discourse,

⁴⁰ Similarly, Stoddard considered it sufficient to find or remember one “act of saving grace” in the soul in order to be assured of one’s salvation (*Puritan Pulpit*, 148ff). Cf. Eugene White’s contrast between Edwards’ and his grandfather’s revival preaching in *Puritan Rhetoric*, 36-48.

⁴¹ That is to say, the years after the Northampton revival of 1734-35 (see 1. 3 above).

namely, that in exercising the ‘sense of the heart’⁴² granted to every true convert one “did not think about his own salvation” (Breitenbach, 184). There was a prevailing tendency in the message delivered from the Northampton pulpit to encourage hearers to look away from themselves and exert themselves in something other than self-centered introspection. In this respect, Jonathan Edwards at this stage of his ministry may have contributed to the rediscovery of Calvin’s focus on the doctrine of assurance, which colonial Puritanism in particular had departed from, whereby the key to one’s certainty of salvation “is taken off the worthiness of the subject and his acts and placed upon the worthiness of the object and his work” (Parker, 58).

Some of the reasons why Shepard’s *Parable* would have appealed to Edwards so much, despite the divergent thinking of both theologians briefly stated above, are not hard to grasp. To begin with, Edwards shared to a considerable extent (especially at times of revival declension) Thomas Shepard’s skepticism about enthusiasm: “And another device of Satan to hurt the credit of this work [...] has been to lead away and deceive some particular professors by enthusiastical impressions and imaginations; which they have conceited were divine revelations, such as were wont to be given to the prophets of old” (19: 550). Also implicit in this quote is the issue of spiritual pride, which always kept Edwards alert during his oversight of Northampton’s church as it did Shepard during his years of ministry at Cambridge. Yet, it would be misleading to equate Edwards’ skepticism about expressions of affections with that of the 17th century Puritan. In addition to the example from *Some Thoughts* (pp. 69-72 above), where we observed that “extraordinary outward manifestations” (4: 400) which were clearly the result of a genuine revival were to be encouraged and seen by others as a means to promote the Great Awakening, there is sermonic and rhetorical evidence to show that in

⁴² See chap. 1 above, pp. 24-26.

the years immediately preceding the Redemption Discourse Edwards ascribed more importance to subjective (if God-centered) experiences than would appear by reading his 1740s and 1750s perspective back into the period here dealt with.

Take, for instance, a sermon from July 1736 which is concerned (relevantly for my present purpose) with making “a professing people or society as a city set on an hill” in order to be “greatly observed and taken notice of”. In other words, Edwards intends to stir up his congregation to display and make visible what is the direct result of what he still confidently called a “very remarkable and distinguishing” season or “occasion”, in reference to their local awakening the preceding year, expressed in the metaphorical terms of the gospel image: “As a city set on an hill stands on distinguished ground, above the level of the common surface of the earth, the place is eminent and lifted up; and this *sets it forth to view* [...] It can’t be hid, and no other can be expected than that *all should observe it*”. Given that the main thrust of the sermon, according to its stated ‘doctrine’, is to call “any professing society” to “honor religion in their *practice*”, one might expect Edwards to have devoted some ink and delivery time to emphasizing the role of good works or ‘Christian practice’ in attaining assurance of salvation as well as their importance for the church’s witness in the world. Or, to apply it collectively (since most of the sermon focuses on Northampton church as a whole), their conduct might have been presented as a potential witness to the genuineness or counterfeitness of their recent experience during the Spirit’s outpouring. On the contrary, what Edwards does is to confidently assume “that greater numbers of [his congregants] are holy” compared to other communities, and assert that he hopes “many of [them] are the children of God” (19: 540-42, 558; my italics). His certainty as to the divine origin of their collective and individual recent experiences permeates the whole sermon.

In an apparently more hypothetical statement from “A City on a Hill”, not directly applied (in principle) to his audience, Edwards explains that when Christians make a profession of having greater degrees of the presence of God with them, of God having done more for them, and of greater mercies that God has bestowed upon them than on other people; when there is a far greater number among them that do make profession of *special experiences*, and of *extraordinary light*, that they have had; when they make profession of greater acquaintance with God, and *more communion with him*, and of greater hopes of what God will do for them hereafter [...] [Such] a people are set forth to the notice of others. Such a people will be much observed. (19: 542; my italics)

It is worth noting that the preacher does not hide the fact that he considers this hypothetical community of believers to be better instructed than most as regards historical, especially future, redemptive events: they claim to have “greater hopes of what God will do for them hereafter”.⁴³ Soon, in the second point of the ‘application’, Edwards makes it clear that in the above description he alluded to his own people:

I come now particularly, to apply this doctrine to the case of this town. *This town is* in a remarkable degree *such a society*, as is spoken of in the text and doctrine. It has been so in a considerable degree formerly. It has in time past been a town of an higher profession, and more noted, for the *works which God had wrought in it* than most towns, if not than any town in the land. But it is become more remarkably so of late, by means of the late wonderful *pouring out of the Spirit of God* upon us. (19: 548, 549; my italics)

God’s work of redemption is, for Edwards, materialized and brought to concrete, historical realization in and through revivals. Revival is the concrete agent of divine intervention in the order of time. Edwards strove to set forth before his church a vision

⁴³ This may be a veiled reference to the millennium. For other examples which evince latent millennial expectations in Edwards’ pulpit oratory during the 1730s, see Sanchez, “Divine Communications” 26, 23 n. 19.

of history which could encompass their personal rebirth experiences, the recent local awakening, the history of Northampton's previous generations and the ultimate revival which would usher in the millennium (see 4. 2. c., p. 245 below).

Thomas Shepard's doctrine of assurance was essentially applied, as we have already seen, through the exercise of introspection and was basically dissociated from his eschatology and vision of history. Although historical references are present throughout his exposition of the Matthean parable, most of them served to focus on New England as a providentially privileged space where pure religion could be practiced in freedom. This dissociation of one's assurance of salvation and concrete prophetic fulfillment, in turn, caused Shepard and the colonial Puritan tradition after him to consign the immediate, verifiable actings of God's Spirit to the intangible and secret realm of the soul, while the various strains of eschatology⁴⁴ developed by New England's first three generations pointed to, and dealt with, affairs and observable events taking place around them or bound to happen in history. These, when they came to pass, would constitute definite and tangible examples of divine intervention in time and space that could be corroborated. This division between historical thought and the application of the doctrine of assurance did not happen in Jonathan Edwards' homiletics during the late 1730s. When, a year and a half after preaching "A City on a Hill", Northampton heard the parable of the ten virgins being applied to them in a "Use of Examination", the commended way to gauge their right standing before God was to consider whether they were not "more influenced by the Spirit of God by far [during the awakening] than you are now". While they are required to examine wherein they are "guilty of declining and backsliding", their verdict is not to be inferred by running a test

⁴⁴ For a brief but accurate summary of the premillennialist, amillennialist and postmillennialist positions on the Second Coming of Christ developed in English and colonial Puritanism, see Lovelace 69, 70.

of self-examination in their own souls. The issue is not so much that they must find an inwrought sign or mark of true grace lest they should turn out to be reprobates; rather, they are to consider the outcome of their experience insofar as it has affected the way *revival* is seen by them and by others: “Christianity, when its virtues are truly excited and its rules truly practiced, is lovely in the eyes of the world” (*Parables*, I, 96, 97, 99). There is undoubtedly greater optimism in, and greater concessions are made by, this Edwards than the one we find in other stages of his preaching career. Why is this so?

Whereas Shepard used the image of the ten virgins being asleep basically to provide a descriptive frame where the church could be envisioned, Edwards used it to encourage his hearers and himself: “*Use II*. Let us rouse out of sleep. Let every one wherein, on examination, he finds himself [asleep, awake]. Let natural men [rouse themselves]”.⁴⁵ Or, in the “*Use of Exhortation*” of another sermon in the same expository series: “*Labor* as it were to realize the midnight cry to yourself...” (*Parables*, I, 100, 136, 137; my italics). This is a surprisingly optimistic mode of Puritan rhetoric, which had usually been pervasively suspicious of and pessimistic about human nature and efforts in both regenerate and unregenerate listeners. The Calvinist theological heritage, which the Northampton pastor fully embraced, was receiving a fresh and new impulse from the positive and innovative Edwardsean conception of “the regenerate person” as a “dynamic force that would seek out and know and love an unending number of beings in an unending number of circumstances” (Lee, *Theology*, 113). Said more plainly: in every Christian there is a force that is unstoppable due to the source from which it draws its life; although this dynamic force is not immediately from him but from God, it is reasonable and necessary to call the faithful to action, even ‘self-awakening’ action. Or, as Edwards himself expressed it more than halfway

⁴⁵ Editor’s additions.

through the same exposition of the parable of Matthew 25: “[I]t is from the Spirit infusing a new and divine principle. ’Tis not only a natural principle, stirred up and set to work by God’s Spirit, as men’s natural conscience is stirred up [...] but ’tis from the creative power of the Spirit of God, giving a new heart, infusing a new principle”. And what was the dynamics of this principle working in the believer? Precisely the same as the dynamics of God’s activity in history that was briefly touched on at the start of this section (pp. 74, 75 above). Edwards had not ruled out, as Shepard had, the potential genuineness and value of a ‘sudden’⁴⁶ work of God, whether in some earthly matter or in the salvation of souls. Divine agency ought to be recognized when operating in both its *immediate* and *progressive* modes: “[This principle] is *continually* from the Spirit of God, dwelling as a spring of life in the soul. It is *at first immediately* from the Spirit of God, and ’tis *always immediately* from the Spirit” (*Parables*, I, 147; my italics). The continual or progressive operation must not be taken for a weaker sort of divine activity due to its gradual and hidden appearance to the inexperienced eyes of some. On the contrary, God may choose to work thus in history, in an individual soul or in a community of believers precisely because his power appears greater in doing so.

Therefore, the way Edwards conveyed assurance of the divine nature of the work his congregation had been the subject of was through an underlying optimism both in his expository and hortatory modes of discourse (corresponding roughly to the sections of ‘doctrine’ and ‘application’ in sermons respectively). This optimism was rooted in the firm belief that what had been bestowed on the Northampton community by the recent spiritual outpouring of 1734-35 was not “inactive and motionless” (*Parables*, I, 148). Edwards was not yet saying that “assurance is not to be obtained so much by *self-*

⁴⁶ Shepard, *Parable*, 346. Edwards would, as late as 1743, continue to partly sanction the work of revival on the basis of the “suddenness of conversions”, though the change produced had to prove to be “manifestly durable” (4: 346).

examination, as by *action*⁴⁷ (with all the potential for moralism that focus had) as he would in the mid 1740s, and his ‘method’ for attaining certainty of a right standing before God definitely had more to do with coming out of oneself than with looking inside oneself for evidences of grace:

Don’t rest in any sort of affection, without a real and deep conviction of the reality and divine excellency of spiritual things. [...] ’Tis one thing to be affected with that, that God has been very good to us and has set his love on us; and another thing to be inwardly convinced, and to see that God is superlatively lovely in himself and worthy to be loved, whether he has loved us or no. (*Parables*, I, 166)

The powerful nature of the source of revivals guaranteed the visibility of its fruits to the spiritual naked eye. There was not only a need for Christians to long for more of God’s presence in their midst, although, following Edwards’ eschatological scheme, Northamptonites had enough reasons to expect further revivals at the threshold of and throughout the millennium. Above all, there ought to be a community of self-forgetful and faithful converts who, on being exhorted and admonished, could release themselves from remaining corruption and rest on God alone for the soul’s eternal wellbeing, and an unshakable faith that could observe divine activity in all its forms.

Despite the evolution of certain aspects of Edwards’ practical theology, such as the ultimate source of assurance or the biblical way of administering communion, his idea of divine agency through revival in its immediate and progressive modes would remain unaltered. Even after being through experiences of personal disappointment and what he saw as spiritual decline in the town, Edwards retrospectively evaluated the effects of the awakenings with the lens of his particular mode of historical thought. Writing in two different letters during the second half of 1743, he could speak about a

⁴⁷ As he would put it in *Religious Affections* (2: 195; italics in original).

“great and abiding alteration” in Northampton since their local awakening, and also about a “visible alteration” at George Whitefield’s coming to preach to his church in 1740 (16: 110, 116). Thus, seeing through the pattern of “degeneration and awakening” that was intrinsic to revival as orchestrated by the Spirit (Zakai, *History*, 250), he construed his town’s recent history of salvation as having advanced unremittingly: first, by recognizing the “abiding” fruits that resulted from the first revival experience, and second, by recalling one instance of remarkable, immediate divine visitation through the itinerant preacher that had been God’s main human instrument during the Great Awakening.

The issue of the visibility of God’s work throughout history brings me to the consideration of the last key to understanding Edwardsean and colonial historical thought: divine providence. This basic doctrine of Calvinistic theology had a bearing not just on observable events that came to pass in Christendom but on everything that came to pass in humanity’s existence and in nature. Thus, it ought to function as an all-encompassing reality and dialectic tool for any Puritan attempting to write a history that would go beyond mere Church history. The wider implications of the doctrine of providence for human history were kept in mind by Cotton Mather as he compiled and wrote a history of the seventeenth century in New England. Though Mather’s *Magnalia Christi Americana* was not as ambitious in its scope as Edwards’ *Redemption Discourse*, setting these two giant intellects of colonial America (arguably the two greatest Puritan thinkers) side by side will serve the comparative purpose of this chapter. How does the issue of divine sovereignty or providence determine their rhetoric and their respective attempts to write historical accounts at the outset of the Enlightenment era?

2. 4. *Edwards vs. Mather: The Operations of Providence in History*

The figure of Cotton Mather will be particularly helpful in synthesizing some of the points already discussed in this chapter, as well as analyzing divine providence, for at least three reasons. Firstly, his views on issues like church ordinances or the visible and invisible church in history are not hard to trace due to the scope of his numerous writings. As a minister of Boston's Second Church, his work consisted mainly in overseeing ecclesiastical affairs. Secondly, he was the son of Increase Mather, who was virtually as much a statesman as he was a clergyman.⁴⁸ He therefore had well-informed (if debatable) insights into politics, civil government matters and relevant episodes affecting early colonial history. As the grandson of John Cotton, he also had, through his family connections, access to first-hand testimonies from people in authority belonging to the first and second generations of Puritans. Finally, the extent to which he keeps providence in mind throughout his historical writing is quite remarkable, even for a Puritan.⁴⁹ Cotton Mather does not simply attempt to justify and prove God's sovereignty over all events, which would be expected from any orthodox Calvinist, but goes to great lengths in expounding divine providence in New England's recent past with all the intricacies that are derived from a due consideration of the material and spiritual dimensions of history.

⁴⁸ Lovelace explains how, in one of his many trips across the Atlantic, Increase Mather was involved in "seeking unsuccessfully to interest King James in restoring the vacated charter and securing Puritan theocracy in New England". His "diplomatic skill [...] gained him respect in London" as he took part in obtaining a new charter, adopted in 1691, and "he was permitted to name the chief officers who were to put [the new] government into operation" (14, 15). Lovelace's biographical inquiry in the introductory chapter of *The American Pietism of Cotton Mather* (1-31) is the main source consulted for contextual details of Cotton Mather's life and work in this section.

⁴⁹ The sixth book of the *Magnalia* (there are seven in total) consists of approximately 130 pages and is exclusively devoted to instances of providential divine interventions in history.

2. 4. a. Providence and Nature.

The doctrine of providence must not be confused with mere government over creation. Following the logic of Aristotelian philosophy or what Edwards and Mather understood to be the heresy of Deism,⁵⁰ it is quite common to think of creation in general and the continuance of it (or God's "sustaining" it) as the proper realm of providential activity. Thus, it is often distinguished from divine sovereignty, which would be the broader and more controversial notion that God rules over moral agents, human affairs and, consequently, directs all of history. But when approaching the work of orthodox Calvinist thinkers, like Mather and Edwards, this distinction must not be made, at least *a priori*. According to Puritan theology, providence encompassed human existence as well as nature, not to mention celestial or demonic creatures. The reason, then, for dividing this section into subsections on 'nature', 'sacred history' and 'secular history' is essentially a practical one, namely, that the main concern in this dissertation is these authors' rhetoric, and their writings are, therefore, surveyed in search of specific allusions, oratorical strategies, use of images or metaphors, and the like. Nevertheless, there is a warranted reason for having a section focused on 'nature' in the broad sense of the term at the start of this last point of chapter two. In the context of the Enlightenment, which chronologically includes the two authors here compared, "the new scientific interpretation [of natural laws and phenomena] was leading to the disenchantment of the world, or to the growing separation between the order of grace and the order of nature,

⁵⁰ Deism was a "system of natural religion" first developed in England during the late 17th and the 18th centuries. Deists eventually came to reject the existence of miracles as well as belief in divine providence or the Last Judgment. They believed in "a Creator God whose further Divine intervention in His creation [would be] derogatory to His omnipotence and unchangeableness". He might be the *first cause* or *mover* of creation but it did not follow that He was *directly* involved in natural events and laws ("Deism"; my italics).

between God and the world, and thus was incompatible with traditional Christian belief” (Zakai, *History*, 88).

Miller and Niebuhr arrived at similar conclusions regarding the development of Puritan philosophy of nature. Despite God’s assumed sovereignty and the implication that he is able to use nature arbitrarily to achieve his purposes, he is not a “meddling deity” but, rather, is made manifest “in ordinary rather than in special events”:

The will of God was not unnatural in the sense that it was imposed on a stubborn and refractory nature from without by spirit warring against flesh; it might be called supernatural, if that term implies the presence of power and purpose behind or beyond as well as within natural events. The early Protestant idea of sovereignty was at least as closely akin to Sir Isaac Newton’s conceptions of nature as it was to those of miracle-bound supernaturalists. (Niebuhr, 55)

In a similar vein, Miller concludes that in the literature of later New England Puritanism “special providences” are accounted for “not by permitting God to meddle with causes already in operation, but by [...] binding Himself by natural law. [...] He does not make an effect without a cause, but supplies the place of the ordinary cause and then works by natural means”. This development of the idea of God’s agency in and through nature, “brings divine interposition into greater conformity with the tissue of nature” (*Mind*, 230). The mechanistic trait shared by Puritan and Enlightenment conceptions of nature meant an eventual acceptance of the new science at face value. Cotton Mather is representative of this era’s “curiosity about the phenomenal universe” and, what is more, he “readily accepted” the premises of natural science and naively took Newtonian principles to be a confirmation of his Puritan convictions (Zakai, *History*, 87, 88).

To say that there was a thin line between the early colonial Puritan conception of man and the notions of “innate ideas” and “natural religion” that paved the way for an eventual acceptance of Deism in certain quarters of American culture (Miller, *Mind*,

276-279) may be inaccurate, especially since deistic doctrine was propounded during the Enlightenment era on the other side of the Atlantic and simultaneously combated against from conservative New England. There are, in fact, numerous instances of explicit opposition to Deism in Mather's writings (Lovelace, 42, 43, 53). However, the departure from the idea of God's immanence in the world, and the tendency to view nature as ruled by fixed, mechanical laws and the deity as subject to those laws, did in the long run cause the rejection of divine sovereignty in many religious and social sectors. And this rejection was, at least to some extent, culminated precisely by New England's conservative divines of the eighteenth century, or 'Old Lights'. By applying to human nature and faculties the same principles of nature in general, outlined in Miller's words above, theologians like Charles Chauncy (who opposed the Great Awakening)⁵¹ conceived of man as essentially "being a rational creature" and concluded that "regeneration accordingly must involve a change in the understanding as well as in the will" (Breitenbach, 198). Revivalists might have agreed up to this point in the argument. But the illumination of the understanding for Edwards happened because "a spiritual and divine light [...] of a different nature from any that is obtained by natural means" was "immediately imparted to the soul by God" (17: 410). For Old Lights, by contrast, there was a mere "influence of the Spirit" on the soul and the "participation of the understanding" in regeneration was intrinsic to the dynamics of the whole process. Divine intervention in a human being's life must be subject to the established laws of his or her nature. Thus, God merely "invites and persuades sinners by the light of truth" but does not meddle with their nature, allowing the human mind to reason its way through the evidence presented in the gospel before coming to a free decision. The decisive move of the will to receive God's grace, then, is not determined by spiritual

⁵¹ See chap. 1, p. 15.

regeneration coming from an outside agent (i.e., the Spirit) but comes from unregenerate people, which leads to the logical corollary that human nature must not be altogether corrupt as Calvinists had held for almost two centuries. It is no wonder that this Old Light rationale of regeneration ultimately led to Arminianism (Breitenbach, 198), and thus to the dethronement of the God who ruled over human nature and history.

Not only, then, was the order of nature separated from the order of grace during and after the turn of the century as a result of the influence of Enlightenment paradigms in theology (Zakai, *History*, 88),⁵² but divine providence was deprived of its critical role in the gracious works of conversion and regeneration. Undoubtedly, the mode of historical thought which was logically derived from these premises “allowed more room for human participation in the process of redemption” (Breitenbach, 198), but the decisive role accorded to humans meant an encroachment upon the supreme power of divine operations, both natural and supernatural. The revivalists’ fostering and sanctioning of sudden conversions, based on the idea that the new birth depended utterly and directly on God’s gracious and sovereign will, went against the ‘spirit of the age’ not just because secular views were gradually prevailing in American society but because theology itself was being conformed to the times. An example from Mather’s *Magnalia* will suffice to show that his use of language, when reflecting on divine providence in nature, was very much in sync with these philosophical developments. One of the numerous sermons inserted throughout his history of New England reads:

It is true, that the *thunder* is a natural production, and by the common laws of matter and motion it is produced; there is in it a concourse of diverse weighty *clouds*, clashing

⁵² Cotton Mather published his *Magnalia* in 1702 and Edwards was born in 1703. Although they belong to different generations, both figures overlap at this time of particular relevance for the subsequent evolution of philosophy.

and breaking one against another, from whence arises a mighty *sound* [...] This is the *Cartesian* account [...] But still, who is the author of those laws, according whereunto things are thus moved into *thunder*? yea, who is the *first mover*⁵³ of them? *Christians*, 'tis our glorious God. (II, 316; italics in original)

It has been stated above that Mather's *Magnalia* is not comparable in its scope to Edwards' attempt to expound God's "grand design" in cosmic history (9: 121). This is so mainly with respect to the fact that Mather was only writing and compiling an "ecclesiastical history of New England from its first planting in the year 1620, unto the year of our Lord, 1698" (I, 1). Nevertheless, his aspirations to produce a work of a more universal character than a mere local history are betrayed in several ways. To begin with, it is claimed that "of all *History* it must be confessed that the palm is to be given unto *Church History*; wherein the *dignity*, the *suavity*, and the *utility* of the *subject* is transcendent" (I, 26). Moreover, the writer of the preface to the 1820 edition⁵⁴ rightly observes that the *Magnalia* "is both a civil and an ecclesiastical history" (I, 4) since political or military affairs are quite prominent throughout the whole work.⁵⁵ Likewise, Mather elevates his *magnum opus* from chapter one of the first book by framing its narrative in the global, international context of the significant and relatively recent discovery of America: no other force than "the overruling Providence of the great God [was] to be acknowledged" as that which had provided the English with a new continent

⁵³ See n. 50 above.

⁵⁴ This is the edition all quotations are taken from in this section. There are no omissions (the work is more than one thousand pages long), the typography of the 1702 edition is retained, and the peculiar "orthography" of Cotton Mather remains intentionally "unaltered" by the editor, including some mistakes and inconsistencies (I, 4). Due to the pervasive use of italics, from this paragraph onwards the reader must assume this and other typographical oddities to be in the original text unless otherwise indicated.

⁵⁵ For instance, in the seventh and last book more than one hundred and fifty pages are basically devoted to the "wars of the Lord" against the Indians (II, 423).

to inhabit and to experience the hand of “Almighty God” favoring them in a way that “exceeded all that has been hitherto done for any other nation” (I, 41, 42).

Now by the way he introduces natural phenomena in the context of this historical narrative, Mather also evinces his intention to encompass more than just a record of local events from the previous century: The “illustrious displays of the PROVIDENCE wherewith our Lord CHRIST governs the world [...] *and the operations of his hands*” in New England comprehend “all *unusual accidents*, in the *Heaven or earth, or water*” (II, 293, 294). The mention of the latter three elements hints at the comprehensiveness of the narratives that will follow, where episodes of God’s deeds (at sea and in the land) in favor of his saints and against the ungodly are explained, in more or less detail, without the inclusion of any *a priori* miraculous event. And even if “the *Heaven*” is primarily referring to “*apparitions, possessions, [sic] inchantments*, and all extraordinary things wherein the existence and agency of the *invisible world*, is more sensibly demonstrated” (294), the sense conveyed by listing the three spheres (heaven, earth and water) is that all tangible, material creation jointly and coherently shows forth these operations of providence.

More will be said about nature’s relationship to those manifestations of the supernatural (or ‘preternatural’, the term most often used in this work), but some more observations must be made regarding Mather’s treatment of natural phenomena and his representation of the natural world in the sundry stories that make up this part of the *Magnalia*. The sixth book, where these narratives appear, is intended to cover both the “remarkable mercies and judgments” of God (I, 291). Interestingly, it appears that the function of natural occurrences is, more often than not, to execute divine vengeance as a “judgment”. Even when an instance of deliverance is narrated, the role of natural elements in themselves tends to be a negative one. Thus, nature in its explicitly

providential operations (whether lightning striking or a raging sea) is *escaped from* by the saints and serves God to *punish his enemies* or turn them to himself through the fear and awe produced in them. With the exception of one instance, in which a crew of starving seamen who are lost receive direct supply from the sea when “there leap’d a mighty *fish* into their boat” (II, 297), the role of natural elements in providential operations is essentially negative.

Although a comprehensive discussion on the issue of nature and Puritanism would require a longer inquiry than the present one can afford to be, I want to bring some of the conclusions of experts on colonial literature to bear on this brief comparison between Mather and Edwards. First, Sacvan Bercovitch avers that “[c]ontrary to general opinion, the Puritans neither hated nor feared their environment” but, rather, believed that “the land belonged to them before they belonged to the land, and they took possession [...] imposing their own image upon it” (*Jeremiad*, 162; *Rites*, 35). However, the “image” Puritans saw in the natural environment of America before a proper settlement was established would have been hateful in some measure since the continent was considered to be “under the dark dominion of the devil” (Zakai, *History*, 263). The latter view was, according to professor Zakai, common to both Edwards and Mather. It can, I believe, be argued that the general opinion Bercovitch gainsays is true at least to some extent, and that, though Zakai may be right in general terms about Edwards having adopted Mather’s view of the American continent as being under Satan, the Edwardsean view of nature itself was more positive than that of earlier colonial Puritans. Perry Miller may have gone too far (as he himself conceded) in establishing a link between Emerson’s and Edwards’ interpretation of their “impressions” from nature, but he was certainly accurate when he described our author as passionately in love with nature (*Errand*, 184, 185). Cotton Mather evinces an

unfavorable perception of nature by consistently assigning a negative role to it in providential operations, and he shows the same prejudice by his use of certain allusions (analyzed below) when dealing with preternatural phenomena. Jonathan Edwards, on the other hand, found great delight in retiring to solitary places, like his “father’s pasture” or the banks of the Hudson River far from the city (see pp. 25, 26 above), to meditate in a natural environment. The essential reason for his appreciation of nature was that he saw an analogy between the “works of creation and providence” (18: 192; 11: 53).⁵⁶

Up to this point of the chapter, *immediate* divine agency has been mainly linked to the consideration of the Holy Spirit’s activity in history toward particular groups or individuals (sections 2. 1, 2. 2, and 2. 3). This has also been referred to as the ‘order of grace’, as opposed to the ‘order of nature’ in which God operates indirectly according to established laws or other secondary causes. The assumption in the ‘negative examples’ of spiritual agency in space and time that follow in this brief study of the *Magnalia* is that, for both Edwards and Mather, neither satanic agents (demons or ‘devils’) nor Satan himself could have intervened to disrupt or affect human affairs without explicit permission from God. Therefore, though the term *divine* agency is not wholly inappropriate, it is not the deity’s direct but *indirect* influence or involvement in history

⁵⁶ Based on this conception of creation, Edwards also “argued that Scripture endorses a system of types in nature”. In his effort to understand and elaborate this system of types and images, he “departed in style if not in substance from the Puritan typological tradition” (McClymond & McDermott, 120). Since the use of images from nature is an instrumental rhetorical device throughout the Redemption Discourse (Wilson, 9: 57), it will be analyzed and discussed fully in chapters 3 and 4 (p. 194ff). At this stage, it is enough to note that, due to his concept of creation as being subordinated to history and ultimately to providence (Zakai, *History*, 39), Edwards “reasoned from the end or purpose of creation to the character of the natural world” (McClymond & McDermott, 121).

that the authors would have envisioned when gauging and examining this kind of supernatural and spiritual occurrences.

In one of his many displays of biblical and etymological erudition, Mather opens the chapter that deals with “the wonders of the invisible world”, or the sphere of ‘Heaven’, by establishing a connection between the ritual whereby a goat carried the sins of ancient Israel to the desert on the day of expiation (Leviticus 16: 9, 10) and deserts themselves as the place “the *Devil and his angels*” were believed to inhabit in the “days of *Moses*” (II, 388, 389). A New Testament confirmation of this doctrine is the fact that those goats, which through the Levitical ritual became an atonement for Israel’s sins, are a prefiguration of Christ, as he was met and tempted by the Devil in the wilderness at the start of his ministry according to the gospel (Matthew 4: 1-11). Based on this exposition, the way Cotton Mather construes a frame for New Englanders’ experience of the demonic in their own wilderness is to contend that

regions, like the land of *Israel*, where the true God is continually pray’d unto, and where the word of God is continually sounding, are filled with such things as are very uneasie unto the devils: The devils often recede much from thence into the wilderness [...] [T]he christians who were driven into the *American desart*, which is now call’d *New-England*, have to their sorrow seen [Satan] dwelling and raging there in very tragical instances. The devils have doubtless felt a more than extraordinary vexation, from the arrival of those christians with their sacred exercises of christianity in this wilderness... (II, 389)

The parallelism with Israel is commonplace in Puritan literature and quite clear in this particular case. Though New England as a whole is referred to as “this wilderness”, the word “there” (my emphases) indicates that for Mather there is a distance between the places where God’s people abound (towns like, say, Boston) and the wilderness or countryside where demons flee due to their horror at the faithful’s holiness. There are

several examples to show that the Bostonian minister consistently associates the wild, natural surroundings of New English settlements with exposure to demonic influences.

The first instance Mather narrates for his readers is that of Ann Cole, “a person of serious piety” who felt she was being haunted. The woman who was examined by the magistrates on account of her being suspicious of the witchcraft behind Ann’s torments “declar’d that her devil appear’d unto her first in the shape of *deer*; skipping about her, and at last proceeded so far as in that shape to talk with her: and that the devil had frequently carnal knowledge of her”. This woman’s execution after her confession brought about the deliverance of Ann Cole from her former “extraordinary troubles” (II, 389, 390). The point is that the reader is able to recognize the same connections in the narratives of the occult in the *Magnalia* as in the frame Mather has established for them, justified in terms of biblical exegesis and sacred history (II, 389). Through several details in these stories, a nexus between the wilderness (or the ‘wild’ and ‘animal’ instincts aroused by it) and satanic influences is clearly hinted at. Other allusions are more subtle but equally significant as regards the way nature comes across in a careful reading of these accounts. In the case of a married couple whose house “near the *Salmon-falls*” was being haunted, the evil spirit made itself visible while “going over the river in a *canoo*”. Up to this moment, they had only heard noises and voices while they were at home and had objects inexplicably thrown against them (“by an *invisible hand*”, Mather intimates). But only when they were rowing “over the river”, on their way to and back from a certain place, did the gruesome apparition of a man’s head magically joined to a cat’s tail manifest the demonic presence scarcely three feet from their canoe (II, 394). A third example of allusion to an element from nature carrying connotations of a devilish influence or presence is found in the story of Philip Smith. A “deacon of a church” in rural and agricultural Hadley, Massachusetts, one of the jobs

the man had was as “a justice in the [*sic*] *countray Court*”. The setting is, for a start, one of closeness to the wilderness. The strange allusion, involving ‘deer’ once again, comes when we are told Mr. Smith saw an apparition of the woman who was using witchcraft against him in revenge for some unsatisfactory services received in the past: “In his distresses he exclaim’d much upon the woman aforesaid [...] as being seen by him in the room; and there was divers times both in that room, and over the whole house, a strong smell of something like *musk*” (II, 394, 395). Since ‘musk’ is a secretion produced beneath the skin of the abdomen of the male musk deer, the same association of ideas is triggered when reading this story as in the previous two short narratives.

Although these tales may have been passed down to Cotton Mather almost exactly as he narrates them, he consciously selected the ones he would include in this short history of the preternatural in New England (II, 389). These three include such elements as I searched for in my survey of the fourteen stories, and they confirm the view that there is a consistent representation of the occult or satanic as connected to nature in the American wilderness. The other eleven stories contain no such references, but two more general observations may be pertinently inserted here. Firstly, Mather is clearly trying to present these supernatural episodes in a way that would make providence consistent with the observable dynamics of nature and acceptable from the point of view of Enlightenment science. His insistence on the presence of an “*invisible hand*” or “*invisible spirit*” behind most of the extraordinary events narrated (II, 391, 392, 393, 394, 398; my italics) evinces the self-consciousness of someone writing during the age of empirical science, which demanded a method of observation in order to ascertain facts. Indeed, Miller is probably accurate when he says “Cotton Mather was venturing beyond the limits of Puritan prudence when he actually did *see* an angel; the more normal attitude was that by close observance of some merely natural occurrence,

the presence of angels or of God Himself could be detected” (*Mind*, 229). The presence of doctors in some of the stories, reaching a common diagnosis with the clergy, also points in the same direction. Mather would have his readers know that in several cases of demonic possession the seizures of the victims were “pronounced extraordinary and preternatural” by “the most *experienc’d physicians*” (II, 396, 397). Thus, even in the part of New England’s history that is hardly explainable in scientific terms, Mather’s narrative is cloaked with the plausibility bestowed by the sanction of scientists.

The other aspect that should not go unnoticed is that, since many of the accounts are concerned with cases of witchcraft, the role of magistrates and executions is crucial in putting a stop to the spiritual evil that affects the different towns and people. Thus, the Christian establishment, represented by the authorities carrying out their office, defends itself against the satanic onslaught. The antithesis of this godly establishment, prevailing outside the settlements and sometimes present within, is associated also with the presence of Native-Americans, that is to say, the natural inhabitants of the wilderness. In the fourteenth and last story, there appears an “*Indian woman*” who is responsible for the torment of many in “*Salem-Village*” during 1691 and 1692 (II, 409). Bercovitch’s contention that colonial Puritans’ view of their natural surroundings was not negative inasmuch as the wilderness was there for the settlers to impose “their own image upon it” (*Jeremiad*, 162) is supported by my present argument. The Christian commonwealth’s depiction in the *Magnalia* as providentially advancing or resisting in terms of its ability to stand against a spiritually and naturally wild and hostile environment implies that the world beyond the settlers’ frontier awaits its subjection to the kingdom of God (*Jeremiad*, 163, 164). A comparison between Mather’s and Edwards’ use of metaphorical language to refer to what they viewed as the historical event of the fall of Antichrist will show that their different perceptions of nature

determined their respective use of figurative language taken from the natural realm in their rhetoric of history.

In a sermon series preached towards the end of his life,⁵⁷ Mather used an “accessible rhetoric” to “restate the old preparationist hope that man, with the help of a stern but loving ministry, can render himself fit for the ravishing experience of grace” (Heimert & Delbanco, 330, 331). To describe the progress of grace or of God’s kingdom in the human soul, the preacher reminds his hearers that “the word of God, accompanied by the influences⁵⁸ of the Holy Spirit, is the plow with which this work of God is carried on”. Taking his metaphor from Jeremiah 4: 3 (“Break up your fallow ground”), Mather describes man’s soul and heart as “earth” that needs to be “broken by the plow”, to signify that it must be “broken with the sorrow of repentance” (*Agricola*, 331). Even though the imagery is from nature, the explicit metaphor employed to represent God’s gracious activity is from agriculture (a man-made “plow”) and points to the idea that the natural element itself (the lump of “earth”) is dignified, or made fit for contact with the divine, by the external human action of subduing nature. Interestingly for the present study (and moving on to the example that was anticipated), in a later sermon from the same series there is a somewhat similar depiction of the “ruin of Antichrist”. This is of particular importance to this dissertation because of the broad sense in which ‘history’ is being considered and analyzed, namely, as encompassing

⁵⁷ Circa 1725 (Heimert & Delbanco, 330).

⁵⁸ Note that Mather’s language in dealing with the work of repentance leading to conversion seems to be in line with the Old Light theology that held there was no direct illumination of the soul by the Spirit but, rather, an “influence” cooperating with the truth presented to the potential convert. However, since Mather’s life does not overlap with the Great Awakening (he died in 1727), there is no certainty that he would have opposed the revival as other conservative ministers from Boston did (see p. 94 above). In fact, some authors have gone so far as to argue that his hopes for the renewal of the churches in New England and in the world, based on a premillennial eschatology, were not unlike those of revivalists like Edwards himself or Gilbert Tennent (Lovelace, 240-250, 274).

future fulfillment of biblical prophecy as well as past historical events. Moreover, the relevance of this particular eschatological reference in Mather's *Agricola* is twofold: first, it draws on the imagery of nature, and, second, Edwards in the Redemption Discourse expounds the issue of the downfall of Antichrist comprehensively since it is a critical event in his scheme of redemptive history. Mather's exposition of Psalm 37:2 starts:

Desector. The Grass before the Mower

Psalms 37:2. They shall soon be cut down as the grass

Of whom speaks the psalmist this? Those whom the spirit of God calls evil-doers and workers of iniquity [...] We find here foretold the ruin of Antichrist, in a tremendous conflagration, wherein the enemies of God shall be consumed [...] When the wicked are cut down as the grass, 'tis that they may be cast into the oven and thrown into the devouring fire. (*Agricola*, 333)

Cotton Mather chooses, once again, an image in which nature (metonymically referred to in "the grass") suffers the onset of human agricultural activity (the "Mower" cutting it down), the latter signifying, as in the previous example, the advancement of God's kingdom.⁵⁹ Edwards' departure from the colonial literary strain that consistently (if subtly, in many cases) represented nature in a negative light can be clearly discerned in one passage from his manuscripts on the history of redemption.

The text under consideration was written by Edwards in his notebooks to expand a section on the gradual rise of Antichrist from the twenty-second sermon of the 1739 series (9: 413 n. 8). To be more precise, he was reflecting on the fact that the Roman

⁵⁹ The kingdom of Satan or Antichrist for the Puritans, as explained earlier (pp. 74, 75), means in principle any influence or vestige of the Roman Catholic church in the world. Nevertheless, the 'kingdom' in a broader sense (i.e., the gospel) was seen as progressing or advancing whenever a soul was truly converted as well as when a Roman-Catholic stronghold fell or yielded. Mather, in this case, is simply alluding to Antichrist and does not develop on the topic further due to the devotional character of this particular sermon series.

church had been corrupted “gradually” until apostasy culminated when “at length [the bishop of Rome], as Christ’s vicar on earth, claimed the very same power that Christ would have if he was presently on earth” and came to be called “God on earth” (9: 412). On revising his sermon manuscript, then, he developed on the idea that the antithesis of this anti-Christian kingdom would likewise advance gradually in the providentially appointed time. God had his “elect times and seasons” of spiritual enlightenment for the present and future just as He had them during Old Testament times. In the divine redemptive pattern, “one remarkable dispensation and another” bring increasing knowledge of God and He “shows great favor to his church accomplishing great things”. The ultimate dispensation or millennium, those

glorious times[,] how they will gradually come on the church of God on earth, will gradually ripen for that greatest glory when all things are settled in clearest brightness and greatest peace and purity, as the times are gradually prepared for their flourishing state in summer by the gradual increase of heat from the depth of the winter. Sometimes a very warm and pleasant season and then cold returns again to give a check to the sap. Otherwise the too sudden growth of the trees would issue in their death. (9: 413)

In the last two sentences it is clear that the gradual triumph of God’s kingdom does not rule out for Edwards a dynamics of cyclical rise and fall working as part of the same pattern (see pp. 67, 68 above). But what concerns our comparison with Mather’s use of imagery in reference to the end of Antichrist’s reign is that, whereas the latter envisioned the withdrawal of Satan’s forces as “grass” being “cut down” and thrown into an “oven” (again, a man-made device is the preferred metaphor to represent the triumph of righteousness; *Agricola*, 333), the Northampton pastor picked his images from nature to paint his picture rather differently. There is indeed a scorching heat to signify the arrival of God’s mighty kingdom and His righteousness, but, instead of coming from an “oven”, it is like the “gradual increase of heat” in the summer that is

accompanied with the “ripen[ing]” of fruit and “flourishing” as well as “brightness”. The darkness and the “winter” of anti-Christian rule yield not at the hands of man, his instruments of husbandry or at the appointed seasons for harvesting, but they withdraw gradually as the naturally established cycles bring “a very warm and pleasant season and then cold returns again to give a check to the sap”. It is “trees” that are growing on the field of Edwards’ depiction of God’s advancing kingdom, not any crop or produce from the plowed fallow ground of Cotton Mather. The wise, God-appointed, natural cycles “give a check” to the progress of redemption, not the skill of the husbandman whose tools (whether a mower or a plow) enforce the divine commandment of subduing the earth.

The issues of revival and the advancement of God’s kingdom hinted at in this last passage from Edwards bring us to the next subsection in this last point of chapter 2. For the Puritans, providence encompassed, as has been argued, absolutely everything in nature and in history. Late Puritanism had unwittingly dissociated divine sovereignty from nature and, by thus obscuring the idea of God’s immanence, it had gradually come to develop an essentially negative, or at least not a glorious, vision of the natural that clashes with what we find in Edwards. Though colonial thought had also subtly rendered the workings of grace man-dependent, as opposed to the traditional humanity-humbling ‘sovereign grace’, there is still in Mather’s *Magnalia* a high view of the Church, the community of saints, as providentially guided and sustained throughout sacred history. Sacred history comprehends the biblical narrative, church history from Christ’s time to the present and the unfolding of all events that confirm prophecy until Judgment Day. These stages and elements structured and enhanced the thinking and historical writings of Mather as much as Edwards’. Bercovitch refers to Mather’s

particular, and in the long-term influential, way of construing sacred history as the “mythic view of history” (*Rites*, 148). But if the bigger picture was essentially the same for both authors, the means they considered to be divinely appointed for the accomplishment of redemption, and therefore crucial to the progress of God’s kingdom in history, differed considerably.

2. 4. b. Providence and Sacred History.

There are two interesting tenets of Mather’s theology, both practical and speculative, which are helpful in tracing the essential differences between providential activity in his scheme of sacred time and the Edwardsean one. Part of New England’s heritage from the time of the migration included a mode of rhetoric and historical thought that assumed “a crisis in the history of salvation”, whether the advance of Antichrist abroad or the decline of spirituality at home, “could be solved only through God’s divine providence acting directly and immediately within history” (*Zakai, Exile*, 66). Mather’s premillennialist eschatology fitted this idea well since he thought that Christ’s appearing would be sudden and His kingdom would be established on earth through a millennial reign where He would be personally present, after a “cataclysmic, supernatural break with history” (Bercovitch, *Rites*, 123). Due to these beliefs about the ‘last things’, and despite some similarities between his hopes for a “plentiful effusion of the Holy Spirit” before the Second Coming and the hopes entertained by postmillennial revivalists, Mather had the tendency to be suspicious when handling news of revival from abroad.⁶⁰ The main function of the expected awakening would be to bring about

⁶⁰ It is generally acknowledged that from among the different Protestant eschatological beliefs, postmillennialism is intrinsically (and has been historically) the most optimistic as regards the possibility of the gospel and the Church’s success within history. Postmillennialism generally “held that the millennium would be inaugurated by a spiritual intervention of Christ in the power of his Spirit, not by his bodily advent”. In its Puritan version, Christianity’s

the conversion of the Jews⁶¹ and it would not necessarily, according to Mather's premillennialist scheme, affect all nations or even New England (Lovelace, 65-66, 246). The other aspect of his theology that had a bearing on his vision of divine agency within history was his concept of church ordinances or polity and the advancement of God's kingdom on earth. Mather was more conservative in this respect than in his eschatological speculations, as his view did not differ essentially from that of John Cotton or Thomas Shepard (see 2. 2 and 2. 3 above). Towards the end of his life, and remaining consistent with what he had defended in his writings and from the pulpit throughout his career, Mather "would build a case in 1726 for the New England Way as the structure that was most truly biblical and hence best suited to nurture Christian experience" (Lovelace, 40). Being able to trace sacred history outside the biblical narrative had much to do, not only with the *speculative knowledge* about how events unfolded during the end times, but with discerning the *experience* of God's true Church throughout the different stages of ecclesiastical history (martyrdom in the primitive church, the sense of communion with God and neighbor of sects like the Waldenses,⁶² the rediscovery of truth and its triumph in the Reformation era, etc.). In this regard, when Cotton Mather presented the readers of the *Magnalia* with some episodes of New England's recent history, he conceived of divine agency and presence as inextricably bound to church ordinances.

success during this period would be materialized "through the Spirit-empowered preaching of the gospel, resulting in the conversion of the world and the world-wide spiritual reign of Christ through the gospel" ("Postmillennialism").

⁶¹ This conversion of the Jewish nation as a whole would precede Christ's coming according to virtually all Puritan theologians and Bible expositors throughout the 17th and 18th centuries. They considered there was no possible exegesis of Romans 11 that could get around the necessity of this event happening within history (Murray, *Puritan Hope*, 72-76).

⁶² See pp. 48, 49 above.

In a sermon under the heading “The history of Boston related and improved”, the minister sets out to tell his audience how “an immediate hand of heaven” has repeatedly and in many ways intervened in their town’s favor. The sermon narrates some experiences of Bostonians, especially collective experiences, weaving them into biblical parallels in order to distinctly insert New England’s recent episodes within sacred history. It begins by recalling a military attack by “an *army* of terrible *destroyers* [...] coming against one of the *chief towns* in the land of *Israel*” in the first book of Samuel, chapter seven. God’s deliverance of his people on that occasion was followed by an “action of the Prophet SAMUEL, which is this day to be, with some imitation, repeated in the midst of thee, O BOSTON, *thou helped of the Lord*” (I, 84). Mather intends to make his homiletic address an ‘Ebenezer’ or memorial of God’s continued assistance to Massachusetts’s capital in the same way that Samuel erected a stone to acknowledge the divine help received by Israel. The doctrine of the sermon reads: “*That a people whom the God of heaven hath remarkably helped in their distress, ought greatly and gratefully to acknowledge what help of heaven they have received*”. The preacher goes on to establish a parallel between the sixty years that had gone by since the settlement of Boston and the “*threescore years*” of age of “the blessed apostle *Paul*” at the time when he thanked God for “having obtained help” in Acts 26: 22 (I, 85).

Cotton Mather weaves his narrative of the sundry deliverances with the language of the Psalms (107, 121, 27 ...). In negative terms, he speaks of famines, plagues, ten fires or the attack of a “formidable *French* squadron”, the effects of which have been averted by the “HELP we have received from the God of Heaven” (I, 85, 86). The key to this continuous divine presence and assistance is spelled out positively in terms of the extent to which Boston has had a congregational establishment according to God’s will:

We have not had the *bread of adversity* and the *water of affliction*, like many other places. But yet all this while *our eyes have seen our teachers*. Here are several *golden candlesticks* in the town. *Shining and burning lights* have illuminated them. There are gone to shine in a higher *orb* seven divines that were once the *stars* of this town. (I, 86)

Thus far, Mather has shifted from a focus on the disasters Boston was delivered from, to the concrete means employed by God in bringing down spiritual benefits from heaven, namely, the ministers of the ordinance of the Word. The Congregational Way once propounded by John Cotton (almost certainly one of the “seven divines” celebrated here by Mather) is explicitly set down as that which distinguishes this town from “many other places”:

The dispensations of the *gospel* were never enjoyed by any town with more *liberty* and *purity* for so long a while together. Our opportunities to draw near unto the Lord Jesus Christ in his *ordinances*, cannot be paralleled. *Boston*, thou hast been *lifted up to heaven*; there is not a town upon *earth*, which, on some accounts, has more to answer for. Such, O such has been our *help* from our God. (I, 86, 87)

Mather contributes in this way to perpetuating the vision of New England as ‘sacred space’ (see pp. 71, 79-80 and 85 above), and in this case uses a dynamic, spatial illustration to emphasize the supremacy of ordinances as an instrument for procuring spiritual blessings. The instances of deliverance had, to this point, reflected and demonstrated the “immediate hand of heaven *upon* them”, the “help *of* heaven” or “*from* the God of Heaven” (I, 84, 85; my italics), all prepositions indicating the source and the downward direction of the benefits bestowed on the people. Now, the consideration of the church polity implemented among Bostonians during the past few decades ought to make them conscious that, as a consequence of following this pattern of church order, their town has been, as it were, “lifted up to heaven” (I, 87). Thus, the idea of New England as ‘sacred space’ is furthered by equating the spiritual experience

of her inhabitants through established church ordinances with a transcending of space and, implicitly, with attaining an ideal of communion with the divine. Mather also continues to frame Boston's history within 'sacred time' throughout the sermon by hoarding biblical parallels and examples which are applicable to the town's own experience (I, 87, 89-90).

The primacy of ordinances as an instrument of (or at least a determining factor in) divine agency within history is actually established by Cotton Mather from the very first pages of *Magnalia Christi Americana*. He expresses his confidence that "the *glory of God* which was with *our fathers*, is not wholly departed from us" because there are "many *signs of his gracious presence* with us, both in the way of his *providences*, and in the use of his *ordinances*" (I, 8). Indeed, divine providence was assumed to be the overarching, all-encompassing principle according to which redemptive history should be recorded (I, 9). But the operations of providence are at times set forth in Mather's narrative so as to render them, at least partly, dependent on ordinances themselves. Some examples from the sixth book of the *Magnalia* will again be useful to illustrate how the Boston pastor articulated providential activity.

Were it not for the shortness of it (barely four pages), the chapter entitled "THE RETURNING PRODIGAL, *Relating Remarkable CONVERSIONS*" (II, 321) would be a suggestive part of Mather's discourse of providential history to be compared with that of Edwards. The very language of the heading might suggest a parallel with the latter's "A Faithful Narrative of The Surprising Work of God in The Conversions of Many..."⁶³ since words like "remarkable" and "surprising" seem, in principle, to point in the same direction. But the concept of revival and conversion Edwards articulated during the

⁶³ The words are from the title page of the 1737 English edition of Edwards' *Faithful Narrative* (*Works*, I, 344), where he described the local awakening of 1734-35 (see chap. 1, pp. 30, 31 and n. 25).

1730s differs significantly from what Mather narrates in this chapter, and elsewhere in the sixth book, regarding conversions and the dispensation of grace. In the very first paragraph of the chapter on “*Remarkable CONVERSIONS*” the difference becomes apparent:

The members of [the mystical body of Christ] were from all eternity written in the book of life: And, in pursuance of the divine decree concerning it, the Holy Spirit in the continuance of time, throu’ several generations, does fashion it into the shape designed for it. But how? We are told in *Psal.* 139. 14 *’Tis fearfully and wondrously made; marvellous are the works of God about it.* The marvellous works of God in converting and uniting of elect sinners unto the Lord JESUS CHRIST, will make an history of heaven. But something of that history has thousands of times been given to particular flocks of the faithful throughout *New-England*, in the relations which devout people have made unto them, at their first admission into their communion. (II, 321, 322)

The basic assumption is that the context of particular congregational churches in New England where the principles of church membership and admission to communion are practiced is the best scenario to observe sovereign grace at work through conversions. Despite the preliminary remarks on the hidden character of the Spirit’s activity in regeneration (it is a work “wondrously made”), there seems to be an unwavering confidence in Mather’s assertion that the new birth of “thousands” has been witnessed and confirmed by the “relations” converts have made, as was required in most churches (see pp. 58 or 64 above). As he explains at the beginning of the *Magnalia*, God has “contrived and established His *covenant*, so as he will be the God of his *people* and of their *seed* with them, and after them, *in their generations*; and in the ministerial dispensation of the *covenant of grace*, in, with and to his *visible Church*”. Then, the idea of staying in the grace of this covenant is expounded in terms of obedience and outward conformity to “*covenant-duties*” (I, 8) rather than love, similarly to what was outlined in

2. 1. above. Taking this text and the previous one from the chapter on conversions in book VI, it would seem that the real answer, for Mather and all Puritans who followed his rationale, to the question “But how?”, is ultimately: “Through the covenant”, rather than mysteriously and sovereignly. God is bound by this covenant, openly equated here with the “*covenant of grace*”, and must ‘dispense’ His grace to everyone in the “*visible Church*”. It is a “ministerial dispensation”, indicating that the presence and role of ministers (primarily in the ordinances of the Word and the sacraments) is instrumental in materializing this grace.

Edwards’ premises and conclusions in his preaching during the years of the local awakening and the late 1730s clash with Mather’s thought and framework just described above. In a sermon which emphasized the helplessness and vileness of men apart from God’s grace, Edwards warned his listeners that “he is not the covenant God of those who are in an unconverted state [...] They are without God in all their affairs, in all the business they undertake, in their family affairs, and in their personal affairs, in their outward concerns, and in the concerns of their souls” (*Works*, II, 819). The last two remarks seem to have been made with regard to a potential confidence in some congregants who might soothe themselves with the thought that they belonged to the visible church. In the application of the sermon it becomes clear what kind of parishioner Edwards has in mind: “You may possibly flatter yourself that your condition is not so doleful, because you have always walked orderly, you have been moral and religious. Here also you deceive yourself. For notwithstanding your moral and religious behaviour, and all your sobriety, you never did the least thing from a gracious respect to God” (II, 827). Conformity to external or outward religious propriety is worthless for Edwards and has no essential connection with the dispensation of God’s grace to His invisible church. For the Edwards of the 1730s, the

“external privileges”, or ordinances, which everyone in the visible church was entitled to (*Parables*, I, 69), were not the channel or means through which the Spirit necessarily, or even primarily, worked within time and space; revival was.

Before finishing with a few observations on revival and our authors’ eschatology, it is interesting to note that for Cotton Mather signs of God’s displeasure also bore a relation to church ordinances. Two accounts of divine judgment narrated in a sermon from 1697, inserted in the sixth book of the *Magnalia*, clearly establish a link between neglecting or contravening church ordinances and being an object of divine wrath. First, there are some people who have dared to pursue a settlement in “the eastern parts of this province” without any regard to “the ordinances of the gospel”. An ecclesiastical establishment “not [being] settled among them”, the “jealousie of the neglected Lord Jesus Christ, has *broke forth* like an unquenchable fire upon those plantations; the fiery *wrath of heaven* has brought a *swift destruction* upon them”. But Mather is speaking in figurative terms, for it was a “barbarous enemy” (presumably Indians) who “has once and again broke in upon those towns, like an irresistible torrent, carrying all *before* it, until they come to those towns, where the *ordinances of the gospel* are more upheld” (II, 336, 337). The second example may have been more of a warning for Mather’s listeners at this lecture (325), as it concerned a member of a church in “a certain town in *Connecticut*” who, on the absence of their “*godly minister*”, dared to disobey the pastor’s orders regarding the ordinance of the Word. Instead of reading the sermon appointed for the Sunday service, this church member (who was “reputed a *pious man*”) preached one of his own. Not only that, but “he betook himself to bewail the *envy of the clergy* in the land, in that they did not wish *all the Lord’s people to be prophets*, and call forth *private brethren* publickly to *prophesie*”. While preaching this very message “God smote him with horrible *madness*; he was taken ravingly distracted:

The people were forc'd with violent hands to carry him home". From that day on, when anyone "began a discourse of any thing in *religion* with him, he would ever fly out into a *fit of madness*" (337). So it is obvious that in Mather's historical scheme divine providence operated within the parameters of the covenant, and was therefore more patently observable wherever an establishment of God's ordinances was present, or where its absence led to an outpouring of wrath instead of blessing.

But this cherished establishment, these highly-valued ordinances, had after three generations brought about precisely the kind of formalism denounced by the preaching of Edwards and other revivalists (Murray, *New Biography*, 125-128, 202, 209, 215). As I have already argued, it was a formalism that affected colonial thought as well as morals, often leading to an unconscious intellectual compromise when faced with the increasingly influential and secularizing Enlightenment philosophy. In the Redemption Discourse, Edwards challenged the "new modes of historical thought" which placed an "increasing importance" on "*historia humana*" and "accorded to human agency" a determining role in the historical process (Zakai, *History*, 224). By considering human actions merely a "by-product of the divine agency", he was not just confronting secular assumptions about the historical process but also shaking off the Puritan heritage of historians who had always (from John Foxe, through John Milton and right down to Cotton Mather) sought to ascribe a greater role to human authorities and rulers⁶⁴ in bringing about God's purposes than, for instance, to ordinary men. Edwards did not let such hierarchical, political considerations undermine the absolute theocentricity of his vision of history (Zakai, *History*, 233, 225). And if God was the main actor in the

⁶⁴ The respective exaltations of Queen Elisabeth I, Oliver Cromwell and John Winthrop by the authors named above are some examples (Zakai, *History*, 251).

theater of history, revival was to be particularly instrumental during the last act of the sacred play, namely, in the millennium.

According to Edwards' postmillennial eschatology, there were many things that would be unprecedented during the millennium, such as the power and clarity of gospel preaching (9: 460) or the amount of "arbitrary" or "miraculous" events taking place (Fiering, 101). However, his language in the Redemption Discourse points to anything but a sudden or stark arrival of the expected 'glorious times of the Church'. This stage of sacred history would, rather, be ushered in "swiftly, yet gradually", by "means" like the preaching of the Word (9: 459). This ambiguity ("swiftly" vs. "gradually") prevails in Edwards' oratory throughout the revival years. Stephen Stein, in his introduction to *Apocalyptic Writings*, argues that the Northampton pastor was too cautious to suggest from the pulpit that their local revival had been "a beginning or even a type of the millennium", and that only in his private reflections did he define awakenings as "preparatory" and "leading to the future glorious state of the church on earth" (Stein, 5: 20). But in one of the last sermons of the Redemption Discourse the opposite seems to be the case. After explaining that the "Spirit shall be gloriously poured out for the wonderful revival and propagation of religion", he stretches his use of language enough to suggest the millennium may have begun: "We know not where this pouring out of the Spirit shall begin, or whether at many places at once, or whether *what has already been* ben't some forerunner and *beginning* of it" (9: 460; my italics). Only a few months later, in December 1739, preaching at a private meeting, Edwards emphasized the fact that awakenings had happened in many colonies and across the Atlantic, and called for serious consideration regarding the historic moment they were living in: "Let it be considered that we know not what these things [the recent revivals] may be forerunners of. It is generally supposed by divines that most or all those things that have been

foretold before God begins to accomplish those glorious things, that shall usher in the glorious time of the church, are already fulfilled” (22: 109). Despite his reference to “divines”, one thing Edwards was not doing was looking for the realization of the millennium in the same way that other New England theologians, Cotton Mather among them, had done it before him.⁶⁵

The basic idea that sacred history would culminate with a glorious period for the saints on earth was commonplace, not just in colonial writings, but in all Puritan literature throughout the seventeenth century. Nevertheless, Mather’s premillennialist stance on the issue led him eventually to hold slightly pessimistic views regarding the possibility of a general revival prior to the Second Coming. Professor Lovelace argues that Mather pursued an implicitly optimistic form of international ecumenism among Protestants, but he concedes that

[t]he positive amillennial and postmillennial strains were driven toward an Edwardsian concept of revival because their understanding of the church’s perseverance in the future had to depend not on the bodily return of Christ but on his *spiritual rule* through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. It might be assumed that literal chiliasts [i.e., premillennialists like Cotton Mather] would lack this dynamic and would be indifferent to the cause of reformation. (70; my italics)

Although the latter has been true in some periods and branches of Protestant Christianity, Mather, as Lovelace proves in his book, did take an interest in the progress and state of the wider Protestant church. Nonetheless, the expectations of Christ’s imminent and visible coming could hardly be kept high indefinitely by someone who, like the Boston minister, firmly believed he would personally witness Christ’s Second Coming and lived to be more than sixty. So, roughly in the last two decades of his life,

⁶⁵ McClymond and McDermott, in fact, argue that the eschatology of the Redemption Discourse is its main innovative aspect (225).

there is a traceable decline of motivation based on eschatology, and Mather finally “surrendered this instrument of awakening the church’s sense of mission” (71, 72). One of the keys to the contrast there is between this pessimism and Edwards’ optimistic eschatological outlook lies in the idea of “spiritual rule” attached to the revival or revivals he expected would introduce human history into its last chapter.

One crucial aspect that distinguishes Mather’s and Edwards’ concept of divine agency or presence during the millennial era has to do with their discrepancy over the role of civil or secular government in providential history. This issue will be explored in the next subsection. However, my survey of ‘sacred history’ in both authors’ historical schemes has logically and inevitably⁶⁶ brought the present discussion to deal with their different eschatological views, so I shall conclude with some observations about the distinct way in which Edwards envisioned immediate or direct divine government during the millennium. Avihu Zakai’s synthesis is helpful for my present purpose:

Edwards’s concept of the millennium thus differed radically from those of previous Protestant and Puritan exegetes. He deemphasized Christ’s millennial rule. He did not look for the personal return of Christ in his majesty to inaugurate the millennium, as the New England divine John Cotton did,⁶⁷ nor did he envision any millennial reign of Christ and his saints upon earth. Further, in contrast to the overt millennial expectations among Protestants and Puritans in England and New England during the seventeenth century, he refused to identify the millennium with any violent social and political transformation that would usher in the transformation of the world into the kingdom of God [...] He dwelt more on the power of the Spirit than on millenarian expectations of earthly dominium. (*History*, 270)

⁶⁶ Since future prophetic fulfillment is encompassed by sacred history, the millennium had to be included in this subsection.

⁶⁷ Or both Increase and Cotton Mather, among others (Lovelace, 70).

Moving away from the theocratically driven perspective of preceding generations, Edwards articulated a historical vision which did not search for the tangibility of the kingdom in the inherited Puritan establishment (ecclesiastical or governmental) or any other institutional structure. This, however, was not done at the expense of the notion that God's plan would ultimately be imposed by an irresistible rule or force. Quite on the contrary, God's authority would ultimately prevail. But it would not triumph *through* earthly governments and means but *over* them. This fresh emphasis on absolute divine sovereignty made it a logical necessity to relativize the importance of the secondary means God used to enforce His agenda, like human rulers or governments.

2. 4. c. Worldly Affairs, Secular History and God's Absolute Sovereignty.

There is a contextual similarity between Mather's and Edwards' position as the ministers of notable and renowned congregations that may shed light on the different aspects which concern this last point in chapter 2 of the present study. As was pointed out in chapter 1 (p. 40), Edwards could observe around him the signs of growing secularization, which was made visible by the fact that, for the first time in Northampton's history, a building other than the meetinghouse was erected to host the town's political meetings. His Redemption Discourse was preached precisely during the first months of this symbolic and definitive physical separation of the secular and the ecclesiastical. Similarly, Mather wrote his history of New England in a time when the "authority of ministers was greatly reduced [and] the state no longer acted as the protective arm of the churches" (Arch, 144). In Bercovitch's rather stark terms, third generation Puritans witnessed the "demise of the church-state", although for Mather "the vanished theocracy [still] enshrined the true meaning of the country" and its errand. (*Rites*, 88, 94). His inability to come to terms with this new social and ecclesiastical

reality probably explains the pervasively hortatory tone of the *Magnalia* and other writings from the last decade before the turn of the century (Lovelace, 239). He was assuming the role of prophet as well as historian in an attempt to convince a generation to join him in his “allegiance to the past” (Bercovitch, *Rites*, 94). The above quote from Avihu Zakai has served to point out that the Edwardsean attitude towards secular institutions and the part they played in history (particularly in the millennium) was significantly different from that of previous colonial Puritans. However, Edwards and Mather showed a keen interest in secular events (present, past and future) that needs to be accounted for, as both theologians assigned to them a more or less direct role in the bringing about of God’s purposes in history.

Colonial Puritans (or “Bay theocrats”, as Bercovitch puts it) who still held on to the theocratic ideal of New England at the threshold of the eighteenth century, like those of the two previous generations, “had joined secular to sacred history” (*Rites*, 156).⁶⁸ Just as the advance and success of Congregational church polity was tantamount to the progress of Christ’s Kingdom on earth, the continuance of an operative theocratic civil establishment was essential for the materialization of God’s plans before the millennium. In broad terms, Mather’s “interest in worldly affairs” during the mid-1690s was linked to his firm belief in the “imminent” return of Christ, which was the closing act of sacred history. His hopes and prayers for revival throughout the nations were not unconnected to what he viewed (following whatever news he received from Europe) as “revolutions” in places like France or Turkey, even if the developments in those countries were not directly connected to religion (Lovelace, 20, 245). Mather also

⁶⁸ Cf. Richard Bauckham’s *Tudor Apocalypse* on the English origins of this Puritan strand of historical thought. After the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588, optimism grew over the role of temporal (i.e., governmental, civil) powers in advancing the cause of the gospel (173, 174).

looked around him and associated any setbacks suffered by secular institutions (especially those set up according to God's will) with divine displeasure or wrath. Thus, he considered it was only logical that the "loss of Protestant territory" at an international level as well as some instances of worldwide Popish persecution should be accompanied by a general spiritual decline (240). Such was Cotton Mather's outlook not only when considering the present and the millennial future, but when he looked back at New England's past. Some examples from the *Magnalia* may serve to show how the progress of piety or the community's experience of the divine presence are envisioned by the author as intertwined with, and at times dependent on, the secular government's action.

When Mather asserted it was a "matter of every body's observation" that the "divine dispensations towards this country" changed as a consequence of decline in religion (II, 270), he had in mind a divine providence that operated at the political level as well as the natural and ecclesiastical ones (sections 2. 4. a. and 2. 4 .b. above). In book V of the *Magnalia*, there is a recapitulation of the 1662 synod's⁶⁹ decisions and conclusions. Mather inserts references to events of New England's recent history (maybe recalled by the synod's participants themselves) where his view of the place and role of civil and governmental institutions in providential dispensations becomes apparent:

Truly, if *New-England* had not abounded with the like *offences*, it may be supposed, such calamities [some natural/accidental disasters previously alluded to] had not befallen it. It intimated a more than ordinary displeasure of God for some *offences*, when he proceeded so far, as to put over his poor people into the hands of tawny and bloody *salvages*: and the whole army had cause to enquire into their own *rebellions*, when they saw the *Lord of Hosts*, with a dreadful *decimation*, taking off so many of our

⁶⁹ See chapter I, p. 28 above.

brethren by the worst of executioners [...] The serious people throughout the country, were awakened by these intimations of divine displeasure, to *enquire* into the causes and matters of the *controversie*. (II, 270, 271)

Now although the sinners in the army who needed to examine themselves are distinguished from more pious Christians (the “serious people” of the land), the emphasis of the passage is on the whole community’s dealing with divine anger. The Indians are the instrument of punishment through the “lamentable *wars*” New England suffers (270). Then, the people, having noticed that this is clearly a “more than ordinary displeasure of God”, turn corporately to Him:

And besides the *self-reforming* effects of these calamities on the hearts and lives of many *particular Christians*, who were hereby brought unto an exacter walk with God, *particular churches* exerted their power of *self-reformation*, especially in the time of the Indian war [...] Moreover, the *general courts* enacted what laws were judged proper for the extinction of those *provoking evils*, which might expose the land unto the anger of heaven. (271)

The definitive part played by the general courts in this episode is quite telling. Civil government is here and elsewhere in the *Magnalia* (I, 90, 91, for instance) assigned the duty, not only of allowing or even preserving piety, but actively promoting and enforcing it. Military success and the survival of the community depend on this instrument of “reformation” being put to its right use, and not simply on a spiritual exercise of contrition, fasting or prayer.

Later on, in the same account of the fifth book, Mather continues to define what the “*reformation* of the land” meant according to the 1662 synod. It is “outward conformity” to the ideals of both church and social order that is to be sought. This, together with the renewal of covenants, shall “divert temporal judgements” and bring back the “presence of God” to the land. In these covenants, New Englanders are asked

(contradictorily, it would seem) to “depend wholly upon the *power* of the eternal *Spirit of Grace*” to follow the way of duty, while knowing that “rulers, both in *church* and *state*” will deliberate on what is specifically to be done. Fear of the general court will, as it were, assist the Spirit in attaining the much-desired ideal of communal godliness. Indeed, “returning to the exercise of their former authority”, the magistrates will ensure “that the *laws* of this colony against vice [...] be now faithfully and vigorously put in execution” (II, 281-285). Despite Mather’s emphasis on the communal nature of society’s mission and duty, it is worth noting that his subtle (but at the same time clear) distinction throughout his narratives between more and less godly sectors among the people also betrays a degree of nostalgia for the theocratic past. What had been propounded in Puritan England and practiced in New England was a commonwealth under “pious rule by the saints” (Noll, *America’s God*, 60). The presence, therefore, in these historical accounts of “serious people” or “particular Christians” who are clearly morally superior to society at large is supposed to constitute a motive of hope for the country, as they can be led in the right direction by the right people. This orthodox theocratic model was impracticable by the end of the seventeenth century in New England not only because the charter that had allowed it to be implemented was now obsolete,⁷⁰ but also because society was clearly drifting in another direction. Mather, nevertheless, “for his basic convictions [...] belonged entirely to the former era” (Bercovitch, *Rites*, 94).

Avihu Zakai goes further (and deeper, I believe) than Sacvan Bercovitch in gauging the extent and quality of Edwards’ contribution in the realm of history, symbolism and rhetoric. Bercovitch concedes that Edwards “abandoned the Puritan

⁷⁰ See n. 47 above.

belief in theocracy” but then goes on to argue, following Alan Heimert,⁷¹ that he retained some form of American exceptionalism: “The aim of the American church, as a ‘type of New Jerusalem,’ was not merely ‘the salvation of individuals, but of society’” (*Rites*, 154, 155, 391 n. 6). In the fifth chapter of *The Rites of Assent* (pp. 147-167) it is rightly observed that Edwardseanism indirectly contributed to the blurring of the line between the ‘sacred’ and the ‘secular’, but it is too categorically stated that Edwards’ postmillennialist revivalism opened the future to “human control” and that the work of redemption was made “synonymous with the advance of mankind” (156). Zakai’s analysis of revival and the Edwardsean concept of divine agency seems to be more consistent with the rest of Edwards’ theology, which may be labeled as anything but humanistic. Although, on the one hand, “Edwards’s insistence that revivals, taking place among the common, ordinary people, manifest the core of divine agency in time, reveals an important ‘democratic’ element in his historical imagination”, and deprives rulers of any “great role in salvation history”; on the other hand, this implies that there is “no sacred particularistic center in the form of a chosen state, an elect nation, or a godly ruler, as with earlier ecclesiastical historians” (*History*, 251, 253). Without denying that human participation in the course of history was real and significant, Edwards articulated a philosophy of history that rendered human actions “a by-product of the divine agency”. The consequence of his “understanding of the historical process was to strip secular, historical time of its validity and to reject the notion that human power and autonomy are responsible for progress in history” (252). Having concluded, then, that the Edwardsean vision stands in sharp contrast to Cotton Mather’s hierarchical view of God blessing a community decisively through godly rulers and ministers and to his longing for a theocratic past where future divine guidance was

⁷¹ See p. 13, n. 14 in chapter 1.

ensured by the civil rule of the saints, the question still remains: If this did not mean that the common people or any other human agent now had a central role in salvation history, how was the value of human action to be measured and how were secular developments to be interpreted in Edwards' historical scheme?

The notion that Edwards was uninterested in politics and secular affairs has fortunately been left behind in most recent scholarship (Noll, *America's God*, 47, 48). However, to say that he looked for the "completion of the divine plan" primarily in military and political affairs either at home or abroad is to grossly misread him (Bercovitch, *Rites*, 159). Edwards showed an interest in what happened outside the ecclesiastical sphere but always considered the outcome of worldly events as it bore on religious matters or on "the advancement of Christ's kingdom in the world" (16: 797). In his own preface to *Some Thoughts*, Edwards emphatically downplayed the importance of a military conflict with Spain taking place during the Great Awakening in the southern colonies: "We in New England are at this day engaged in a more important war", namely, the Great Awakening itself. In the same passage, he asserted that his thoughts on the religious revival throughout the colonies were much more relevant than the different opinions that were daily published expressing what "the Parliament and the principal ministers of state" ought to do about the conflict (4: 291). Such matters could only be second in importance to the progress of redemption, and that only insofar as they served the interests of religion. The progress of the kingdom, or "the propagation of religion", would be "accomplished, not by the authority of princes, nor by the wisdom of learned men, but by God's Holy Spirit" (9: 460). A divine rule was to be imposed eventually, but for revivalists "the kingdom of Christ remain[ed] a rule of knowledge" (Niebuhr, 112). Edwards, therefore, when picturing the glorious millennium, predicted that "great knowledge shall prevail everywhere. It may be hoped

that then many of the Negroes and the Indians will be divines, and that excellent books will be published in Africa, in Ethiopia, in Turkey [...] It shall be a time of great holiness; now vital religion shall everywhere prevail and reign” (9: 480, 481).

For human events to take such a turn in history, that is, for society’s outcasts and the empire’s enemies and pagans to become eminent in Christian knowledge, a divine intervention was necessary. A “vital religion” had to replace the New England system, which relied so heavily on outward means for the control of social and moral conduct (or at least it had in the past that Mather nostalgically looked back on). Establishing the connection between knowledge, which was so crucial to Edwards’ vision of the progress of redemption, and the kind of human activity that could contribute to furthering God’s purposes in society is essential in order to understand the dynamics of divine agency through revival. The fact that Edwards is envisioning, in the above-quoted passage from the Redemption Discourse, the prospective sanctification, as it were, of secular institutions or structures in remote places and at home (colleges of divinity attended by Negroes and Indians, publishing houses run by Africans or Turks, etc.) shows that his millennial expectations did encompass the subjection of worldwide social and institutional spheres to Christ. But it also questions the validity of worldly and human means in the advance of the kingdom, as the “wisdom of learned men” is denied any part in this spread of divine knowledge. The key, then, is not in the particular means that constitute the providential cause-effect chain whereby knowledge would spread but, rather, in the intrinsic natural (or supernatural) result of this kind of knowledge making progress in humankind: “It will be a time of great light and *knowledge*” and it “shall be a time of great *holiness*” are the first and main two brushstrokes in Edwards’ depiction of “the prosperous state of the church through the bigger part of” the millennium (9: 479-481; my italics).

The year before preaching his series on the history of the work of redemption, Edwards had gone to great lengths to establish ‘love’ or ‘charity’ as the essential outworking and fruit of holiness in the hearts of Christians in the sermon series *Charity and its Fruits* (8: 123-398). Likewise, an unbreakable link united holiness and knowledge of God in Edwards’ rhetoric of piety: “When God would describe the true knowledge of himself to the people of Israel, he does it by this fruit of it, viz. an holy practice” (8: 297). Returning to the picture of the latter-day church in the *Redemption Discourse*, *holiness* would ultimately reach the sphere of earthly authorities but Edwards’ language shows that what he envisions as the means to this end is not at all like the theocratic model for the promotion of piety depicted and desired by Cotton Mather: “Vital religion then shall take the possession of kings’ palaces and thrones, and those that [are] in highest advancement shall generally be holy men” (9: 482). Once holiness, mediated by knowledge, takes root in the higher spheres of the social scale, Edwards goes on to explain, “*peace and love*” shall abound: “Then shall there be peace and love between rulers and ruled” (482, 483; my italics). The dynamics in the progress of divine knowledge, holiness and their necessary fruit (i.e. love), is identical when it reaches the secular world at large to the dynamics of conversion and revival (see chapter 1, pp. 32, 34-35). Only after establishing this pattern carefully does Edwards mention the issues that were so prominent in colonial thought, namely, “order in the church discipline and government” or the church’s “temporal prosperity”, and he does so devoting comparatively small space to them (484).

For Edwards’ God to make himself manifest in history and lead humans to acts of love was an ontological necessity. In Sang Hyun Lee’s words:

The divine disposition ‘seeks occasion to exercise’ itself *ad extra*—that is, an occasion in temporality to delight in the divine beauty [...] Now, God is a dynamic and personal

being whose internal life consists in the perfect knowledge and love of the divine beauty. Thus, the repetition or communication of God's internal fullness in time and space requires sentient creatures who can repeat in time God's dynamic internal life. (*Theology*, 197)

Following the Edwardsean rationale, then, although God may show his anger through temporal judgments and thereby *indirectly* lead men to repentance, the fear induced by godly authorities or by ministers' thundering jeremiads could never be a means for God's *direct* communication of his blessings or attributes, as love or holiness. There must be an "occasion" for "delight" whereby the human subject can derive "perfect knowledge and love" from the divine object. Revivals, outpourings of the Spirit, and genuine conversions were the occasion for this principle to be established and for subsequent secular or sacred activity to have intrinsic value and contribute to the progress of the work of redemption in history. An *immediate* contemplation of the divine transcendence enables the sparking off of the process, and a *progressive* "repetition" by human subjects of what has been communicated to them carries on God's providential plan, which is "stretched" beyond the millennium, even into heavenly history (Lee, *Theology*, 221).

This was the basis for the "dialectic of God's transcendence and immanence" which permeated Edwards' mode of historical thought and discourse (Zakai, *History*, 225). The kind of Christianity he sought to revive in the present among Northamptonites and other colonial congregations he had the chance of preaching to derived its vitality from a due consideration of its source as well as its medium. Moreover, the source and the means whereby this principle of "vital religion" (9: 481, 482) came to be infused into human agents in time and space was one and the same, namely, the triune God. An outpouring of the Spirit was nothing but the Father's

transcendence made immanent: “The novel element in Edwards is his conception of God’s ad extra not only as God’s relation to the world but as *God’s external repetition of his own being*” (Lee, *Theology*, 204; italics in original). God’s involvement, then, in creation and in human affairs alike was originated in the divine disposition to communicate and exert himself, and the “external” fruits and vitality mirrored by creatures and the historical process itself made God’s presence manifest and his character known.

The word “external” as it is used by Lee in his definition of these philosophical intricacies in the Edwardsean conception of the divine must not be understood as when the pastor, during the mid-1730s awakening, reproved his congregation for flattering themselves on account of the ‘outward’ or ‘external’ religion they practiced and the earthly, temporal prosperity they might enjoy (p. 114 above). Though this was Edwards’ use of the term at times in his preaching of the 1739 series (9: 231, 287, 322), there is one sermon, delivered barely six months after finishing the Redemption Discourse, where “external things” refers to the necessary action in order to revive the flame, which the pastor assumes has not been extinguished (nor can it be), that was sparked by the Spirit five years before the current decline: “And of all the external things that we can do to have the Spirit of God continued amongst [us], I believe the most likely thing to be successful to that end, of any one thing whatsoever, is abounding in deeds of love and charity. The abounding in deeds of love is the likeliest way to have the God of love and peace always dwelling with us”. First, it should not go unnoticed that the use of the phrase “love and peace” in this context of the outworkings of the Spirit amidst a society is very much like the one encountered when Edwards described the millennial future of ruling classes (p. 128 above). Secondly, though (a few lines on) the people are exhorted to promote “any design that tends to encourage [the] duty [of giving to the needy]”, the

main rhetorical function of this part of the sermon's application is not so much to call congregants to some form of organized activism as to define what is the logical consequence of having the "Spirit of God continued amongst [them]" (22: 260). Niebuhr's words seem at this stage a good synthesis of the point I have been trying to clarify and expound, namely, the way revivalists ("Edwards above all") sought to, first, spread God's knowledge and, only then, express compellingly that "[s]uch knowledge require[d] action":

In preaching the kingdom of Christ as the kingdom of love they did not commit the mistake their successors [i.e., 19th century evangelicals] often made, that of defining love of neighbor as the essence of Christianity, as though men could practice this love without reference to other elements in the Christian life, without apprehension of the divine sovereignty or without revolutionary change from natural to divine affection. Neither did they fall into the other error of confusing love with amiable sentiment. Sentiment which does not press to practice is like knowledge which does not issue in action; if the latter is the abhorred speculative knowledge, that is, spectator knowledge, the former is counterfeit affection, satisfied with itself and not based on knowledge of reality. Practice is the test of genuine love. (112, 113)

The observation made about the doctrine of divine sovereignty in the above-quoted fragment from Niebuhr's *The Kingdom of God in America* is particularly pertinent as I come to the close of this section on *providence*. Much has been said throughout this second chapter about how Edwards left behind Mather's theocratically driven vision of divine agency in history, how he did not attribute the same intrinsic spiritual value to church ordinances as John Cotton and Thomas Shepard did, or how his modern outlook on the individual's participation in communion with God contrasts with Winthrop's communal ideal, enshrined in his 'Model of Christian Charity'. But, though

it is understandable that Jonathan Edwards should often be viewed as a transitional figure, due to the pivotal moment at which he stands in the history of colonial thought, it is easy to overstate (if unwittingly) the innovative character of his theology and rhetoric. Nineteenth century evangelicals, as Niebuhr remarks, inherited the activism that revivalism fostered but they would obviate the revivalists' emphasis on God's absolute sovereignty. Edwards in no way compromised this doctrine but, rather, defended it with the same (if not greater) vehemence as his forefathers. In this respect, he may more accurately be called "the last of the Puritans" than "the first of the evangelicals" (Noll, *America's God*, 258).

As many scholars have noted when analyzing the Puritan tradition and the different cultural developments that ran parallel to it, the "high Calvinistic doctrine of divine sovereignty", more often than not, constituted an "impulse" (Goen, 4: 3).⁷² Predestination, being one of the most controversial ideas directly associated with this emphasis on God's sovereignty, rather than leading men to desperation or some form of static fatalism, was often at the centre of believers' motivation to lead industrious and practical lives in every sphere. But, since the concern of this chapter is to discover how this tenet, like others, of Edwards' theology determined the way he articulated and presented God's intervention in history, let us consider one example connected to the issue of knowledge. It has been stated that knowledge of God was in the Edwardsean scheme a means whereby the same deity exercised authority over the minds of people in and through revivals, and that, in a very specific manner, knowledge would serve to bring about an irresistible divine reign over humankind (even over the most powerful men) during the last act of human history. How did Edwards manage to remain

⁷² Cf. Perry Miller in *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century* p. 37 and William Haller in *The Rise of Puritanism* p. 192, to name just two of the most widely recognized scholars who have expressed this view.

optimistic about the proximity of the millennium when Enlightenment philosophy was taking over theological institutions like Harvard, and its implications undermined the core of Christianity? Indeed, significantly for this dissertation, Enlightenment historical thought was increasingly leading to a “detachment” of “divine agency from temporal events” (Zakai, *History*, 229). The key to resisting the onset of worldly wisdom was precisely a reaffirmation of God’s absolute control over everything that came to pass. God would turn the very ignorance and pride (as Edwards perceived it) that prevailed in secular philosophy into a means to make his presence and truth known. And He could do so *immediately*; that is, acting both directly and soon.

Cotton Mather had understandably looked back at God’s preparation for the Reformation, and later for New England’s colonization, and recognized in what he called the “*resurrection of literature*” (*Magnalia*, I, 41) an agent or force behind the success of Protestantism. He was viewing the apogee of the humanities during the Renaissance and the instrumentality of the printing press as providential developments which God made use of in the gradual advancement of His kingdom. Edwards would have essentially agreed with Mather’s survey of the past. He himself had had the tendency to think that the increase of human learning was destined to be subservient to the cause of faith. However, during his own times, “the advance of learning [...] proved to be an obstacle to the growth of Christian faith and knowledge”. His assumption that the progress of divine revelation would go hand-in-hand with burgeoning secular and scientific knowledge proved to be wrong, at least at present (Zakai, *History*, 264). Considering the role of human learning during the millennium, Edwards held the same basic idea as Mather when he analyzed the Reformation: “God will improve *this* great increase of learning as a handmaid to religion, a means of a glorious advancement of the kingdom of his Son” (9: 441; my italics). The age of “midnight darkness” the church

was living in did not change the fact that divine purposes were progressing (9: 440). The very same knowledge and erudition which for a time keeps men in their pride (“*this* great increase of learning”) can be used by God to humble them when they become better informed.

‘Progressive’ divine agency is always operative at a multiplicity of levels despite the apparently cyclical pattern of ‘rise and decline’ of the religious cause (p. 68 above). In fact, things are just being prepared to fit divine purposes more strictly, as revival must eventually break in to manifest ‘immediate’ divine presence or agency. God was reserving Enlightenment learning for a time when He had “sufficiently shown men the insufficiency of <human wisdom>, when the time comes for that *glorious outpouring of God’s Spirit*, when he will himself by *his own immediate influence enlighten* men’s minds”. Human efforts and progress are futile *per se* though God will use such secular things as the invention of the printing press to bring about his millennial reign (9: 441; my italics). It is interesting that Edwards seems to be suggesting two alternative ways for mankind to come to the true knowledge of God: They may come to a point when it has “sufficiently” (*for them*) been shown that their wisdom, useful as it is in many ways, will not bring them to spiritual self-fulfillment or intellectual satisfaction, and they will therefore be gradually brought to the right disposition for the acceptance of all the corollaries of the gospel (the total depravity of man, Christ being wisdom itself and the author of faith, etc.). Alternatively, God may consider that *He* has “sufficiently” proved to men the futility of their scientific and philosophical endeavors, though they may refuse to accept the truth. In the latter case, God’s “immediate influence” will dazzle men by contrast; that is to say, when the truth of the gospel is irresistibly and clearly presented before their eyes, they will acknowledge their downright folly. In the former instance, the change having been wrought gradually (to a certain extent only, for the

coming of the Spirit through revival would decisively inform people's minds and change their hearts) would not make it less admirable or manifest (cf. pp. 75, 76 above).

The hope of awakening and the millennium served the last of the Puritans in times of difficulty and intellectual opposition like the Enlightenment. Belief in absolute divine sovereignty over the historical process meant that, though one had to concede that the cause of a certain event or situation might after all remain hidden, it was never inappropriate to search for a logic behind any (or all) providential outcomes because there was in fact a divinely appointed end in everything that came to pass, whether 'sacred' or 'secular', 'natural' or 'supernatural'. Jonathan Edwards grappled with the questions raised by apparently contradictory methods in God's disposition of events, and he put all his acumen, his imagination and rhetorical resources at the service of orthodox Christianity. Divine sovereignty and some of its corollaries (like mankind's utter dependence on God for true and ultimate knowledge, let alone for salvation) were the premises that led Edwards through his meditations on history and his attempts to make sense of all of God's past, present and future acts. His concept of revival as a *sovereign work of God* did not differ from Cotton Mather's or even from that of Puritans and some evangelicals before and after their own generations respectively (Murray, *Revivalism*, 374). But revival in Edwardsean rhetoric and philosophy of history virtually paralleled eschatology or prophecy in importance. The latter two, in fact, were materialized in the form of awakenings, which for Edwards encompassed anything from Northampton's local experience in 1734-35 or the Protestant Reformation, to the zeal of Joshua's generation of Israelites or the piety of Job. Edwards' compelling articulation of revival as the concrete agent of divine intervention

in history derived its freshness from his “unique combination of tradition and innovation in theological reasoning” (McClymond & McDermott, 207).

3. PROGRESSIVE DIVINE AGENCY: THE RHETORIC OF PIETY

Some crucial quotations from the sermon series that mainly concerns this study have already been analyzed in the context of chapter 2, where outlining *divine agency* in Edwards' rhetoric of history and searching for the keys to his historical framework were the primary aims. I shall, in the present and next chapters, continue to bring the distinction between *immediate* and *progressive* divine agency to bear on the literary analysis of the Redemption Discourse, focusing first on the latter and on how the preacher's deeply theological thought was effectively fleshed out in the historiographical and homiletic endeavor of this sermon series. Oratorical strategies, therefore, are the main focus in the following pages and also how (or whether) they brought about the response on the part of Northamptonites that their pastor intended. Enough biographical background has already been outlined throughout the foregoing chapters although some key events and circumstances will be described again where relevant and for clarity's sake. However, my purpose is to look at Edwards' rhetoric throughout the thirty sermons and to analyze it in its own terms, taking the text's internal coherence at all levels for granted. This task depends to a great extent on some elements that have already been unpacked in chapter 2, such as the Edwardsean view of nature (pp. 92-108 above) and, hence, how imagery from the realm of nature is imbued with a transcendence that was rare in other colonial Puritans;¹ or the importance of contemplating God at work in history (pp. 72-90), both local and universal, the role this had in making spiritual experience tangible, as it were, and the assurance and encouragement, both collective and individual, that were to be derived from such contemplation. This latter aspect bears on

¹ See Mason Lowance's conclusions in this regard (273-276).

my rhetorical analysis, for instance, as I explore what are some of Edwards' most subtle uses of allusion and of parallelism between his own congregation and other faithful communities in biblical and historical narratives.

Although it is probably not necessary by now, I think it necessary to define the scope and qualify the complexity of the task that I have set for the present and next chapters in terms of scholarship. Some remarks from two different editors of the Yale collection of Jonathan Edwards' works may be quoted to this end. John F. Wilson makes the following comment in his editorial introduction to the Redemption Discourse:

To move into a systematic analysis of Edwards' literary strategies necessarily misrepresents them, because it treats as separate elements that are fused in his text. But it ought to be evident that, already in the thirty sermons preached in 1739, he had moved far toward the conception of a treatise or sustained essay on the fundamentals of the Christian religion, which he would organize in terms of the objective side of the redemptive process, namely, God's Work of Redemption. The sermons stand without the ambitious development he intended for them. But they stand also as a literary achievement in their own right, without the revision, refinement, and extension he would have given them. (9: 34)

There is a rudimentary character to Edwards' work that does not lessen its literary value. At the same time, and despite the lack of "ambitious development" or elaboration in the sermon series as it appears in volume 9 of the Yale edition, there is a structural complexity and sophistication wherein Edwards innovates and breaks away from Puritan sermonic tradition. The evolution from sermon to treatise during the 1730s and early 40s, or what Wilson Kinnach (Yale general editor of the sermons) calls the "tendency to

preach treatises from the pulpit” (10: 105), probably with future elaboration in mind,² must not lead the reader of Edwards’ homiletic works to forget they are first oratory and then literature (Kinnach, 10:115). In fact, the art of oratory in its classical sense has everything to do with apologetics and persuasion, which is precisely what Edwards had in mind as he sought to systematize “the fundamentals of the Christian religion” for a future comprehensive publication. The ‘History of the Work of Redemption’ was to be an (if not *the* most) important piece in Edwards’ defense of orthodox Christianity (Marsden, 482) and that places this sermon series not just at the center of his thought but of his heart. For this pastor-preacher, informing the mind of his hearers about anything concerning the faith had to go hand-in-hand with a response of the will. So he mustered all his oratorical skill and resources to paint the grand historical picture, which was meant to not merely lead listeners to accurate propositional truths, or ‘doctrine’, but to become a driving force for their individual and communal piety in an ‘application’ of history’s past examples and future promises.

Although the present and following chapters of my dissertation will not stick to a linear analysis of the sermons, but shall encompass the whole series and follow an order based on specific imagery and other literary resources, it seems appropriate to begin with some observations about sermon one. Despite its relative shortness, there are a number of elements contained in it that begin to set the tone for the whole Redemption Discourse, establish a framework for the series and define the dynamics of divine activity in history. The latter definition Edwards provides explicitly as well as through the use of biblical illustrations and other allusion. He seems compelled, after having established his doctrine

² This was almost certainly the case when he conceived and preached the Redemption Discourse. See pp. 23-24 above.

from Isaiah 51:8, to clarify what he means when he speaks of God's work of redemption being "carried out from the fall of man to the end of the world". It is continually carried on "in two respects":

With respect to the effect wrought on the souls of the redeemed, which is common to all ages from the fall of man <to the end of the world>. This effect that I here speak [of] is the application of redemption with respect to the souls of particular persons in converting, justifying, sanctifying and glorifying of them. By these things the souls of particular persons are actually redeemed—do receive the benefit of the Work of Redemption in its effect in their souls [...] The Work of Redemption with respect to the grand design in general as it relates to the universal subject and end of it, is carried on from the fall <of man to the end of the world> in a different manner, not merely by the repeating and renewing the same effect on the different subjects of it, but by many successive works and dispensations of God, all tending to one great end and effect, all united as the several parts of a scheme, and altogether making up one great work. (9: 120, 121)

This "different manner" of divine acting which consists of sequences of "successive works" which finally, and gradually, bring about God's purposes is what has to this point in my study been termed *progressive* divine agency.

That God is envisioned primarily as acting in this progressive dynamics from the start of the series becomes apparent through a number of details in sermon one. First, there is Edwards' choice of biblical text. It is obvious that he could have chosen many other verses that speak about God's mercy or favor toward his people "from generation to generation", as there are numerous instances of this idea being expressed in the Psalms and elsewhere. But Isaiah 51:8 may have had a particular suggestiveness about it for Edwards; it reads: "For the moth shall eat them up like a garment, and the worm shall eat

them like wool: but my righteousness shall be for ever, and my salvation from generation to generation”. Now though the gospel simile of the worm that “dieth not” is immediately brought to mind, and thus the association made with the fire that “is not quenched” (Mark 9:44),³ Edwards is not here depicting or representing eternal punishment in hell. Rather, he is consciously using the image of two insects that would carry out their actions (eating up a garment and eating wool) slowly, even going unnoticed for a time. It is “the church’s enemies” that are thus being destroyed *within* history, and not on Judgment Day where they would be instantly sent to their torments away from divine presence (9: 113). Finally, the phrase “from generation to generation” also points to a continual dispensation of God’s mercy to His people through His immanent presence among them.

Apart from the choice of biblical text, there is the use of certain words like “degrees”, “progressive” or “steps” in the first few pages of the Redemption Discourse, which also contributes to defining the progressive mode of divine activity in the historical process. The moth and the worm are, in figurative terms, the agents of “a secret curse of God” which Christ’s enemies (despite “their present glory” and their “finest and most glorious apparel”) are “consumed by”; “they shall *by degrees* consume and vanish away”. This work of God’s vengeance upon his enemies finds a parallel in the “continuance” of divine favor towards the church (9: 113, 114).⁴ These remarks being made in the exegetical introduction of the verse that Edwards chose as the basis for the whole series, he goes on to state the ‘doctrine’ not just for this one sermon but for the twenty nine remaining. In the first few lines of the doctrinal statement we read that “the generations

³ Indeed, the simile is evoked and the verse quoted in Edwards’ famous *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God* (22: 415).

⁴ My italics, and so through the end of the paragraph.

of men on the earth” are the limit within which “those *progressive* works of God” pertaining to redemption are carried out (9:116). The idea of an ongoing historical chain of events is further hinted at as Edwards clarifies his meaning to the congregation:

What I mean is that those things that belong to this work itself are parts of that scheme, are all this accomplishing. There are things that are in order to it that are before the beginning of it, and fruits of it that are after it is finished [namely, in heaven]. But the work itself is so long a-doing even from the fall <of man to the end of the world>; it is all this while a-carrying on. (9: 119)

As though history itself could be pictured as a ladder or staircase leading to final glory, the word “steps”, as well as “degrees”, becomes a favorite for Edwards throughout the Redemption Discourse.⁵ In this first sermon the word is repeated to emphasize the consistent structure and providential stages of “the grand design [of history] in general”: “It is carried on [...] by successive works wrought in different ages, all parts of one whole or one great scheme whereby one work is brought about by *various steps*, one *step* in each age and another in another” (9: 122).

Edwards’ framework for presenting the grand historical picture flows from the biblical narrative, his Trinitarian ontology and his postmillennial eschatology.⁶ The Bible constitutes his main source of events for roughly the first half of the series, especially historical books like Genesis, Exodus or the Synoptic gospels. The fact that Edwards is constantly referring to the “fall of man” (twenty five times in the first sermon alone) as the starting point for the work of redemption keeps the Bible in the foreground of his narrative, even though he draws information from secular and church history, Rabbinic

⁵ See 9: 347, 350, 353, for instances of this.

⁶ For a brief analysis of the latter, see pp. 117-120 above.

literature, or his own interpretations of prophecy when it comes to sketching out present and future events. A linear conception and depiction of history need not *per se* lead to a progressive view of it, since there is the option of conceiving of time and historical stages as indefinitely cyclical instead of teleological. Thus, for Edwards, as for many Christian thinkers before him, belief in the triune God of the Bible mattered as much as the biblical account of history itself since, as we will promptly see, the internal dynamics of the deity and the latter's involvement in time and space imbued the historical process with purpose.

If both creation and history were the stage for God's self-glorification, there was a teleological expectation about everything that existed and every event that came to pass. Historically, before and after the Protestant Reformation, there had been speculation about a Trinitarian structure of the historical process and the whole of history was divided into three periods, corresponding to the respective revealing of God the Father, the Son and Holy Spirit. Many English authors after the Reformation, especially 17th century Puritans, came to identify the 'age of the Spirit' with the millennium, or the time of the church's triumph and prosperity on earth (Bauckham, 212, 213). Although Edwards does not follow this pattern explicitly in his own attempt to write (or, rather, preach) a 'universal history', we know that the presence and intervention of the Trinitarian God in time and space was essential to establish the frame for his narrative because he does not want to leave the following consideration out of the first sermon. At the very end of it he explains:

In all this God designed to accomplish the glory of the blessed Trinity in an exceeding degree. God had a design of glorifying himself from eternity, to glorify each person in the Godhead. The end must be considered as first in the order of nature and then the means,

and therefore we must conceive that God having proposed this end had then, as it were, the means to choose. And the principal means that he pitched [upon] was this great Work of Redemption that we are speaking [of]. It was his design in this work to glorify his only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, in this great work [...] And [also] that the Son should thus be glorified and should glorify the Father by what should be accomplished by the Spirit to the glory of the Spirit, that the whole Trinity conjunctly and each person singly might be exceedingly glorified. (9: 125, 126)

What Edwards has in mind when he speaks of “what should be accomplished by the Spirit” is no doubt revival, as well as the regeneration of individuals. As we shall see (chapter 4 below), the rhetoric of revival as an “outpouring of the Spirit” becomes instrumental in Edwards’ weaving of his own narrative; but, for now, it is enough to note that the activity of the Father, Son and Spirit meant the historical process was imbued with a teleological dynamics of progression.

This dynamic operation of the deity within history culminates with the millennium. Though the thousand years that were prophesied to precede consummation in Revelation 20 are not mentioned by Edwards in sermon one,⁷ his postmillennial eschatological framework is latent in the prevalently optimistic tone. Postmillennialism has generally been regarded as intrinsically optimistic since it envisions a glorious future for Christianity this side of the Second Coming of Christ (see p. 109, n. 60 above). Thus, the millennium (whether it be understood as a literal thousand years or as a symbolic number) consists of a period in which God’s enemies are subdued and the kingdom of his Son is made manifest, though Jesus Christ is not yet visibly present (as in the

⁷ There is, however, an indirect reference to postmillennial consummation when Edwards alludes to the “new heaven and new earth in a spiritual sense at the end of the world [...] represented [in] Rev. 21” (9: 124).

premillennialist millennium). Jonathan Edwards considered his generation to be living *after* the worse times for the church had finished. The Reformation he interpreted as the penultimate ‘coming of Christ’ (the third one out of four, 9: 421ff) since Antichrist, i.e., the Roman Catholic Church, had received a deadly wound in the sixteenth century and its satanic influence must inevitably and gradually decrease. Edwards’ own time, then, was to overlap with the climatic and final stage of history.

The preacher’s historical optimism regarding the present is evinced by his preliminary exegetical remarks. Though he concedes that his chosen verse, Isaiah 51:8, was inspired “to comfort the church under her sufferings and the persecutions of her enemies”, he quickly points out “[h]ow shortlived the power and prosperity of the church’s enemies is” (9: 113). He considered the church to be presently thriving towards a state of prosperity and her enemies to be declining since the times of the Reformation. As opposed to the Manichean Augustinian vision of the heavenly and earthly cities according to which temporal existence (which is by definition in tension with the spiritual and eternal) must await deliverance only outside of history,⁸ the Edwardsean scheme provides a hope that the plan of salvation, not just from hell but from earthly enemies, is fulfilled in time and space as we know and perceive it. Another striking remark on his biblical text is that the phrase “for ever” in Isaiah 51:8 is to be taken as referring to this temporal existence, or until “the end of the generations of men”, and not as the equivalent of “to all eternity” or “forevermore” (9: 115). Edwards would not look at the ‘city of God’, as Augustine had done in a somewhat Platonist fashion, and keep it on a completely separate plane from this earthly, historical existence. For the latter, the verse in the book of Hebrews where the ‘heavenly city’ is defined as that “which hath

⁸ See St Augustine’s *The City of God*, passim. Cf. p. 42 above.

foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (11:10) pointed to everything invisible and beyond the present. By contrast, Edwards would exploit the Pauline imagery of construction and architecture to unfold before his listeners the great masterpiece of the Redeemer of history (present past and future), whose work “may be compared to such a building that is carrying on from the fall of man to the end of the world”. The ‘heavenly city’ was made, as it were, more earthly and tangible for the observer of the divine “Work of Redemption” (9:121).

While John F. Wilson is right in pointing out that Edwards’ choice of biblical text “contrasted God’s everlasting righteousness and resolute intention to achieve salvation [...] with the transitoriness of earthly goods [thus setting] a dialectical framework” for the whole series (9: 38); it is no less true that in Edwards’ rhetoric there is, apart from a “dialectic of God’s utter transcendence” (which Wilson’s comment implicitly purports), a dialectic of “divine immanence” whereby the Puritan orator aims at the “reenchantment” of both creation and history. Earthly existence, hence, is not reduced to futility, and mundane material things (“bodies”) themselves carry the mark of divine power and intervention in the order of time (Zakai, *Nature*, 49, 217-19, 241). This is the reason why Edwards’ attempts to give divine agency a tangibility through homely metaphors is of particular significance. For instance, a new building was being erected in Northampton so that pews and pulpit (in the also relatively new meetinghouse)⁹ were now destined to stand separate from the space of earthly, secular, political decisions. The parish’s minister did not despair but made the most of the occasion, laboring to encompass (beginning from the first sermon through the very last one) his historical narrative with imagery derived from ‘building’. It was an appropriate oratorical resort not just because of the

⁹ See p. 40 of chap. 1 above.

immediate local context but due to the kind of activity it evokes. A building that is worked on “from the fall of man to the end of the world” must indeed be erected slowly, gradually and progressively, but it must, in the end, become all the more imposing and unequalled in magnificence and complexity. Edwards thus turned a mundane process, which his listeners could immediately identify in their own local context, into something illustrative of the divine immanence and of the piety that ought to result from the presence of the Spirit.

3. 1. *God’s Building*

3. 1. a. Moral Decay and the Ruins of Satan’s Kingdom.

As it was pointed out in this dissertation’s introductory chapter, after the decline of Northampton’s local awakening Edwards had begun to show greater concern for establishing patterns that would lead to lasting personal piety and communal edification rather than trying to revive the flames of revival. His sermon series preached a year before the Redemption Discourse on 1 Corinthians 13, *Charity and Its Fruits*, is an example of this pastoral concern (see pp. 39-41 above). The rhetoric of imminent “revolutions” (*Works*, II, 124), or at least the emphasis on immediate expectations found in Edwards’ language during the mid 1730s, was replaced by a more sober discourse which intended for his listeners to contemplate God’s gradual but relentless activity in time and to be stirred up to a heartfelt but unwavering piety.

In order to achieve an effective depiction upon which his congregation could base their Christian practice and against which they could measure their spiritual experience, Edwards recurrently resorted to the image of a building which is constructed throughout

history and culminates after much scaffolding, complex (though not unforeseen) rearranging, laying down of foundations and erecting of a vertical structure. But before I explain how he *positively* deployed this array of images, similes, etc., it is interesting to note how he did it *negatively*. Edwards combined biblical allusion to the tower of Babel as the anti-God building, which in turn paralleled historical and apocalyptic Babylon, and the construal of divine activity in terms of a restoration from ruins. The latter was not simply one more way of stating God's manner of carrying out his Work of Redemption as can be inferred from some of Edwards' private writings. Composed during the years of the Great Awakening in the colonies, the following 'Miscellany' on the "Progress of the Work of Redemption" categorically affirms that

God's manner is, in almost everything, to suffer 'em first to be undone, and then to build 'em up again in a more glorious, in vastly greater, perfection than before they was undone. When he has anything very glorious to accomplish, he accomplishes it and builds it up out of ruins of something that was excellent but is destroyed, hereby manifesting the glory of his sufficiency, power and wisdom, and infinite superiority to all things.

Miscellany 907 continues with numerous biblical examples where this dynamics of divine activity can be traced, but the writer goes beyond the sacred narrative to state that God

suffers even the Christian church to be brought down wonderfully by Antichrist, to raise it again, immensely more glorious. And after the reformation from popery, he suffers it, in a great measure, to be destroyed by deism, heresies and cold, dead formality; that he may make way for an immensely greater and more glorious reformation. And sometimes

in a particular saint he suffers grace to be exceedingly overcome, as in Peter, to raise it to a more glorious height. (20: 161, 162)

Edwards absolutely masters the weaving together of historical and spiritual experience, and he incorporates the pattern of ‘rise and fall’ into the progressive divine dispensations whereby the advancement of the building is accomplished. Though he began by saying that God suffers “excellent” things to be destroyed and be turned into ruins so they may be restored as something even “more glorious”, by the end of the reflection he is stretching, as it were, this mode of divine activity so it will encompass the ruins of God-opposing forces.

It is the Northampton pastor’s latter twofold, or two-dimensional, reflection that allows him to stretch an allusion to the tower of Babel of the Old Testament and turn it into an argument in favor of the idea that not only was a satanic monument being knocked down, but God’s building was being brought to a greater degree of height and glory. The biblical episode is broached in relation to the preceding deluge which brought destruction to God’s creation as a result of sin during Noah’s time (9: 148). Something excellent (i.e., creation), therefore, is turned into ruins, which (following the Edwardsean rationale for divine intervention laid forward in miscellany 907) will contribute to the advance of God’s architectural masterpiece. Straight after the flood comes “God’s disappointing the design of building the city and tower of Babel [...] City and tower was set up in pride [and] had their foundation laid in the pride and vanity of men and the haughtiness of their minds [...] contrary to the nature of the foundation of the kingdom of Christ and his redeemed city, which has its foundation laid in humility” (9: 153, 154). Interpreting the ancient episode through a typological reading of Scripture and

contrasting human (and implicitly satanic) pride with the humility of the incarnate¹⁰ and crucified Son, Edwards turns the thwarting of Babel's culmination into an essentially Christological event. This is noteworthy since in this same sermon Babel becomes identified, both historically and spiritually, with Babylon (9: 155), which for Edwards' audience would undoubtedly lead to an association with Antichrist and Roman Catholicism. Later in the series, while explaining the roughly four-hundred-year period between the Old and New Testaments which the Bible keeps silent about, Babylon's "ruins" are said to have been replaced by subsequent "monarchies" or empires which culminated with the Roman Empire (9: 245). This historical chain of events, complemented by mainstream Reformed identification of antichristian imperial Rome with the Pope as Antichrist, makes it clear that the biblical allusion to Babylon is supposed to function coordinately with that of Babel and that, ultimately, the ruins of the "kingdom of Satan" or "Antichrist" would by association ring in the ears of Northamptonites as they heard these biblical/historical references. Though the exact words "Babylon the Great has fallen" (Revelation 18:2) were not quoted in Edwards' series, the inherited interpretive framework he worked with in his exposition of the Bible sufficed to have the congregation make the pertinent association of ideas.

The above explanation of the Babel allusion in sermon three becomes relevant as I turn to analyze the way Edwards uses the image of 'restoring' or, rather, 'rebuilding over' *ruins*. All in all, there are eleven instances of the word "ruins" being used. Although in some cases these references allow for the idea of restoring, as in the case of

¹⁰ Elsewhere in the Redemption Discourse, and precisely in the context of interpreting a prophecy about raising the "ruins" of "the tabernacle of David" (Amos 9:11), Edwards reuses this contrast between human glory and the birth of Christ "in a manger" (9: 300).

restoring creation after the flood, the tendency in Edwards' discourse is to increasingly support the idea that God builds his kingdom 'over' or 'on top of' Satan's so as to tread down his enemies, not just in their spiritual but in their visible and earthly manifestations. The first instance of the word 'ruins' is in sermon one, which goes to show how he intends the construction (and in this case 'destruction') metaphors to encompass and set the dynamics of his narrative. Edwards' audience is reminded that the recurrent mention of "the fall of man" is not so much aimed at pointing back to a past moment in history as passing sentence on the human condition. Indeed, "God's design was perfectly to restore all the ruins of the fall" (9: 124). God's good and excellent creation was ruined by Adam's fall and needed restoring. But, although divine wisdom would set up and guide all events that followed the Fall so as to bring good out of evil, there was not enough good remaining in creation and created beings to make indirect divine intervention sufficient in order to a complete cosmic restoration. The issue of emphasizing human depravity and earthly corruption was not a minor one for the Calvinist theologian and rhetorician, so he mentioned this "perfect" restoring of the ruins of the fall again in the second sermon and, more significantly, expounded it in the third one (9: 127 n. 2, 145).

In the third instance where ruins are said to be restored, there are some clues as to the effect Edwards intended on his listeners. Although, as I am arguing from the beginning of this section, the preacher's purpose throughout the series is to present God as primarily acting progressively, by 'steps', and at times even in a hidden manner, the immediate intervention of the transcendent deity is not ruled out or excluded from Edwards' narrative. In this instance, the function of such divine meddling with creation in the case of Enoch being directly taken up to heaven is didactic as well as prophetic:

I was showing in my first discourse from this text what were the great things that God aimed at in the Work of Redemption, and what the main things were that he intended to bring to pass, I among other things mentioned the *perfect restoring the ruins of the fall* with respect to the elect, and restoring man from that destruction that he had brought on himself both in soul and body. Now this translation of Enoch was the first instance that ever was of restoring the ruins of the fall with respect to the body. (9: 145; my italics)

The case of Enoch serves Edwards to develop the positive image of ‘building’ prior to the above quote, and that will be analyzed below. But for my present purpose it is interesting to note that the event which was most surprising and contrary to nature, or supernatural, in this episode from Genesis is precisely what Edwards would have his church consider in relation to the restoration of ruins. According to Hebrews 11:5, this man was “translated that he should not see death”. It was the first clear revelation of the fact that “all the bodies of the saints shall be redeemed” and a pointer to Christ’s resurrection (9: 145, 146). The state of humanity was one of enmity against God and only a supernatural irruption in time and space could contribute to definitely establishing the newly begun building.¹¹ It was in the days of Enoch, Edwards explains, that the Coming of Christ was prophesied, not the first or second coming in particular, but “in every remarkable manifestation Christ has made of himself in the world for the saving of his people and the destroying of his enemies” (9: 144). Edwards’ historical account necessitates a locus for “remarkable” divine action even though he strives to construe his narrative by fitting ‘means’ and ‘secondary causes’ in a way compatible with a logical deity, and depicting a

¹¹ Enoch precedes Noah in the account of Genesis (chapter 5).

God who does not act contrary to reason.¹² One of the principal tenets of the Edwardsean rationale for the redemption of mankind being their utter and direct dependence on God,¹³ Northamptonites were compelled, through the allusion to the extraordinary case of Enoch and the implicit reminder about their corruption, to examine themselves and consider what individual and collective moral ruin still prevailed among and around them.¹⁴

The depiction of ‘restoration’ from ruins is intertwined in Edwards’ discourse with the negative image of enmity and opposition to God being in recession or trampled over (despite appearances to the contrary) by the advance of Christ’s kingdom. Moreover, not only are these two ideas ‘intertwined’ or used in coordination but, as the Redemption Discourse progresses, only the idea of building over Satan’s destroyed kingdom is evoked and expressed in relation to ‘ruins’. Sermons twenty-one, twenty-two and twenty-seven contain the following quotations:

¹² In the thirtieth and last sermon of this series Edwards’ insists on how divine providence is “reasonable” in its operations (9: 520). See also pp. 187-189 below.

¹³ See p. 53, n. 15 above.

¹⁴ That this was the main thrust in the third sermon becomes apparent, though subtly, in the last paragraph of the same. Though lacking an ‘application’ section as such, the end of Edwards’ text reads: “We are not to understand that [Abraham’s family] were wholly drawn off to idolatry to forsake the true God, for God is said to be the Lord of Nahor, Genesis 31:53, “The God of Nahor judge betwixt us.” For they only *partook in some measure of the general and almost universal corruption of the times*, as Solomon was in a measure infected with idolatrous corruption, and as the children of Israel in Egypt are said to serve other gods in Egypt, though yet there was the true church of God among them, and as there were images kept for a considerable time in the family of Jacob himself, the *corruption* being brought from Padan Aram whence he fetched his wives. This was the second [time] that the church was almost brought to nothing by the *corruption and general defection of the world from true religion*. But still the true religion was kept up in ⟨the line of whom Christ was to come⟩, which is another instance of God’s remarkably preserving his church in a time of a *general deluge of wickedness* (9: 156; my italics).

Now [i.e., in the millennium or “glorious times of the gospel”] the kingdom of heaven is come in a glorious degree; it pleased the Lord God of heaven to set up a kingdom *on the ruins of the kingdom of Satan*. And such success is here of the purchase of Christ's redemption, and such honor does the Father put upon him for the disgrace he suffered when on earth. And *now we see* to what a height that glorious building is erected

[...] Christ finally conquers and subdues and *utterly ruins* [Satan's] *visible kingdom* on earth, as he will do in the time of the destruction of Antichrist; thus gloriously triumphing over him after he has done the utmost that his power and subtilty can extend to, and showing that he is above him after he has dealt most proudly and lifted himself

[...] The *visible kingdom* of Satan shall be overthrown and the kingdom of Christ set up *on the ruins of it* everywhere, throughout the whole habitable globe (9: 398, 410, 473; my italics)

As God's “glorious building is erected”, then, there is a trampling on every satanic initiative and apparent success on earth. Satan, obviously, feeds on human pride to extend his dominion and succeeds (due to the extent of man's corruption) until there is a manifest instance of divine intervention to thwart the “haughtiness” that was present in an episode as far back as the Tower of Babel or to turn the tide of corruption implicit in the fact that “the papists have since [the Reformation] gained ground” (9: 422). Edwards' Christological interpretation of biblical passages, of recent history or of prophecy about the future, pinpoints the dichotomy of Christ versus Antichrist and also serves as a reminder of human depravity and dependence (including the dependence of the elect, as they are only chosen ‘in Christ’ and ‘by grace’) since all spiritual fruit must be fully attributed to Christ, whether conversions in Northampton or the figurative resurrection of Enoch.

Finally, the Edwardsean articulation of progressive divine agency through the parallel ‘ruining’ of opposing forces and ‘erecting’ of God’s building was aimed at achieving a greater sense of the Work of Redemption’s *visibility* in time and space. The last three passages from this sermon series (quoted above) where the word ‘ruins’ appears evince this intention on the preacher’s part, as he avers that from his exposition “now we *see*” the substitution of Christ’s kingdom “throughout the whole habitable globe” for Satan’s “*visible* kingdom”. Though it may have been easier for Edwards’ audience to think concretely about the negative historical examples he gave (for example, the setbacks against the Protestant cause in Europe [9: 422]), these references were meant to function as pointers to the global dimension of what God was about to do or would accomplish in due time. Thus, the “whole habitable globe” was evidently full of sinners by nature and under Satan’s spiritual dominion, but since only ‘ruins’ would remain after divine intervention, the visibility of what would stand in their stead would be at least as notable as the evil that currently prevailed. In this sense also, specific references to Northampton’s or the British empire’s circumstances in the Redemption Discourse have the role of establishing an immediately observable stage for divine action. Therefore, when Edwards says that Deists “deny any revealed religion”, that they say “God has given mankind no other light to walk by but his own reason” and that “[t]his *our nation*, which is the principal nation of the Reformation, is very much overrun with [the deist heresy] and it prevails more and more”, he is calling attention to a manifest Satanic onslaught against the Work of Redemption. Indeed, he points out all these things to his audience “concerning the opposition that *Satan* has made against the Reformation” (9: 432; my italics). But, considering the picture he had been painting in preceding sermons

(this latter quotation being from sermon twenty-four) and how divine agency would operate “in almost everything” (20: 161) by building over the ruins of God-opposing forces, there was an implicit and “unshakable optimism” in the very denunciation of the orator’s jeremiad (Bercovitch, *Jeremiad*, 7).

3. 1. b. The Solid Structure of Piety.

So I come to the analysis of Edwards’ positive use of the ‘building’ simile and related imagery. The importance of these rhetorical figures for the preacher is, again, evident by the fact that he introduces the idea in sermon one. Furthermore, he would evoke the same imagery twice in the thirtieth and last sermon of the series. Early on in the ‘doctrine’ of the whole series, we read that God’s works of providence are more important than and superior to creation itself. In this regard, Edwards argues, “God’s works of providence are the end of God’s works of creation as the building of an house or the forming of an engine or machine is for its use” (9: 118). There seems to be, in this first instance, a different approach to the simile than what appears later in the same sermon and in the series in general. As Edwards develops the image of the building, it becomes tantamount to the result (therefore “the end”) of God’s “successive works” and culminates with the laying of the “topstone” (9: 121). But the first mention of the building simile as an illustration of the secondary nature of creation does not imply an inconsistency or even an ambivalence about the orator’s use of this set of images. Edwards would mainly employ the construction metaphor in this sermon series precisely to depict divine providential activity in history, not creation. However, this first instance of the ‘building’ simile does point to one reason why the construal of God’s preparatory

work for Christ's Second Coming in terms of building metaphors is particularly effective. The purpose and end of a building is to have someone dwell in it, and in this respect it may be said that Edwards 'plays' with some degree of ambivalence as he weaves his historical narrative. The dweller would eventually be the trinitarian God at the consummation of history (the ultimate instance of the transcendent becoming immanent),¹⁵ but in the meantime it was true Christians who were simultaneously the subjects of immediate divine activity and called to progressive abiding in God's work, and therefore the dwellers of God's building.

So, while Edwards construes the work of redemption in terms of a building that "will appear complete and consummate [and] stand forth in its proper perfection" (9: 121, 122), there is always, due to the nature of the image, the potential for further purpose in such a structure and a sense that what is being contemplated is a means, or a sequence of means (since the building is erected gradually) in which the community of believers may participate actively. As when he handles the imagery of 'ruins', here Edwards masterfully coordinates a series of allusions, biblical and historical, with these building metaphors and similes which serve to invite Northamptonites to reflect on their own recent history in light of the God-written, cosmic history. The key to the effective weaving of the narrative in terms of a building that displays both the transcendent and immanent deity, acting

¹⁵ Mason Lowance shows how, from the English reformer Joseph Mede to the transitional colonial figure of Increase Mather, the resurrection from the dead and final judgment at the end of human history were viewed as a manifestation of "Christ's transcendent glory". The fact that for these Puritans, as for Edwards, the resurrection of the body was "literal and real [and hence physical] for both saints and sinners" (99) warrants my use of the expression "the ultimate instance of the transcendent becoming immanent". The latter (i.e. immanence) refers to the divine presence dwelling perfectly and definitively in the bodies of saints through the Spirit.

immediately and progressively in history, lies in Edwards' conscious choice of some synonyms of 'building' throughout the Redemption Discourse, as will be shown shortly. Likewise, there is a powerful though subtle cohesion in the orator's prolonged delivery of the series as regards every allusion he makes to this set of ideas and images. He integrates into the same discourse the dialectic of God's transcendence through references to direct divine intervention or God's immediate presence in time and space (revivals, the Incarnation, miracles, etc.), and the mode of progressive divine agency through the depiction of the church, who are the recipients of God's immanent presence through the Spirit, as a scattered, still imperfect, community that gradually moves towards a goal and is established and consolidated through the practice of Christian piety.

The synonym of building that Edwards uses to hint at immediate divine agency and at the solidity of God's Work of Redemption is 'temple'. The temple in the biblical narrative had been established not just as the place where God dwelled immediately (so as to make it impossible at times for humans to share that space, 2 Chronicles 5:14) but as a symbol of divine commitment to favor and dwell among his people "for ever" (2 Chronicles 5:13). This simile is significantly put forth in the first instance where the preacher develops the idea behind building imagery:

The Work of Redemption with respect to the grand design in general [is carried out] by many successive works and dispensations of God, all tending to one great end and effect, all united as the several parts of a scheme, and altogether making up one great work. Like an house or *temple* that is building, first the workmen are sent forth, then the materials are gathered, then the ground fitted, then the foundation is laid, then the superstructure erected one part after another, till at length the topstone is laid. And all is finished. Now the Work of Redemption in that large sense that has been explained may

be compared to such a building that is carrying on from the fall of man to the end of the world (9: 121)

Thus, “temple” is equated to the stable and imposing work of God as it is “finished” and without defect. But Edwards warns, through a further development of the simile, that it takes a considerable degree of knowledge and expertise to gauge the “grand design” and not be confused due to its complexity. Though he starts off with the possibility of a “house” as well as a “temple”, only the latter or an equally grand structure fit the image he wants to paint:

In order to see how a design is carried [to] an end, we must first know what the design is. To know how a workman proceeds and to understand the various steps he takes in order to accomplish a piece of work, we need to be informed what he is about or what the thing is that he intends to accomplish [...] If an architect with a great number of hands were about building some great palace, and one that was a stranger to such things should stand by and see some men digging in the earth, others bringing timbers, others hewing stones and the like, he might reason that there was a great deal done. But if he knew not the design, it would all appear confusion to him. (9: 122)

The “various steps” and the whole image as furthered here by Edwards point to the idea that although the plan and the execution of it may be perfect, and perfectly understood by the “architect”, the inexperienced eye may perceive it as chaotic, like one observing the making of a tapestry from the wrong side. The same process, however, if viewed from another angle and with the knowledge that provides perspective, would make perfect sense. Edwards is not very subtle when he tells his congregation how, or by means of whom, they may attain a due contemplation of the Work of Redemption. He implicitly places them on the side of “confusion”, of being “quite puzzled and in the dark about it”:

“And therefore that the great works and dispensations of God that belong to this great affair of redemption may not appear like *confusion to you*, I would set before you briefly the main things as designed to be accomplished in this great work” (9: 122, 123; my italics).

Edwards probably did not merely think that the complexity and vastness of “this great work” (implicit in the image of a “temple” or “some great palace”) was beyond his congregation’s present reach, but that it was *glory* they needed to behold for the right kind of transformation to be accomplished in them. They must be helped to attain a due contemplation of God’s glory in His works for the kingdom and vital piety to advance in their community and individual lives. Evoking the temple of Solomon’s time would set the right tone and help inculcate the right notion of what the church needed at present. When Edwards came to explain in the Redemption Discourse the implications that the setting up of the temple had for the Jews, he used the language of glory: “Now the church of Israel was in its highest external glory [...] Now the Jewish worship in all its ordinances was fully settled. Now instead of a movable tent and tabernacle they had a glorious temple; the temple the most magnificent, beautiful, and costly structure...” (9: 226; my italics). The sense of stability and solidity derived from the symbolic value of the temple here is meant to function as a reflection of the kind of piety that the sight of divine glory should bring about in the people (the current dwellers of God’s building). So there is the glorious temple itself, with its unmovable and magnificent structure to indicate the transcendence of God’s presence, and there is a solidness about the people’s pattern and way of life. The use of the word “church” and the reference to “ordinances” as “fully settled” is far from accidental here. Rather, these terms help establish a parallel

between Edwards listeners and the community of the biblical narrative. Though, as was extensively argued above (p. 57-73, 108-121), ordinances were not considered by the Northampton pastor to be so crucial in communicating the divine presence in the order of time as they had been for his Puritan predecessors, the allusion to structured and orderly worship in the Old Testament community is a subtle pointer to Edwards' aspirations for his parish at this stage in his ministry.

What was crucial for, and the concrete agent of, divine intervention in the order of time for Jonathan Edwards was revival. And the imagery of building in its 'temple mode' together with biblical parallelisms, are also present when he begins to introduce the rhetoric of revival into his Redemption Discourse. The Edwardsean construal of history through a pervasive use of revivalistic language will be analyzed fully in chapter 4. However, it is unavoidable to refer to this discursive mode since it bursts into Edwards' narrative as he interprets the first few chapters of Genesis by applying what he defined in sermon one, namely, God's Work of Redemption as a building, to a specific case. It must be acknowledged that here the orator imposes a register of language on certain biblical passages in a somewhat artificial or at least unwarranted manner, which inevitably calls for an interpretation of his intentions in retelling the antediluvian story the way he does.

The third sermon begins asserting that "the first remarkable pouring out of the Spirit through Christ that ever was" took place in the days of Enos:

This seems to have been the next remarkable thing that was done towards erecting this glorious building that God had begun, and laid the foundation of, in Christ the mediator. We read in the Genesis 4:26 ["then began men to call upon the name of the Lord"]. The meaning of these words have been considerably controverted among divines, for we can't suppose that the meaning is that time was the first that ever man performed the duty of

prayer. Prayer is a duty of natural religion, and a duty that a spirit of piety does most naturally and manifestly lead men [into]. Prayer is as it were the very breath of a spirit of piety, and we can't suppose therefore that those holy men that had been before for about two hundred years had lived all that while without any prayer (9: 141)

Edwards goes on discussing what the origin of this situation where people began to call upon God's name could have been, and concludes that it "must be the consequence of a remarkable pouring out of the Spirit of God" (9: 142). The "piety" of the community of believers in this episode of antediluvian salvation history was of a more elevated sort than that which "those holy men that had been before" ever experienced. Here, a subtle parallelism may have underlain Edwards' text and oral delivery. When he had retrospectively analyzed the 'little awakening' of Northampton and other towns nearby in his widely circulated *Faithful Narrative*, he had noted that despite the existence of some 'harvests' during his pulpit predecessor's ministry, the quality and extent of the recent revival of the mid-1730s had surpassed them all. This local experience is reflected in the way Edwards chooses to weave his narrative of Genesis 4 and 5. The clearest example, however, comes only a few lines after this description of the "days of Enos" in terms of revival and as a significant step "towards erecting this glorious building" (9: 141)

There are several clues that testify to the fact that the preacher in this third sermon is appealing to his audience by means of establishing a parallelism between biblical events and their recent past and present. Firstly, there is the above-mentioned imposition on the biblical text of the kind of revivalistic language that had begun to be used pervasively during the awakenings, and by Edwards in particular. Interestingly, however, the shrewd orator follows the account of what allegedly constituted the first revival in history with the case of one man, Enoch, who stood out in that same generation for his

“eminently holy life”. Indeed, even though God had been “pleased to grant a more large effusion of his Spirit for the bringing in an harvest of souls to Christ” during that “special season of mercy”, this man “was a saint of greater eminency than ever any had been before him”. At this point, Edwards continues to use the thread of building imagery to weave his narration:

So that in this respect the Work of Redemption was carried on to a greater height than ever it had been before. With respect to its effect in the visible church in general, we observed just now how it was carried higher in the days of Enos than ever it had been before. Probably Enoch was one of the saints of that harvest, for he lived all the days that he did live on earth in the days of Enos. And with respect to the degree to which this work was carried on [in] the soul of a particular person, it was raised to a greater height in Enoch than ever before. His soul as it was built on Christ was built up in holiness to a greater height than there had been any instance before. (9:143, 144)

Apart from the prevalently progressive increase of divine agency’s fruits and the parallel this finds in the idea of steps or degrees of “height” in a building, there is a sense of stoutness or solidity in the way Enoch’s holiness is expressed. The emphatic words “His soul as it was built on Christ was built up in holiness” evokes again, as it were, the ‘temple mode’ of building imagery whereby solid foundations and an imposing vertical structure convey or mirror the glorious and divine presence. This, in turn, reveals the kind of piety that Edwards wanted to see established among Northamptonites, which is evinced by his sequencing of revival and its ensuing fruits in the story of the generation of Enos and Enoch. He placed solid piety *after* the experience of awakening, thus implying that gradual spiritual growth, which might or might not be furthered by an

outpouring of the Spirit in particular individuals, was an example of greater vertical edification, both individual and communal, than the revival experience *per se*.

The role of the orator's allusion to how revival had had an "effect in the visible church in general" during this time is also noteworthy. It is, at the surface level, very much in keeping with his references elsewhere to how the eyes of the world were on his congregation during the local awakening and its aftermath.¹⁶ But there is ambivalence about how this first awakening should be assessed and delighted in. Surely this work of God was to be admired. At the same time, what took the divine building to a greater height than "any instance of before" in that same generation (9: 144) was Enoch's steady and unwavering piety. In this sense, Edwards is pleading with Christians who had witnessed an unquestionably genuine revival in their community to go a step further in their vision of the glory of the Work of Redemption, as if to say, 'do not just flatter yourselves that divine presence was immediately manifest among you some years ago, but strive forward spiritually based on the belief that divine agency is also immanently and progressively at work in you now'. It becomes evident that the latter was Edwards' intended 'use' or 'application' of the doctrine laid out in his historical account because he makes an observation (the one on Enoch's remarkable piety) which, though it may seem incidental or digressive, functions as an appendix to his seemingly absolute statement two sermons earlier about the paramount importance of divine intervention in history through revival.

As pages 139 to 141 above point out, Edwards made sure that his audience distinguished divine agency in history with regard to conversion or regeneration and the

¹⁶ The brief analysis of "A City on a Hill" (1736) above is just one example (pp. 83-85).

“different manner” of its operations throughout history. The latter, rather than simply renewing the effects of Christ’s work on the cross in “particular souls”, providentially made up “one great work” by “many successive works and dispensations of God” (9: 121). This mode of divine activity was essentially progressive. But now, in the third sermon, Edwards seems to want to avoid a complete dissociation of these two manners of God’s dispensation of grace. Having commended Enoch as an example of piety which exceeded all his contemporaries (all of whom had equally experienced the first ever outpouring of the Spirit), he observes “by the way [...] that the increase of gospel light and the carrying on the Work of Redemption as it respects the elect church in general, from the first erecting of the church to the end of the world, is very much after the same manner as the carrying on of the same work [...] in a particular soul” (9: 144). Looking back in time, whether to recent local history or ancient biblical narratives, should lead to individual as well as collective forward striving, and not merely function as an anchor for spiritual assurance (pp. 88-90 above). Despite the appearance of “ups and downs” in both personal and universal ‘histories’, a child of God could rest *and act* on the conviction that “in the general[,] grace is growing from its first infusion till it is perfected in glory; the kingdom of Christ is building up in the soul” (9: 145). Again, the language of glory and building, which evoked the temple’s architecture here and elsewhere in the series, is used coordinately giving the Edwardsean narrative a powerful cohesion when sketching out and developing both the individual believer’s story and cosmic history.

I come now to the other synonyms of building that our rhetorician picks to achieve a different effect from, but complementary to, the one analyzed previously. The

‘temple mode’ of construction imagery contributes to displaying God’s works in time and space as glorious, unshakable and ever rising higher. Although this use of language prevails in the Redemption Discourse and, indeed, serves as an overarching and all-encompassing simile for the sermon series, Edwards also plays with suggestive, though scattered, references to less glorious buildings like the Jewish tabernacle or synagogues. The former is the epitome of divine presence in the Old Testament and therefore an effective symbol to suggest a rudimentary though powerfully genuine instance of God’s dwelling among his people; paradoxically, it also constitutes a weak architectural structure which evokes the church’s vulnerable and imperfect condition in the wilderness. Edwards’ discourse and theological framework necessitate reminders of the pathetic, corrupt human condition as well as a locus for the display of definitive and triumphant divine action, and the ‘tabernacle’ simile becomes useful for him in this respect. Not even the last instance mentioned above, where “the building that is the subject of our present discourse” is “built up higher than [it] had ever before” (9: 144), can escape a setback of “corruption” which makes grace “languish for a great while together” (9: 145).

Earlier in my analysis, the importance of Edwards’ typological and Christological reading of Scripture was brought to bear on the negative example of building imagery implicit in the allusion to the Tower of Babel and its destruction. In dealing with references to the tabernacle, those instances where the preacher is simply telling where, when or how it was literally set up (9: 182, 183) will be overlooked, and more attention must be given to particular interpretations of its figurative meaning. There is, on the one hand, a visible/external change (towards greater glory) when the son of David, Solomon, replaces the tabernacle with the temple. This is, not surprisingly, noted by Edwards as

having a typological import with regard to Christ, as the antitypical ‘Son of David’, and his kingdom (9: 220). But there are two other references to the tabernacle which should not go unnoticed in the Redemption Discourse, as they reflect what was pointed out earlier (p. 156, 157 above), namely, that the potential of ‘building’ images allows Edwards to extend their representation to the ‘dwellers’ of the building under consideration, thus including the congregation under his care in the historical process as active partakers.

In the first reference to the tabernacle, from sermon two, Edwards is following a standard typological interpretation of Adam and Eve’s divinely appointed coverings for their nakedness: “Thus our first parents were covered with skins of the sacrifice, as the tabernacle in the wilderness, *which signified the church*, was when it was covered with ram’s skins dyed red as though they were dipped in blood, to signify that Christ’s righteousness was wrought out through the pains of death” (9: 136; my italics). The association of the skins from Genesis 3 and the Exodus tabernacle is not as surprising as the idea that the tabernacle “signified the church”, though the latter is not an originally Edwardsean interpretation either.¹⁷ The preacher later in the series interprets the tabernacle as a symbol of the contrast between the earthly and the heavenly state of God’s people: “The tabernacle seemed rather to represent the church in its movable, changeable state here in this world. But that beautiful, glorious, costly structure of the temple that succeeded the tabernacle, and was a fixed and not a movable thing, seems especially to represent the church in its glorified state in heaven” (224, 225).

¹⁷ The authoritative Bible commentary of the late seventeenth century Puritan Matthew Henry would suggest, as Edwards’ Redemption Discourse does (9: 225), that it “might represent the state of God’s church in this world” (47). Edwards is clearly more categorical than Henry in his typological interpretation of the ancient Jewish tent.

In his interpretation of Genesis 4 and 5, Edwards had alluded to the revival in the days of Enos as having an “effect in the visible church in general” (9: 143), hence suggesting that Christ’s kingdom was, immediately after that episode, more manifest to the ancient world and therefore visible in ‘earthly’ terms. But the continuing of the Church’s spiritual edification to the next level depended on the piety of someone, Enoch, who had been converted as a result of that remarkable awakening. That piety, following Edwards’ narrative brushstrokes intuitively, may have been more hidden to the world and to the worldly but was not less glorious, despite coexisting with remaining corruption in the flesh. The tabernacle image had the suggestive power to point both to flesh, corruption, weakness and the like, as well as to “Christ’s righteousness” (9: 136). The last synonym of building that will be taken notice of, i.e., synagogue, adds to this evocative function of the tabernacle in that it suggests a ‘scattered’ condition about the true church, there being not just one but many synagogues in New Testament times.¹⁸

Although much has been said, and so it must, regarding the optimistic outlook Edwards had on the church’s glorious millennial future, it cannot be denied that, on the whole, the Northampton pastor conceived of preaching as having the essential function of separating between true and false Christians, which means the presence of the latter

¹⁸ It is interesting how similar my findings are with respect to Jonathan Edwards’ rhetoric when articulating and trying to inculcate piety in this sermon series to the conclusions of Serene Jones regarding Calvin’s ‘rhetoric of piety’ in his *magnum opus*, the *Institutes*, insofar as their strategies rest on a particular use of biblical parallelism, Christological interpretation and identification of the people with Christ himself: “Calvin [...] form[s] a narrative weave that makes the struggle of the French evangelical church almost indistinguishable from the life of faithful struggle carried on by the prophets and apostles in biblical times [...] Furthermore, [he] uses christological images to describe the church’s plight [...] Thus, in addition to their social marginality, this community is identified as a community of the truly faithful” (*Calvin and the Rhetoric of Piety*, 67).

within and around the audience was assumed by the minister to a greater or lesser extent. Based on this view, in fact, he shaped his revivalistic pulpit oratory and rhetorical strategies (Yarbrough & Adams, *passim*). Therefore, it was only consistent that he should employ a discursive mode aimed at depicting an elect ‘remnant’ which would remind the regenerate congregants that they were still in the world and, therefore, in a spiritually hostile setting. These sorts of reminders and pointers are not very prominent in the Redemption Discourse but in sermon eleven Edwards makes a rather telling parallelism between colonial New England churches and the historical Jewish community between Babylonian captivity and Christ’s coming. There is, as opposed to other cases analyzed previously, no subtlety about this parallelism:

But after the captivity the constant reading of the law was set up in every synagogue throughout the land. First, they began with reading the law, and then they proceeded to establish the constant reading the other books of the Old Testament. And lessons were read out of the Old Testament, as made up of both, in *many synagogues which were set up* in every city and everywhere, wherever the Jews built, *as our meeting houses are*; thus we find it was in Christ's and the apostles' times (9: 268; my italics)

The building of these synagogues for communal spiritual gatherings “was one great means of their being preserved from idolatry” (268). In the context of the church having been punished by God through exile, it is quite logical that Edwards should use the language of the church in the wilderness. In fact, it is in this context, namely, from sermons four to nineteen, that the church is often pictured as “preserved”,¹⁹ denoting its precariousness, and where Edwards gradually drops the imagery of the ‘temple’ or glorious building. Instead he inserts this mention of synagogues, the construction of

¹⁹ For example, 9: 157, 165, 195, 268, 286.

which is not explained or situated in the Bible, and affirms that there are common elements between Northampton's church and these Jewish architectural structures. The paragraph's main thrust is the role of the scriptures in God's preservation of his church. Likewise, the identification of synagogues and meetinghouses shows that Edwards envisions colonial churches in general as being freer from "idolatry" than others. But there is the ambiguity of telling Northamptonites, on the one hand, that they live in a context that is to some extraordinary extent conformed to the will of God, having a privileged exposure to right doctrine (represented by "the constant reading of [...] the Old Testament"), while, on the other, the wider framework of this reference to the post-captivity Jewish community points to a church very much humbled by circumstances and lacking in divine inspiration and presence (9: 270).

The church depicted in this middle section of the Redemption Discourse, where Edwards completely suspends the use of the construction metaphor (sermons nine to nineteen, with one exception [9: 285]) and alludes indirectly to 'building' by means of references to the tabernacle and synagogues (9: 224-225, 268), is a community who have the assurance of Christ's righteousness in the symbol of the red skins that covered the Exodus tent. However, they are simultaneously a people that must continually be reminded of their still corrupt and scattered, diasporic condition. In such discursive mode, what was encouraged in the audience for several weeks²⁰ by their pastor was to not be on the lookout for new remarkable manifestations of God but, rather, to grapple with the

²⁰ Ten sermons altogether, Edwards probably stopped employing the imagery of the 'glorious building' for about two months. This sort of estimation cannot be ascertained because the dates of delivery for every sermon are not in the manuscripts. Likewise, as Wilson's editorial notes helpfully explain, there were occasions on which, it seems, two of these sermons were preached on the same day.

issues of true sainthood (namely, whether they were indeed true converts) and the need to grow spiritually if indeed they were born again. It was argued in the previous chapter that in some sermons preached not too long before the 1739 series, Edwards was quite confident that a majority of his listeners had been truly regenerated (p. 84 above). It therefore makes sense that he should be deploying the oratorical strategies unpacked so far. It was a time for sober collective reflection and for the laying of spiritual foundations that would allow growth in individual and communal piety; and there was good reason to expect a fruitful outcome. The source and materials for this task were to be the sacred scriptures, which had kept the Jewish people from idolatry during the intertestamental period as they regularly read them in their scattered synagogues and awaited the coming Messiah.

As recent scholarly research has shown, it is hard to measure the extent to which the Bible was foundational to Edwards' thought and preaching and how even his philosophical and scientific knowledge was permeated and filtered by the holy scriptures. Due to the fact that this predominant role of the Bible in Edwardsean literature and thought has often been overlooked, a "distorted" and "unbalanced" portrait of the last Puritan theologian has been handed down until relatively recent times. By focusing on some peripheral aspects of his philosophical thought, Edwards has been construed as an eclectic scholar rather than a "biblicist" devoted to the study of the holy scriptures (Barshinger, 4-6). The following passage from the Redemption Discourse is a good reminder and illustration of how Scripture stood at the center of Edwards' theology and how it bore on his redemptive-historical thought. Roughly half way through the sermon series, the preacher envelopes an apology of biblical truth and usefulness (as the key to

understand the goal of human history) with building imagery precisely to establish the Bible as foundational to the knowledge and spiritual experience of believers.

Edwards had indirectly presented Scripture to his listeners as instrumental for the preservation of the true church from doctrinal error and as preparatory for Christ's coming by establishing a parallel between synagogues and colonial meetinghouses. Only two sermons later, in the thirteenth of the series, he evinces his unwavering commitment to defend the scriptures' historical truth when he directly commends the Old Testament as basic to the Christian faith. In this apologetic context we find a reference to "that building of God that has been the subject of our discourse from this text [i.e., Isaiah 51:8]" (9: 285). Edwards argues:

If it had not been for the history of the Old Testament, how woefully should *we* have been left in the dark about many things that the church of God needs to know. How should we have been ignorant of God's dealings towards mankind, and towards his church, from the beginning, and have been wholly in the dark about the creation of the world, the fall of man, the first rise and continued progress of the dispensations of grace towards fallen mankind, and should have known nothing how God at first *set up a church in the world*, and how it was preserved, and after what manner he governed it from the beginning, how the light of the gospel first began to dawn in the world, how it increased, and how things were preparing for the coming of Christ. If we are Christians, *we belong to that building of God* that has been the subject of our discourse from this text; but if it had not been for the history of the Old Testament, we should never have known what was the first occasion of God's going about this building, and how the *foundation of it was laid at first*, and how it has gone on from the beginning (285; my italics)

There is a thin line, for the preacher, between the church being "wholly in the dark" and her being "set up" on a firm "foundation". It is contingent on the truth of Scripture being

received and its content being searched conscientiously. In his endeavor to prove how the Bible informs all other forms of knowledge, Edwards seems to lack time and space as he enumerates the different aspects of historical-theological knowledge with a cluster of subordinate clauses introduced by “how” or by the conjunction “and”. In this way, the implicit exhortation to go deeper in the knowledge of the sacred writings is graphically (for the reader of the sermon) and audibly (for Edwards’ contemporary audience) presented as triggering numberless subsequent conclusions and discoveries. Moreover, the “continued progress” of grace cannot be traced unless it be contemplated in the very account of “history” given in the Bible. The purpose and end of reflecting on God’s structured operations in the order of time is clearly that the addressees of the oration identify themselves as “belong[ing] to that building” erected throughout history. Edwards’ exposition of the holy scriptures’ narrative does not simply lay them down as the basis for his discourse and doctrine, but the narrative itself becomes the very material with which he appeals to his audience. This appeal, which in turn ought to lead listeners to action and forward striving as well as to comfort or assurance, functions on the principle that they must see their own story as an echo or new fulfillment of universal providential history and understand the “dispensations of grace” in their souls according to the patterns of God’s work of redemption as mirrored in the biblical narrative.

The passage quoted above is the only one between sermons ten and twenty where building imagery is employed its ‘temple mode’. Therefore, it would seem that these sermons, on the whole, have the function of depicting the church in its diasporic and imperfect state. This is achieved mainly by the scattered references to the tabernacle and synagogues and by suspending the use of the ‘glorious temple’ metaphor (except for the

apologetic passage of the thirteenth sermon) during numerous weeks of pulpit delivery (see n. 20 above). The instrumentality of the Old Testament in helping Christians to contemplate “the building of God” is broached by Edwards in the context of a defense of the importance of biblical historical testimony (9: 285). Therefore, this isolated text (insofar as it is the only one evocative of the temple) functions as a reminder that, notwithstanding the apparently pitiful state of religion and the Church, the sacred records of history prove that God’s continual faithfulness and past works are a solid foundation to stand on. Later on in the series, after explicit building imagery has been resumed to represent God’s larger work of redemption (e.g. 380-381, or 398), Edwards still uses biblical allusion and identification of the Old Testament Church with his congregation as a means to exhort them to active involvement in God’s work. When he employs images from building to frame the whole divine scheme, the result may be that human participation in the historical process is rendered “a by-product of the divine agency” (Zakai, *History*, 233). Nevertheless, as this set of ‘temple’ images draws heavily on biblical concepts and exemplary events, Edwards is able to argue, or at least suggest, through his own use of the biblical narrative that Christians may actively take part in building God’s spiritual temple.

The way Edwards contrives an allusion to the post-captivity reconstruction of the temple in Jerusalem so as to prompt his listeners to action is by repeatedly pointing to the “gradual” manner in which the next stage of redemptive history will be introduced. This implicitly suggests a form of divine operation that involves the use of ‘secondary means’. Furthermore, the biblical episode he chooses to allude to includes the instrumental intervention of a heathen agent (king Cyrus of Persia; see Ezra 1:1-2) that was prompted

by the Spirit to take part in God's work and favor His people, so that *divine*, and yet somewhat *indirect*, operations are brought to the mind of Northamptonites (since Cyrus of Persia would be assumed to be unconverted and simply an instrument in God's hands). The context of the passage is the present time, and Edwards is exploring the issue of the millennium and how "this glorious work of God" will be brought about:

It is now a very dark time with respect to the interests of religion, and such a time as this prophesied of in this place wherein there is but a little faith and a great prevailing of infidelity on the earth. There is now a remarkable fulfillment of that in the 2 Pet. 3:3 [...] Whether the times shall be any darker still, or how much darker before the beginning of this glorious work of God, we can't tell.

2. There is not reason from God's Word to think any other than that this great work of God will be gradually wrought, though very swiftly, yet gradually. As the children of Israel were gradually brought out of the Babylonish captivity, first one company and then another, and *gradually rebuilt their city and temple*, and as the heathen Roman empire was destroyed by a *gradual though a very swift prevailing of the gospel*. (9: 458; my italics)

Interestingly, Edwards had already established, when explaining how Christ's kingdom had advanced from His first coming to the present time, that the "dismal night of darkness" for the Church had already ended and that Antichrist (typologically prefigured by Babylon and historically manifested in Rome) "was swiftly and suddenly brought down and fell half-way" at the time of the Protestant Reformation (9: 421, 422). However, he paints a bleak, jeremiad-like, picture of the present as though things could hardly be worse for Christians in order to make his audience aware of the need for godly action and for the support of the cause of the gospel in the present generation. In this

sense, the example of how the gospel prospered throughout the Roman Empire complements the allusion to the building of the second temple in Jerusalem. The latter would mainly have a spiritual, symbolic and exemplary value while the extra-biblical example of Christianity as it spread throughout the Roman Empire serves Edwards to point to a literal fulfillment of prophecy in Church history. In addition, he is claiming that the state of the world in the 18th century also fulfills biblical prophecy from one of the latest texts of canonical Scripture (2 Peter), thus imbuing his own historical narrative and current events with a sense of climax.²¹ Again, Edwards holds a high view of the Bible as the all-encompassing source of revelation about the historical past, present and future, and at the same time he sees the biblical message (“the gospel”) as divine agency’s primary means to spread godliness and piety in the world. This advance of the kingdom of God is best represented for the Northampton preacher by alluding to the gradual rebuilding of the temple.

Thus, it is clear that Northamptonites were being guided to identify certain patterns of divine agency, in both exemplary and metaphorical/typological instances from biblical and historical narratives (including Edwards’ own one), in order to lead them to spiritual edification. The pervasive use of building imagery and allusion in the pastor’s more or less subtle exhortations to his congregation links directly to the Edwardsean interpretation and unpacking of the biblical narrative. He could find no better metaphors

²¹ For prophecies concerning the spread of grace or the gospel to all nations, see Genesis 12:3 or Matthew 28:19-20. This example confirms Wilson’s argument that Jonathan Edwards’ “typology broadened to the point that paradigmatic events outside Scripture had a figural relationship to the rest of history. Again, this moved him decisively beyond a conservative typological hermeneutic.” (9: 49). See also Janice Knight, 532, and Lowance 196, 197.

to encompass the whole oratorical endeavor whereby he primarily sought to present progressive divine agency in its manifold operations. This use of ‘sacred metaphor’ allowed the preacher to lay out the ‘steps’ and ‘degrees of height’ that God’s work went through in time and to define the church’s and the individual believer’s spiritual journey in terms of the kingdom’s progress in history. The fact that Edwards viewed this set of images as the optimal one becomes apparent when in the last sermon of the Redemption Discourse he resorts to it twice, and returns particularly to the language, evocative of the temple, of both a complex and “glorious building” (9: 519 and 524-525 respectively).

3. 2. *Modern Science and Mechanics in Nature*

Another recurrent idea that Edwards employs to depict divine operations as progressive and structured in patterns is that which is evoked by the “engine” simile from sermon one (9: 118) and expressed by the “wheels” of providence or the “machine” throughout the rest of the series. The notion that there is an operating mechanism behind events and creation at large serves the preacher to present, once again, divine agency in its progressive mode. While it is accurate to say that Edwards repudiated the Enlightenment conception of nature as driven by mere mechanical laws (which, in turn, undermined the vision of divine activity as immanent in creation [Zakai, *Nature*, 259]), it is no less true that in the Redemption Discourse we find a certain degree of “mechanization of God’s redemptive activity”. Moreover, the “mechanization of God’s providence reached its highest level” in this sermon series (Zakai, *History*, 214, 241-242). The significance of the notion of divine activity being structured in somewhat mechanical, predictable patterns, like the laws that can be perceived to operate in the

natural realm, lies in the fact that Edwards was making his own picture of history match current ideas about history as cyclical while ultimately rejecting the contemporary philosophical, often Deistic, conclusions. For the Northampton theologian, the “dimension of progress inherent in time” introduced by Enlightenment philosophers into historical discourse could be accepted without necessarily detaching “divine agency from temporal events” (201-202, 229). In bringing together the biblical metaphor of the ‘wheel’ (from the vision of Ezekiel) and elements evocative of modern science and technology (the ‘machine’), the preacher proved to be philosophically ambitious and a shrewd wielder of contemporary notions related to natural science in order to uphold his own view of the coherence and inspiration of the sacred scriptures as well as the idea that divine agency pervaded the historical process.

3. 2. a. Cyclical History and Mechanical Providence.

Before explaining how a ‘mechanical providence’, if teleological at the same time,²² is presented in the Redemption Discourse through the use of imagery from nature, it is worth analyzing some passages where Edwards, in keeping with the empiricist ideal of a method based on observation,²³ contrives explanations for historical chains of events which convey a sense that the same were brought about by secondary means and make up predictable, observable patterns. As opposed to nature, the realm of human history was

²² For an explanation of how the “wheels” of Ezekiel 1 represented for Edwards both a linear/teleological and cyclical historical process, and how this was philosophically coherent with the Edwardsean ontology of God, see Lee, *Theology*, 224, 225.

²³ Schweitzer succinctly explains how Edwards consciously furthered the arguments in his few scientific writings by trying to appear as if he proceeded “according to the canons of secular Enlightenment rationality” (41-43).

not filled with inanimate elements or beings that interacted with each other by instinct and without a sense of ultimate purpose. As free and moral agents and entities, humans, governments, empires, etc. were driven by desire, changed by decisions, struggles or conspiracies, and swayed by man-driven forces; all of these seemed to be determined by a number of contingent, arbitrary and unpredictable factors. Although Edwards himself endorsed a view of human action as free to some degree (e.g. *Freedom of the Will*, 1754), the ultimate ends and purposes of history being divinely appointed, he renders human activity as moral but, at the same time, strictly fulfilling God's plans. Far from conveying a fatalistic idea of history, by identifying recurrent patterns in the spiritual history of Israel, the Church or in the judgments upon the world, the historical process is imbued with a purpose that these cycles fulfill and continuously confirm. Precisely because it is impossible that any man or human initiative²⁴ should infallibly implement such a scheme throughout the centuries without being thwarted by numerous setbacks or uncontrollable forces (like one empire overthrowing another), these observable patterns in history, especially 'sacred history', which escape human agency, prove that there is a superior will at work behind each cycle and not just a pointless or chaotic repetition of events.

What I am arguing is by no means that miracles or supernatural occurrences are not focused on by Edwards in these sermons because he had to address people in an age of growing skepticism and scientific knowledge. Rather, he evinces an awareness of Enlightenment scientific reasoning by the way he articulates his historical narrative as following cyclical patterns, and this entails a particular use of imagery as well as a

²⁴ Indeed, based on the Calvinistic conception of the human condition as utterly corrupt, the thought of history being ultimately driven by humans themselves or of humanity "progressing" according to their capacity for self-improvement would have been truly fatalistic.

construal of history in rationalistic terms. A good example is how Edwards goes out of his way in sermon fourteen to frame the conception of Christ by stressing the logicalness of everything surrounding the supernatural event. Though divine intervention could hardly be more immediate and manifest than in the Incarnation, the whole event is explained as happening at “the most proper time on every account” (9: 297). In the sermon preceding the passage under consideration, Edwards had significantly alluded to the prophetic image of the ‘wheel’ and established how irrational it was to deny that Christ’s coming into the world was a divinely wrought event:

If we seriously consider the course of things from the beginning, and observe the motions of all the great wheels of providence from one age to another, we shall discern that they all tend hither. They are all as so many lines that, if they could be observed and accurately followed, it will be found that they, every one, centers here. It is so plain in very many things that it would argue stupidity to deny it. This therefore is undeniable, that this person is a divine person that was sent from God [...] It cannot be any vain imagination, but a plain and evident truth: that person that was born at Bethlehem [...] must be the great messiah or anointed of God [...] This shows the unreasonableness of deists that deny revealed religion, and the Jews that deny that this Jesus is the messiah foretold and promised to their fathers. (9: 281, 282)

In sermon fourteen, Edwards’ manuscript shows he intended to (and we may assume he did) recapitulate by making some preliminary remarks, including a going over the “periods” he had expounded so far (9: 294, n. 2). Thus, providential preparation for the first coming of Christ is presented to the audience as structured and following a set pattern that gravitates towards Christ as the goal and center of history. To emphasize the necessity of the Incarnation and what preceded it according to the biblical account, he

introduces the different heads thus: “It was necessary not only that Christ should take upon him a created nature...”, “It was needful...”, “It was needful...” (9: 296). Regarding the “incarnation itself”, he argues:

His conception, which was in the womb of one of the race of mankind, whereby he became truly the son of man, as he was often called. He was one of the posterity of Adam, and a child of Abraham, and a son of David, according to God's promise. But his conception was not in the way of ordinary generation, but by the power of the Holy Ghost. Christ was formed in the womb of the virgin, of the substance of her body, by the power of the Spirit of God. So that he was the immediate son of the woman, but not the immediate son of any male whatsoever; and so was the seed of the woman, and the son of a virgin, one that had never known man.

Edwards is weaving an argument full of biblical references but going beyond them also with negative arguments such as “not the immediate son of any male”, which is not (based on any literal reading of Scripture) a requirement of the Messiah. Also, he is not just concerned with proving that what the prophets announced really happened, but mostly with the fact that it happened in the most reasonable way possible. He goes on:

His birth. Though the conception of Christ was supernatural, yet after he was conceived, and so the incarnation of Christ began, *his human nature was gradually perfected* in the womb of the virgin *in a way of natural progress*, and so his birth was *in the way of nature*. But his conception being supernatural, by the power of the Holy Ghost, he was both conceived and born without sin.

The second thing I would observe concerning the incarnation of Christ is the fullness of the time in which it was accomplished; it was after things had been preparing for it from the very first fall of mankind, and when all things were ready. It came to pass at a time

which, in the eyes of infinite wisdom, was the most fit and proper season (9: 297; my italics)

In the latter paragraph, the biblical expositor is doing little more than expounding the Pauline expression “the fullness of time”. But the highlighted phrases in the former show Edwards’ intent with regard to how to insert the direct divine intervention within a narrative that seeks to rationally connect events in a teleological continuum. There is an apologetic undertaking to present events as happening ‘necessarily’ (9: 296) and logically.

Again, after having positively laid forward and expounded the events surrounding the Incarnation, Edwards pinpoints his argument by piling up negative arguments indirectly drawn from the Bible: “Any time before the flood *would not have been* so fit a time”. He explains why and goes on from the Flood to the next period of biblical history:

It would not have been so fit a time for Christ to come after the flood before Moses’ time, for till then mankind *was not* so universally apostatized from the true God. *They were not* fallen universally into heathenish darkness, and so the need of Christ, the light of the world *was not* so evident. And then the woeful consequence of the fall with respect to man's mortality *was not* so fully manifest till then, for man's life *was not* so shortened as to be reduced to the present standard till about Moses’ time.

It was most fit that the time of the messiah's coming *should not be till many ages after Moses’ time*, till all other nations but the children of Israel had lain long in heathenish darkness, that the remedilessness of their disease might by long experience be seen, and so the absolute necessity of the heavenly physician before he come.

Another reason—*why not* soon after the flood—was that the earth might be full of people, that Christ might have the more extensive kingdom [...] *Not* before the Babylonish captivity; Satan’s kingdom [*had*] *not come* to the height: [the] heathen world

or Satan's kingdom. God saw meet that it should be in the time of one of the four great monarchies.—*Not* in the time of the Babylonish monarchy; it was God's will that several should follow one another (9: 298; my italics)

The point is driven home through the comprehensive enumeration of negative arguments explaining why no other time would have been as appropriate (or logical) for Christ's First Coming. But Edwards is also being very didactic in this passage by using the negative argumentation as a pretext to review all the periods he had narrated during the last few months of pulpit delivery. Considering that he had done as much at the beginning of this very sermon (9: 294, n. 2), it seems he wants to lay forward before his hearers over and over again what the *order* of providential dispensations was according to the Scriptures. The "great wheels of providence" invoked during the previous sermon (282) were now illustrated by reminding Northamptonites that there was a logical progressive aspect to the divine activity, as each dispensation (whether exile, judgment or the irruption of salvation) proved to precede or follow another according to the fittest and wisest design, indeed, in a manner comparable to "the way of nature" (297).

The clearest instance of the wheel simile being used as a means to convey a sense of God's *orderly* activity in time and space is found in the last sermon. As in the case of 'building' imagery, the place where the images of 'wheel' and 'machine' occur is significant. The word "wheel" (or the same in the plural form) is found only occasionally throughout the series; in fact, just four times between sermons two and twenty-nine (9: 128, 282, 492; twice in the latter page). Sermon one introduces it and the greatest cluster happens in the thirtieth and last delivery of the series, with five occurrences in total. Before tracing Edwards' intention in employing the biblical image, it is important that we note how he modifies it by extending its evocative function beyond what the scriptural

context would strictly allow. If he were to follow conservative exegetical parameters, the vision of Ezekiel 1 would “represent God’s chariot, in which God rode, and those wheels are the wheels of his chariot”, as he himself notes elsewhere (15: 384). That the wheels signified divine “providence in this visible world, especially mankind that dwell on earth” (15: 385) was well established and consistently developed in the Redemption Discourse. But from the first occurrence of ‘wheel’ in the series it becomes apparent that Edwards would have it pictured by his hearers as something less rudimentary than a part of an ancient “chariot”:

[A]ll the persons of the Trinity do conspire and all the various dispensations that belong to [the Work of Redemption] are united, as the several wheels in one machine, to answer one end and produce one effect [...] God’s works of providence are the end of God’s works of creation as the building of an house or the forming of an engine or machine for its use (9: 118)

Edwards drops the wheel simile during the rest of the introductory sermon but insists once more: “The various dispensations of God [...] are all to be reckoned but as several parts of one work, as it were several successive motions of one machine to strike out in the conclusion one great event” (119). The effect of mentioning an “engine”, a concept foreign to the ancient world of biblical narratives, and of mentioning ‘wheels’ in reference to a ‘machine’ make it unlikely that Edwards’ audience would primarily envision the scriptural image of Ezekiel. Nevertheless, the use of the term later in the series is consistent with the Edwardsean interpretation of Ezekiel 1,²⁵ which means the

²⁵ The fact that they are always the “wheels of providence” (9: 128, 282, 492) and that Edwards is speaking of the way one stage in history is “preparatory” for the next (9: 128) clearly shows that this is the case. Moreover, his use of words

preacher intended to recast the biblical metaphor so as to encompass modern notions of mechanisms and evoke the most complex technology of his time.

That Edwards was optimistic and positive about contemporary technological developments, and not just the advancement of scientific or philosophical knowledge, is clear from one of his reflections on the millennium. The millennium being, as it were, the penultimate cycle or the last turn of the last ‘wheel of providence’ in Edwards’ scheme and a “happy and glorious season” on earth (9: 488), it is significant that ‘machines’, or incredibly complex “inventions”, should be viewed as agents in making the divine presence more manifest during this period:

’Tis probable that this world shall be more like heaven in the millennium in this respect, that contemplative and spiritual employments, and those things that more directly concern the mind and religion, will be more the saints’ ordinary business than now. There will be so many contrivances and inventions to facilitate and expedite their necessary secular business, that they shall have more time for more noble exercises, and that they will have better contrivances for assisting one another through the whole earth, by a more expedite and easy and safe communication between distant regions than now. The invention of the mariner’s compass is one thing by God discovered to the world for that end; and how exceedingly has that one thing enlarged and facilitated communication! And who can tell but that God will yet make it more perfect; so that there need not be such a tedious voyage in order to hear from the other hemisphere [...] but the whole earth may be as one community, one body in Christ. (13: 369)

like “motions” or “revolutions” (119, 128, or 492) in relation to the wheels’ movement clearly echoes the explanation of Ezekiel 1 in his *Notes on Scripture*, no. 389 (15: 373-379).

God's presence is pictured as being mediated by "contemplative" and "noble exercises", which are only possible after the Spirit's own mediation in converting the soul and immediately imparting the 'new sense' that is so instrumental for such contemplative reflections. But 'worldly', technological advances are expected by Edwards to be, together with scientific knowledge about nature, a "handmaid to religion" (Zakai, *Nature*, passim.). The gradual development of complex machines is allowed and divinely directed to bring about the final cycle of history before consummation. In this sense, the broader notion that the creation of the natural world was in order to the Work of Redemption is specifically discerned in the scientific advances that spring from the activity of humans, who are also part of natural creation. Moreover, mankind's greatest capacities and most complex artifacts become harbingers or announcements of the divine purposes and are potentially a mirror and symbol for God's own way of operating in history. The latter is what concerns our analysis of the last sermon of the Redemption Discourse below, but it must not be overlooked that the Edwardsean system of types and symbols was sophisticated and complex enough to make it possible to draw literal eschatological predictions from "the invention of the telescope" or state doctrinal points based on "the principles of hydrostatics" (Anderson, Lowance & Watters, 11: 15).

The scriptural God, then, acted progressively and would manifest Himself climactically in the end-times, but always according to a logical and orderly dynamics. The clearest example of how the wheel serves to reflect this kind of divine activity comes, as has been suggested, in the thirtieth and closing sermon of the series. Not wanting to undermine the omnipotence and direct involvement of the deity in history, Edwards reminds the congregation that

Providence is like a mighty wheel whose ring or circumference is so high that it is dreadful with the glory of the God of Israel above it, as 'tis represented in Ezekiel's vision [...] The Work of Redemption being, as it were, the sum of God's works of providence, this shows the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ as being above all, and through all, and in all (9: 517, 518)

In this same context, the preacher broaches a term, the ambiguity of which is used much to the advantage of his historical narrative's coherence. In the first mention of 'wheels' (out of four) between sermons one and thirty, Edwards had established that the "many great changes and *revolutions*" in the world before Christ's Incarnation "were all only the *turning* of the wheels of providence" (9: 128; my italics). Here the word "revolutions" still retains much of its primary meaning, denoting commotion or the subverting of established order since it is immediately referring to war, exile and the overthrowing of successive empires. However, the word "turning" is meant to function not just as an explanation of the ultimate cause behind the world's changes (i.e., divine activity) but as a synonym of revolution. In the last allusion to Ezekiel's wheel before the thirtieth sermon, it is again ambiguously connected to "revolutions": "What great revolutions there have been and are to be, [...] how *the great wheels of providence have gone round* for the accomplishment of that kind of success of Christ's purchase that consists in the bestowment of grace on the elect" (9: 492; my italics). The overturning of the world or dramatic events are here hinted at, contributing to a sense of expectation ("great revolutions... are to be"), but the identification of a providential cycle having been fulfilled in the past (through the perfect form "*gone round*") serves as a gloss to the term 'revolution'. In the instance under consideration, in sermon thirty, the disambiguation of the term is explicit: "We have seen the revolution of this wheel, and how that as it was

from God so it has to return to God again. All the events of divine providence are like the links of a chain, the first link is from God and the last is to him” (9: 518).

Divine transcendence and immanence are upheld in the Edwardsean historical discourse through this distinct identification of God as the source and ultimate goal of creation and redemptive history, as well as through the linear, intrinsically teleological, nature of the historical process. The “links” of this “chain” are not static but could be pictured as “wheels within wheels” in keeping with Edwards’ explanations of the prophetic image in his private notebooks (15: 373). The extra-biblical ‘chain’ image as a representation of immanent, providential activity in time and space is also enriched and complemented by the prophet’s wheels not being “turned round by blind chance, but [...] full of eyes round about”. Wherever “the Spirit goes they go. And all God’s works of providence through all ages: they meet in one at last as so many lines meeting in one center”. Cycles, as Edwards presents them in his progressive historical scheme, are so imbued with purpose that they can be synonymous with ‘lines’ and be conducted in a single direction by the Third Person of the Trinity. Historical events beheld “in any other view than that in which it has been set before us [i.e., in the Redemption Discourse], it will all look like confusion, like a number of jumbled events coming to pass without any order or method [...] as though one confused revolution came to pass after another [...] without any regular design or certain end” (9: 519). But “revolution”, which would in principle imply a notable overturning of order or a lack of conformity to a pattern, is turned into the equivalent of one instance of ‘going round’ or the ‘revolving’ of a ‘wheel of providence’ and, therefore, there is an observable symmetry and order in God’s very act of “overturning the world from time to time and to accomplish his designs” (9: 524).

The involvement of the Spirit in accomplishing these eternal “designs” through all means, human and spiritual, make the transcendent deity immanent and available to the discerning observer. Granted, Edwards had only regenerate congregants in mind when he spoke of perceiving the things of religion or, in this case, the true meaning of an apparently cyclical history. But his insistence that there is a method, based on rightly observing the evidence, that will result in the right interpretation and in understanding the forces behind regular patterns or cycles evinces the appeal he found in modern modes of empirical thought.

The repeated use of adjectival/adverbial language to denote ‘ordered’ or ‘regular’ patterns and synonymous ideas in this second half of the sermon matches the cluster of occurrences of the term ‘wheel’, and they coordinately convey the sense that the Christian and biblical God acts in time and space following a set rule or law: “Hence we may observe what a *consistent* thing divine providence is”; “the events of providence [appear as] an *orderly series* of events”; “’tis all one work, one *regular scheme* [...] all *united*, just as the several parts of one building”; “There is doubtless some *design* that God is pursuing, and some *scheme* that he is carrying on in the various changes and revolutions...”; “Now there is nothing else that informs us what this *scheme and design* of God in his works is but only the holy Scriptures”; “how they were *ordered* from the beginning”; “*regular scheme* or drift in those revolutions which God *orders*”; “The Scriptures set [...] an *orderly* history, and nothing else sets before us how he will *govern* it to the end by an *orderly* prophecy of future events” (9: 519-521). Though total dependence on the Bible is fostered by Edwards at the close of the sermon series, he is no

less keen to uphold the reasonableness and logical consistency of the historical account and the deity he has presented.

The same rationalistic insistence that was found in the passage from sermon fourteen analyzed above (pp. 177-181 above) is noticeable in the closing lines of the thirtieth sermon: “Reason shows that ’tis very fit and requisite that the intelligent and rational beings of the world should know something of God’s scheme and design in his works [...] [R]eason teaches that God has given his rational creatures reason and a capacity of *seeing* God in his works” (9: 521; my italics). Contrary to what might be expected, in this context of an apology of Scriptural truth and the reasonableness of God in His manner of intervention in history, Edwards is far from drawing abstract metaphysical conclusions or exalting divine sovereignty to the point of rendering human action futile. The whole point of the argument is that

rational creatures [...] may *see* God’s glory in [his works] and give him glory for them.

But how can they *see* God’s glory in his works if they don’t know what God’s design in them is, and what he aims at by what he is doing in the world. And further it is fit that mankind should be informed something of God’s design in the government of the world because he is made *capable of actively falling in with that design [...] and acting* herein as his friends and subjects. (521, 522; my italics)

‘Seeing’, in keeping with the empiricist ideal, becomes instrumental in attaining a due knowledge of salvation history, but there is a reciprocal relation between the two. One must also “know what God’s design” in his works is in order to see His glory in and through the historiographical evidence, and the subsequent growth in spiritual knowledge and sight results in fruitfully aligning oneself with the divine will and becoming part of his unfolding purposes.

In the next few paragraphs, before making a last use of the ‘wheel’ image, Edwards restates the progressive character of divine operations by means of phrases that denote the kind of activity that is prolonged in time and consists of the repetition of patterns. God conquers the “mighty enemies of his church *one age after another*”; He brings Satan “under foot *time after time*” and, on an exclamatory final note, “how great is the majesty of God’s appearing in overturning the world *from time to time* and to accomplish his designs and at last in causing the earth and the heavens to flee away for the advancement of the glory of his kingdom” (9: 523, 524; my italics). Between these three quotations (in barely two pages) the word “glory”, or adjectives and adverbs derived from it, appear a dozen times. This gradual “advancement” of the kingdom and of grace in the world throughout many generations is envisioned by Edwards as exceedingly glorious. Just as the contemplation of ‘ruins’ or the ‘humility’ of Christ were to function, by contrast, as pointers to the erecting of a ‘glorious temple’ and the ‘glory’ of its divine dweller,²⁶ here the seeming repetitiveness and slow motion of providential cycles is to be viewed as a majestic and powerful example of divine intervention in history. An appearance of chaos and darkness (in ‘revolutions’, ‘overturnings’ of worldly order, etc.) was not incompatible with an immanent deity who used those very events to establish an eternal and stable kingdom. Moreover, the cyclical aspect of providence implies an incessant and purposeful involvement of God with his creation and within the historical process. The idea of God as simultaneously “actual”, or transcendent, and “self-

²⁶ See pp. 155 and 148 above respectively for an explanation of these two contrasts.

enlarging” (Lee, *Theology*, 221)²⁷ necessitates both constant change and essential perfection to be manifested in time and space:

And how wonderful is the wisdom [of God] in bringing all such *manifold and various changes and overturnings* in the world to such a glorious period at last [i.e., heavenly glory, not the millennium]; and so directing all the *various* wheels of providence by his skillful hand, that every one of them shall conspire, as the manifold wheels of a most curious machine, at last to strike out such *an excellent issue, such a manifestation of his glory*. (9: 525; my italics)

The effect of finally associating Ezekiel’s “wheels of providence” with the “machine” simile is to definitely depart from the idea of a rudimentary ancient chariot and depict divine agency as extremely complex in its operations. Likewise, it assumes a *mechanical dynamics* in God’s manner of acting throughout history so that, as Wilson suggests, the kind of “machinery” that is evoked is not unlike a “clock” (9: 66). An unlikely potential (and certainly one unforeseen by the New England pastor) may have underlain this Edwardsean mode of historical discourse and use of imagery. Mason Lowance inferred from his reading of some of Edwards’ private notebooks that he envisioned a future within human history where “the fusion of technology and religion

²⁷ Philosopher and theologian Sang Hyun Lee argues that the essence of God, according to Edwards, is so manifestly mirrored by history that the dynamics perceived in the redemptive process within time and space reflect a divine reality which continues to be displayed after final judgment and the destruction of the visible world. History might appropriately be called the stage for divine “self-repetition” and “self enlargement” as much as heaven, outside historical time, will be the place for a never-ending display of God’s glory (*Theology*, 214-221). Edwards’ sermon “Heaven is a World of Love”, preached approximately one year before the Redemption Discourse, proves that he envisioned divine knowledge and love as continuing to be revealed after the resurrection and never coming to full completion (8: 373-386).

[...] would provide a transition from a spiritual to a natural millennium” (Lowance, 203). Despite Edwards’ proven optimism that natural science and technology would become an advantage and a ‘handmaid to religion’, it seems unwarranted to infer that the Spirit’s agency and other supernatural occurrences were to be, in the theologian’s scheme of future things, replaced by secondary means of divine intervention, like the God-appointed advance of human knowledge and inventions. More so in view of the otherworldly goal of creation and history that is established in passages like the one quoted above, or the crucial role of revival in Edwards’ articulation of universal history that we will see in chapter 4. Nevertheless, if all of Edwardsean typology and use of imagery is taken into account, it is understandable that Lowance should see in it “an organic life” with the potential to inspire movements like Transcendentalism, where nature, including human consciousness or inner life, did replace (or at least fully reveal) the divine (203, 204; cf. Miller, *Errand*, 184, 185). Jonathan Edwards’ symbolic understanding of nature and the metaphorical language derived from it led to an ‘organic fusion’, as it were, of the natural world and providential history. Not simply because, as we have seen, he himself averred that creation existed primarily as a means for divine manifestation through the Work of Redemption (9: 118), but because his depiction of divine agency in terms of the orderly activity of nature closely resembled the various aspects of God’s outworking in human history described above. The cyclical and mechanical character, or at least appearance, of natural events and natural laws was a common feature to them and to the cycles of history or man-made machines. Thus, Edwards was able to coordinately employ imagery from the realm of nature and figures suggestive of modern technology to uphold the veracity of Scripture and the reasonableness of God’s works. Again, he indirectly engaged current

ideas derived from the predominant mode of empirical thought by incorporating and implicitly accepting some corollaries of modern science²⁸ (like the idea that natural laws and forces operated according to some kind of ‘mechanics’) while rejecting most of its premises and conclusions.

3. 2. b. Nature, Natural Cycles and the Goal of the Universe.

Edwards’ private reflections are, once again, a good aid to decipher what his typological and symbolic conception of nature really was. His already quoted *Notes on Scripture* are of particular interest, as I contend with some recent scholars that the Bible functioned for Edwards as an all-encompassing source of revelation, informing all other knowledge in a cogent way. His high view of reason and human ability to attain certainty of some truths outside special, biblical revelation did not undermine the idea that humankind desperately needed the latter. The epistemological pattern he conceived was one of “reasoning after revelation”. Certainty about some realities was essentially intuitive for Edwards (for example, impressions derived from observing nature directly could lead to logical and unquestionable propositions that confirmed but did not immediately depend on Scripture) and logic could help attain knowledge of objective truth from these premises despite the fallenness of human minds. The same process was followed, then, when a regenerate mind intuitively understood the great truths of religion revealed in the Bible. Some basic tenets of the Christian faith could be articulated through the use of reason, mediated by the “sense of the heart” which the Spirit imparted directly to those who were saved and which enabled them to intuitively know the truths

²⁸ Cf. n. 23 above.

of the gospel. By closely observing nature, any man could, according to Edwards, understand that there was a God, that he had certain attributes, and even that, since righteousness was demanded by this deity, there was such thing as morality. Valuable though this capacity of the human mind was, it could not lead to a saving knowledge of God (Moody, 123-131). However, one cannot but wonder that Edwards went to such great lengths to construe providential operations (and, therefore, implicitly divine *saving* activity within history) in terms of natural laws and insisted so much on the revelation we find in the natural world regarding Christ and the way God redeems man.

In a passage from the pastor's notes on the 'wheels' of Ezekiel 1, we find just how literally he understood the 'organic unity' between natural laws and divine activity in the world:

God's providence over the world consists partly in his governing the natural world according to the course and laws of nature. This consists wholly as it were in the revolution of wheels. So the annual changes that appear in the natural world are as it were by the revolution of a wheel, or the course of the sun through that great circle, the ecliptic, or the ring of that great wheel, the zodiac. And so the monthly changes are by the revolution of another lesser wheel within that greater annual wheel, which, being a lesser wheel, must go round oftener to make the same progress. (15: 373)

Up to this point, he has only said that this is "partly" how providence operates and is a means of divine government over the world. But after comparing providence to the "circulation of the blood in a man's body", the cycles or "motions of the air in the winds" or "the water in the tides", Edwards asserts: "*So it is* in the course of things in God's providence over the intelligent and moral world; *all is* the motion of wheels. They go round and come to the same again; and the whole series of divine providence, from the

beginning to the end, *is nothing else but* the revolution of certain wheels” (373, 374; my italics). There is more than a mere resemblance between what goes on in the natural and spiritual worlds; the inference from Edwards’ categorical assertion is that God governs both worlds in exactly the same way. The sense of mechanical motion conveyed by his way of expressing how divine providence is at work in creation at large is hardly lessened when he writes that “[w]hat comes to pass in the natural world is, in this respect, *typical* of what comes to pass in the moral and intelligent world” (374; my italics). That is, after his insistence on the similarities between natural processes and providential activity “over the intelligent and moral world”, and having presented both as parts of the same divine agency or government, Edwards’ sudden assertion that the natural world is “typical” of spiritual realities cannot simply mean that nature has symbolic value or a didactic function in this respect. Rather, the idea is consistently conveyed that both natural laws and providence in the lives of humankind (spiritual, “moral and intelligent” beings) identically fulfill one and the same divine will, equally displaying God’s orderly being and harmonious character. The apparently mechanical operations of natural laws are matched by the mechanistic dynamics that is identifiable in divine providence; but as long as the close connection between the spiritual and material worlds is maintained, the cyclical character of providential activity will not imply that there is no end or ultimate purpose in it. On the contrary, since God has established that the whole of history be as one cycle that begins and ends in Him, such patterns in the order of time are to be expected and they denote a radically teleological universe.

In Edwards’ thought and writings, typology was instrumental because it provided a “deep unity” to the otherwise fragmented dimension of time or history, and its

“representation of reality” had the potential to include the material world as well as historical events (Wilson, 9: 43, 44). Therefore, as one surveys this sermon series and finds that there are instances of recurrent symbolic or metaphorical language related to nature and natural processes, it must be recognized that for the author this is more than an attempt to enrich his discourse with poetic imagery. His use of this kind of figurative language reflects a vision of reality that cannot conceive of any element in the material world (the sun, earth, oceans, etc.) apart from their ultimate end, namely, to witness to and display the spiritual reality those very elements depend on for their existence. Every natural phenomenon is for Edwards subordinated to, and cooperating in, the Work of Redemption. In this sense, Lowance rightly observes that in Edwardsean typology there is a tendency to minimize “the distance between the figure and the thing figured”, especially with regard to the “correspondences” between nature and religion (196, 197). Natural cycles, therefore, appropriately represent God’s manner of working in history because He has instilled His own image in creation, and the temporal and material continuance of the natural order is inextricable from the deity that upholds it and to Whom it must return at consummation.

An image I shall trace in the next few paragraphs is that of the ‘ocean’. There is a striking symmetry in the way Edwards employs this figure that, in principle, so suitably denotes the vastness and intractableness of a sovereign deity. The ocean simile appears at four different points in the Redemption Discourse: sermon twelve, sixteen, eighteen and the thirtieth and last of the series. The symmetry is not found in any numerical or spatial equidistance between these four occurrences of the term but is understood when one has a

grasp of the Edwardsean scheme of prophetic fulfillment and the relevance of number four within the progressive advance of Christ's kingdom throughout history. It was already explained above that for Edwards there had been a literal and historical fulfillment of the prophecies in the book of Daniel, where the coming of four successive monarchies is announced. Though it was a somewhat debated matter among theologians, for Edwards it was clear that the monarchies were, first, the Babylonian empire (which God used to judge the Jews through exile), then the Persian (see pp. 174ff above), the Greek (with Alexander the Great) and, finally, the Roman Empire which played such a critical role in Christ's life and work. These were all prophetic fulfillments that Edwards saw as corroborated by "profane history" (9: 244) and preparatory for the paradigmatic instance of divine intervention in creation at the Incarnation. Moreover, there seemed to be a symmetry about the unfolding of divine designs *after* Christ's coming because Edwards considered that there were also "four great, successive dispensations of providence" announced in the New Testament that had been (indeed, were being) fulfilled in the Christian era. These were the coming of Christ "destroying the enemies of his kingdom" in 70 A. D.; the era of Christendom inaugurated by Constantine's conversion; the beginning of Antichrist's destruction by the Protestant Reformation and the antitype or ultimate fulfillment at the Second Coming (9: 351-353). These cycles before and after Christ, consisting of four consecutive 'revolutions', were inserted within the all-encompassing motion of the one wheel that began at creation and would end in heaven. Heaven, in fact, was the fourth and last stage of human history, the third and present one having been introduced by "Christ's resurrection" and stretching into the end of the millennium (9: 344).

So the fact that the ocean image, which (as we will see shortly) stands out conspicuously and is fully developed in the last sermon, appears precisely in four places in the contexts of, first, the Old Testament times when the four pagan monarchies swept over the Middle East, then at the revealing of Christ's own person, thirdly in the introduction of humanity to the Christian era and, finally, in the arrival of the "different streams" at the "ocean" of God or heaven (9: 520); all of these correspondences point to a contrived use of the maritime figure on the preacher's part. The dynamics underlying Edwards' use of this kind of imagery, as in the case of the imagery of 'mechanics' or the wheels in a machine, is similar to the imagery of building in several respects. In general, Edwards' representation of "many tributaries that come together to form a river as it makes its way into a great ocean" (Wilson, 9: 66, 67) is highly suggestive in terms of prolonged, gradual divine activity as well as evocative of natural and orderly patterns. In addition, the ocean and the sea in the context of biblical hermeneutics bear a negative potential²⁹ which Edwards does in fact exploit, though not abundantly in the Redemption Discourse. In this respect, it resembles the way in which the 'erecting' of God's 'glorious building' is coordinately depicted in this series with the image of destruction and the setting up the architectural structure over the 'ruins' of God's enemies. It seems appropriate to begin with the subtle and comparatively few references to the ocean as representing an instrument, or as accompanying a process, of destruction.

²⁹ Most famously, one of the satanic beasts of the Apocalypse "rise[s] up out of the sea", and heaven, as represented in the same book, is said to have "no more sea" (Revelation: 13:1 and 21:1 respectively). For an analysis of Edwards' use of negative "water imagery" (with expressions such as "sea of wrath" or "ocean of wrath") in revival sermons, see Sanchez, 17, 23-25.

The first mention of the ocean is significant, as has been suggested, due to the context of prophetic fulfillment:

Thus the world after it had been, as it were, in a continued convulsion for so many hundred years together, like the four winds striving together on the *tempestuous raging ocean*, whence rose those *four great monarchies* being now established in the greatest height of the fourth and last monarchy, and settled in quietness, and now all things are ready for the birth of Christ. (9: 280; my italics)

The context of divine judgment upon His people through the Babylonian exile and upon heathen nations (since one empire, or ‘monarchy’, overthrows the preceding one in these preparatory centuries of “convulsion”) calls for Edwards’ qualifying the ocean as “tempestuous” and “raging”. The ocean, a metaphor for God himself later in the series, is here a scourge on created moral beings and on the land but gradually ushers in a period of peace or “quietness”. Divine wrath appears neither as an end in itself nor as arising from a raging arbitrary feeling. Instead, Edwards’ listeners hear how there is an order and a limited number (i.e., four) to God’s dispensations of judgment and chastisement, which are here introduced by the simile “like the four winds”. For Edwards, as was seen above, these winds and their cyclical activity are “typical” of divine providence and therefore, even if repeated in time and space, always tend to make “progress towards a certain final issue” (15: 374, 375). Having, at the beginning of this same sermon, used the language of “overturnings” and “revolutions” to refer to one of the monarchies God used in a special way to prepare the world for the Messiah (9: 272), the reader is reminded of the ‘wheels’ that revolve around repeatedly, following an established order and tending to harmony despite appearances of chaos or “convulsion”.

This single instance, therefore, of the ocean being directly associated with a negative impact on humanity is meant to be seen as a means to establish the kind of earthly peace that would function as “a fit prelude for the ushering the glorious Prince of Peace into the world” (9: 280). And although in the thirtieth sermon “the infinite ocean into which [providence] empties itself” is introduced after an enumeration of enemies that “are all destroyed” by the time the consummation of history arrives, the main emphasis and the function of the ocean image is positive. God’s kingdom has gradually, but no less triumphantly, advanced to the point of making all earthly enemies and “Satan, the great dragon” himself a thing of the past, in contrast with the prevailing and “everlasting kingdom” to which “there is no end”. Indeed, “God is the infinite ocean” where the “stream of divine providence” tends to and where it ends after its “various windings and turnings”. The “mighty wheel” started its revolution in God at creation and returns to the same point at consummation (9: 517). Only a few brief moments later in this final delivery of the Redemption Discourse, Edwards fully develops the image or type from nature:

God’s providence may not unfitly be compared to a large and long river [...] The different streams of this river are ready to *look like* mere jumble and confusion to us because of the limitedness of *our sight*, whereby we can’t see from one branch to another and *can’t see* the whole at once, *so as to see* how all are united in one [...] Their course seems very crooked, and the different streams seem to run for a while different and contrary ways. And if *we view things* at a distance, there seem to be innumerable obstacles and impediments in the way to hinder their ever uniting and coming to the ocean, as rocks and mountains and the like. But yet if we trace them they all unite at last

and all come to the same issue, disgorging themselves in one into the same great ocean.

Not one of all the streams fail of coming hither at last. (9: 520; my italics)

Interestingly, these lines are inserted in the very place where, as we observed earlier, there is an emphasis on divine reasonableness or God's logical way of acting, and a rationalist dialectic is consistently employed throughout several paragraphs. Rhetorically, the role of imagery from nature, and from 'water' in particular, is to imbue Edwards' otherwise rationalistic discourse with the dynamism that derives from such depiction of providence. There is a "run[ning]" of "streams", all eventually "disgorging [...] into the same great ocean", that graphically evokes an uncontrollable (for man) and awesome divine power. The ability to picture this kind of divine agency through an appreciation of the patterns in the biblical narrative of redemption, as well as in the preacher's own articulation of ancient and recent history, will help the congregation overcome the "limitedness of [their] sight". Edwards continues to suggest that there is objective evidence outside the individual to be reckoned with in an empirical-like manner, but implicitly recognizes the need for a subjective spiritual experience that must accompany the process of truly seeing God's glory in His works (namely, the experience of having all obstacles to spiritual "sight" removed). The prevalent use of sensorial language in relation to the act of 'seeing',³⁰ together with a description of the object of contemplation in terms of natural processes that virtually surpass human perceptive capacity (they may look like "jumble and confusion"), are Edwards' rhetorical materials to make history come alive from the pulpit. God's transcendence becomes, as it were, less absolute when divine agency is recognized as being immanently communicated both

³⁰ See my emphases in the above quotation.

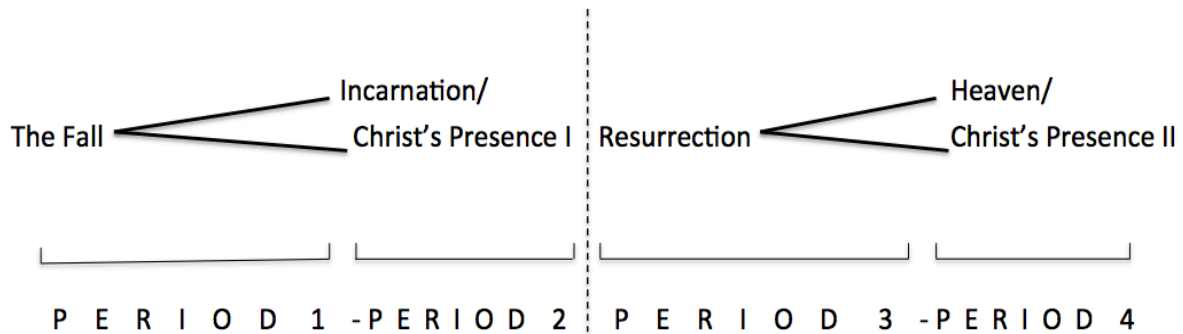
in the historical process and, as the orator's handling of imagery implies, in the realm of natural phenomena.

Returning to the relevance of the number of times the ocean image is used throughout the Redemption Discourse (i.e., four), it is worth noting what the specific references and contexts are in the second and third instances. As if he were aiming to spell out the whole scope of divine activity through the use of the maritime figure, Edwards intimates through these two instances that the coming of the Son of God into the world has supremacy over, and somehow fulfills and anticipates, every other divine intervention in and out of history. His irruption into human space and time is the epitome of the display of God's character, as well as His actions: "[T]he love to men that Christ showed when on earth as much exceeded the love of all other men as the ocean exceeds a small stream". The latter being a specific reference to Jesus in his humiliation on the cross (the "greatest act of love", one "beyond all parallel" [9: 323]), it is complemented by the next occurrence of 'ocean', which points to the transcendence and power of the Son as he becomes the "heir of the world [...] to all eternity" at the resurrection: "So far are the waters of the long channel of divine providence, that has so many branches and so many windings and turnings, emptied out and disgorged into their proper ocean that they have been seeking from the beginning and head of their course, and so are come to their rest" (9: 349). Reading this passage from the middle of the series (sermon eighteen) after our previous analysis of the ocean image in relation to the fourth and heavenly stage of history, it would seem, due to the similarity of the terms and imagery,³¹ that

³¹ The words "windings and turnings", "disgorging", and the verb 'empty' in different tenses are found here as in the last sermon (9: 517, 520).

consummation and the eternal state of things in God are an echo of this event. Human history from the fall to the Incarnation (period one³² of the History of the Work of Redemption) consisting of thousands of years, ‘issue in’ Christ’s coming (the second period consisting of His life and work) which lasted little over thirty years. The pattern followed by Edwards’ narrative seems to imply that the immensity of the Incarnate Son, whose immense love and wondrous character may be compared to the ocean (9: 323), is such that the magnitude and significance of His comparatively short presence among humankind parallels the proportion that “the everlasting heavens and earth” after the Second Coming bear to the centuries or millennia of the Christian era. In fact, these “new heavens and new earth” are said to be “established” at the resurrection (9: 349, 350) so that the idea of an echo, or typological progressive fulfillment, is brought to mind:

Figure 1.



And so, significantly for this study, the sense of immensity and intractableness conveyed *a priori* by the ‘ocean image’ is subtly fitted into a symmetrical and traceable pattern. The course of the streams of providence and their final meeting-point (the Son of God) are admittedly confusing and seem “crooked” and running in “contrary ways” at

³² For an outline where these four periods can be clearly seen to constitute the overarching structure of the Redemption Discourse, see Wilson’s “Appendix A” in 9: 531, 535 and 537.

times (9: 520). However, the occurrence of the ocean simile and other water metaphors precisely to represent, first, judgment for sin (which evokes the Fall) by means of the four monarchies as prophesied by Daniel and, then, immediate divine presence in the world (see “Presence I” in Fig. 1 above) helps Edwards’ listeners view a harmonious pattern that will serve to trace ongoing divine activity in history. The function of the third and fourth instances of the ocean metaphor being to represent the moment of the resurrection (the counterpart of the Fall) and divine presence in heaven itself, Edwards instrumentalizes this image of both providence and the deity to depict two cycles of divine activity in time and space that result in the symmetry of human history. The first half of the diagram corresponds to the scriptural account of history so it is clear that, in seeking to identify another four waves, as it were, in God’s dispensations of grace (always accompanied by judgment and the destruction of His enemies)³³ after Christ’s first coming (see pp. 197, 198 above), Edwards is furthering his apology of the Bible as true and prophetically accurate.

More importantly for the rhetorical aspects under consideration in this section, a fixed and steady, but at the same time dynamic and teleological, mode of divine agency is implied by the Edwardsean understanding of nature’s typological meaning. The apparently ‘mechanical’ ways of nature as observed in fixed natural laws find a parallel in the kind of divine activity that can be observed throughout universal history when it is analyzed through the lens of Scripture and prophecy. Nevertheless, and in keeping with Edwards’ contention that there is a degree of divine immanence in creation, these observable and even (to some extent) predictable patterns do not preclude but support the

³³ See p. 198 above.

idea that God is continually involved and at work in nature and history. Through imagery from the natural realm, then, Jonathan Edwards is himself enacting, if one may take parallelisms a little further, what he understands to be God's instrumentalization of the natural, created order. In his own words from the last sermon of the series, which are once again thoroughly Christocentric: "[The Work of Redemption] shows the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ as being above all, and through all, and in all. That God intended *the world* for his Son's *use* in the affair of redemption is one reason that is given why he created the world by him" (9: 518; my italics). If the Christological purpose of the created world is understood and recognized in the typological and symbolic import of nature, images such as those evoking the natural cycles of water become a means to depict teleological and progressive divine agency in the historical process, rather than mechanical or cyclical movement leading to no particular end.

In discussing Edwardsean "progressive eschatology" in the context of the Great Awakening, Mason Lowance makes an observation that is worth quoting as I close this chapter:

The prophetic language of the Bible [...] was for Edwards instituted at the beginning of time in the building of the natural world in God's image, so that all creation resonates with prophetic images of God's ultimate glory and his redemption of the saints. Similarly, the incarnation was for Edwards more than the arrival of the Word as flesh; the antitype is eternal, not temporal, so that Christ's fulfillment of the prophetic figures, like the figures themselves, operates throughout human time. (202)

Christ's presence in history, though termed "Presence I" and "Presence II" in the above diagram (Fig. 1, p. 204), is not so much a reality that is brought about through separate

events or instances of the appearing of Second Person of the Trinity. There is, rather, a gradual and progressive³⁴ manifestation of the Son within the historical process. Christ's First Coming into the world serves, partly, to confirm the trustworthiness of God and of his revelation (the Scriptures) up to that point and, most importantly, to guarantee and definitely establish His presence in the world forever. Yet, as the diagonal lines of the second half of Figure 1 indicate, this presence is immanently experienced by his people in the Christian era, not unlike in biblical times (for the pattern is repeated), and gradually increases until the ultimate fulfillment at consummation. The "antitype [i.e., Christ] is eternal" and, therefore, eternity and temporality overlapped at the Incarnation. Moreover, they continue to overlap so that the gradual advance of God's kingdom in the world is no more than the continued revelation of an already-accomplished victory during the period ("Period 2" in Fig. 1) on which all of history hinges. The "natural world" being somehow an "image" of the divine character as well as a mirror of providential activity, Edwards uses imagery derived from it in the hope of eliciting an affective response to God's glory as manifested in His works, and to enhance what he otherwise expounded as a cyclical, orderly and (only to some extent) 'mechanical' historical process. But both the 'rational' and the more 'vivid' aspects of providence make up Edwards' portrait of God. Typology, whether taken from the Book of Nature or from biblical episodes, was for the Northampton pastor instrumental in giving an 'organic unity' to his historical discourse, which had to be in sync with how he envisioned creation and the works of providence, namely, as dynamically fused to bring about God's purpose of glorifying His Son. The Edwardsean construal of universal history through this particular mode of typological

³⁴ Graphically represented by the diagonal lines in Fig. 1.

interpretation of reality cogently encompassed the Scriptures, history and nature (Anderson, Lowance & Watters, 11: 3).

As we already saw in chapter 2 of this dissertation, when comparing Cotton Mather's pervasively negative view of nature with Edwards' highly positive one, natural cycles were at one point found in the Redemption Discourse to describe "elect times and seasons" or, in the biblical idiom, "accepted times". More specifically, Edwards there suggests that the sun, with its "brightness" and "heat", very appropriately represents God's saving and illuminating influences during such special seasons (9: 413, n. 8). The sun being for Edwards, as other planets in the Solar System, the epitome of cyclical movement (15: 388), it is interesting that he should deploy the set of images related to it precisely to denote divine activity of a unique kind, not repetitive nor bringing about similar events. His use of the 'light' metaphor in this passage (9: 413) and others throughout the Redemption Discourse is weaved into the rhetoric of revival.

In the following chapter, then, I will continue to trace some use of imagery from nature and, more specifically, the kind of figurative language which signifies the 'sun' or 'light' derived from it. But, despite the fact that this imagery may rightly be associated with, and most naturally denote, a cyclical and gradual advance of God's kingdom, I argue that in this case the idea of *progressive divine agency* is not so much reinforced as that of the *immediate* or direct divine intervention in history. Edwards' rhetoric of revival, with which light imagery is consistently intertwined, is highly suggestive in terms of the unexpected, imminent acts of God, as opposed to the orderly and predictable patterns analyzed previously. What I term 'rhetoric of revival' here is probably a key to this preacher's oratorical effectiveness and to his success during the revival that would

follow this sermon series of 1739. The Great Awakening (1740-1742) was still to come and the sense of expectation was heightened in Northampton and elsewhere by the approach of George Whitefield's first visit to New England (Zakai, *History*, 277). However, though Edwards' prominence as a revivalist throughout the colonies was also to reach its highest point in coming years (most famously through his sermon *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*, preached in Enfield, away from his habitual pulpit and audience), the local context of Northampton's 'little awakening' less than half a decade before the 1739 series is crucial to understand his revivalistic discourse. That recent event gave Edwards a historical reference (though not the only one) that could be vividly evoked from the pulpit and that served as a dramatic backdrop to his preaching activity. In addressing his hearers so as to compel them to grow in a deeper, or to enter a new, spiritual life, Edwards was aided by imagery from the natural realm.³⁵ But, in keeping with the notion that redemption is greater than creation, the rhetorician searched for transcendence not so much in nature itself as in historical instances of revival which he considered the fruit or direct result of the "purchase of redemption". The latter was a theological concept that by definition transcended nature and stood at the center of Jonathan Edwards' narrative of cosmic history (Wilson, 9: 54).

³⁵ In fact, the relevance of the sun, for example, as a "Christological type" is not so much that it provides new information or knowledge about the Son of God but that it "enable[s] us both to see and to *feel* in a new way the old truth of Christ being the source of all goodness" (Schweitzer, 48; italics in original).

4. IMMEDIATE DIVINE AGENCY: THE RHETORIC OF REVIVAL

To speak about the deity's self-communication through creation or *immediate* divine presence in the historical process is something that potentially leads to innumerable complexities and philosophical debates, which are clearly beyond the scope of this dissertation. The consideration of such matters in Edwards' theology and interpretation of reality have led to the publication of numerous works, and some of the subsequent debates continue to attract scholarly attention.¹ As for the relevance of these ideas to the present study, it is the effectiveness of a minister's oratory in a particular ecclesiastical context (that of Northampton's Congregational church in 1739) that is being considered. More particularly, the majority of congregants in this local community believed God had visited them during their recent awakening and they, under their pastor's guidance, were in the process of trying to understand the existential implications of having been the object of divine mercy in such extraordinary circumstances. It is important, therefore, to spell out in this fourth chapter the different ways in which Jonathan Edwards sought to compel his hearers through references to their past and analyze how he conceived of the idea of revival in a broader sense than the mere collective experience of a community in Northampton or even of all New England.

Since I am arguing that for Edwards the very idea of 'revival' was imbued with Christocentricity, it is necessary that the relationship between the Son of God's work while on earth and other events of an essentially spiritual and transcendent nature be understood. In other words, since Edwards construed revivals, or the Spirit's

¹ See, for example, Oliver Crisp's *Jonathan Edwards on God and Creation*, 151-154 or Schweitzer's *God is a Communicative Being*, 115-117, both of which were published in 2012.

‘outpourings’, as the fruit of Christ’s ‘purchase’ on the cross, it must be clearly spelled out how he envisioned all revivals (recent, ancient or future) as bearing the mark of immediate divine agency. This, in turn, would determine certain stylistic aspects of the preacher’s pulpit oratory and, like the concept of progressive divine agency, permeated his historical discourse with the very dynamics of what he considered to be God’s self-display in time and space.

4. 1. *The ‘Hub’ of Historical Progress: The Purchase of Redemption*

This “purchase” consisted of the life and saving work of Christ in general but, more particularly, Edwards asks his audience to “consider [the] *completeness* of the purchase” and how it “was *wholly finished* during the time [of Christ's humiliation]” (9: 342; my italics). Thus, it fits the exact center of human or *earthly* time if history is taken as linear and divided into the first three stages of the Edwardsean scheme (see p. 204 above, Fig. 1). The fourth one being the *heavenly* state of things, eternity or, as it were, timelessness, it would not be unwarranted to see the second period as the center of human history, which spans “from the fall of man to the end of the world” (9: 116). Indeed, the sermons mainly concerned with Jesus’ death (or “humiliation”) stand literally at the center of the thirty-sermon-long series, occupying the fifteenth and sixteenth positions. The noun “purchase” appears often throughout the series but there is a noticeable cluster of the term in these two sermons.² Expressions in sermon fifteen such as “satisfaction for sin”, “his last sufferings”, “the humiliation that he was subject to”, “the obedience he performed in laying down his life”, etc., are clearly a gloss to the event of Christ’s

² Eighteen occurrences in total (see 9: 307, 308, 319, 324 and 331).

crucifixion, making this sermon the center of the historical narrative in more ways than one (9: 306, 307). Thus, the symmetry of Edwards’ Redemption Discourse makes its literary structure a mirror of what he viewed as a crucial aspect of God: harmony.³

Nevertheless, the fourth and final stage of history need not be left out of the equation in order to appreciate a symmetry or harmony about Jonathan Edwards’ sermonic narrative. Following his own way of expounding the biblical idea of providence as a ‘wheel’, which encompasses creation, historical time and begins and ends its ‘revolution’ in God himself, we may turn the linear diagram of Figure 1 (p. 204 above) into a circular one. The following diagrams show two possible ways of representing the same Edwardsean scheme and elements, but sorted into different patterns:

Figure 2.

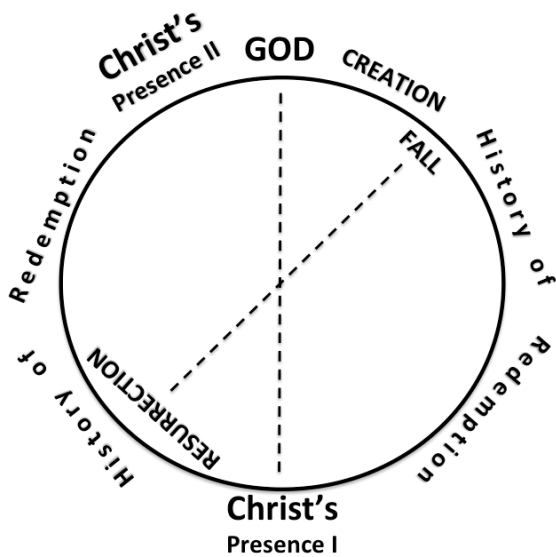
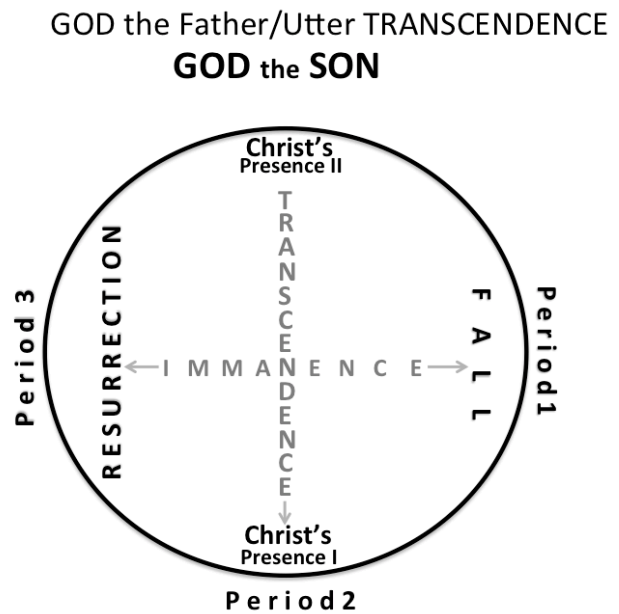


Figure 3.



³ For a thorough explanation of how the concept of ‘harmony’ within the deity informed Edwards’ understanding of reality and of God’s involvement in his creation, see Schweitzer’s recent study *God is a Communicative Being: Divine Communicativeness and Harmony in the Theology of Jonathan Edwards*. The relevance of God’s internal harmony to the Edwardsean conception of history is dealt with in the fifth chapter, entitled “History” (113-141).

In Fig. 2 “creation” and the Second Coming (“Christ’s Presence II”) appear as part of the circle that represents human time. Also, the “RESURRECTION” is close to “Christ’s Presence I”, taking it to represent, in Edwards’ own terms, the inauguration of the “third and last period” or “latter days” with the Spirit’s outpouring at Pentecost (9: 344, 346) but considering it mainly as an event in time, happening right after the “purchase of redemption”. This way of picturing the cycle of the ‘wheel of providence’ does render the whole scheme harmonious and somewhat symmetrical. An event like the Incarnation finds its transcendent source in “GOD” at the top, while the human experience of sin or the “FALL” finds its supernatural counterpart and solution in the resurrection (these connections are indicated by the dotted lines of Fig. 2). However, I consider that Fig. 3 may help visualize better the Christocentricity of Edwards’ concept of history and of the universe itself. Indeed, any divine operation and communication “throughout human time” (Lowance, 202), whether experienced as transcendental or immanently by God’s creation, comes from the same source: “[There were] great effects and glorious successes of Christ’s purchase of redemption before [Pentecost], even from the beginning of the generations of men” (9: 344). All of God’s revelations to or interventions in the world, then, even before the Incarnation, are through the Second Person of the Trinity.

Therefore, it seems appropriate to indicate that the deity, insofar as it is manifested and known in the universe (even beyond the present reality of time and space, as humans experience it),⁴ is not just ‘God’ but “GOD the SON” (Fig. 3). There is an “utter transcendence” that lies beyond the reach of created reality and, in fact, according

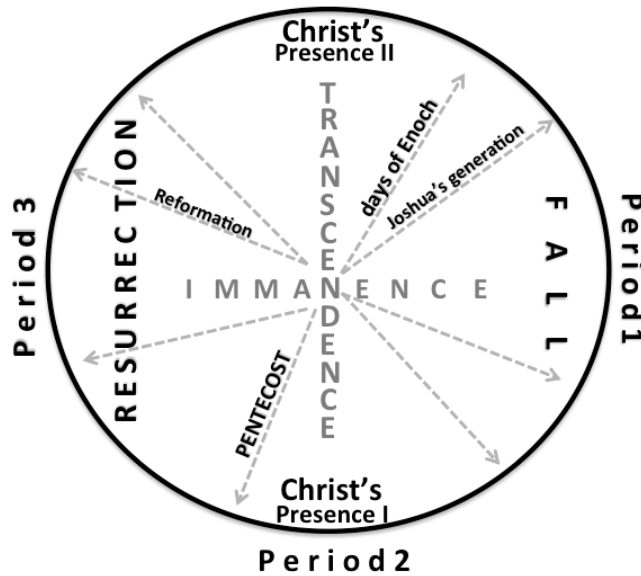
⁴ See p. 192, n. 27 above.

to Edwards, is never to be fully comprehended even by redeemed intelligent creatures in heaven. But God the Son is also essentially transcendent and can only be experienced immanently because of (though not only ‘after’) the event of the crucifixion or “purchase of redemption”. The word “TRANSCENDENCE”, written vertically and crossing “IMMANENCE” perpendicularly to form a cross shape, reminds us how for Edwards these metaphysical categories of reality ultimately have a tangible and historical manifestation around 33 A. D. If periods one and three are seen as the sum of human time, since both the death and the Second Coming of Christ happen in an instant and transcend temporality, whatever truly spiritual reality (demonic meddling excepted) is experienced during these millennia is directly related to the Son’s mediation, which, in turn, is only guaranteed by the fact that He “lay[ed] down his life” (9: 307). Moreover, humankind’s “Fall”, the effects of which are experienced immanently (see horizontal arrows in Fig. 3) by all in the natural and existential realities of death, weakness, futility, uncertainty, etc., only finds the possibility of redress in the resurrection, which necessitates Jesus’ death or ‘purchase’. This resurrection is also experienced immanently, though in this case supernaturally and only by the elect through the Spirit’s continual presence with them. In the Edwardsean narrative the resurrection may be pictured as encompassing the whole of the Christian era since, in fact, he himself defines the different turning points within this third period as “spiritual resurrections” (see pp. 231, 232 below).

But these are only the ideas that underlie the Redemption Discourse, structured in a way that provides a framework for Edwards’ prolonged sermonic delivery. That he envisioned the crucifixion or “purchase of redemption” as the hub of the great wheel of

providence is probably doubted by nobody who has carefully read this sermon series. However, the pattern (Fig. 3) that emerges by organizing Edwards' metaphysical and narrative elements into a circle can still be worked around with one more idea and its corresponding visual representation. In order to energize or replace the mechanical picture of a rotating wheel, the 'hub' may appropriately be thought of as a 'source' instead. From the cross, then, all genuinely spiritual activity (mainly in the form of revivals) flows into the historical process. The image obtained is one of 'irradiation':

Figure 4.



Each dotted line ending in an arrow represents an instance of revival. So the circumference still represents providential time and, as was explained in chapter 2 above and is amply argued by Avihu Zakai, revivals are the “concrete agent” of God’s “will and power in the order of time” (*History*, 248). These revival episodes tend to appear when an important or simply a new stage in the history of redemption is being introduced (*History*, 250). However, the asymmetrical position of these lines and the unknown total number of revivals both point to the unpredictability and suddenness with which they can

be expected to break into history. I have chosen to label some of the examples we shall look at in the following pages (“Reformation”, “Joshua’s generation” etc.) but to leave some unnamed, as Edwards would not have, I think, presumed to know about every ‘outpouring of the Spirit’ that there had ever been or was to be. The biblical and post-biblical events that Edwards does enumerate and construes by means of his rhetoric of revival are of different kinds and shall be looked at separately. Nevertheless, and in connection with the idea of ‘rays’ shining forth from the transcendent crucified Son/Sun, it is interesting to note how often the revival moments of Edwards’ narrative are enveloped in, or at least signaled by, light imagery one way or another.

4. 2. *Of the Sun’s Dawning and the Spirit’s Outpourings*

Although I am arguing that there is a creative originality to Edwards’ conflated use of ‘light’ imagery and the kind of rhetoric which implies that God acts arbitrarily and immediately in time and space, it should not go unsaid that, to a great extent, the Northampton preacher is borrowing from biblical metaphorical language. Thus, the identification (and subsequent phonetically-based pun in English) of “the Sun of righteousness” of Malachi 4:2, who “arise[s] with healing in his wings”, and the Son who dies and rises again to bring salvation is nothing new or innovative, not just in the context of typological exegesis but in the literary tradition.⁵ More relevant to conversion and to the idea of ‘irradiation’ or sun beams coming from Christ to illuminate humankind is the Pauline description of the Christian’s experience: “For God, who commanded the light to

⁵ An example of many that could be given is John Donne’s Easter poem “Good Friday, Riding Westward” (ll. 11-13, 264).

shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Corinthians 4:6). Biblical passages like these are naturally incorporated into Edwards’ language, like that of any other Puritan writer or orator, and more so when the focus of his discourse is conversion and revivals. Likewise, the verb ‘pour out’ to refer to the Spirit’s bestowal on a community or individual has its origin in the language of the prophets (Joel 2:28, 29) and is also evocative of Pauline discourse of conversion (Romans 5:5).

4. 2. a. The Paradigmatic Case of Pentecost.

That the words “outpouring” and “pouring out” should predominate in Jonathan Edwards’ revivalistic idiom is not at all surprising. The prophecies that refer to the Spirit’s coming using this terminology (Joel 2), after all, are said to have been fulfilled at Pentecost in Scripture itself (Acts 2:16-21). When Edwards gets to this episode of salvation history, he evinces his keenness to set this moment of revival above all other awakenings that came before it. Christ’s resurrection and ascension appear as a means “whereby Christ was put into an immediate capacity for accomplishing the end of his purchase” (9: 357). Though these two events (the resurrection and ascension of Jesus) are presented as thoroughly transcendental (358-361), the nineteenth sermon mainly highlights the importance and transcendence of revival itself. Whether Edwards is intentional about this is uncertain, but the greater part of the sermon proves that he held revivals (not just the one at Pentecost) to be the main means of Christ’s “obtaining the success [of redemption]” (362). Essentially, this “success consists in two things, viz. either in grace or glory”, and the preacher lists “those things by which the means of this

success were established”. The list, consisting of twelve points, presents a telling disproportion in the amount of space (and time, we must assume, of pulpit delivery) devoted to three of these means of divine agency in bringing about the “success” of God’s “grace” and the display of his “glory” (362-370). Approximately fifteen lines are spent explaining each of the following: “the abolishing of the Jewish dispensation” and “the appointment of the Christian sabbath” (362, 363). The third point, “Christ’s appointment of the gospel ministry” (363), is subdivided into nine points, which is where Edwards betrays a preference for the revival-like manifestation of grace as evidence of God’s immediate presence among His people.

It is important at this point to recall the analysis of chapter 2, where Edwards’ emphasis on the need to experience direct personal contact with the deity at conversion was highlighted. In contrast, we saw that the Puritan tradition in which he stood, while emphasizing individual introspection in order to discern whether true grace had worked or was at work in the soul, ultimately held ‘ordinances’ and the religious establishment to be crucially instrumental in the operations of divine providence. Thus, conservative colonial Puritanism interpreted history and current events through a somewhat different lens than that of Jonathan Edwards.

In the second half of sermon nineteen, which deals with the Spirit’s outpouring at Pentecost and how the Church was established, Edwards enumerates (devoting little ink to the task) ordinances such as the ordination of leaders (“ministers or elders”) in the Church, the apostles’ foundational role and their “power” in “teaching and ruling”, or the “appointment of Christian baptism” (9: 364). In point “4”, however, there is a digression that will continue through the fifth point, making both of these several times longer than

the three preceding and the three following points put together. The fourth consideration is that God endued “the apostles and others with extraordinary and miraculous gifts of the Holy Ghost [...] The Spirit of God was poured out in great abundance in this respect”. The language of revival irrupts with force to outshine ecclesiastical ordinances: “How wonderful a dispensation was [this!]” (364, 365). Then, Edwards points to the essential and providential connection there is between these “extraordinary” experiences of early Christians and the written Word:

And then by means of these extraordinary gifts of the Holy Ghost, the apostles and others were enabled to write the New Testament to be an infallible rule of faith and works and manners to the church *to the end of the world*. And furthermore these miracles stand recorded in those writings as a standing proof and evidence of the truth of the Christian religion *to all ages* (9: 365; my italics)

We may note how the preacher wants to endow the sacred scriptures with the transcendence derived from the remarkable and subjective experiences of God’s Spirit that those people had. The highlighted expressions point to the eternal repercussions of this paradigmatic revival. Christians in those days were the objects of an immediate divine manifestation and, consequently, the course of history was changed perpetually.

The same triumphant and ecstatic tone continues in point five of the list of things that God brought about during the days of the apostles. A focus on the Scriptures, or revelation, is likewise maintained: “The next thing I would observe is the revealing of those glorious doctrines of the gospel fully and plainly, which had under the Old Testament been obscurely revealed”. Now “the veil of the temple is rent from the top to the bottom and Christ, the antitype of Moses, shows *the shining of his face* without a veil, II Cor. 3:12-13” (9: 365, 366; my italics). Then comes a cluster of Bible verses to support

the idea that the events and times of the apostles were indeed unique in terms of how much was “now [...] made manifest to his saints” (366; cf. Colossians 1:26). With the first New Testament allusion (to 2 Corinthians), the image of Christ as the sun begins to emerge. The next paragraph, however, is where Edwards finally digresses from the content of his narrative into the figurative language that denotes transcendence and signifies immediate divine revelation:

Thus the sun of righteousness after it is risen from under the earth begins to shine forth clearly, and not only by a dim reflection as it was before. Christ before his death revealed many things more clearly than ever they had been revealed in the Old Testament, but the great mysteries of Christ's redemption and reconciliation by his death, and justification by his righteousness, were not so plainly revealed before Christ's resurrection. (9: 366)

Significantly for the above graphic representations (Figures 1-3) and their explanation (chap. 3, pp. 204-208, and 212-214 above), Christ is in a sense present in definite historical moments, but also (even before the Incarnation) revealing himself gradually. Nevertheless, the instances of divine intervention that introduce new periods or stages in the Work of Redemption are rendered remarkable and cloaked with the discourse of immediate divine agency. The results and fruits of these episodes are traceable through time and even revivals themselves may be construed *retrospectively* as a gradual increase of light.⁶ Yet, this in itself is a rhetorical strategy to set the particular revival under consideration above any other in terms of the power displayed and the greatness of the accompanying divine revelation.

⁶ This is, as we shall see below, what Edwards himself does when he looks back at some historical periods and episodes narrated throughout the Redemption Discourse during weeks or months of pulpit delivery (depending on how much of the series had been preached).

In this nineteenth sermon, and before he returns to a quick listing of points (6, 7 and 8 [9: 367, 368]), Edwards closes the above digression as follows: “Thus we see how the light of the gospel which began to *dawn* immediately after the fall, and *gradually grew and increased* through all the ages of the Old Testament, as we observed as we went along, is now come to the light of perfect day, and the brightness of the sun shining forth in his unveiled glory” (367; my italics). Now, there seems to be an explosion of knowledge, signified by “light”, whereas the times of the Old Testament are retrospectively seen as times of no such divine manifestations, but having only the dim and light of “dawn”. However, while Edwards, as was stated above, does set Pentecost (the “now” of sermon nineteen) apart as a superior kind of revival, it is no less true that ‘remarkable outpourings’ of the Spirit are found in his account of pre-33 A. D. times. In fact, some events “immediately after the fall” (which are here defined as a “dawn” or gradual increase) are construed in the Edwardsean narrative by means of this very rhetoric of revival, even to the point of giving the reader and hearer the impression that much of the essence of those ancient events is to be found in post-Pentecost experiences and may be newly communicated to God’s people.

The ninth and last point of this subsection in sermon nineteen is about the writing of the New Testament (9: 368) and is therefore closely linked to point “5” (365). Not surprisingly, this section is also significantly longer than most preceding points, though just about the same length as the fourth and fifth points where Edwards deploys the rhetoric of revival conjunctly with the Sun/Son metaphor and derived light imagery. As we turn to specific examples of Edwards’ original way of construing historical episodes (biblical and extra-biblical) as ‘revivals’, it is important that Pentecost, the epitome of

revivals, remain as the backdrop to any other manifestation of Christ in this mode of divine intervention in history. The “purchase of redemption” remains central even though it is the resurrected and exalted Savior who is in the “immediate capacity for accomplishing” divine purposes (357). The “shining of his face” in and through revival experiences, which act as God’s concrete agents in history, has no other immediate cause than the “veil of the temple [being] rent from the top to the bottom”. The crucifixion,⁷ for Edwards, is closely linked to Pentecost as well as to every other instance of revival (366; cf. Fig. 4 above). As well as the close connection with the “purchase of redemption”, the paradigm of Pentecost establishes the principle that revelation accompanies outpourings of the Spirit. It will be seen in 4. 2. b. and 4. 2. c. that the imparting of new knowledge (through additions to the canon of Scripture) and the remarkable advance of learning are notions which Edwards juxtaposes with spiritual outpourings.

4. 2. b. Ancient, Biblical Revivals.

Sermon three of the Redemption Discourse presents readers and 1739 listeners with “the first *remarkable pouring out of the Spirit* through Christ that ever was, which was in the days of Enos. This seems to have been the *next remarkable thing* that was done towards erecting this glorious building that God had begun, and laid the foundation of, in Christ the mediator” (9: 141; my italics). Dealing with antediluvian history, Edwards envisions the Son of God as already interceding, or ‘mediating’, between the utterly transcendent First Person of the Trinity and fallen humanity. But more relevant for

⁷ See Matt. 27:51, Mark 15:38 or Luke 23:45 for the reference to the veil’s renting in the Jewish temple during Jesus’ crucifixion.

our present purpose is the language of ‘remarkableness’ used to define the episode of “the days of Enos”. This early moment in the Work of Redemption is one of those that will recurrently be retold in terms of ‘dawning’ or gradual increase of light, and yet it is enveloped at this stage of the Redemption Discourse with a sense of the sudden and immediate irruption of God from heaven by “pouring out” His Spirit. The lines and pages that follow the opening statement of sermon three were already analyzed in 3. 1. b., concluding that the prevalent use of building imagery to describe the collective and individual spiritual experiences of that whole generation and Enoch respectively ultimately contributes to an emphasis on divine agency in its progressive mode. Nevertheless, since it is building imagery in its ‘temple mode’ that can be traced in 9: 142-145, the idea of God’s immediate and special presence during this period is not ruled out but confirmed:

If it was now first that men were stirred to get together in assemblies to help and assist one another in seeking God so as they never had done before, it argues something extraordinary as the cause, and could be from nothing but uncommon influences of God's Spirit. We see by experience that a remarkable pouring out of the Spirit of God is always attended with such an effect, viz. a great increase of the performance of the duty of prayer [...] So it has been in all remarkable pourings out of the Spirit of God that we have any particular account of in Scripture, and so it is foretold it will be at the great pouring out of the Spirit of God in the latter days. (9: 142)

Edwards’ allusion to what Northamptonites know (“*We see*”) “by experience” clearly serves to establish a parallelism with their local awakening in 1734-1735 and to appeal to their first-hand experience in “remarkable season[s] of this nature” (142). The pastor is also using eschatological allusion here (“the latter days”) to extend the relevance of the

antediluvian episode to the present and future. By asserting that the spirit of prayer of those days came as a result of “uncommon influences of God’s Spirit” and that the Scriptures foretell the same will happen in the millennial era (Zechariah 12), Edwards is applying a common paradigm for divine awakening activity to the whole of redemptive history.

The minimal but relevant use of light imagery found in these lines is, therefore, in keeping with Edwards’ intention of highlighting the extraordinary nature of this first ever outpouring of the Spirit by tracing its source to the cross. The “efficacy of [Christ’s] grace” in Enoch’s life, which was the direct result of revival in his generation,

is an instance of the increase of that gospel light that began to dawn presently after the fall of man [...] I would observe that the increase of gospel light and the carrying on the Work of Redemption as it respects the elect church in general [...] is very much after the same manner as the carrying on of the same work and the same light in a particular soul [...] Sometimes the light shines brighter, and sometimes ’tis a dark time. (9: 144, 145)

The implication is clearly that at this point in salvation history, as in Northampton four years earlier, light did shine bright though a period of corruption and darkness (like that of the Flood, 9: 146ff) may have soon followed. But the genuinely spiritual fruit that was gathered at this “harvest of souls to Christ” was not the transcendent experience of having this “gospel light” break forth into one’s soul *per se*; rather, an “eminently holy life” achieved by continually depending on God’s immanent presence through the Spirit was the result of revival and what a true believer cultivated daily (143). Edwards’ pastoral concern is as obvious as his philosophy of history or divine ontology in passages like this one of the third sermon, where he primarily seeks to depict God’s acts as sudden and unpredictable. The consideration that, as the sovereign God He is, He may choose to act

arbitrarily and that His will, therefore, remains hidden from humankind does not exempt the congregation from their share of spiritual responsibility. There was nothing in the event of Northampton's recent revival that could be attributed to anything other than a unilateral divine initiative to reach and transform their community through His immediate presence. And yet, there was something that ought to follow logically and depended (at least apparently) on human agency; namely, the perseverance of congregants in holiness and their leading lives of exemplary piety.

In this first instance of immediate divine intervention in the world through the Spirit's outpouring upon the Church, Edwards' use of the term "dawn" (9: 144) points to preceding events (presumably including Abel's death and subsequent arrival in heaven, or Adam and Eve's "conversion and justification" [139, 140]) and sets forth the revival in the days of Enos as a comparatively "great increase of gospel light" (146). As can be inferred from my analysis in 3. 1.,⁸ the first three sermons of the Redemption Discourse form a unit where the basis for Edwardsean historical discourse and narrative is established. The central statement concerning the role of the Spirit's outpourings in the historical process is found in the context of this first revival. In an 'aside', the pastor tells his audience:

It may here be observed that from the fall of man to this day wherein we live the Work of Redemption in its effect has mainly been carried on by remarkable pourings out of the Spirit of God. Though there be a more constant influence of God's Spirit always in some degree attending his ordinances, yet the way in which the greatest things have been done towards carrying on this work always has been by remarkable pourings out of the Spirit

⁸ Especially pp. 139-165.

at special seasons of mercy, as may fully appear hereafter in our further prosecution of the subject we are upon. (9: 143)

Edwards is committed to the defense of revivals as the most desirable and effective event in the Church and the world. Likewise, by affirming that revivals are operative from the “fall of man” to “this day wherein we live” he is inviting his listeners to compare their recent and current experience with the scriptural narrative but also beyond. This quotation also shows how “ordinances” are relegated to a second place (confirming my conclusions of chapter 2) inasmuch as the “influence of God’s Spirit” is only conveyed through them “in some degree” and not so immediately and fully as in revivals.

The next remarkable revival Edwards identifies in the Work of Redemption is that of Joshua’s generation. Needless to say, the Bible itself does not present this period, or the days of Enos, in those terms. Edwards, therefore, is clearly reading his own inferences into the text or being intentionally creative in his hermeneutics. The preacher is going beyond strictly exegetical boundaries in order to construe this second episode in terms of a “remarkable pouring out” of God’s Spirit (9: 189). He may have hoped to make the sixth sermon a reminder and admonition to the youth among whom his ministry had been particularly effective during the local awakening (see pp. 32-34 above). Speaking of the generation that was granted to enter the Promised Land under Joshua’s leadership, he says: “Another thing by which God carried on this work at this time was a remarkable pouring of his spirit on the younger generation in the wilderness”. The basis Edwards finds for inferring that the sovereign Spirit was indeed the main agent behind the affairs and condition of this group of Israelites echoes the example of Enoch three sermons earlier: “This generation God was pleased to make a generation to his praise, and they were *eminent for piety*”. Scripture itself, through Jeremiah’s retrospective and inspired

account (Jer. 2:2, 3), highly commends this generation “as eminent for holiness” (9: 189, 190). But although Edwards makes every effort to sanction the terms of his Old Testament exegesis with Scripture, his evangelical and revivalistic language register is clearly imposed on the texts:

Though this generation had a much greater trial than the generation of their fathers had [...], yet [they] never murmured against God in any wise as their fathers had done. But their trials had a contrary effect upon [them] to *awaken* them, convince and humble them, and fit them for great mercy. *They were awakened* by those awful judgments of God that he inflicted on their fathers, whereby their carcasses fell in the wilderness *and God poured out his spirit* with those awakening providences towards their fathers, and their own wilderness travail together with his word preached to 'em by Moses, whereby they were *greatly awakened* and made to see the badness of their own hearts, and be humbled, and at length *multitudes of 'em savingly converted*. (9: 190; my italics)

Edwards wants his hearers to know that despite the remarkable means used by God to “awaken” the Old Testament Church, including awful and visible judgments, there were also ordinary ones involved in the affair, like the “word preached” (a clear pointer to his own active role in Northampton’s revival from the pulpit, if we see this passage as another instance of parallelism between the people in the biblical narrative and his congregation). The spiritual fruit bestowed on Israel during this period of sacred history owed much to the occasional instances of immediate divine intervention, but “that this younger congregation were eminent for piety *appears by all their history*” (9: 191; my italics). Once again, there is a pastoral concern that is evidenced by Edwards’ insistence on God’s ongoing presence with a people and the long-term effect that is brought about when He has manifestly been present among them.

Before Edwards' discourse (in the same sermon) returns to the idea of God providentially but *not* extraordinarily upholding the Israelite people⁹ there is one more effort on the preacher's part to construe this revival of Joshua's time as remarkable and even 'typical' of later transcendental historical episodes. Edwards avers that it is "questionable whether there ever was a time of so great a flourishing of religion in the Israelitish church" as in this "sanctified [...] younger generation". Despite some recurrent "renovations of the covenant" in Old Testament times, which were "commonly accompanied" by "reformation" and the "pouring out of the Spirit", this particular instance of revival was only paralleled by the "first setting up" of the Christian "church in the days of the apostles" (9: 192). There is evidence that Edwards increasingly viewed this Old Testament period as transcendental not just because he considered it a parallel or type of Pentecost but because in later revisions of this sermon series and in other private notes about the same biblical episode he noted that it even had an eschatological relevance.¹⁰ Notwithstanding all the potential historical ramifications of this instance of revival, as viewed and creatively construed by Edwards, it must be observed that by choosing to so conspicuously highlight an event linked to Joshua, he was vindicating traditional, Christocentric typology. That is to say, Joshua being probably second only to

⁹ This discursive mode in the Edwardsean historical narrative is evinced by the repeated use of the verb "preserve" (three times in 9: 194, 195) in reference to continual divine activity of a less visible or conspicuous kind.

¹⁰ Edwards later wrote that "the cleansing that will purify the church after Antichrist is defeated" is like "the purging of Israel in and after her deliverance from Egyptian bondage" (9: 191, n. 6; cf. 192, n. 1). Regarding the latter reference, which seems to include more than just Joshua's figure and the second generation of the Exodus, it may be noted that in the sixth sermon I am analyzing Edwards sums up the considerations about the "former wicked generation" and "this younger generation" by referring to the "first establishment [of the Jewish church] in *Moses'* and Joshua's times" (9: 192; my emphasis).

king David as a type of the Messiah, the close link between this revival and Christ in light of typology backed the otherwise original Edwardsean reading of these events as transcending their time and bearing typological significance. As we shall see immediately, Edwards subtly made use of light imagery to set the revival of Joshua's generation above any other pre-Pentecost spiritual event and to give cohesion to his narrative, which was otherwise fragmented, if only due to its protracted delivery (partly on Sundays and partly on Thursday lectures) from the Northampton pulpit.

The function of the term "dawn" (just before Edwards introduces the passage analyzed above) to refer back to everything that had preceded this revival from "immediately after the fall" is similar to the instance of the same term in sermon three. By speaking of "the light of the gospel" as "gradually increas[ing]" up to this point in the narrative (9: 189) and, straight after that statement, digressing into the discourse of immediate divine agency through revivalistic rhetoric (189ff), the idea is conveyed that there is remarkable progress in the Work of Redemption by means of the awakening under consideration. The sun can be pictured as suddenly rising to a higher and more visible position, whereas before this historic moment there was just the dim light of dawn. Interestingly, the only time the word "dawn" appears between this point in the series and the already quoted one in the context of Pentecost (p. 221 above) is in the isolated passage where building imagery in its 'temple mode' reappears (see p. 172 above). This concurrence of two of the preacher's main metaphorical resorts happens in an apologetic context where he argues for the usefulness and providential role of the Bible (9: 285-290). More particularly, Edwards develops in this thirteenth sermon the idea that the Old Testament canon is of paramount importance to confirm historical

testimony since it “foretold” future events “in a vast variety of types and figures”. Obviously, of all the things anticipated by the Jewish scriptures, “Christ is the very person so evidently pointed at in all the dispensations of God’s providence” (281). The foretelling of Christ’s coming, then, occurs in “figures” but also in events, revivals being the epitome of all “dispensations of grace” (285). In this sense, the image of light having increased gradually (as light does at “dawn”) until this moment of the narrative serves, yet again, to emphasize that the light of the sun (literally the Son’s coming, not revival, in sermon thirteen) is about to remarkably break in to communicate God’s immediate presence.

For Edwards it was basic to maintain a Christocentric typological paradigm and not to stray from an orthodox interpretation of the Bible. At the same time, as several authors have observed, his revival writings (and the *History of the Work of Redemption* project in particular) made it evident that he was expanding the boundaries of typology to provide an all-encompassing interpretation of reality: “Jonathan Edwards’ central spiritual and intellectual endeavor became the unearthing of those harmonious correspondences prophesied in Scripture and, in his resurrection of typological patterns, [he applied] the types and antitypes to the natural world”. Moreover, he believed a “close relationship” existed “between Scripture, history and nature” (Lowance, 198, 199). Thus, the Northampton pastor innovated within Calvinist orthodoxy and gave revivals a conspicuous role in history, not just because (according to his own construal) there were plenty of them in the Bible, in the Christian era and they fitted nicely into his narrative, but because they were God’s main way of furthering His redemptive plan in the world.

The very defense of the Great Awakening that Edwards would lead during the years following the Redemption Discourse evidences how essential he believed revivals to be to the advancement of God's work and kingdom. In the 1739 series, the biblical, sacred narrative is recast through the rhetoric of revival precisely so that contemporary and recent events may be understood to be part of the progress of the same Work of Redemption revealed in Holy Writ.

4. 2. c. Revivals Outside the Scriptures: The Protestant Reformation.

With New England and other American colonies at the threshold of a general awakening and with Northampton's recent revival experience to draw on, Edwards' 1739 sermon series was solemnly momentous. But he did not lack a transnational and diachronic perspective about current and recent events. Quite on the contrary, he envisioned New England as having a providential and apocalyptic role in the last act of redemptive history, although not in any nationalistic sense (Zakai, *History*, 264). Though part of the Edwardsean legacy that is traceable in the following generation through the pulpit oratory of the Revolution consists precisely in "rhetorical modes fashioned during the [Great] Awakening" (Weber, 56ff), the implications of Edwards' philosophy of history can only be accurately understood (more so than some revolutionary clergymen might have done) if viewed within the framework provided by his own writings. In this sense, considerations of a political or military nature were only of relative importance when compared to an event like the Great Awakening (see p. 126 above). Furthermore, the Northampton theologian would outline in the Redemption Discourse, just before this period of spiritual turmoil and of the ecclesiastical establishment's breakdown, what he

termed “spiritual resurrections” (9: 352), denoting the essentially spiritual nature of the turning points of post-Pentecost history. And although political strife and military struggle were not excluded from the earthly manifestations of the Kingdom of Heaven, there is an observable tendency in the Edwardsean historical narrative whereby these means of divine government (for politics and war were certainly ruled over by the Calvinist deity) gradually pale into insignificance when set beside the event of ecclesiastical and intellectual reformation according to God’s Word and Spirit.

As was pointed out in the preceding chapter, the Scriptures were meant to guide and inform all knowledge, including scientific or historiographical discoveries. God’s Word was destined to rule over men’s understandings and to the extent that communities submitted to this authority they could also be expected to receive His immediate favor or grace. This high view of the Bible was, of course, commonplace within the Reformed tradition, at least up to Edwards’ own time. What is noteworthy in terms of Edwards’ articulation of a philosophy of history that upheld this tenet of orthodox Protestantism is how he weaves together the themes of reformation according to the authoritative Word of God and the need for a heartfelt individual and collective transformation through the Spirit’s agency. To the dimension of an objective truth that must be implemented to please the deity, the revivalist ideal emphatically adds the need to subjectively assimilate and become aligned with the divine precept. Two examples of spiritual awakening that Edwards finds (though he does not elaborate on them) between Joshua and Pentecost are quite representative of this ideal balance between Word and Spirit, between head and heart. Just as in the cases of Enoch and Joshua’s young generation ‘eminent piety’ evidenced the Spirit’s agency, the pre-exilic example of king Josiah and the post-exilic

one of Ezra¹¹ were deeply emotional instances of awakening among God's people that signaled an underlying genuine spirituality. Both episodes are referred to in the Redemption Discourse as a "pouring out of the Spirit" and are explicitly related to the revelation of biblical truth to the people. Significantly for our present argument, another identical expression Edwards uses for both biblical stories is "general reformation", in order to describe the kind of changes that a renewed understanding of the Law (or Torah) entailed (9: 192, 265).

It is worth noting that the example of Ezra and the Jews is presented by Edwards in connection with "the days of Joshua" due to the careful observance of a certain feast which had not been kept by God's people since that time. The people were moved by their deep conviction of sin to obey the Law and celebrated the "feast of tabernacles" (9: 266), which had not been observed "since the days of Joshua son of Nun" (Nehemiah 8:17). But these post-exilic Israelites are different from Joshua's generation in that, according to the biblical narrative, they have no military leader or power to rely on or to forcefully reclaim the land. In fact, there is a pagan political leader (Cyrus of Persia; Ezra 1:1-2) that the Spirit has moved to favor the Jews and this is, at a purely human level, what has enabled them to return to their land to rebuild the temple. Humanly speaking, this is a weak and much humbled people who nevertheless appear, in Edwards'

¹¹ In 2 Chronicles 34:19 king Josiah is said to have "rent his clothes" as a sign of being deeply moved when he heard how the newly rediscovered book of the Law condemned Israel's conduct. A reformation of the whole land followed, destroying all pagan idolatry and ordering that the Passover be observed for the first time in generations. Ezra provides an example of both individual and collective repentance through the reading of the same Law: "Now when Ezra had prayed, and when he had confessed, weeping and casting himself down before the house of God, there assembled unto him out of Israel a very great congregation of men and women and children: for the people wept very sore" (Ezra 10:1).

interpretation of the biblical account and in providential chronology, more prepared and fit for the arrival of the Messiah. Spiritually, however, these two generations have in common a measure of the Spirit working in them that is evinced in their renewed pious disposition to obey God's Word. They do not merely carry out a reformation according to past revelation; Ezra himself "added to the canon of the Scriptures" (9: 266) just as Joshua had, though the Torah had been fully revealed to his predecessor Moses.¹²

Now, in Ezra's time, there began a period when the completed canon of the Jewish Bible was read and known in an unparalleled manner by means of "greatly multiplying the copies of the law, and appointing the constant public reading them in all the cities of Israel in their synagogues" (9: 267). Little after this, comes the parallel between synagogues during this period and New England meetinghouses (268) that was brought to bear on my analysis of the much used 'building imagery' and, in this particular case, of the relevance of allusion to buildings denoting a scattered, diasporic or weak state of the true church (see pp. 168-171 above). In this unlikely context of military and political disadvantage, the knowledge of true religion greatly increases as a consequence of revival and the accompanying revelation to Ezra the scribe. Later on in the series, as we shall see below, there is an echo of this instrumental "multiplying" of Old Testament copies throughout Israel during the Protestant Reformation, since the pace and the far-reaching effects of the sixteenth century spiritual reform providentially depended on the printing press. There is also a subtle but implicit parallel between Christ's own coming into the world and the period inaugurated by the Reformation intimated by the order of

¹² The book of Joshua follows the Pentateuch in the canon of Scripture.

events and the instrumental role of an unprecedented knowledge of the Scriptures in both cases.

Edwards construed what mainstream Puritan and Reformed theology viewed as the definitive wound of Antichrist, i.e. the Reformation, as yet another ‘outpouring of the Spirit’ or revival. This historical episode, dating roughly from two hundred years before Edwards’ ministry, was seen by Reformed Christians in the American colonies as closely connected with their own history. Seventeenth century Puritanism was the religious and social background of most New Englanders’ grandparents and the source from which their offspring, to a great extent, were still theologically nurtured in the first half of the eighteenth century. The Protestant Reformation was considered to have advanced significantly during the English Civil War and Cromwell’s Protectorate (1642-1660) and to have been almost perfected through the settlement of Congregationalism in the British colonies of America. These recent historical developments were familiar to average educated New Englanders, and they knew that the common element to all three events (European Reformation, English Puritanism and the migration of the Pilgrim Fathers) was the struggle for the triumph of the *Sola Scriptura* motto, or the authority of the Bible. Yet, Edwards chooses to present the Reformation in terms of a “glorious outpouring” of the Spirit in the Redemption Discourse (9: 438). Identifying the essence of these events with what had so far been expounded as remarkable instances of immediate divine intervention in the biblical narrative, and implicitly linking it to Northampton’s immediate context, was crucial for Edwards to bring universal history alive from the pulpit and to prove the current relevance of his own vision of the history of the Work of Redemption.

Before unpacking some of the keys to Edwards' construal of the Reformation as a revival, it seems necessary to quote what came, some years ago, as a challenge to Avihu Zakai's contention in *Jonathan Edwards's Philosophy of History* (Princeton, 2003) that the main driving force of providential history in the Redemption Discourse is revival. In a review from the year after the publication of Zakai's work, John E. Smith (Yale professor emeritus until his death in 2009) argued that, apart from "seasons" of revival, "Edwards notes other special events like the Reformation that 'promoted the work of redemption' (*Works*, 9. 272), but are not revivals in the usual sense. For Edwards, special events are of many kinds and are identified by interpretation based on God's Providence" (343). Smith quotes one page from the 1739 sermon series but fails to notice that the whole homiletic text argues in favor of considering the Reformation, above all and essentially, a revival. Whatever the term means "in the usual sense" may be established by common use or by comparing Edwards' use of the word with that of other revivalists, but for the Northampton theologian the meaning and nature of revivals was to be discovered through the comprehensive analysis of redemptive history. His most explicit attempt to define them was the Redemption Discourse. This sermonic historical narrative, if understood in its own terms, clearly points to an understanding of the spiritual essence of the Protestant Reformation as being one and the same with that of 18th century awakenings in the colonies.

As was said above, Edwards breaks the Christian era down into four "spiritual resurrections". Interestingly for us, the first two (year 70 A. D. and the days of Constantine) are not linked explicitly to any 'outpouring' or remarkable intervention of God's Spirit in the sense that Pentecost had been. By contrast, these periods are

primarily, and most naturally, seen in the political and military dimensions of human history. The destruction of Jerusalem is materialized by a Roman general's military intervention and massacre, while the conversion of Constantine mainly results in the civil authority's "countenance" of Christianity (9: 353). There seems to be no deep, positive transformation of society or any particular community in these events. While Edwards contends that these two stages meant "a glorious advancement of the state of the church" on earth (352), it is clear by his language register that he does not conceive of them as so 'remarkable' in nature as the third and fourth resurrections. Sermon eighteen, where he mentions all four "resurrections" but unpacks mainly the first two, states that "in each one of them [the advancement of Christ's kingdom] is accomplished in a further degree than in the foregoing [...]. So that the kingdom of Christ is gradually prevailing by these several great stages" (354). The progressive mode of divine agency is primarily envisioned as operating in the events here dealt with. The destruction of Antichrist (the third resurrection) is technically included in this gradual establishment of God's kingdom on earth before Judgment Day, but when in a later sermon Edwards comes to explain the Reformation, which was the beginning of this second-last resurrection, he shifts his discursive mode notably. In any case, even in sermon eighteen, it is anticipated that through the third dispensation of the Christian era God's kingdom would advance "in a further degree" than in "foregoing" ones.

From the sermons that dealt with Christ's own presence on earth and the pouring out of the Spirit at Pentecost to sermon twenty-three, Edwards' sermon series swerves into the kind of discourse that, despite the first two resurrections (defined as earthly rather than spiritual in essence), renders human and church history as marked by sinful

nature. Indeed, the very stage where Christianity began to be established as the official religion of Western empires would lead to a “dark time” for the true church and to “overflowing corruption” in the world (9: 420, 421). During this time, providential activity was powerfully at work but the most that could be said about God’s true church was that it was “upheld” or preserved (9: 418; cf. p. 169, n. 19 above). Finally, however, the ushering in of the Reformation “by Luther and other servants of God” (introduced halfway through sermon twenty-three) meant that much “clear light was held forth” before the apostate generation (425). In the remainder of the sermon (425-429) Edwards goes into considerable historical detail to define the content and explain the development of the Protestant Reformation in Europe, and (not surprisingly) he includes references to seventeenth century England, like the times of Charles I or even the Glorious Revolution of 1688. In spiritual terms, much is said of “the devil and his great minister Antichrist”, and how they “rage with such violence and cruelty against the church of Christ” (429). However, Edwards feels it is necessary to articulate and expound positively what the impact of the Reformation was in the world in order to understand the movement’s essentially spiritual nature, so he devotes most of the following sermon to the task.

The first thing that must be noted regarding this sermon and the shift it represents in the Edwardsean narrative is that in the twenty-fourth sermon the revival of the sixteenth century seems to outshine Northampton’s and the British empire’s spiritual state, while it obviously cannot be construed (through the ‘dawn’ metaphor) as greater than Pentecost except, maybe, inasmuch as the Reformation meant a larger geographical expansion of the light of the gospel in the world. Edwards thinks Antichrist received a definitive blow and cannot fully recover after God’s immediate intervention at the

beginning of the Protestant Reformation. Nevertheless, “Satan has opposed the light of the gospel that shone forth in the Reformation” (9: 430). This event being the only outpouring of the Spirit mentioned by Edwards between Pentecost and the immediate context of New England’s recent awakening, it acquires great relevance (signaled by the expression “shone forth”) in the congregation’s retrospective self-assessment. That is, the Reformation provides a tangible example (due to its closeness in time) by which the church’s spiritual state may be tested. And despite the undeniable political dimensions of this event, essentially there

was a glorious outpouring of the Spirit of God that accompanied the first Reformation, not only to convert multitudes in so short a time from popery to the true religion, but to turn many to God and true godliness. Religion gloriously flourished in one country and another, as most remarkably appeared in those times of terrible persecution which have already been spoken [of]. (9: 438)

The literal and physical “persecution” alluded to pertained to those satanic manifestations against the Spirit’s immediate presence. The dimension of human effort or agency in trying to stop the spread of gospel light only made it clearer that a spiritual, divine agent had produced the movement of reform.

Edwards uses these references to the Reformation as a revival, as I have anticipated, not just to promote his own congregation’s introspective test (whether “true godliness” was at work in them after their local awakening) but to assess the state of Christianity at large. Before delivering the above-quoted statement, and thus defining what was for him the essence of the sixteenth century Reformation, the preacher sets forth a number of criteria to be employed not just in evaluating past and present but in looking to the future. Earlier in the same sermon, Edwards says: “And of late years this

heresy [i.e., Arianism] has been revived in England, and greatly prevails there both in the Church of England and among Dissenters. These hold that [Christ and the Holy Ghost are but mere creatures]" (9: 432). Right doctrine or orthodoxy, of course, is one criterion to measure the spiritual condition of professing Christians in general. But Edwards wants his people to expand their horizons by looking beyond the local and national spheres. He refers to Russia or "the empire of Muscovy" and how, thanks to "a reformation in doctrine" orchestrated by "Peter Alexander", that place has "become a land of light in comparison of what it used to be before". This political ruler, "within these twenty years", has "reformed the churches of his country of many of their superstitions" so that "the religion professed and practiced as in Muscovy is much nearer that of the Protestants than formerly it used to be" (433). He continues by returning home to the "American continent on which we live". There, "the devil had the nations [...] out of the reach of the light of the gospel" and in "the grossest heathenish darkness" but the providential discovery and settlement of the American continent just before the Reformation allowed light to begin to advance (433, 434). Thus weaving his narrative through the use of some, though not conspicuous, light imagery, Edwards paves the way for his main point in the sermon, namely, that "from the Reformation to the present time" (431) the "success" of the gospel is accomplished through "revivals of the power and practice of religion" (435, 436).

As he explains that there is news of a "remarkable revival" in Germany, his terminology clearly evinces that in the Edwardsean articulation of redemptive history reformation and revivals both imply the same kind of divine agency. The movement that has sprung from the German awakenings, which fosters works of "charity" and

educational reform and initiatives, has ramified and is “accompanied with a wonderful *reformation and revival* of religion [...] in the city and university of Halle” (9: 436; my italics). At this point in the sermon’s delivery, Edwards chooses to mention New England’s “remarkable pouring out of the Spirit of God [...] of which we in this town have had such a share”. Indeed, it would be “ungrateful” to forget such manifest example of divine blessing upon a community. Yet, the Northampton preacher dedicates almost no space to dwelling on his people’s own experience and seems to want to quickly transition from this local reference to the hortatory section he introduces immediately: “I proceed now to [consider] what the state of things is now in the world with regard to the church of Christ and the success of Christ’s purchase. And this I would do by showing how things are now compared with the first times of the Reformation”. The comparison begins by pointing out “wherein the state of things is altered for the worse” (436, 437). Edwards surveys the progress of religion in several countries of Eastern Europe, as well as France and Germany, and (following the previous pattern) moves closer to home by making a remark about “England, the principal kingdom of the Reformation”. Again, the use of the ‘light’ image (though with no elaboration in this context) serves the rhetorician to emphasize, by contrast, the darkness of his congregation’s own world, as he had done to depict the state of the American heathens apart from the gospel (p. 240 above). Speaking of the British religious context, he emphatically affirms that

history gives no account of any age wherein there was so great an apostasy of those that had been brought up under the light of the gospel to infidelity, never such a casting off the Christian religion and all revealed religion, never any age wherein was so much scoffing at and ridiculing the gospel of Christ by those that have been brought up under gospel light, nor anything like it as there is at this day (438).

Despite this prevalently negative view of his own times and nation (indeed, people “wander in the dark” and “fall in matters of religion as in midnight darkness” [440]), Edwards moves on to consider what had improved since the Protestant Reformation.

The three points which make up this final section of sermon twenty-four are very telling if viewed in relation to the above-mentioned hierarchy, as it were, whereby Edwards holds the spiritual outpouring of God’s immediate presence to be the greatest means to advance His Work of Redemption, as opposed to other secondary means like military or political power. He begins: “The Pope is much diminished in power and influence”. Thus, the importance that Edwards has attributed to revivals up to this point in the sermon does not imply that developments of a political nature are not also orchestrated by God to favor the progress of His kingdom in the world. Likewise, persecution, though still present in “some parts of the Protestant church”, is “now in no measure as it has been heretofore”. These human factors and their bearing on the state of religion were not to be minimized when considering what the divine designs might be through them. However, they were not positively decisive (as revivals were) since the absence of persecution, for example, meant that “the enemies of Christ” now found “another channel” of “opposition against his cause” through downright mockery (9: 439). The third and last respect in which things had improved since the sixteenth century was the “great increase of learning”. Interestingly, Edwards devotes twice as much space and ink to this point than to the two preceding put together. Also, there seems to be a real basis for optimism according to what he makes of the issue of contemporary scientific knowledge, its origin in God’s own intervention at the Reformation and how God will use it in the millennium to glorify Himself and abase human pride.

The period from the Reformation to the present day is depicted, in this consideration of “learning” or “knowledge”,¹³ as one abounding in ‘light’. This is done without actually using the term but by indirect allusion through contrasts, imagery and certain expressions that are suggestive of the sun being “raised to a vastly greater height” than ever before (9: 440). In this regard, the end of the twenty-fourth sermon works with the same notion of ‘dawn’, or light that has hitherto increased gradually but suddenly advances by a remarkable divine intervention, as did the sermons dealing with other ‘outpourings’ like those of the days of Enos, Joshua’s generation or Pentecost. That “light” should be rhetorically replaced by “knowledge” is not surprising since Pauline discourse of conversion referred to “the *light of the knowledge* of the glory of God” shining through His Son (2 Corinthians 4:6). And although the ‘sun’ is not literally present in the last three pages of the text under consideration, Edwards’ use of certain expressions subtly evokes its zenith. First, there is the obvious contrast between the coming of the sixteenth century’s outpouring of the Spirit and the preceding “dark times of popery”. Also, there is the fact that scientific as well as religious “[l]earning began to revive with the Reformation”. Providence assisted this increase and spread of knowledge with the human invention of “the art of printing” just at the right time, and caused “learning” to be “increased more and more, and at this day is undoubtedly raised higher than ever it was before” (9: 439, 440). Here there is a clear parallel between the course of apparently natural or human intellectual advance and the point reached by supernatural light that has Christ, the Son/sun, as its source. Edwards goes as far as to suggest a parallelism between the current situation and the time of Christ’s First Coming into the

¹³ These words are repeated throughout 9: 439-441.

world. Basing his inference on Daniel's prophecies concerning the increase of knowledge that was to precede the Messiah's advent, it is suggested that "God in his providence now seems to be acting over again the same part which he did *a little before* Christ came" (my italics). These prophetic and, for Edwards, historical correspondences between the first appearing of the Son of Man and the millennium imply that the coming of the latter cannot be far off. His interpretation (two sermons later) of the gospel saying "Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on earth [?]", in fact, places that "coming" announced by Jesus himself at the time of his "set[ting] up his kingdom in the world", not at Judgment Day (457). So, how are prevailing unbelief and great human pride in their scientific breakthroughs turned into an "excellent handmaid to divinity"? Men now "seem to wander in the dark, are miserably deluded, stumble and fall in matters of religion as in midnight darkness. Trusting to their learning, they grope *in the daytime* as in the night" (440, 441; my italics). At this point it is clear that Edwards pictures the sun, as it were, shining in its zenith but light is prevented from entering humankind's understanding only due to their unconverted state. The present historical period is objectively one of spiritual light in the same way that secular advances (technological, scientific, etc.) are undeniably great.

Despite all the pointers to a predictably imminent divine intervention, the "appointed time" for the millennium, or "for that glorious outpouring of God's Spirit", remains unknown and is viewed by Edwards as depending entirely on an arbitrary and immediate act of God. Indeed, He "will himself by his own *immediate influence enlighten men's minds*; then may we hope that God will improve this great increase of knowledge as an handmaid to religion" (9: 441; my italics). So there is, after all, an

optimistic outlook implicit in the Edwardsean vision of history (McClymond & McDermott, 237) despite the preacher's jeremiad-like insistence, until the very last sermon, on "the present dark circumstances" for the church and the interests of religion (9: 526). What makes this third point of improvement since the Reformation (i.e., the increase of knowledge) significant in comparison with the previous two which were connected to political or more human considerations (the Pope's power and physical and material persecution) is that the understanding or intellect, for Edwards, had a particular role to play in perceiving and immediately experiencing the divine presence within time and space. Though God's "ordering of events" and the "details of providence, which very much include human instrumentation" are important to understand "secondary causation" in Edwardsean theology of history (Schweitzer, 115, 116), God's immediate presence and glory is "manifested to [creatures'] understandings". Divine self-communication was possible to intelligent creatures by means of the "divine supernatural light"¹⁴ and their subsequent ability to perceive glory in all of God's works (supremely in the Work of Redemption) resulted in an appropriate response of the heart (26, 27). Edwards firmly believed this and with this confidence he expounded the Bible, which he considered to be instrumental in revival and in the subsequent increase of knowledge to be expected, as in Ezra's days or the Reformation. Likewise, there was the paradigm of Pentecost, typified also by Ezra's completion of the Old Testament canon, which established great revelation to be a corollary or accompaniment of the revival experience.

¹⁴ See Schweitzer, 116, 117, and pp. 32ff above.

After sermon twenty-four, the use of terms pertaining to the ‘rhetoric of revival’ serve merely to point forward to the millennium, and that only in one single instance (9: 460-462). Otherwise, the account of the Reformation in relation to the awakenings of Edwards’ own day is the last context for his compelling deployment of oratorical strategies designed to elicit a response from Northamptonites. These have been shown to be, mainly, the identification of 16th to 18th century reform and revival movements with biblical ones by means of numerous connections (typological or more direct allusions) through the use of the revivalist idiom both in biblical exegesis and in the construal of post-apostolic history. Parallelisms or “historical comparison” would, in fact, continue to be one of Edwards’ main tools in making an apology of the Great Awakening during its aftermath, especially comparing the situation in the colonies with the days of the apostles (Zakai, *History*, 278; cf. p. 38 above). But extra-biblical revival, as has been shown, was also instrumental to enable congregants in 1739 to measure their own experience against something less remote and easier to identify with. Likewise, due to the essential connections between the Protestant Reformation begun two hundred years before and Reformed/evangelical identity in the colonies, the construal of the third “spiritual resurrection” in period three of human history as beginning in the sixteenth century but stretching to the present placed their own local, first-hand spiritual experience in a “sacred historical moment” and a transnational context. By doing this Edwards intended to elicit people’s response (Zakai, *History*, 286). Revivals were the “immediate effect” of the pouring out of God’s Spirit (235) and, therefore, there was nothing to be found within human time and space that more directly signaled the presence of divine agency. The eschatological dimension of revivals went beyond the millennial hope that was implicit in

them, since the very eternal “destiny of human beings is inextricable from the course of salvation history” (282). That is to say, what will be revealed at Judgment Day (the ultimate eschatological event) has already been decisively materialized in the unfolding of the Work of Redemption, during which individuals or multitudes (depending on the kind of ‘season’ one lived in) were converted by the Spirit. In the same way, it could be said that every conversion and revival is, in the Edwardsean scheme, “inextricable” from the purchase of redemption at Calvary. The latter was an event very much prepared for by providential developments and followed by repeated and manifold manifestations of its success; however, in itself, it constituted the apex and axis of redemptive history and transcended time and space, as was shown in Fig. 4 above. (p. 215).

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS AND FURTHER PERSPECTIVES:

EDWARDS AT THE CROSSROADS OF AMERICAN HISTORY

Although this dissertation began with, and has returned to, plenty of references to what was essentially a local or, at the most, colonial context of religious revival (1. 3. and chap. 4), I hope it has become increasingly clear that Jonathan Edwards was a visionary with broader horizons than may appear at a first or superficial glance. The circumstances of the years following the writing and preaching of the Redemption Discourse would afford this New English orator a notable position from which he was able to influence more than just a few hundred congregants. As the main representative of a moderate stance on the Great Awakening he would, from pulpits and in print, seek to win colonial Americans over to the revivalist cause, thus contributing decisively to what became, in time, the collapse of New England's Congregationalist establishment (1. 1. above). Though he may accurately be labeled both a conservative and a rationalist, Edwards would be opposed precisely from some Congregational quarters where ministers advocated for a rationalistic interpretation of Scripture and stood for ecclesiastical conservatism. They lacked the Edwardsean framework that provided a practical balance between Word and Spirit (pp. 232, 233 above) while acknowledging divine sovereignty to the point of letting God himself conduct human history, even if this meant a temporary suspension of ecclesiastical order or the shaking of social structures (pp. 70-72 above). The good old 'New England Way' (cherished by figures like Cotton Mather), with its love for social order and its blurring of the line between civil and spiritual categories, was by the middle of the eighteenth century totally outdated. Movements of religious renewal

with a fresh outlook on the future were necessary but orthodox Christianity, by definition, could not have an identity that was not deeply rooted in its historical past.

Jonathan Edwards' main contributions in this regard were his construal of salvation history in terms of continuous and teleological progress (which stretched into both an earthly and a heavenly future) and the radical Christocentricity of his philosophical understanding of reality. Revivals, which were inextricable from Christ's 'purchase of redemption', constituted mighty acts of an unpredictable God and were the best proof that immediate divine agency had always been, and was still, operative in the world. However, this deity's redemptive activity towards humankind was not just 'immediate' but also 'progressive', as Edwards' rhetoric of piety made evident (chapter 3 above). Though an emphasis on God's remarkable irruptions throughout history was crucial in order to maintain the traditional sense of divine transcendence in historical discourse, the Spirit's outpourings in the Edwardsean scheme always resulted in the creation (or, to use the Pauline idiom, the *new* creation) of pious dispositions and communal holiness in human objects of divine mercy. These people, God's elect, were called to experience the divine presence immanently through mutual edification and by continual perseverance in the basic duties of the Christian life. It was with respect to these two necessary effects of revival that Edwards' handling of imagery from building or construction became instrumental (being directly linked to the idea of 'edification'; 3. 1. above) and that an Edwardsean understanding of the new birth remained fundamental in order to see the essential connection between individual conversion and the pious life that should follow it. "The creative power of the Spirit" gave the believer "a new heart, infusing a new principle". This principle was "*continually* from the Spirit of God,

dwelling as a spring of life in the soul. It is *at first immediately* from the Spirit of God, and 'tis *always immediately* from the Spirit" (*Parables*, I, 147; my italics). This ontological necessity was not simply explained to Northampton congregants so they might go home and figure out how to lead a life that would mirror such inwrought principle. Approximately one year after the words above were preached, they would be summoned by their minister to accompany him through a six-month-long sermon series for the sober contemplation and comprehensive analysis of the Work of Redemption. If they were able to recognize beauty as well as acknowledge God's absolute sovereignty during this prolonged consideration of salvation history, the glory of the Son, Edwards hoped, would supernaturally influence and nurture the spiritual lives that had begun at each Northamptonite's conversion.

Compelling elements in Edwards' rhetoric of piety and revival included not only imagery (from 'building', 'light', etc.) and typology (Christ as the Sun/Son, revivals themselves as echoes or fulfillments of biblical episodes and prophecies, etc.) but the preacher's shrewdness as a logician and creative exegete. As I suggested above, the Northampton theologian might be termed a rationalist insofar as he believed that reason and logical argumentation could play an important role in the believer's growth in the knowledge of God's will. Edwards' historical discourse reflected this confidence in the power of reason as he endeavored to articulate divine agency in terms of reasonable and orderly providential activity. His depiction of cyclical and strictly symmetrical patterns within the historical process (3. 2. and 4. 1. above) conveyed the idea of a God who acts in no irrational or arbitrary way but who, on the contrary, implements His eternal plan and designs according to the highest ideal of reason. By employing logic (following the

principle of “reasoning after revelation” [Moody, 123]) in his very defense of divine reasonableness in the Work of Redemption, Edwards tried to appeal to colonial contemporaries who had neutralized, to say the least, the vitality of true Christianity with their formalism and who claimed to defend a purely rationalistic interpretation of the Bible (chapter 1, pp. 4-6, 10 above).

Despite this colonial American context, which undoubtedly conditioned Edwards’ choice of rhetorical strategies, there was also the wider philosophical scene of the Enlightenment, whose shifting paradigms threatened traditional approaches to history in particular and the Christian interpretation of the cosmos in general. In light of this international context, the Redemption Discourse also seems quite ambitious, especially as Edwards subtly engaged the empiricist mode of thought whereby the material universe was seen as operating and being sustained by mere mechanical laws. By using language that is highly suggestive in terms of sensorial perception (especially ‘seeing’; pp. 190, 201, 202 above) when considering how the historical process is revealed and clarified by Scripture’s own account and prophetic predictions, Edwards seems to intimate that the Bible itself can withstand a test conducted according to the empirical method, that is, based on the observation of evidence. Moreover, in conducting such a test, one may distinctly identify patterns that resemble natural processes themselves or human inventions, which are set in motion by some contrived mechanism and the interaction of different forces. The discovery of this apparent ‘mechanics’ within the very tissue of temporal and material reality as revealed in the Scriptures, far from pointing in the direction of a self-sustaining universe, should confirm the existence of an immanent, as well as transcendent, deity. But Edwards does not intend his hearers to consider these

intricacies of providence at a merely theoretical level and to remain unaffected by their implications. He has in mind, first and foremost, the providential dispensations of God towards the ‘intelligent part’ of creation (namely, humans, angels and the elect in particular), not divine activity in sustaining nature or inanimate matter. Through his own redefinition of the biblical image of Ezekiel’s ‘wheel’ and by recasting it so as to suggest that the ‘wheels of providence’ are extremely complex and operate in much the same manner that sophisticated machines or mechanisms do, the Northampton pastor provides both a dynamic depiction of providence and a basis for the regenerate believer’s confidence irrespectively of outwardly chaotic future events or developments.

This is achieved, mainly, by the new connotation that ‘revolution’ acquires when envisioned as part of a God-appointed historical cycle. Although the term appears throughout the Redemption Discourse in juxtaposition with ‘overturnings’ or various kinds of commotion among human societies (war, exile, a government or ruler being overthrown, etc.), if these *earthly* developments can be seen as a mere manifestation of the irruption or advance of the *heavenly* kingdom, God’s elect need not fear these apparently chaotic and adverse circumstances. Patriotic ministers during the American Revolution were doubtless influenced in some measure by New Light theology, which drew heavily on Edwards’ own writings and thought (p. 11, n. 12 above). In fact, Jonathan Edwards Jr., who would be a stalwart supporter of the colonies’ independence, was transcribing and editing his father’s unfinished manuscript on the *History of the Work of Redemption* during the early 1770s before sending it across the Atlantic for its posthumous publication (Weber, 57). It seems inevitable, therefore, to imagine that Edwards’ historical thought must have, in one way or another, determined his son’s and

other ministers' interpretation of contemporary events as they unfolded during the Revolutionary War. They dedicated whole sermons to calling the people to rise up in arms against tyranny, evincing the kind of "postmillennial eschatology that was rooted in the possibility of social perfection on earth" (Lowance, 181). But the essentially 'otherworldly' mindset possessed by the Northampton pastor was virtually lost in this generation of patriotic preachers as is evidenced by Donald Weber's analysis of their pulpit oratory (56). Moreover, in light of my foregoing analysis (4. 2. c.) there was a substantial difference between the historical climax that revolutionaries believed to be reaching through the fight for independence, which was essentially military, political and nationalistic (Lowance, 181), and the millennial outpouring of the Spirit that would be accompanied with a remarkable increase of knowledge as the penultimate major revival (i.e., the Reformation) had been. Edwards conceived of the millennial divine rule over humankind as one that would be exercised through knowledge and in their minds, not by force or by the mediation of institutions (Niebuhr, 105). Only secondarily, and by means of the progress of the gospel in individuals and communities, would earthly rulers and institutions also gradually and voluntarily come under that sovereign rule.

A 'revolution' driven by essentially economic and political motives would not, based on Edwards' articulation of the millennium, be a direct instrument in God's hands to materialize the eschatological blessings that were announced in Scripture, as he interpreted it, for the glorious times of the Church. At the same time, true Christians need not fret or be too anxious about such military uprisings and political subversions of order because the cyclical and teleological dynamics of providence often implied the necessity of such earthly commotion in order to the establishment of heavenly peace amongst a

society. That society, however, was not any chosen nation but the body of believers, the true elect, and the Christocentricity that pervaded their conversion and revival experiences also ought to inform their understanding of history and of God's way of dealing with communities.

The parallelisms and comparisons found in the Redemption Discourse between the faithful people of God throughout the ages (in and outside Scripture) and the preacher's audience have the function of setting this community (i.e. the Church) above any other that believers might identify with. This in itself, of course, constitutes no homiletic novelty nor is it an innovation in historical thought or discourse. The Grand Itinerant himself, in a completely unsubtle way, established close connections in his sermons between the movement of spiritual renewal he represented, Methodism, and figures of sacred history. Thus, Moses himself was called a "Methodist, a very fine one, a very strong one too" and English reformers like Cranmer or Latimer were described as George Whitefield's own "brethren, what? why, they were Methodist preachers" (*Eighteen Sermons*, 72, 181). Edwards, on the other hand, was more subtle when he wished to make comparisons between his person or his role in Northampton's history and the leaders of the sacred narrative (see p. 227 above) and he tended, in any case, to establish numerous communal rather than individual parallels between his congregation and the ancient Church (see examples in pp. 78, 168ff, 223, 224, or 243, 244). The artistry of his use of comparison lay in how it was weaved into his typological exegesis, whereby not just people (like Joshua) or objects (like the tabernacle) but whole events and circumstances surrounding the Church's spiritual journey through history were rendered symbolic or prophetic of later revival experiences like New England's.

Apart from the immediate context of the Great Awakening and the political developments of the next colonial generation during the American Revolution, there is one more historical perspective I wish to briefly look into as I bring this study to a close. Some potential connections between Jonathan Edwards' philosophy of history and nature and New England's Transcendentalist movement of the nineteenth century have already been alluded to (pp. 192, 193 above). In his *American Transcendentalism: A History*, professor Philip Gura formulates some of the questions that were debated in Harvard's religious and intellectual circles a hundred years after the 1739 sermon series and the Great Awakening:

How could Christians who believed in a rational, orderly universe overseen by a benevolent God hold that mankind needed supernatural proofs to sanction and validate faith? In other words, if God worked in rational, predictable ways, why did he have to break through the normal order of things to establish Christ's special mission in the world? (98, 99)

Most Unitarian Congregationalists of the younger generation, from which the main figures of Transcendentalism sprang (like Ralph Waldo Emerson), gravitated towards a purely rationalist approach to the life and work of Christ that denied the miracles recorded in the gospels and the possibility of any other supernatural occurrence in history (Gura, 99ff). Although some of the young ministers linked to the Bostonian intellectual movement came from New England congregational churches (like Brattle Street Church [21, 22]) that had for decades had pastors who sympathized with the revivalist cause and

with Edwards in particular,¹ they were obviously no heirs of the Edwardsean mode of historical thought. They shunned the idea that God would act supernaturally in time and space to reveal himself immediately to the understanding but, at the same time, sought to transcend the intellectual molds and limitations of their times through a spiritual experience of fusion or union with nature.

One may look for, and even find, similarities between the kind of transcendental experience that American Transcendentalists found in a mystical union with nature and the ‘new sense’ imparted to the human soul that changed Edwards’ whole worldview, including his typological interpretation of natural phenomena (pp. 24-26 above). In terms of symbolic and redemptive representations of nature, it has been suggested that Puritanism, and Jonathan Edwards’ cyclical vision of history in particular, contributed in the long run to “the mystical and regenerative figuralism of Henry David Thoreau and the Transcendentalists”. More specifically, the “dominant image in *Walden* is the circle, and it reflects a cycle of spiritual investigation that is followed by spiritual regeneration” (Lowance, 220, 292). However, and despite the common rhetorical and experiential elements that converge in their respective construals of the spiritual universe, the Transcendentalists’ wholesale rejection of a deity that could, and did, act immediately upon creation drives a chasm between them and Edwards. Though the latter may be seen as a progressive figure precisely in that he accepted and incorporated into his historical narrative the Enlightenment notion of a “dimension of progress inherent in time” (Zakai, *History*, 201, 202), his keenness to maintain a strictly biblical framework of redemptive

¹ See references to the former minister of Brattle Street Church, Benjamin Colman, and his relationship and correspondence with Jonathan Edwards in chapter one above (p. 30 n. 26, and p. 38).

history (4. 2. above) in which supernatural intervention in the form of revivals was instrumental makes him a conservative, if revivalist, orator. Likewise, the radical Christocentricity that underlay his rhetoric of revival (4. 1. above) anchors his life-long personal and literary endeavors to further the cause of spiritual renewal in a historical past. If his original hermeneutics “represented an important innovation in Christian typology and philosophy” and allowed him to transcend “philosophical dualism, linking the natural and the supernatural in a compelling and dynamic unity in God” (Anderson, Lowance & Watters, 11: 33), it is no less true that his belief in an immediate, as well as a progressive, divine agency within history showed he would not renounce his traditional and orthodox understanding of God as utterly transcendent. It has been argued by many scholars from different academic disciplines that Edwards accomplished much through innovations, creativity, and even artistic genius. Maybe this proves the general observation historian Edmund S. Morgan made after reflecting on the role and influence of John Winthrop in colonial history: “the men whom Americans recognize as great seem to have pursued and accomplished radical ends by conservative means” (*Genuine Article*, 14).

The fact that Jonathan Edwards “set out at the end of his life to master the art of historical narrative” by reworking his 1739 sermon series on the Work of Redemption (Kimmach, 10: 258) proves that the historical vision enshrined in the main object of study throughout this dissertation (namely, the Redemption Discourse) remained always to the forefront of his thought and, therefore, determined his career as preacher and revivalist.

As much as his postmillennialist outlook on the future may have led to various intellectual and social developments in America during and after his own lifetime, the ultimate goal of history, i.e. God and heaven, would no doubt be considered by him the best legacy to be passed down “from generation to generation”. Lying outside human time, but not beyond human reach due to Christ’s Incarnation and ‘purchase of redemption’, the transcendent, “immutable” God had “built heaven” for a “happy society”, His invisible Church, to enjoy after every word in the book of Revelation was fulfilled (9: 525, 526, 528). With such language and with apocalyptic readings from the last chapter of the last book of Scripture, Edwards arrived at the end of his thirtieth and last sermon of the historic series.

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