



Some Thoughts Concerning the Present Revival of Religion in New England

Jonathan Edwards (1742)

Jonathan Edwards was a white Congregational minister from Connecticut who became famous for his theological writings; he served briefly, before his sudden death, as president of the college that later became Princeton University. In the 1730s-40s, Edwards played a leading role, as a preacher, in a series of religious revivals that other Congregational ministers criticized as excessively emotional. The selections presented here come from one of several works that Edwards wrote in defense of the revivals. Here he touts the revivals as the beginning of the establishment of Christ's millennial reign on earth, which he argues is destined to emanate from America.

Edwards celebrates, in particular, the conversion of indigenous people as a result of the revivals. In subsequent years, Edwards became close to David Brainerd, a white missionary to the Lenape people; Edwards published a hagiography of Brainerd after the young missionary's death. For a time, Edwards himself took a post as pastor in a mission settlement for Mohicans.

[This work is very glorious]

[T]here has been of late a very uncommon influence upon the minds of a very great part of the inhabitants of New England [...] Multitudes, in all parts of the land, of vain, thoughtless, regardless persons are quite changed and become serious and considerate. There is a vast increase of concern for the salvation of the precious soul and of that inquiry, "What shall I do to be saved?" The hearts of multitudes have been greatly taken off from the things of the world, its profits, pleasures, and honors [...] They are more afraid of sin, more careful and inquisitive that they may know what is contrary to the mind and will of God, that they may avoid it, and what he requires of them, that they may do it [...] And there has been this alteration abiding on multitudes, all over the land, for a year and a half, without any appearance of a disposition to return to former vice and vanity.

And under the influences of this work, there have been many of the remains of those wretched people and dregs of mankind, the poor Indians—that seemed to be next to a state of brutality and with whom, till now, it seemed to be to little more purpose to use endeavors for their instruction and awakening than with the beasts—whose minds have now been strangely opened to receive instruction, and have been deeply affected with the concerns of their precious souls, and have reformed their lives and forsaken their former stupid, barbarous, and brutish way of living—and particularly that sin to which they have been so exceedingly addicted, their drunkenness—and are become devout and serious persons; and many of them, to appearance, [have been] brought truly and greatly to delight in the things of God and to have their souls very much engaged and entertained with the great things of the gospel. And many of the poor Negroes also have been in like manner wrought upon and changed. [...]

The work is very glorious if we consider the extent of it, being in this respect vastly beyond any former outpouring of the Spirit that ever was known in New England. There has formerly sometimes been a remarkable awakening and success of the means of grace in some particular congregation [...] But now God has brought to pass a new thing: he has wrought a great work of

this nature that has extended from one end of the land to the other, besides what has been wrought in other British colonies in America. [...T]he land in all parts has abounded with such instances, any one of which, if they had happened formerly, would have been thought worthy to be taken notice of by God's people throughout the British dominions. The New Jerusalem, in this respect, has begun to come down from heaven, and perhaps never were more of the prelibations of heaven's glory given upon earth. [...]

[The glorious times are probably to begin in America]

'Tis not unlikely that this work of God's Spirit, that is so extraordinary and wonderful, is the dawning, or at least a prelude, of that glorious work of God, so often foretold in scripture, which, in the progress and issue of it, shall renew the world of mankind. [...] And there are many things that make it probable that this work will begin in America. 'Tis signified that it shall begin in some very remote part of the world, that the rest of the world have no communication with but by navigation, in Isa. 60:9. "Surely the isles shall wait for me, and the ships of Tarshish first, to bring my sons from far." It is exceeding manifest that this chapter is a prophecy of the prosperity of the church in its most glorious state on earth in the latter days; and I can't think that anything else can be here intended but America by the isles that are far off, from whence the firstborn sons of that glorious day shall be brought. [...]

God has made, as it were, two worlds here below: the old and the new (according to the names they are now called by), two great habitable continents far separated one from the other. The latter is but newly discovered; it was formerly wholly unknown, from age to age, and is, as it were, now but newly created. It has been, till of late, wholly the possession of Satan, the church of God having never been in it, as it has been in the other continent, from the beginning of the world. This new world is probably now discovered that the new and most glorious state of God's church on earth might commence there—that God might in it begin a new world in a spiritual respect, when he creates the new heavens and new earth.

God has already put that honor upon the other continent, that Christ was born there literally and there made the purchase of redemption. So, as Providence observes a kind of equal distribution of things, 'tis not unlikely that the great spiritual birth of Christ and the most glorious application of redemption is to begin in this. [...] The other continent hath slain Christ, and has from age to age shed the blood of the saints and martyrs of Jesus, and has often been, as it were, deluged with the church's blood. God has therefore probably reserved the honor of building the glorious temple to the daughter, that has not shed so much blood, when those times of the peace and prosperity and glory of the church shall commence that were typified by the reign of Solomon.

[...] America has received the true religion of the old continent; the church, of ancient times, has been there, and Christ is from thence. But that there may be an equality, and inasmuch as that continent has crucified Christ, they shall not have the honor of communicating religion in its most glorious state to us, but we to them. [...] And so 'tis probable that that will come to pass in spirituals that has in temporals, with respect to America: that whereas, till of late, the world was supplied with its silver and gold and earthly treasures from the old continent, now it's supplied chiefly from the new; so the course of things in spiritual respects will be in like manner turned.

And 'tis worthy to be noted that America was discovered about the time of the Reformation, or but little before, which Reformation was the first thing that God did towards the glorious renovation of the world after it had sunk into the depths of darkness and ruin under the great Antichristian apostasy. So that as soon as this new world is (as it were) created and stands forth in view, God presently goes about doing some great thing in order to make way for the introduction of the church's latter-day glory, that is to have its first seat in, and is to take its rise from, that new world.

It is agreeable to God's manner of working, when he accomplishes any glorious work in the world to introduce a new and more excellent state of his church, to begin his work where his church had not been till then and where was no foundation already laid, that the power of God might be the more conspicuous, that the work might appear to be entirely God's and be more manifestly a creation out of nothing [...] When God is about to turn the earth into a paradise, he doesn't begin his work where there is some good growth already but in the wilderness, where nothing grows and nothing is to be seen but dry sand and barren rocks [...] when he is about to renew the whole habitable earth, 'tis probable that he will begin in this utmost, meanest, youngest, and weakest part of it, where the church of God has been planted last of all; and so the first shall be last, and the last first [...]

And if we may suppose that this glorious work of God shall begin in any part of America, I think, if we consider the circumstances of the settlement of New England, it must needs appear the most likely of all American colonies to be the place whence this work shall principally take its rise. And if these things are so, it gives us more abundant reason to hope that what is now seen in America, and especially in New England, may prove the dawn of that glorious day; and the very uncommon and wonderful circumstances and events of this work seem to me strongly to argue that God intends it as the beginning or forerunner of something vastly great.

Source: Jonathan Edwards, *Some Thoughts Concerning the Present Revival of Religion in New-England* [...] (Boston: S. Kneeland and T. Green, 1742), 51-52, 58-59, 84-87, 96-104 (parts 1-2), <https://archive.org/details/somethought00edwa>. Free eBook from the Internet Archive.

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