Remembered around the World

The International Scope of Edwards's Legacy

David W. Bebbington

“If the Spirit of God should be immediately poured out,” mused Jonathan Edwards in his Humble Attempt of 1747, “...there must be an amazing and unparalleled progress of the work.” The gospel would make enormous strides in future decades. Over the first fifty years, that is, by around 1800, vital religion might conquer “the Protestant world.” Over the next fifty, by 1850, “the popish world” might submit to the truth. Over the succeeding fifty, by 1900, “the greater part of the Mahometan world, and ... Jewish nation” might be brought into the gospel fold. And over the ensuing century “the whole heathen world” might be converted to the Christian faith. The year 2000 would in that case inaugurate “the happy state of the millennium.” Perhaps the New England Congregationalist was a truer prophet than he is usually supposed to have been in predicting a happy millennium for the year 2000. He was, of course, thinking in round numbers; and his version of the millennium was not the frenzied bout of self-congratulatory celebration that marked 1 January 2000 but a period of “holy rest.” Yet he rightly envisaged that the gospel in the revivalist mode that he endorsed would advance steadily around the globe over the two and a half centuries after his time. Evangelicalism has indeed grown from its origins in Edwards's day to become a potent sector of world Christianity. Partly as a by-product, Edwards's own reputation has extended to girdle the earth. The process of evangelical growth, however, has not been as orderly as the theologian hypothesized; and the development of Edwards's reputation has been even less a matter of regular stages over time. The appreciation of Edwards has decayed as well as grown, and it has been disproportionately restricted to certain parts of the world. This paper aims to sketch the vicissitudes of Edwards's legacy outside America over the last two hundred and fifty years. It points to several distinct phases, suggesting that, notwithstanding times of downturn in his celebrity, at certain periods and places the theologian exercised an extremely powerful influence.
The first phase of Edwards's reputation was among contemporaries who continued to value his works after his death. In England his writings circulated widely because so many were published in London and elsewhere. The Faithful Narrative (1737) was actually issued, with a preface by the hymn-writer Isaac Watts and his fellow Congregational minister John Guyse, in England before it appeared in America. On the grounds of affinity with Edwards as a Congregationalist, the more intellectual members of the denomination in England tended to take a particular interest in his works. Four years after Edwards's death, for instance, in 1762, another Congregational minister, William Gordon, published in London an abridged edition of the New Englander's Religious Affections. Gordon, who was then minister of Gravel Lane Meeting in Southwark, seems to have imbibed a fascination for America because in 1770 he immigrated to Massachusetts, where he was to rise to become secretary to George Washington before, in the end, returning to the obscurity of a provincial pastorate at St. Neots, Huntingdonshire, in 1789. Edwards's fame, however, was not confined to his fellow Dissenters. Members of the Church of England who were caught up in the Evangelical Revival admired a man who shared their gospel principles. John Newton, the slave ship captain turned clergyman, declared in 1762 that Edwards was "my favorite author." Yet Anglican evangelicals increasingly tended to be wary of Edwards as too much a Calvinist and too much a metaphysician. Their exposed position as a small embattled minority within the established church made most of them reluctant to avow a Reformed theology, at least in public, and induced them to invoke the Bible alone rather than philosophy to defend their teaching. By 1779 Newton himself was criticizing what he called the "Scheme, System, & Notion" of American divinity, by which he meant the writings of Edwards and his followers, and fifteen years later he expressed regret that he had been in the habit of referring others to the Freedom of the Will. Nevertheless even when Anglican evangelicals doubted the value of Edwards's philosophical theology, they honored his spirituality. William Wilberforce, the politician who led the agitation against the slave trade, praised the Religious Affections for its "close searching into the heart." Edwards the champion of revival Christianity held a powerful attraction for the promoters of the gospel cause in England.

To one Englishman in particular, however, Edwards posed a dilemma. John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, was at the forefront of the evangelical movement, and therefore greatly valued Edwards's accounts of revival in the New World, where Wesley himself had served before his conversion. At the third annual Methodist conference in 1746, the Faithful Narrative and Distinguishing Marks were read by the assembled preachers. Yet Wesley was a militant Arminian who believed Calvinism to be a sinister threat to morality. If human beings were in any sense determined in their actions, he held, they were not responsible for their behavior. Hence his attitude to Edwards's writings was ambiguous. Wesley described the Religious Affections, for instance, as a "dangerous heap, wherein much wholesome food is mixed with much deadly poison." So eager was Wesley to make the food available that he took upon himself the elimination of the poison. He drastically revised several of the more revival-orientated works for publication. Taking William Gordon's abridgement of the Religious Affections, which included roughly two-thirds of the original, Wesley cut out so much more that his version contained only about one-sixth of the original. Having purged Edwards of his noxious errors, Wesley set about the propagation of the abridged work with characteristic energy. Four such Edwards abridgments—the Faithful Narrative, Distinguishing Marks, Some Thoughts, and Religious Affections—were included in the "Christian Library" that Wesley directed all his preachers to possess and sell. The Methodists continued the task of making known Edwards's revival writings into the following century. The standard nineteenth-century edition of the Life of Brainerd, cheap and pocket-sized, for example, was a version issued in 1808 that had been adapted from Wesley's abridgement. The dissemination of Edwards's more practical writings in England owed much to John Wesley.

In Calvinist Scotland, Wesley's theological reservations did not exist among those identified with the evangelical cause. The circle of Presbyterians around William McCulloch, minister of the parish of Cambuslang, where revival broke out in 1742, saw their movement as being part and parcel of the Great Awakening that had begun at Northampton, Massachusetts. McCulloch and his friends corresponded across the Atlantic with Edwards, first suggesting the concert for prayer that is the subject of the Humble Attempt. One of them, John MacLaurin, so admired Edwards that he tried to obtain the New Englander's portrait during his lifetime. Even the philosophers of Scotland took note of the Calvinist metaphysician. David Hume seems to have read Edwards, and Lord Kames tried to recruit the theologian in support of his version of fatalism, an attempt that Edwards rebutted in a letter that from 1768 was standardly printed in editions of the Freedom of the Will.

The recipient of the rebuttal, John Erskine, was the most regular Scottish correspondent of Edwards during his lifetime and his most ardent champion after his death. Erskine was an urbane intellectual figure from an old landed family in Angus, who rose to become, as joint minister of Old Greyfriars, Edinburgh,
the leader of the evangelicals in the Church of Scotland. It is true that he did not endorse every line of Edwards. The Scottish minister took issue, for example, with Edwards’s sermons on justification.13 Yet Erskine saw Edwards as the foremost advocate of evangelical Calvinism, and so determined to extend the New Englander’s influence. Securing transcriptions of the manuscripts from Jonathan Edwards Jr., Erskine worked up a set of sermons into the History of the Work of Redemption, which was first published in Edinburgh in 1774. Its notices were by no means entirely favorable: the Monthly Review in London dismissed it as “merely an attempt to revive the old mystical divinity that distracted the last age with pious conundrums: and which, having, long ago, emigrated to America, we have no reason to wish should ever be imported back again.”14 Such contemptuous treatment may well have discouraged Erskine from continuing the publication of the manuscripts at that point, but in 1788, 1793, and 1796 he issued some sermons and two volumes of theological observations by Edwards, again for the first time.15 Erskine was committed not only to the honoring of Edwards’s name but also to the spread of his theology.

The revival enthusiasm that gripped Wesley and the Scottish ministers during Edwards’s lifetime also extended to parts of Germany. The network of those eager for the revitalization of the Protestant cause included J. A. Steinmetz, superintendent of Magdeburg in Prussia. As the editor and biographer of Philip Spener, Steinmetz was deep in the Pietist tradition. As early as 1738, the year immediately after its publication in London, Steinmetz became aware of Edwards’s Faithful Narrative. Translating it into German himself, he added an account of soul-saving in German lands and New England. Perhaps, he surmised, “the Lord might finally remove his candlestick from ungrateful Europe and give the glory of Lebanon to the American wilderness.”16 His prophecy may have contained a grain of truth: the book fell on stony ground in his own land, creating no discernible effect. No other work by Edwards was translated into German during the eighteenth century.

Steinmetz’s edition, however, did travel over the border into the Netherlands. A copy was obtained by Isaac Le Long, an avid book collector in Amsterdam who, because he enjoyed independent means, could usually secure titles he wanted, whether old or new. Le Long came from a Flemish Calvinist family, but had been brought up in Germany. When Count Zinzendorf’s revivalistic Moravians arrived in Amsterdam in about 1733, Le Long was one of the first to give them his support.17 Edwards’s account of revival in the New World was bound to excite him. In 1740 Le Long published a translation not of the English-language original but of Steinmetz’s German version. It achieved more success than its German equivalent, for it went into a second edition ten years later. In 1756, furthermore, the Life of Brainerd was translated into Dutch, this time directly from English and by another hand. News of the spread of the gospel was clearly attractive in the Netherlands, winning Edwards an audience even during his lifetime.

If the early interest of the Dutch was in Edwards the advocate of revival, that predominantly Reformed land began in the 1770s to gain an appreciation of Edwards the theologian. In 1774 the Freedom of the Will was translated into Dutch. Although there is no certain evidence, that development may have been on the initiative of John Erskine, the Edinburgh minister who had taken charge of Edwards’s posthumous reputation. Certainly Erskine was starting to establish links with the Netherlands. Through David Thomson, minister of the Scots Kirk in Amsterdam, he made contact with Gijsbert Bonnet, professor of divinity at Utrecht.18 Bonnet’s stance, confessional but enlightened, appealed immensely to Erskine, who learned Dutch from scratch in his fifties in order to able to correspond with him.19 Erskine no doubt recommended Edwards to Bonnet as the ablest protagonist of the same doctrinal perspective. In 1776 the History of the Work of Redemption appeared in Dutch, introduced by Erskine and with the formal approval of the classis of Utrecht, no doubt arranged by Bonnet.20 The same translator was responsible for the life of Edwards published at Utrecht in 1791. Others in the Netherlands, however, also recognized in Edwards a bulwark of the twofold cause of vital piety and sound doctrine. Marinus Van Werkhoven, who had previously translated a range of English theologians, published a Dutch version of the Religious Affections in 1779 and went on to issue Two Dissertations in 1788 and Original Sin in 1790. The last was introduced by a veteran preacher, J. C. Appelius, who had previously defended orthodoxy against rationalist teaching.21 The Reformed network linking Scotland with the Netherlands had successfully injected Edwards into the Dutch bloodstream.

In the first phase of remembering Edwards, therefore, the period when his reputation was sustained by his contemporaries, the world beyond America was more active in the task than America itself. The publication history of his writings down to 1775 confirms that verdict. Of Edwards’s works relating to revival, twelve items were issued in America. The equivalent figure for England alone was twelve and for Scotland ten. Of his works relating to theology, seven items were published in America. The equivalent figure for England was six and for Scotland five. Only in the field of sermons was America far ahead, with twenty titles compared to one each for England and Scotland.22 Britain, no doubt in part because of its vastly greater population, was well ahead in the publication of Edwards’s treatises as opposed to his sermons. His fame extended to
Germany and, more substantially, to the Netherlands, where Scottish influence ensured that he took root in the late eighteenth century. Hungary, however, containing the next largest Reformed community, remained immune, never publishing a title by Edwards in the eighteenth century or, indeed, at any time afterward. So Britain played a major part in the dissemination of Edwardsian influence. Perhaps that was to be expected when we recall that Edwards had recognized the solidarity of “all within the British dominions.”

In the second phase, lasting from the 1770s until long into the nineteenth century, Edwards shaped the shapers of opinion. The process is perceptible far beyond the religious sphere. In political thought following the French Revolution, when the world seemed to totter on its axis, Edwards’s legacy was keenly contested in England. William Godwin is perhaps best known now as the husband of the early feminist Mary Wollstonecraft, but he was also one of the most radical thinkers in the wake of the revolution. In 1793 he published An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice praising liberty, equality, and fraternity. He explicitly appeals to Edwards on two scores: to establish the impossibility of free will and to dismiss the legitimacy of gratitude, the giving of preference to one person over another on grounds other than intrinsic worth—the second argument deriving from Edwards’s Nature of True Virtue. The debt is not surprising since Godwin had commenced a career as a Dissenting minister and had been trained by a tutor, Joseph Fawcett, who was a follower of Edwards.

The implications of Godwin’s two arguments, however, were alarming to defenders of the existing order in Britain. From the doctrine of necessity he drew, in the spirit of the secular Enlightenment, the inference that human beings are not truly responsible for their vices. “The ideas,” he declared, “of guilt, crime, desert and accountability have no place.” Likewise, from the rejection of gratitude he inferred that individuals have no obligations to their social superiors for benefits conferred. To his readers, the legitimacy of punishment and the very bonds of society seemed under threat, apparently as a result of Edwards’s contentions. Accordingly Samuel Parr, a clerical schoolteacher and himself a very advanced Whig, but nevertheless a defender of the established social order, felt it essential to preach a sermon explaining that Godwin had misapplied Edwards. The New England theologian, though notable for “metaphysical acuteness” and “fervent piety,” did not, according to Parr, have to be followed over free will; and, though gratitude was not a part of true virtue in Edwards’s restricted meaning of the term, the New Englander did not deny that gratitude is an element in justice. Edwards, Parr concluded, could not be treated as an authority for revolutionary principles.

In philosophy Edwards similarly made a mark. Sir James Mackintosh, the leading Whig ethicist of the turn of the nineteenth century, considered Edwards’s powers of subtle argument “unsurpassed among men” and admired his moral theory because it took him far along the road toward Plato. Likewise Dugald Stewart, the chief disseminator of Scottish common sense philosophy in the same generation, praised the ability of Edwards’s case against free will and tried to assimilate him to the common sense school. The New England theologian was recognized as a force to be reckoned with far beyond his own main department of knowledge.

In the theological sphere, naturally, Edwards’s standing was even higher. His influence can be illustrated from the case of the English Baptists. They were troubled in the late eighteenth century by what had come to be called “the modern question” among orthodox Dissenters. Did Calvinism, with its confidence in the effectual calling of the elect, dictate that preachers must not make a free offer of the gospel? They would like to summon sinners to repentance, but did a consistent theology prohibit the practice? Jonathan Edwards’s distinction between natural and moral inability provided a solution to the conundrum. Sinners possessed a natural ability to respond to the gospel, according to Edwards, even though their actions were part of a chain of causation. Their failure to repent and believe, however, was a case of moral inability, a willful refusal that rendered them guilty before the Almighty. Hence human beings had an obligation to believe; and hence, in turn, ministers of the gospel had to challenge them to believe.

Here was a potential resolution of the difficulty of the English Baptists. Caleb Evans, the principal of their Bristol Academy, was teaching this distinction between natural and moral inability by 1772, but the idea only gradually dawned on others in the denomination. In about 1775 it was reading Edward’s Freedom of the Will that gave light on the subject to John Ryland, who was later to succeed Evans as principal at Bristol and so to pass on this view to several generations of Baptist ministers. Ryland became an Edwards enthusiast: in 1780 he published the theologian’s sermon on “The Excellency of Christ” as a tract at the low price of four pence each “or 3 shillings per Dozen to those who give them away”; he even called his sons “David Brainerd Ryland” and “Jonathan Edwards Ryland.” The circle of Ryland’s friends in and around Northamptonshire eagerly obtained more of Edwards’s writings from other sources. In 1784, for instance, John Erskine, the Scottish promoter of Edwards, sent Ryland a copy of the Humble Attempt. The Baptists reissued the book, which declared on its title page that it was published at “Northampton, in Old
England.” The result was a series of monthly prayer meetings for revival that helped quicken the pace of denominational growth.

Probably most important in the reception of Edwards by the English Baptists was the impact on Andrew Fuller, minister at Soham in Cambridgeshire and later at Kettering. Fuller was personally refreshed by the *Religious Affections,* was struck that David Brainerd had no inhibitions about preaching to American Indians, and embraced Edwards’s distinction between natural and moral inability. As a result, Fuller, in his *Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation* (1781), urged ministers to proclaim the obligation of their hearers to receive the gospel, the principle of “duty faith.” Fuller became the outstanding theologian of evangelical Dissent at the turn of the nineteenth century. His teaching was to remain the touchstone of orthodoxy for several generations. In 1872 the secretary of the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland was still pointing to Fuller as the paramount authority in theology. And Fuller was basing himself on the premises supplied by Edwards.

Another case study can be made of the Welsh Independents. Although they were of the same denomination as Edwards, “Independents” being the equivalent of “Congregationalists,” the members of this Welsh body were largely ignorant of Edwards’s reputation for much of the eighteenth century because of the language barrier. Most of their congregations, and even their ministers, used only Welsh. Edwards was known in Wales to the English-speaking revivalist Howell Harris in the 1740s through contact with Scotland, but Harris belonged to the Calvinistic Methodists who remained associated with the Church of England and so distant from the Independents.

The breakthrough of Edwards into the denomination in the Welsh-speaking world was achieved by Edward Williams, who was principal of the Independent academies at Oswestry and then at Rotherham. Williams, who was bilingual in Welsh and English, eventually corresponded with Edwards’s circle in America, and it may well have been through them that he originally became aware of the New Englander’s stature. It was Williams who brought out the first collected works of Edwards to appear anywhere in the world, the Leeds edition of 1806–1811. While engaged on this project, Williams published his *Essay on the Equity of the Divine Government* (1809), which propagated the Edwardsian approach to theology among the Independents of England as well as those of Wales.

In Williams’s native country, however, there was a particular stirring of interest. John Roberts, Independent minister at Llanbrynmair, Montgomeryshire, who had briefly been under training by Williams, took up the cudgels for his mentor’s position in the Welsh language. In 1807 Roberts issued a *Friendly Address* to Arminians, urging them to recognize the distinction between natural and moral inability and so to turn to moderate Calvinism. Two years later he issued a series of extracts from Edwards’s *Religious Affections,* and in 1814 published, in opposition to higher Calvinists, the significantly titled *Humble Attempt* in order to resolve the question of the extent of the atonement. Roberts was a militant exponent of what was called in Wales the “New System,” opposed to the beliefs of Wesleyan Arminians and Calvinistic Methodists alike. This ideology was the motor of denominational expansion, Roberts’s own area becoming the “cradle of early Independency in Wales.” As others adopted his Edwardsian principles, the denomination emerged as a major force in the north of the principality. Edwards inevitably became sought after by Welsh readers. In 1827 there was a translation of the *History of Redemption* and in 1833 one of the *Religious Affections, Freedom of the Will* followed later, in 1865, together with *Two Dissertations* at about the same time and *Original Sin* in 1870, all translated by Independent ministers. The whole Welsh denomination was invigorated by a commitment to the Edwardsian framework of belief.

Almost the same can be said of Scottish Presbyterianism. Erskine’s efforts in the eighteenth century created awareness of Edwards, but it was in the following century, through Thomas Chalmers, the evangelical leader in the Church of Scotland, that the New England theologian made his greatest impact. Chalmers was trained at St. Andrews, where the professor of divinity, George Hill, though not aligned with the evangelicals, acknowledged a heavy debt to Edwards as an able defender of Calvinism, and especially of the doctrine of original sin. Although Chalmers learned from Hill to respect Edwards, it was only after his own subsequent conversion to evangelical religion that he became a disciple of the American. In an 1821 work, Chalmers lauded Edwards as the man who, when David Hume was undermining religion and morality, had most powerfully defended the Christian faith. As professor of divinity at Edinburgh from 1828 to 1843 and for four years afterward as the prophet of the Free Church of Scotland that he led out of the established church, Chalmers instilled the worth of the New Englander into his receptive students. Edwards, he claimed, was the most incontrovertible writer on necessity and the origin of sin, superior to Leibniz on both topics. “My Theology,” he remarked at the end of his life, “is that of Jonathan Edwards.” The supreme achievement of the American, according to Chalmers, was to demonstrate that religion was for “men of cultivated minds.”

In Scotland, however, Edwards was revered not only for his intellectual capacity but also for his other qualities. Horatius Bonar, the Free Church hymn writer, published extracts from the *Faithful Narrative* in 1845 and, six years
later, the *Life of Brainerd*, which soon ran to a third edition. Edwards the pro-
moter of revival was warmly admired. So, furthermore, was Edwards the man of
personal piety. The most popular Edwards title in the homes of Victorian
Scotland, according to the theologian James Orr, was the *Religious Affections.*

The New Englander enjoyed a secure place in the hearts of nineteenth-century
Scottish Presbyterians because of his great versatility.

Edwards was also known beyond Great Britain. One of the chief agencies
for the dissemination of his works was the missionary movement, in which
during the nineteenth century Britain took the lead. William Carey, the pio-
near Baptist missionary to India, came from the group of Northamptonshire
ministers whose zeal for spreading the gospel had been rekindled by Edwards.
To Carey the *Life of Brainerd* was “almost a second Bible.”98 As a result of the
planting of a Baptist mission in India, there was printed at Calcutta in 1859 a
reissue of Edwards’s prayer call from the *Humble Attempt.*99 Other missionary
societies also found Edwards’s writings an inspiration. The predominantly
Congregational organization called at first simply the Missionary Society sponsored
another edition of the *Humble Attempt* in 1814.97 The Church Missionary Soci-
ety, an evangelical Anglican body, published an abridgement of the *Life of Brainerd*
in its periodical, subsequently reissued in book form in 1834.98

Awareness of Edwards extended to the continent. In Paris, perhaps as a
result of the work of the British agents of the Continental Society, the *Humble
Attempt* was translated into French in 1823. The *History of Redemption* followed
it into the French language in 1854. In Switzerland, the *Life of Brainerd* appeared in French in 1838 and in German thirteen years later. Perhaps the
most striking instance of the international penetration of the New Eng-lander’s
writings is a translation into Arabic, at Beirut in 1868, of the *History of Redemp-
tion*, quaintly described as being written by “the Learned Chief Jonathan
Edwards.” There was a real global interest in Edwards during the nineteenth
century; but the interest, it will be noticed, was only in certain works: *Humble
Attempt*, *Life of Brainerd*, and *History of Redemption*. In missionary endeavor,
inevitably, the books relating most directly to mission, human and divine, were
the ones that attracted attention.

Yet in Britain itself what had been erected on the foundations of Edwards’s
thought during the second phase of the theologian’s reputation was an elabo-
rate doctrinal structure. There were, of course, reservations about points in his
system and modifications of aspects of his legacy even among the most favorably
disposed. Andrew Fuller, Edward Williams, and Thomas Chalmers all ac-
cepted the governmental theory of the atonement, drawing on Joseph Bellamy
as their source rather than on Bellamy’s master, Edwards. It would be fairer to
claim them as exponents of the New England theology than of simple Edward-
sianism. By the 1830s, furthermore, it was becoming common, even among
Edwards’s admirers, to censure him for not being empirical enough in his
methods.100 Despite his unstinted praise for Edwards, Chalmers could dismiss
the American’s a priori reasoning on some topics as “execrable rubbish.”101 Ne-
evertheless these were criticisms from within Edwards’s system, suggestions for
improvement rather than proposals for replacement. Edwards had created an
intellectual framework within which his successors in the English-speaking
(English-speaking) world did their thinking and their mission. The Almighty
was the giver of the laws of determinism; these were compatible with human
liberty; therefore the gospel could be preached in the twofold confidence that
God was in charge of the world and that human beings were free to respond.
This was the worldview of moderate evangelical Calvinism, and it exercised a
profound sway.

It was, in fact, relatively more influential in Britain than in the United States.
In America this synthesis was championed, as Joseph Conforti has shown, by
Edwards A. Park of Andover, and it certainly achieved popularity.102 Yet it was
resisted as too innovative by the Old School Presbyterians of Princeton and
regarded as too traditional by the Consistent Calvinists of New Haven. The
mediating position was criticized by these higher and lower Calvinists alike.
In Britain, by contrast, there was no contemporary school of high Calvinism that
carried intellectual weight; nor was there an attempt to adopt a system similar
to Consistent Calvinism until the 1840s, when Charles Finney’s popular theology
was imported from America. Neither Princeton nor New Haven had an
equivalent in Britain. Therefore, the theology deriving from Edwards reigned
supreme in the denominations possessing a self-conscious Reformed heritage.
His paradigm molded the evangelical Calvinist tradition in Britain until after
the middle of the nineteenth century.

The third phase, overlapping with the previous one, was a period in which
Edwards’s reputation was challenged and declined. A new intellectual mood
arose during the nineteenth century that was much less favorable to the theo-
logian. Rooted in Romanticism, the rising temper of the age stressed the cate-
gories of growth, will, and emotion, looking askance at rule-governed models
of the world. Its origins were in Germany, where there was little awareness of Ed-
wards. Among the German philosophers of the Romantic age, it is true that he
was known to J. G. Fichte, who praised “this solitary thinker of North America”
for rising to “the deepest and loftiest ground which can underlie the principles
of morals." But German theologians in the age of Schleiermacher knew nothing of Edwards. In the Netherlands, despite the earlier burst of interest in Edwards's works, he did not mold the Reformed mind as he did in Britain. There was no publication or republication of his writings in Dutch at all during the nineteenth century. Willem Bilderdijk, the celebrated Pietist poet at the opening of the century, had works by the American in his library, but he and his associates in the Dutch Reveal movement were deeply swayed by the new stirrings of Romanticism and must have found both the style and the content of Edwards's books uncongenial. The New Englisher might still be honored by some as a spiritual writer, but his weightier philosophical theology faded from the Dutch memory.

Likewise in England the Romantic poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge knew of Edwards, but thought his position superseded by idealist philosophy. "I greatly admire President Edwards's Works," he told John Ryland in 1807, "but am convinced that Kant in his Critique of Pure Reason has completely overthrown the edifice of Fatalism." Failing to distinguish between an absolute fatalism and Edwards's determinism, Coleridge rejected what he called "the New England System." Many of the next generation, swayed by Coleridge and other advocates of metaphysical liberty, were equally unable to draw the distinction. Among them was the young W. E. Gladstone, the future prime minister, who in 1839, while moving from his early evangelicalism to a form of High Church Anglicanism, spent some time each day for a whole month wrestling with Edwards. The texts he used survive, complete with their copious annotations. First he read the life of the theologian, finding much to admire in his spiritual dedication. Gladstone sprinkled the margins with marks of appreciation. Then, however, he passed on to the Freedom of the Will, and the signs of approval turned to crosses of dissent. He could not accept the contrast between natural and moral inability, and so saw Edwards as a covert advocate of the slavery of the human will. The New Englander's book, he concluded, "proceeds upon unsound psychological assumptions, and confusions of things palpably distinct, and it has no ground either in Scripture or in metaphysics." Edwards was ceasing to persuade minds affected by the fresh currents of thought coursing through the nineteenth century.

In theology the new temper of the age brought a reaction against Edwards's synthesis in its British heartland. Thomas Erskine, a nephew of Edwards enthusiast John Erskine and a Scottish Episcopal layman, gradually departed from his uncle's moderate Calvinism during the 1820s and 1830s. In 1837 Erskine's Doctrine of Election argued that Edwards's definition of freedom reduced human beings to the level of animals, depriving them of their proper moral dignity, and that Edwards's restriction of the Almighty's love to the elect denied the great doctrine of the Fatherhood of God. Erskine's contemporary John McLeod Campbell, expelled from the Church of Scotland ministry in 1831 for abandoning received orthodoxy, reached his mature views, as he explained in The Nature of the Atonement (1856), through mental debate with Edwards and his Calvinist successors. Edwards was to be preferred to later theologians in the same tradition, according to McLeod Campbell, because he came closer to the truth as he saw it of divine pardon for the whole of humanity through a universal atonement. Yet McLeod Campbell felt that the New Englander's legal language handicapped him, keeping him away from the right conception intellectually, "though I do not think spiritually." This generation of theologians, affected by the milder and more sentimental opinions of the day, wanted to stress love rather than justice, God as Father rather than God as lawgiver. The standard evangelical Calvinist framework was the target of their complaints. As these thinkers rejected the paradigm, they turned away from Edwards.

The shift is clear in F. D. Maurice, the trendsetter in Broad Church Anglican opinion in the middle years of the century. In 1862 he praised the Freedom of the Will as the "most original" product of colonial America, rightly meeting opponents on metaphysical grounds. Yet Edwards, according to Maurice, was tainted by the eighteenth century's exaltation of happiness, being too much a disciple of Locke, and limited by a deterministic universe, so that human beings were the victims of their motives. The New Englander, Maurice concluded, undervalued freedom and the compassion of the incarnate God. Edwards could be no mentor in theology to the Victorian world. By the end of the century, not least through the influence of Maurice, a law-governed cosmos with the atonement at its center was being replaced among theologians by a world under the care of a benign Father with the incarnation at its heart. The Edwardsian mold had been broken.

A few resisted the trend. In the Scottish Highlands, where a stern theology had put down roots, the older synthesis survived. Edwards's Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God was translated into Gaelic for Highland use in 1848 and again in 1876. John Kennedy, the doughty Free Church of Scotland minister of Dingwall, denounced the new teaching that the Almighty was Father of all because that would restrict the free exercise of his sovereignty. Kennedy's friend C. H. Spurgeon, pastor of the Metropolitan Tabernacle in London, held a similar position. At Spurgeon's training college for Baptist pastors, the principal
from 1881 to 1893, David Gracey, still praised the New Englander’s theological method, quoted him with approval, and expressed a preference for Edwards over Charles Hodge on the imputation of sin. Their fellow Baptist Joseph Angus, the principal of Regent’s Park College, London, was commending the joint convictions of Edwards and Bellamy on tests of regeneration as late as 1895. In general, the reputation of Edwards was greenest among conservative Presbyterians and Baptists. Yet, there were certain Calvinistic Anglicans who appreciated the New England theologian. J. C. Ryle, Bishop of Liverpool from 1880 to 1900, for instance, highly valued his Religious Affections. Furthermore, at least in Wales, there were Congregationalists who maintained esteem for their co-religionist. Robert Thomas, who had translated the Freedom of the Will into Welsh in 1865, continued to teach an Edwardsian moderate Calvinism at Bala College down to his death in 1880. Many of his former students must still have been serving in the chapels when the Welsh Revival descended in 1904, and may have been convinced of its authenticity by Edwards’s tests. The theological legacy of Edwards persisted, though only within attenuated groups, into the twentieth century.

Even late Victorian liberal theologians and freethinkers sometimes took notice of the New Englander, and, despite dismissing his views, paid him at least a grudging tribute. James Martineau, the leading English Unitarian theologian of the Victorian age, treated Edwards in 1888 as one of the modern necessitarians he wished to refute. He did so by the simple device of claiming that Edwards’s argument for divine foreknowledge rested only on a body of scriptural texts, which nobody now accepted as decisive. “But,” he admits, “the proof that the Scriptures contain Edwards’s view is unanswerable.” W. E. H. Lecky, the freethinking historian of rationalism, also felt constrained to acknowledge Edwards’s massive ability and “great ingenuity” even while condemning his Original Sin as “one of the most revolting books that have ever exceeded from the pen of man.” John Stuart Mill, the great Liberal philosopher and another freethinker, believed that Edwards argued the determinist case “as keenly as any modern.” Perhaps most intriguing is the appreciation in 1876 by Leslie Stephen, the agnostic intellectual who was the descendant of an evangelical family and the father of novelist Virginia Woolf. Edwards, according to Stephen, with Benjamin Franklin, represented the genuine Yankee, combining “an element of shrewd mother-wit and an element of transcendental enthusiasm.” Stephen detested the doctrine of election as an “appalling dogma” and found much else to reject. Yet he was entranced by the New Englander’s acute reasoning, lofty morality, and tendencies toward a Spinozan pantheism.

Edwards, he suggested, was “formed by nature to be a German professor, and accidentally dropped into the American forests.” Even those who were miles apart from Edwards in their religious convictions found something to impress when they looked into his pages.

What did not happen, however, during the late nineteenth century in Britain was a cultural revival of Edwards. At the time when America was turning the theologian into a national icon, there were equivalent native Puritans for Britain to heroize: Oliver Cromwell in England and the Covenanters in Scotland. Consequently Edwards was superfluous. There were nevertheless a few symptoms of the tendency to treat Edwards as an artifact from the past rather than as a man with a message for today. As early as the 1850s, Alexander Grosart, a young minister of the United Presbyterian Church of Scotland, traveled to meet Tryon Edwards in Connecticut in order to explore the possibility of printing some of his ancestor’s unpublished manuscripts. Grosart was an admirer of Edwards’s Christian thought, but his enterprise also had an antiquarian flavor. He was delighted to discover a manuscript on grace “carefully placed within folds of thick paper, and tied up with silk ribbon,” perhaps by the hand of Edwards himself. Grosart took the materials back to Scotland, and in 1865 privately printed a selection of the manuscripts, with a facsimile, but never took the project further.

One or two others in Britain developed a similar interest in Edwards as a historical figure. While visiting America in 1881, A. A. Bonar, like his brother Horatius a Free Church of Scotland minister, made a pilgrimage to Northampton as “a place of sacred memories.” The most obvious instance, however, was when, on the erection in 1889 of Mansfield College as a Congregational foundation in the University of Oxford, one among the sixty doctors of the church depicted in the stained glass windows of the chapel was Jonathan Edwards. A handful of Congregationalists still regarded Edwards as theirs; but to most people in Britain who were aware of his name, he was, as Grosart put it in the title of his book, “Jonathan Edwards of America.” The absence of a cultural revival confirms that the standing of the theologian was in decay.

The fourth phase in the vicissitudes of Edwards’s reputation came in the twentieth century. It consisted in an Edwards revival, or rather in a series of Edwards revivals. The first was in the Netherlands in the early years of the century, but proved abortive. The Reformed confessional movement led by Abraham Kuyper saw in Edwards a potential ally. Kuyper himself shows no familiarity with Edwards, but the theologian Herman Bavinck refers several times to the American in his Reformed Dogmatics (1895–1901).
minister Jan Ridderbos, later professor at Kampen Theological University, received his doctorate in 1907 for a thesis on "The Theology of Jonathan Edwards." The dissertation reveals an ambiguous attitude toward Edwards. There is praise for Edwards's resistance to Arminianism, for his clear thinking, and for his warm heart; but there is also trenchant criticism, because, according to Ridderbos, Edwards allowed his theology to be polluted by the philosophy of the day. Therefore, as a pure system of Reformed doctrine, Edwards's work is judged to be "useless." Although Ridderbos published an appreciative article on Edwards in 1957, at the end of his life, it is clear that he could not recommend him wholeheartedly. Edwards was not Calvinistic enough for the taste of the early twentieth-century Reformed Church of the Netherlands.

A longer lived revival started in Wales. In 1929 Martyn Lloyd-Jones, a former physician who had entered the ministry of the Calvinistic Methodists, bought a two-volume set of the 1834 edition of Edwards's works in a Cardiff secondhand bookshop. The tight reasoning suited Lloyd-Jones's deductive cast of mind. He became absorbed by Edwards, who effectively turned a commonplace evangelical into a Calvinist zealot. Lloyd-Jones would relax on holiday by reading the New Englander, calling excitedly from the kitchen, "Listen to what Jonathan Edwards has to say on this." The Welsh preacher came to appreciate the Puritans as a whole, but at the end of his career he still ranked Edwards above John Owen—or even John Calvin.99 From 1955, gathered round Lloyd-Jones, there was an Evangelical Movement of Wales in whose circles Edwards was highly rated. The impulse, however, spread far beyond Wales. From 1939 Lloyd-Jones was minister of Westminster Chapel in central London, exercising a potent influence in the evangelical world. During the 1950s and 1960s he presided over an annual Puritan Conference that attracted hundreds to the Reformed cause. It encompassed J. I. Packer and other young men from Oxford, together with Iain Murray and other young men from Durham. Together they challenged the reigning conservative evangelical theology of the day, a compound of Keswick holiness teaching, pre-millennial adventism, and, in many quarters, a suspicion of the mind. Edwards provided a sovereign antidote. When Murray set up a publishing agency, the Banner of Truth Trust, the Select Works of Jonathan Edwards was, in 1958, the fourth title to appear under its imprint. Later, in 1987, Murray published the American's biography. As Banner of Truth books circulated around the world, to Australia, South Africa, and elsewhere, so a fresh awareness of Edwards was kindled. The New Englander was rediscovered as a champion of a thoughtful but vibrant Calvinism.

Pockets of interest in Edwards continued to exist independently. Theologians of the small continuing Free Church of Scotland had not ceased to respect his writings, and there were occasional outcrops such as the appearance in Switzerland in 1960 of a German translation of Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God. But it was charismatic renewal, a gathering global force from the 1960s, that did the most to bring Edwards to a new audience, primarily as an analyst of revival. In 1989, for example, an English study of renewal called Delusion or Dynamic? included an afterword by J. I. Packer using Edwards's criteria for distinguishing a genuine spiritual movement. The bursting forth in the mid-1990s of the Toronto Blessing, a new phase of renewal exhibiting prostrations and animal noises, elicited a fresh spate of books and articles appealing to Edwards for a verdict either for or against its authenticity. Guy Chevau, one of the leadership team at the Toronto Airport Vineyard Fellowship where the phenomenon originated, wrote a book in its defense that reached a worldwide audience, soon being translated into German. Fully one-third of its text is a discussion of Edwards.90 Here was widespread popular interest not in Edwards the Reformed theologian but in Edwards the advocate of true spiritual renewal.

The final type of revival was the upsurge of academic attention to Edwards. It started in the late 1950s, the same time as the appearance of the first volume in the Yale edition of the theologian's works, and was no doubt stimulated by the new series. This revival, which can be studied chiefly through the admirable bibliographies compiled by Max Lesser, was threefold: literary, philosophical, and theological. The spread of interest in Edwards as a littératou, a master of rhetoric and imagery, can be traced from the first dates of publication in that field in particular counties: Germany in 1963, England in 1966, Ireland in 1979, and Russia in 1981. Steadily fresh language barriers were surmounted. All these instances, however, are European. There was an isolated article published in an African journal in 1965, but it was written by an author with an English surname and so no doubt represents a surviving outpost of empire. The real exception to the European monopoly of literary attention to Edwards therefore came from Argentina. J. L. Borges, the polymathic national librarian in Buenos Aires, published in 1967 an appreciation of Edwards in a handbook to the literature of North America. Two years later he followed it up with a poem on Edwards in Spanish, treating the theologian as a Calvinistic curiosity: Edwards's world is a "Vessel of wrath," his deity a "prisoner, God, the Spider." Edwards clearly appealed to the taste for the bizarre of this most metaphysical of twentieth-century authors. Yet Borges was self-consciously European in his cultural orientation; the great breakthrough to global concern for Edwards the writer did not come until 1992, with an article in Japanese by a Japanese author in a Japanese periodical.91 At last Edwards had attained fully international status in literary studies.
The scholarly interest in Edwards the philosopher followed a similar pattern. The first works in this field appeared in Italy in 1966, in a neoscholastic journal, and in Germany in 1972, specifically on the New Englander’s political thought. Although an English philosopher published an edition of some theological writings of Edwards in 1971, England did not pay attention to the strictly philosophical side of Edwards until 1985, when he was included, though with a speaker from abroad, in a series of Royal Institute of Philosophy Lectures on American themes. Canadian studies of Edwards's philosophy, an outgrowth from the United States, began in 1973. The chief interest in this area, however, came from France, reflecting the national penchant for the discipline. A century before, in 1888, there had in fact been a chapter on Edwards's immaterialism in a book by Georges Lyon published in Paris. From 1979 there was a series of articles in French periodicals by Miklós Veto, culminating in a masterly book on Edwards's thought that appeared eight years later. That in turn led to a batch of reviews in French, including one from the Ivory Coast. Outside Europe there was little else, except that in 1983 a set of lectures in English by Richard R. Niebuhr was issued in Kyoto. So attention to Edwards the philosopher outside America was primarily a European phenomenon, though by the 1980s it was just starting to extend beyond that continent.

In Edwards's theology, as was natural, there was an even greater degree of academic interest. German publications in this field date from 1958, Swiss (in German) from 1978, Canadian from 1976, and French from 1981. Italy forms a special case here as the base of the Roman Catholic Church. A Jesuit, though not an Italian, presented a doctoral dissertation at the Pontifical Gregorian University as early as 1967, a first fruit of the broadening of Catholic sympathies after the Second Vatican Council. Twelve years later an Italian submitted another on Edwards to the same institution. In both there was a sense of excitement that the distance of Edwards from the Catholic tradition was less than might have been imagined. The same ecumenical temper is exhibited in an article in Portuguese on Edwards the preacher published in Brazil in 1982. Book reviews in French and German of works about Edwards's theology multiplied from around 1980. By 1997 there were two significant landmarks: Edwards was discussed, apparently for the first time, in a Czech work; and excerpts from Edwards on revival were actually translated into Italian in a scholarly collection of Protestant texts. Asian scholars studying in America were also becoming fascinated by Edwards, and so his fame reached Korea and Japan. So again there was a spread of interest in Edwards's theology beyond the United States and Europe. Toward the end of the fourth phase of Edwards’s legacy, respect for the New Englander was being globalized.

Edwards’s reputation outside America, we may therefore conclude, has passed through four phases. In the earliest, when the theologian’s works were first becoming known, non-Americans, and especially John Erskine, played a major part in their dissemination. Edwards’s fame, however, was largely confined to the English-speaking world, together with the Netherlands. In the next phase, Edwards’s writings constituted the foundation of the New England theology that shaped the dominant version of Calvinism in England, Wales, and Scotland. Edwards’s legacy molded the evangelical intellectual hegemony in Britain and gave dynamism to the missionary impulse abroad. Spreading Romantic assumptions, however, gradually eroded that synthesis, Calvinism fell into decay (except in the Netherlands), and outside America there was little interest in Edwards as a cultural icon. Consequently the third phase of Edwards’s reputation represented a decline, so that in the first half of the twentieth century he was decidedly out of fashion. A series of revivals, however, buoyed his fame in the later twentieth century, both at a popular and at an academic level. In the final phase he reached a far wider geographical constituency than ever before. Edwards hoped, as he put it, that by the year 2000 “the whole . . . world should be enlightened.” His celebrity, like that of the gospel he preached, is still far from universal. Yet his legacy has played a crucial role internationally, not least in the spread of the evangelical movement. And there is no doubt that in the year 2000 his global fame is again on the increase.

Notes


4. Ibid., 154.


7. Ibid., 473.


45. The Congregationalist and Christian World, 3 October 1903, 467.
47. Extracts from the Call to Extraordinary Prayer published in 1748 by President Edwards (Calcutta: for Calcutta Christian Tract and Book Society, 1859).
51. [Chalmers], "Edwards's Inquiry," 249.
52. Conforti, Jonathan Edwards, Religious Tradition, and American Culture, chap. 5.
54. Later on Edwards was still virtually unknown to German theologians. In K. R. Hagenbach's History of Christian Dogmatics, the section on Protestant church doctrine outside Germany merely notes his existence as the author of Freedom of the Will and Original Sin (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1881), 3:283.
55. I owe this estimate to Roel Kuiper.
58. The marked copy is at St. Deiniol's Library, Hawarden, Flintshire.
63. John Kennedy, Man's Relations to God (Edinburgh: John Maclaren, 1869), 21–38.
75. I owe this point to Roel Kuiper.


