Thinking about George Whitefield and the great colonial theologian and preacher Jonathan Edwards together in the same room or in the same pulpit is a tantalizing exercise. Scholars have made much of their encounters, some accounts being more saccharine, others more bittersweet.¹ Virtually all attention has centred on Whitefield’s first visit to Edwards’s home and church in Northampton, Massachusetts, in late 1740, a visit that, while dramatic in terms of impact, left the pair at an emotional and theological distance from one another. But that is not the end of the story. This chapter provides an account of the interactions between Whitefield and Edwards, first in 1740 and especially in the virtually ignored visit of 1745, showing that there were initial points of friction between the two—points over which Edwards, true to character, confronted his visitor. However, Whitefield’s subsequent moderation, combined with Edwards’s evolving views of the revivals, resolved the friction to a large extent. In the end, Edwards’s public support of Whitefield as an instrument of God and as a fellow labourer in the revival vineyard reflected a consensus they had reached about the nature of the subjectivity of spiritual experience.

Whitefield’s First Visit to Northampton

In a brief interlude in New York City during his first, breakneck tour of the British North American colonies, Whitefield sat down to pen a letter to Edwards, from the young phenomenon to the writer of the internationally famous *Faithful Narrative of a Surprising Work of God* (1737), by that time published in several languages. The letter of introduction was accompanied by one of his printed journals—probably *A Continuation . . . from his Arrival at London, to his Departure Thence on his Way to Georgia* (1739)—and expressed a desire to come to Northampton in a few months. ‘I am but a stripling’, Whitefield demurred, ‘but the Lord chooses the weak things of this world to confound the strong’.² In February 1740 Edwards, trying to out-do Whitefield in the rhetoric of humility, responded with a warm invitation, hoping that ‘such a Blessing as attends your Person and Labours may descend on this Town, and may enter mine own house, and that I may receive it in my own soul’. He also expressed fear that Whitefield would be disappointed in New England, because its people were ‘more hardened than most of those places where you have preached hitherto’.³

Following the waning of the Connecticut Valley Revival of 1734-35, Edwards had seen many supposed converts in his congregation and elsewhere sink quickly back into their sinful pre-awakening habits. He had worked since then to coax back the Spirit, preaching a lengthy sermonic series on Matthew 25, the Parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins; on I Corinthians 13, later published as *Charity and Its Fruits* (1852); and most of all, on Isaiah 51:8, the first run at what he would later call his ‘great work’, *A History of the Work of Redemption* (1774). He even

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appealed to civic pride, trying to get his parishioners to at least *act* like the people of *A Faithful Narrative*. In a letter to the Reverend Eleazar Wheelock of Lebanon, Connecticut, only a few weeks before Whitefield was due to arrive, Edwards lamented the ‘sorrowfully dull and dead time’ at Northampton.⁴ One of Edwards’s main pastoral challenges at Northampton from 1735 until his dismissal in 1750 was that he perceived of most of his congregation as evangelical hypocrites, and this perception tinged how he viewed their reaction to Whitefield.

There must have been great anticipation of Whitefield’s arrival, built up by Edwards, and when he did arrive he affected nearly everyone, though apparently with the exception of many elderly in the congregation.⁵ He spent 17-19 October 1740 at Edwards’s home, preaching four times in the meetinghouse—‘one on Friday, one on Saturday, and two upon the Sabbath’—and gave a private lecture in his host’s home. ‘The congregation’, Edwards recounted in a narrative later published in the *Christian History*, ‘was extraordinarily melted by every sermon; almost the whole assembly being in tears for a great part of sermon time’.⁶ When he came into Edwards’s pulpit, Whitefield wrote, ‘I found my Heart drawn out to talk of scarce any Thing besides the Consolations and Privileges of Saints, and the plentiful Effusion of the Holy Ghost in the Hearts of Believers. And when I came to remind them of their former Experiences, and how zealous and lively they were at that Time, both Minister and People wept much.’⁷

Edwards made good on his desire to have Whitefield’s power evident in his own family. He gave Whitefield an opportunity to speak alone to his ‘little children, who were much affected’.

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⁴ Edwards to Eleazar Wheelock (9 October 1740), WJE, 16:85.
⁵ On elderly opposition to the Great Awakening, see Kenneth P. Minkema, ‘Old Age and Religion in the Writings and Life of Jonathan Edwards’, *Church History*, 70 (December 2001), 674-704.
⁶ Edwards to Thomas Prince (12 December 1743), WJE, 16:115-7.
⁷ *A Continuation of the Reverend Mr. Whitefield’s Journal From Savannah, June 25. 1740, to his Arrival at Rhode-Island, his Travels in the other Governments of New-England, to his Departure from Stanford for New-York* (Boston, 1741), 82.
Whitefield was quite taken with the Edwardses. As for Edwards himself, Whitefield commented, ‘I think I may say, I have not seen his fellow in all New-England’; on Edwards and his wife, Sarah Pierpont Edwards: ‘A sweeter Couple I have not yet seen’; on the family: ‘Their Children were not dressed in Silks & Sattins, but plain, as becomes the Children of those who in all Things ought to be Examples of Christian Simplicity.’ In particular, Sarah Pierpont Edwards was, Whitefield wrote, ‘adorned with a meek and quiet Spirit’ who ‘talked so feelingly and solidly of the Things of God, and seemed to be such a Helpmeet for her Husband, that she caused me to renew those Prayers, which for some Months I have put up to God, that he would be pleased to send me a Daughter of Abraham to be my Wife’. When Whitefield departed from Northampton on 21 October, Edwards accompanied him to Westfield (where Whitefield’s horse threw him) and Springfield, and on 22 October to Suffield (where Whitefield remonstrated with unconverted ministers), and then on to Windsor, Connecticut, and the home of Edwards’s aged parents, whom Whitefield likened to Zacharias and Elizabeth.8

In a follow-up report to Whitefield, written in mid-December and published in The Weekly History, Edwards gave ‘joyful tidings’: religion had returned as the chief topic of conversation, particularly among young people and children, as had been the case in the earlier awakening at Northampton; elsewhere he reported that ‘a very considerable work of God appeared among those that were very young, and the revival of religion continued to increase’.9 By spring, the awakening at Northampton and environs was in full swing.10

While Edwards’s reports were true, they did not tell the whole truth. For upon Whitefield’s departure, Edwards was left with a congregation in emotional disarray—a situation

8 A Continuation of the Reverend Mr. Whitefield’s Journal From Savannah, 83.
9 Edwards to Whitefield (14 December 1740), WJE, 16:87; Edwards to Thomas Prince (12 December 1743), WJE, 16:116.
doubtless not unique to him. It was up to him, the settled pastor, to help his people make sense of what had happened under Whitefield’s whirlwind. In November 1740, when Whitefield was already in the Philadelphia area, Edwards began a nine-unit sermon series on the Parable of the Sower that drew strict limits around the effects of Whitefield’s preaching. Edwards followed the figures suggested by the parable itself: the ‘wayside’, the stony ground, and the thorny ground, sustaining the natural images throughout, and likening the different kinds of soil to corresponding spiritual states.

Much of the sermon series was a gauge of Edwards’s ongoing efforts to overcome his congregation’s worldliness and spiritual presumptions, but he was also working out his assessment of Whitefield. Each part within the Sower discourse was structured around a proposition, one of those being, ‘The hearts of some of the hearers of the Word preached, are like a rock with a thin covering of earth.’ Edwards noticed how hearers’ minds may be ‘impressed and affected’, in that they may have ‘a sort of belief’ in what they heard, but it was temporary. Referring to Whitefield’s preaching style and its effects on auditors, Edwards pointed out that stony-ground hearers may have initial joy in hearing the Word, but their joy arose from pleasure in the manner of preaching, being taken with the eloquence, fervency, and gestures of the speaker rather than having ‘joy in the things preached’.

His observations had as much to do—and perhaps more to do—with how his congregation heard Whitefield, than with how Whitefield preached.

The next proposition, ‘Sudden conversions are very often false’, arose from Edwards’s fear that many in Northampton claiming conversion upon hearing Whitefield might be the

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victims of fleeting emotions. Edwards did not deny the reality of sudden and unexpected conversion, since the Bible had several notable instances of it. The problem with those who had what they thought was a sudden conversion was that they had no real conception of what conversion was, either through experience or through ‘consideration of the cost’. They therefore had to examine their experience scrupulously. Did they have a ‘settled abiding sense’ of their state, did their comfort make them strive after more grace, and did they have a disposition to embrace religion with all of its difficulties?\textsuperscript{12}

In his observations on the ‘thorny ground’, Edwards asserted that the soil of the hearts of some hearers was full of ‘useless growth’, ruled by a ‘carnal spirit’ and the ‘natural produce of the heart’. Thorny-ground hearers could ‘show considerable regard to the Word of God for a while, yet these thorns do at length prevail and choke the Word, so that it never brings forth any saving fruit’.\textsuperscript{13} So, too, in the new round of awakenings caused by Whitefield’s arrival, Edwards was asking: Will the thorns quickly grow back again in the soil that the sower has sown? His implicit answer was, for many, yes.

Scholars have observed that this critical series defined a divide between Whitefield and Edwards. Yet it is important to note that the series had certain parallels to Whitefield’s own Directions How to Hear Sermons, published in 1739. All indications are that Edwards read this before Whitefield’s arrival, since in the Directions Whitefield began with a reference to the Parable of the Sower, expressed similar views on the efficacy of preaching, cited similar proof-texts, warned against hearing a preacher out of mere curiosity, and, as Edwards would do in the

\textsuperscript{12} Sermons by Jonathan Edwards on the Matthean Parables, 68, 73, 74.
\textsuperscript{13} Sermons by Jonathan Edwards on the Matthean Parables, 98, 99, 101.
Sower Discourse, mentioned the sinners of Sodom and Gomorrah. It seems that Edwards took some details of the Directions and folded them into his sustained treatment of the parable, at once confirming Whitefield but also critiquing him—an apt reflection of his ambivalent attitude towards Whitefield at that time.

For now, beyond his own pulpit, Edwards had nothing but good to say about Whitefield, the ‘New Methodists’, and the returning religious ardency. But privately there were misgivings, which only became more widely known later (as when he lumped together many of the followers of Wesley and Zinzendorf as guilty of the same ‘follies’). Even more, Edwards, hoping to avoid a repeat of the results of the Connecticut Valley Revival, was concerned about the course that the new outpouring would take. So he resolved to ‘try the spirits’, embarking on a study of the positive and negative signs of grace, and of the sociological aspects of conversion and religious discourse. Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God, preached at the Yale College commencement in September 1741, at the very height of the Great Awakening in New England, defended the ‘work’ as real, but with many human and demonic devices thrown in. Then, in Some Thoughts Concerning the Revival, published in early 1743, he again affirmed the revivals as a ‘glorious work of God’, arguing that all were required to promote it, but showing nonetheless that there were many errors to be corrected.

The Context of Whitefield’s Second Visit to Northampton

Whitefield’s personal encounters with Edwards in 1740 and 1745 nicely bookend the New England phase of the Great Awakening. In the intervening years, the revivals waxed and

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14 Whitefield, Directions How to Hear Sermons, in Sermons by Jonathan Edwards on the Matthean Parables, 119, 121.
waned on the one hand, as what Edwards feared did indeed occur, with supposed converts returning all too easily to their worldly ways. On the other hand, however, among those who remained zealous he saw things spinning out of control, as the kinesthetics of revival, such as bodily manifestations, became more excessive, claims to spiritual powers increased, dissension spread, and polemics became ever more inflated. Portions of the clergy famously split over the revivals into an anti-revivalist party, the Old Lights, and a pro-revival party, the New Lights.

Edwards had plunged himself into the awakenings in its early stages, conducting half-day-long prayer meetings, going on preaching tours, taking part in team preaching, and the like. But as the years went on, he became more circumspect, realizing that some aspects of the work were questionable, partaking of human imagination and conceit at best, of devil-inspired delusion at worst. He became more of a moderate, believing the work to be, on the whole, that of the Holy Spirit, but with much excess, error, and hypocrisy thrown in; the important thing was to separate the one from the other, and to do something about it so that God would not withdraw the Spirit’s presence.

Moving forward to December 1744, word that Whitefield had again landed in New England was spreading, and the opposition forces were rallying to block him at every possible turn. One key figure among the antagonists was Thomas Clap, rector of Yale College, whose faculty had had a hand in prompting the colony of Connecticut to condemn itinerancy and, by implication, Whitefield.16 Now, searching for other means, Clap decided to turn Edwards against Whitefield by making public a conversation between himself and Edwards while the two were en route together in May 1743 to Boston to attend a clerical convention. What precisely was the

content of the conversation became the point in dispute. Clap, in a letter printed as a pamphlet, claimed that Edwards had told him that Whitefield in 1740 had confided in Edwards of his ‘design of turning out of their places, the greater part of the ministers in New England, and of supplying their pulpits with ministers from Great Britain and Ireland’. In a printed letter of his own to Clap, dated 1 February 1745, Edwards utterly denied this, including in the pamphlet two letters, both from October 1744, that Clap had cited as proof. In the latter of these, Edwards wrote of the absurdity of Clap’s statement, especially considering that Clap, an avowed antagonist of Whitefield’s, was the last person in whom Edwards, as a supporter of Whitefield, would have confided:

You say that I told you, ‘That I took all opportunities to talk with Mr. Whitefield alone about this matter. But when Mr. Whitefield saw that I did not approve of his design in that matter, he did not seem to choose to say anything about it; he would either turn off the discourse upon something else, or go out of the room.’ This account is amazing to me. It is all of it perfectly new to me.

Edwards, however, did admit that he had taken “an opportunity to talk with Mr. Whitefield alone about impulses” and later “about judging other persons to be unconverted,” had told people that he had reproved Whitefield for giving “too great heed to such things, and that while Whitefield did not seem offended, he avoided any further talk on the subject. Edwards further noticed afterwards that though Whitefield treated him “with great kindness, yet he never made so much of an intimate of me, as of some others.” But, Edwards averred,

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17 The full exchange is found in Thomas Clap, A Letter from the Rev. Mr. Thomas Clap . . . to a Friend in Boston (Boston, 1745); Edwards, Copies of Two Letters cited by the Reverend Mr. Clap (Boston, 1745); Clap, A Letter from the Rev. Mr. Clap . . . to the Rev. Mr. Edwards (Boston, 1745); and Edwards, An Expostulatory Letter from the Reverend Mr. Edwards (Boston, 1745). The quote here is from Edwards, Copies of Two Letters, WJE, 16:154.
that I took all opportunities to talk with him, about a design of his, of turning out the
generality of the ministers of New England, or any ministers; or that I took any one
opportunity to talk with him about it; or that I ever said a word to him, or he to me, either
alone, or with others, about any such design; or that I took many opportunities to talk with
him about any of his errors (as your expression seems to imply), or that he ever went out of
the room when I was talking with him about any of his errors, so putting an end to, or
avoiding the discourse; or that he ever turned off such discourse to anything else; I say these
things are not true.\textsuperscript{18}

Each disputant issued another pamphlet in this nasty little exchange, which did credit to neither,
each claiming that accuracy was on their side and the other person was guilty of elided memory,
or worse, fabrication. If Clap was driven to ‘great straits’ to ‘injure’ Whitefield and Edwards his
ally,\textsuperscript{19} or Edwards was forced to disclose more than he wished for the sake of discrediting Clap’s
accusations, the whole episode reflects a larger effort by the ‘Grand Itinerant’s’ adversaries to
close ranks against him and by his supporters to make the rough places plain for his next tour.

Edwards’s extremely rare self-disclosure in his public letter to Clap about his reproving
of Whitefield is important for revealing the nature of their relationship at the time. In addition,
the very terms that Edwards used reflected issues in which he and New England peers had been
involved in the three years and more since Whitefield’s first visit. Therefore, a review of the
debates that occurred in the interim between Whitefield’s first and second tours are crucial for
understanding why Edwards confessed to speaking to Whitefield on impulses and judging others

\textsuperscript{19} Edwards, \textit{An Expostulary Letter}, WJE, 16:167.
to be converted. These issues, in turn, implicitly reflected on their respective views of assurance of salvation.

Debating the Revivals in New England

In early 1743, Edwards’s growing reservations about the social consequences of the revivals began to manifest themselves. In mid-February, he was called to head a ministerial council in Westfield, Massachusetts, considering the case of a Bathsheba Kingsley. Kingsley, on the strength of what she believed were divine ‘dreams’ and ‘impulses’, repeatedly took her husband’s horse and went about from town to town exhorting, criticizing the ministers she encountered as unconverted. While Edwards and his fellow ministers praised her zeal, and cautioned her husband not to forbid her from attending religious meetings, they came down squarely against her for preaching publicly, and strongly condemned her, a woman, for stepping out of her gender’s proper sphere. It was no doubt important to Edwards and his colleagues to reassert order in this way, because this was precisely the kind of behaviour upon which Old Lights were delightedly pouncing to bring the movement into disrepute.²⁰

A much more publicized case was that of James Davenport, minister of Southold, New York, who, influenced by Whitefield, Tennent, Wheelock, and others, had abandoned his church to itinerate in Connecticut, where he became notorious for declaring ministers to be graceless and encouraging their congregants to abandon them, and for walking through town centres, his head held back and eyes closed, preaching at the top of his lungs. In March 1743, at the New London docks, he held a bonfire of the vanities, beseeching people to burn their fine clothes,

²⁰ For the council’s decision, see ‘Advice to Mr. and Mrs. Kingsley’, WJEO, vol. 39; and for an account of Kingsley, see Catherine A. Brekus, Strangers and Pilgrims: Female Preaching in America, 1740-1815 (Chapel Hill, NC, 1998), 23-6.
jewelry, even books—which proved too much for the authorities, and he was arrested. Once again, Edwards was called to lead a council, this time to reclaim Davenport, the scion of New Haven’s first family. The meetings took place during the last week of the month; on the 31st, according to the diary of New London’s Joshua Hempstead, Edwards preached a lecture ‘against ye prevailing disorders & destractions’.21 With Davenport convinced that he had acted inappropriately, he was returned home by authorities further to contemplate his behaviour.22

As an on-call expert in revivalism, Edwards during these years spent a lot of time travelling, whether in the saddle or on vessels going up and down rivers and plying the coasts. Only four days after wrapping up things at New London, he was in Springfield, Massachusetts, more than seventy miles north on the Connecticut River, to attend his county’s ministerial association meeting. There, his colleague the Reverend John Sergeant of Stockbridge (whom Edwards would eventually succeed as missionary) delivered an important sermon on *The Causes and Danger of Delusions in the Affairs of Religion*, published later that year in Boston, a sermon that reflected the views of Edwards and his moderate New Light peers.

Among other beliefs and practices that Sergeant attributed to the current delusions was the credence given to ‘impressions’ on the mind: ‘it is no uncommon Thing perhaps, that Persons, especially if somewhat ignorant, or if they have been deeply concern’d about the Affairs of their Souls, have in this Case some strong Impressions made upon their Imaginations, and seem to apprehend the Person of Christ, in a more lively Manner than usual, as it were with open Arms ready to receive them’. Sergeant commented, ‘If such Impressions made upon the Fancy or Imagination were consider’d only as natural Effects, People would not be apt to lay so much

Stress upon them. And yet, I think, he is but little acquainted with humane Nature, that does not know that such Impressions naturally arise from or accompany the Passions raised high and strongly fix’d upon any Object.’ Further describing this ‘inward Experience’, Sergeant noted, ‘it often happens, that a great Part, or perhaps the Whole of this Process, is carried on by some particular Texts of Scripture powerfully impress’d upon the Mind’. Here, Sergeant was describing a phenomenon that was particularly present in the New England revivals, noticed by Edwards among others.

The issue went back to Whitefield’s first visit, when his ‘impressions’ or ‘inward feelings of the Spirit’ were remarked upon in his preaching and in his published journals and made a model by others. Some, such as South Carolina minister Josiah Smith, vigorously defended Whitefield, mentioning ‘The IMPRESSIONS or (which was the Preacher’s own Phrase) inward Feelings of THE SPIRIT’ that Whitefield cited, and ‘how he guarded against the invidious censure, of assuming the Character of an Apostle’, renouncing ‘all Pretensions to the extraordinary Powers & Signs of Apostleship, Gifts of Healing, Speaking with Tongues, the Faith of Miracles’, asserting only ‘that we might feel the Spirit of God, in his sanctifying and saving Impressions, and witnessing with our own Spirits’.

Some, however, did not know what to make of Whitefield. Among these was the Reverend Daniel Wadsworth of Hartford, Connecticut. In his diary for the last day of 1741 appears this amusing entry: ‘Met with the famous Mr. Whitefield’s Life, and read it. But what is

25 Josiah Smith, *The Character, Preaching, etc. of the Rev. Mr. George Whitefield* (Boston, 1740), 8-9.
it?' Wadsworth represented a large number of colonials who remained ambivalent or uncertain about the meaning not only of the ‘Grand Itinerant’ but of the new era he had ushered in.

Still others, however, expressed great concern about claims to ‘inward feelings’, from the Bishop of London, Edmund Gibson, to Harvard Professor Edward Wigglesworth, not to mention Edwards and his Hampshire County (Massachusetts) colleagues. Meeting together in May 1742, they agreed that the general religious concern was a work of the Spirit of God, but that there were some aspects that were contrary to the Rules of Gods Word, and of hurtfull tendency (viz) Depending upon and following Impulses and Impressions made on the mind Either with texts of Scripture brought to the mind or without as tho’ they were Immediate Revelations of Some truth or Duty that is not Reveald in the word of God.

Here they joined hands with Old Lights. William Hart, in a 1742 sermon on the nature of regeneration, castigated the increasing number of individuals, lay and ordained, men and women, who ‘will resign themselves up to be led and determin’d in their Sentiments about Religious Matters, by sudden Impressions & Impulses upon their minds, by Imagination, Phantasy and

26 The Diary of the Rev. Daniel Wadsworth, ed. George L. Walker (Hartford, CT, 1894), 58, possibly referring A Short Account of God’s Dealings with the Reverend Mr. George Whitefield (1740).

27 For some criticisms of Whitefield regarding impulses, and his responses, see The Bishop of London’s pastoral letter answer’d by the Reverend Mr. George Whitefield (London, 1739; alternatively titled, The Rev. Mr. Whitefield’s Answer, to the Bishop of London’s Last Pastoral Letter [London, 1739]); 26; The Querists, Or, an Extract of sundry Passages taken out of Mr. Whitefield’s printed Sermons, Journals and Letters (Boston, 1740), 21-2; Whitefield, A Vindication and Confirmation of the Remarkable Work of God in New-England (London, 1742), 11; Whitefield, A Letter to the Reverend Dr. Chauncy (Boston, 1745), 11; Theophilus Pickering, Mr. Pickering’s Letter to Mr. Whitefield (Boston, 1745), 5-6; Edward Wigglesworth, A Letter to the Reverend Mr. George Whitefield (Boston, 1745), 12-13.
Conceit, by Passion and Humour, and viti us Pretences’. And in his famous Seasonable Thoughts of 1743, Charles Chauncy equated the belief in such impulses being from the Spirit of God with Quakerism. When James Davenport re-emerged, abashed, he published in August 1744 his Confession and Retractations, among which, in addition to admitting his error in declaring ministers to be unconverted and in encouraging church members to separate from them, he confessed that he was ‘much led astray by following Impulses or Impressions as a Rule of Conduct, whether they came with or without a Text of Scripture . . . I am persuaded this was a great Means of corrupting my Experiences and carrying me off from the Word of God, and a great Handle, which the false Spirit has made use of with Respect to a Number, and me especially.’ In this statement, one hears an echo of Edwards’s criticisms.

One unfortunate effect of impulses and impressions was that individuals who misinterpreted their nature too easily based their assurance of salvation on them. Sergeant in his 1743 sermon expressed a general concern among religious leaders:

Nor let any one presume with too much Confidence to say, I know assuredly, that my Experience is right, nor can I doubt, but that ‘tis the very Work of divine Grace in my Soul . . . Which, tho’ you may call it Assurance yet is really nothing but your own confident Judgment concerning your self.

Edwards himself, collecting his observations on the revivals in A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections, provided extended and close distinctions between true and false assurance, expressing

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28 William Hart, A Discourse Concerning the Nature of Regeneration (New London, CT, 1742), 22.
29 Charles Chauncy, Seasonable Thoughts on the State of Religion in New England (Boston, 1743), 10.
30 James Davenport, The Reverend Mr. James Davenport’s Confession & Retractations (Boston, 1744), 5.
31 Sergeant, Causes and Danger of Delusion, 32.
discomfort with the notion of assurance as an ‘immediate witness of the Spirit’, which smacked too much of antinomianism for him.  

*Whitefield Returns to New England*

Moving back to late October 1744, when Whitefield landed at York, north of Boston, he was seriously ill. Edwards, in a narrative later published in the Scottish *Christian Monthly History*, described the ensuing events. Though ‘brought near to death’, Whitefield ‘was wonderfully soon restored, so that he began to preach. Many ministers’, Edwards continued, ‘were more alarmed at his coming, than they would have been by the arrival of a fleet from France, and they began soon to preach and write against him, to warn people to beware of him, as a most dangerous person’. Among those who came out against Whitefield were the president and faculty of Harvard College, who condemned Whitefield under three major heads: enthusiasm, judging others to be unconverted, and deluding the people. The first charge, enthusiasm, was the most substantial; they defined an enthusiast as ‘one that acts, either according to Dreams, or some sudden Impulses and Impressions upon his Mind, which he fondly imagines to be from the Spirit of God, persuading and inclining him thereby to such and such Actions, tho’ he hath no Proof that such Persuasions or Impressions are from the holy Spirit’. They then proceeded to provide numerous examples of this brand of enthusiasm, so defined, in Whitefield’s journals and sermons, concluding, ‘we must suppose him conducting himself by his Dreams’, or even by ‘a divine Direction to him, as was that of the divinely inspir’d Apostle’. For his part, Whitefield

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33 Edwards to Friends in Scotland [after 16 Sept. 1745], WJE, 16:175.
34 *Testimony of the President, Professors, Tutors, and Hebrew Instructor at Harvard College* (Boston, 1744), 4-5.
defended the practice by pointing to none other than New England’s famous Increase Mather, who ‘dealt as much in Impressions and inward Feelings’ as himself.\(^{35}\)

Whitefield was obviously sensitive to the criticism of his ‘impulses’, because he felt that he was misunderstood. There was a sharp difference between the definition and credibility of ‘inward feelings’ on the part of the orthodox in New England and of Whitefield and the Wesleys. With its history of opposition to antinomianism, such as in the controversy with Anne Hutchinson during the 1630s,\(^ {36}\) and with later proponents during the Great Awakening, the New England clergy, including Edwards, denounced anything that might introduce new truths beyond those of God’s Word, at least as they interpreted it. John Wesley, writing to his brother in January 1738, wrote of his convictions of his sin coming ‘By the most infallible of proofs, inward feeling’, while the following year, contending against the influence of the French Prophets, he warned his followers not to follow ‘inward feelings’, but to heed ‘the law and the testimony’.\(^ {37}\) Despite his efforts to explain his view, Wesley apparently was susceptible to the charge of antinomianism for some time, as evidenced in his exchange with Drs Lavington and Rutherforth in the following decades.\(^ {38}\) So, too, was Whitefield in the American context, an opening that his opponents played up and exaggerated for their own purposes. It is telling that,


when Whitefield re-issued his journals in 1756, he either revised or deleted entirely several references to dreams and ‘strong Impressions’.  

Interestingly, Edwards himself, at least fairly early on, used the language of ‘impulses’ when describing legitimate, mediate means by which the mind could have knowledge of God. In ‘Miscellanies’ no. 777, written in late 1738 or early 1739, Edwards observed that while immediate knowledge of God was possible only for Christ, perceiving beings could have knowledge at second-hand through images, words, effects, and a priori. Under the second category, Edwards asserted that a mind can see or know God ‘in his Word, or voluntary signification of what is invisible in him, either internally speaking by impulses made on the mind, as in inspiration, or externally by voices, or by his written Word’. Here Edwards was adopting language that had become part of the discourse of revival. As Stephen J. Stein writes, ‘One controversial way in which the Bible sometimes took centre stage during the awakenings occurred when laity had scripture passages “dart” into their minds while engaged in other activities. These “biblical impulses” became marks of the Spirit’s presence among those who had these experiences, but were declared signs of enthusiasm by critics.’

In Edwards’s own experience, such impulses, biblical or otherwise, could be disturbing, even tragic. As the Connecticut Valley Revival peaked in 1735, for example, his uncle, Joseph Hawley, overcome by melancholy, slit his throat in despair over his eternal fate. Afterwards, as

39 See, for example, A Brief and General Account of the First Part of the Life of the Reverend Mr. George Whitefield, from his Birth, to entering into Holy Orders. The Boston, 1740 edn, p. 11, relates a dream about appearing before God on Mt Sinai and an impression to preach ‘quickly’, but in the London, 1756 edn, p. 9, the first is truncated and the second eliminated altogether. And his account of a dream about a prisoner in the Boston, 1740 edn, p. 35, was deleted in the London, 1756 edn, p. 19.
Edwards described in *A Faithful Narrative*, ‘multitudes in this and other towns seemed to have it strongly suggested to ‘em and pressed upon ‘em, to do as this person had done’. They ‘had it urged upon ‘em, as if somebody had spoke to ‘em, “Cut your own throat, now is good opportunity: now, NOW!”’\(^{42}\) As Edwards witnessed and examined the progress of the revivals, he had ceased giving credence to impulses, whether pastorally or philosophically. As early as March 1736, in a sermon with the doctrine, ‘The Devil is a Liar’, Edwards, no doubt thinking of Hawley but also of other participants in the Connecticut Valley Revival who claimed divine impulses, warned his congregation about the peril of heeding such imaginations:

> If anything be suggested to [you], as if it were from God, that is more than what you are taught in the Word of God, don’t receive it or give way to it. If anything seems to [be] inwardly revealed to you, by a strong suggestion in your mind, either in a dream or awake, if it ben’t a truth somewhere revealed in the Scripture, don’t hearken to it as if it were from God, for you are not safe if you do. You have no rule to judge whence it comes. The devil is a liar, and when you are got beyond the Word, and come to have revelations or impressions of things . . . you are liable to be deceived.\(^{43}\)

During the subsequent revivals, in his sermon for the colony-wide fast day of April 1742, for example, he warned against the ‘temper’ that many converts were exhibiting:

> There is often a mixture of three things with great discoveries: natural passion, a degree of secret spiritual pride, and imagination. The devil works with these. And the person, being insensible of his danger and through ignorance not distinguishing, by and by their great


\(^{43}\) MS Sermon on John 8:44 (no. 384), March 1736, Beinecke Collection, Yale University Library.
discoveries come to little else but strong impulses, beats of animal spirits, great imaginations. And the person, because he is violently moved, still imagines he has great discoveries, and spiritual pride then is risen to a great height. Long observation confirms me in this.44

By 1745, therefore, when Edwards was drafting his Treatise Concerning Religious Affections (at the very time of Whitefield’s second visit to Northampton), the term ‘impulses’ had for him taken on a strictly negative, even demonic, connotation: ‘those who take comfort from texts of Scripture, as being a particular testimony concerning them, follow impulses. They take comfort from the Scripture as exhibiting new truths not contained in the Word of God.’45 And in the published treatise, Edwards identified impulses as one of the key causes of evangelical hypocrisy:

The affections of hypocrites are very often after this manner; they are first, much affected with some impression on their imagination, or some impulse, which they take to be an immediate suggestion, or testimony from God, of his love and their happiness, and high privilege in some respect, either with or without a text of Scripture; they are mightily taken with this, as a great discovery; and hence arise high affections. And when their affections are raised, then they view those high affections, and call them great and wonderful experiences; and they have a notion that God is greatly pleased with those affections; and this affects them more; and so they are affected with their affections. And thus their affections rise higher and higher, till they sometimes are perfectly swallowed up: and self-conceit, and a fierce zeal rises withal; and all is built like a castle in the air, on no other foundation but imagination,

self-love and pride.\textsuperscript{46}

In \textit{Religious Affections}, Edwards also addressed the problem of misidentifying assurance, which he, along with other observers of the awakenings, saw as stemming from relying on impulses, impressions, and dreams. He devoted an entire head in Part II to the observation, “‘Tis no sign that affections are right, or that they are wrong, that they make persons that have them, exceeding confident that what they experience is divine, and that they are in a good estate.”\textsuperscript{47} While some saints, such as martyrs, can have a full assurance of salvation, and most saints are able to have a reasonable certainty because of the declarations of God’s Word, the nature of the covenant, and their continuance in Christian behaviour, there is also ‘an overbearing, high-handed and violent sort of confidence’ that is false.\textsuperscript{48} It should be noted that in April 1745, only a few months before Whitefield arrived for a second time in Northampton, Edwards had acquired a copy of radical New Light and Separatist preacher Andrew Croswell’s \textit{What is Christ to Me?} in which the author asserted an antinomian and complete assurance of salvation as the essence of Christianity. Sounding again like the Harvard faculty and many Old Lights, Edwards was here seeking to rein in some of the more extreme of his pro-revival peers. For this reason, among others, Croswell, after he had read \textit{Religious Affections}, had some choice words about Edwards in a letter to Eleazar Wheelock:

Mr. Edwards is a Gentleman I have no personal Knowledge of; but yet I love him Dearly, and never can think of him (Scarcely) without blessing God for him: however I make no Doubt at the Same time but that he is too timerous, or Cowardly in the Cause of Xt, and that t’was Owing to this Infirmity and a Culpable Desire of pleasing both Sides, that led

\textsuperscript{46} WJE, 2:252.
\textsuperscript{47} WJE, 2:167.
\textsuperscript{48} WJE, 2:171.
him into a Gross, and Important Selfcontradiction in the latter End of his late Treatise.\textsuperscript{49}

Whitefield Back in Northampton

Whitefield and his wife, Elizabeth James, arrived in Northampton in July 1745. During June and the first part of July, Edwards, this time prior to Whitefield’s visit rather than afterwards, was preaching an extended discourse, a five-unit series on Revelation 1:5-6 treating the ‘names’ of the Second Person of the Trinity, including Saviour, Christ, Faithful Witness, First Begotten of the Dead, Prince of the Kings of the Earth, and Man of War. This series had at once political and typological valences. In his sermon notebook at this time Edwards sketched several ideas for sermons on ‘War’, ‘Rulers’, and ‘Expedition to Canada’,\textsuperscript{50} reflecting the Jacobite rebellion of ’45 and the campaign against Louisburg, for which Whitefield famously provided the motto.\textsuperscript{51} Also, Edwards was in 1745 writing his treatise-length piece on ‘Types of the Messiah’, considering the historical, figural, and redemptive meanings of biblical and natural types as they pertained to the ultimate antitype, the Messiah and his kingdom.\textsuperscript{52} Edwards concluded the series on Rev. 1 — presumably right before Whitefield arrived — by holding up the love of Christ to his chosen people, the fruits of that love, the ‘expense’ Christ was at to secure it, and the benefits he sought for them.\textsuperscript{53} The diary of Jonathan Judd, pastor of Southampton, Edwards’s neighbour, reveals that Whitefield preached on 15 July in the Northampton

\textsuperscript{49} Andrew Croswell to Eleazar Wheelock (3 May 1749), Letter C83, WJEOR, vol. 32.
\textsuperscript{50} Edwards, MS Sermon Notebook ‘45’, L. 49v., entry nos. [490], [493]-[495], WJEOR, vol. 36.
\textsuperscript{53} Edwards, MS Sermon on Rev. 1:5-6 (June-July 1745), nos. 782-786, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.
meetinghouse on Isaiah 54:5, the sermon printed as *Christ the Best Husband*, which, too, dealt with a ‘name’ of Christ. And on 17 July, Whitefield preached at Southampton his sermon on Hebrews 4:9, *An Exhortation to the People of God Not to be Discouraged in their Way*, which resonated with the concluding piece of Edwards’s discourse on Rev. 1.  

Because of all of the debates raging in New England about impulses, impressions, bodily manifestations, assurance, lay and itinerant exhorting, and censoriousness—which Whitefield’s presence only exacerbated—Edwards was very gratified, on Whitefield’s second visit, to see that he had seemingly backed off (at least when in Edwards’s hearing) on many of the points about which Edwards had felt compelled to upbraid him in 1740. Despite all of the ‘great uproar’ the country was in over Whitefield’s presence, and the ‘scurrilous and scandalous’ reports about him in pamphlets, newspapers, and public discourse, Edwards reported that this time Whitefield only preached ‘the pure doctrines of the gospel to the people, applying them with proper earnestness, carefully avoiding meddling with their controversies, behaving himself with admirable meekness under all reproaches that were cast upon him, not justifying his former faults, and humbly confessing some of them’. Mr. and Mrs. Whitefield spent ‘almost a week’ at Edwards’s home, and, their host reported, ‘he behaved himself so, that he endeared himself much to me; he appeared in a more desirable temper of mind and more solid and judicious in his thoughts, and prudence in his conduct, than when he was here before’. That he had brought ‘his lady’ with him was also doubtless pleasing to Edwards, after Whitefield’s obvious admiration in 1740 of Sarah Pierpont Edwards and the Edwards children. The contemporary view of personhood assumed that only in marriage would an individual find social and spiritual wholeness. Studies of

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54 Jonathan Judd, MS Diary (1742-1801), entry for 15 July 1745, Forbes Library, Northampton, Massachusetts.
55 Edwards to Friends in Scotland [after 16 Sept. 1745], WJE, 16:175-79.
early modern views of masculinity show that at that time a bachelor, especially one in a prominent position, was considered something of a social parasite, so Whitefield’s new status as a husband and household head warranted further respectability as a person fully invested in the social fabric.56

Since Edwards’s account was for Scottish allies, destined for publication in the *Christian Monthly History*, he was certainly still being a good party man, being upbeat for the revival cause, but there was a real difference this time. Whitefield’s new, chastened decorum and circumspection obviously pleased—and relieved—Edwards (and, no doubt, other New Light leaders) a great deal. He could now defend Whitefield with an easy conscience, and without having to exercise his admirable yet undiplomatic trait of speaking what he felt was the truth no matter what the cost. Though the two would not work together again—Edwards would move on to missionary work and the great Stockbridge treatises, dying in 1758—it seems the rift between the ‘Grand Itinerant’ and America’s Augustine was mended, providing a basis for further revival work in the British Isles, in the colonies, and eventually in the United States, in which the revival culture that Whitefield and Edwards had so important a hand in forging would become formative and formidable. Yet, at the same time, it should be recognized that the admittedly anticlimactic consensus reached between these two fountainheads of modern evangelicalism was short-lived and of only general influence. In some ways, they were moving beyond the revivals, shifting into different phases of their careers, even while the revivals were passing them by. Revivalism proliferated during the late eighteenth and into the early nineteenth centuries in the hands of others reflecting a growing diversity of approaches, who, though they claimed reliance on

56 On masculinity in the colonial period, see Lisa Wilson, *Ye Heart of a Man: The Domestic Life of Men in Colonial New England* (New Haven, CT, 1999).
Whitefield and Edwards, adopted ideas and methods that neither man would have condoned.\textsuperscript{57}