

Jonathan Edwards, a New Biography by Iain H. Murray, (The Banner of Truth Trust, Carlisle, PA: 1987) (17 Quotes selected by Doug Nichols)

1. Consciences of Men on Fire

His view of the ministry of the world was the same as that of his wife's father, Solomon Stoddard, who said, "We are not sent into the pulpit to shew our wit and eloquence but to set the consciences of men on fire. (Page 8)

2. His Pursuit of Knowledge

'He reads all the books from which he might hope to derive any aid in his pursuit of knowledge', writes Samuel Hopkins, his first biographer, and M.C. Tyler, in *A History of America Literature*, speaks of him as 'The most original and acute thinker yet produced in America'. (Page 67)

3. He Fed on Puritan Divines

B.B. Warfield writes, 'He fed himself on the great Puritan divines, and formed not merely his thought but his life upon them'. (Studies in Theology, 1932, p. 529) (Page 67)

4. Mr. Edwards Favorite Authors and Subjects

More evidence on his assessment of the respective merits of different schools of religious literature is found in his 'Catalogue' already mentioned. This is a notebook of forty-three pages, measuring eight by six inches, in which he listed either what he had read or volumes which he wished to read. Many of the 690 entries in the Catalogue belong to a later period in his life but they follow the lines upon which he was already settled by 1725. There are 452 entries in all on religious books and these have been divided as follows: Church History, 62; Bible, 33; devotional, 24; Works, 17; Sermons, 37; and Theology, 279.¹

¹(The entries on non-religious authors in the Catalogue number 238 and have been divided as follows: Education, 8; Geography, 16; History, 43; Household and Etiquette, 6; Language, 43; Dictionaries, 18; Literature, 28; Lives, 11; Mathematics, 12; Natural History, 23; Philosophy, 19; Unclassified, 11; [See Ralph G. Turnbull, *Jonathan Edwards The Preacher*, 1958]. The Catalogue, however, does not cover all his reading for it is obvious from his Work that he had read titles not listed here.)

While is apparent that Edwards read theological writers who were his contemporaries, including promoters of 'new divinity', the names which predominate in the catalogue are those of old authors of Reformed and Puritan persuasion: Calvin, Perkins, Van

Mastricht, Sibbes, Manton, Flavel, Owens, Chaenock and so on. Against as early reference to John Owens he noted the view of Thomas Halyburton, 'recommended by Mr. Halyburton to the young students at Divinity at St Andrews above all human writings for a true view of the Mystery of the Gospel.' Although the Catalogue is not an exhaustive guide to all his reading, at least it proves beyond dispute that in his taste and preferences he was a through Puritan. (Page 67-68)

5. Native darkness of the human mind in spiritual things

But Edwards' viewpoint was wholly different from that promoted by London's publishing house. In his case, beliefs were not to be judged by their apparent success or failure; they, and history, must be judged by Scripture. While this may well have been his opinion before his conviction in 1721, without question it was thereafter the dominating conviction in his intellectual life. His fundamental criticism of the learning of the eighteenth century was that it failed to recognize the native darkness of the human mind in spiritual things and therefore it placed itself above the revelation of God in Scripture.

When Christ came into the world learning greatly prevailed; and yet wickedness never prevailed more than then. . . . So now, learning is at a great height in the world, far beyond what it was in the age when Christ appeared; and now the world, by their learning and wisdom, do not know God; and they seem to wander in darkness, and miserably deluded, stumble and fall in matters of religion, as in midnight darkness. Trusting to their learning, they grope in the day-time as in the night. Learned men are exceedingly divided in their opinions concerning the matters of religion, running into all manner of corrupt opinions, pernicious and foolish errors. They scorn to submit their reason to divine revelation, to believe any thing that is above their comprehension and so being wise in their own eyes they become fools (1.601). Page 69-70)

6. Essentials Biblical Theology

The reason why Edwards put a high value on the Puritans and their writings is he judged their theology to be, in its essentials, biblical theology. On matters of science and philosophy which could not be authoritatively settled by Scripture his mind was open: on issues of doctrine, which the Reformed churches had settled by exposition of Scripture, it was fixed. (Page 70)

7. The Mind is the Man

Cromwell once told English Parliament: 'The mind is the man.' (Page 99)

8. Records Extracts or References

He always read with pen in hand, his notebook open to record extracts or references, or, more often, to put down his own thoughts. So habitually committed was he to writing, observes a great-grandson, that he not only often stopped, in his daily rides, by the way-side, but frequently rose even at midnight, to commit to paper any important thoughts that that had occurred to him. (Page 138)

9. God decrees all things

His belief that God has decreed whatever comes to pass by summoning his hearers to undertake action and duty themselves. No such dichotomy, however, existed in Edwards' mind between divine action and human endeavour. God does decree all things, *including* all the actions of men and yet all falls harmoniously within his sovereign purpose. (Page 141)

10. Study and Writing for the Gospel

Study and writing were not ends in themselves. They were for the service of the gospel. (Page 142)

11. Knowledge of God should be personal and first-hand

His view of his public work as a calling to speak to men in the name of God was inseparable from his conviction that the first demand in such a calling was that his own knowledge of God should be personal and first-hand. (Page 142)

12. Personal communion with God must come first

Edwards' whole ministry, as of the Puritans, was based upon the conviction that the usefulness of a preacher's work is invariably related to the nature of his inner life. Personal communion with God must come first. Speaking of this characteristic of the Puritans, Macaulay has written of how their minds 'derived a peculiar character' from the nature of their daily contemplation: 'To know God, to serve him, to enjoy him, was with them the great end of existence. . . . Instead of catching occasional glimpses of the Deity through an obscuring veil, they aspired to gaze full on the intolerable brightness, and to commune with him face to face.' (Page 142-143)

13. To fully enjoy God is far better than anything else!

Edwards was speaking the language of reality when he told his people: The enjoyment of God is the only happiness with which our souls can be satisfied. To go to heaven, fully to enjoy God, is infinitely better than the most pleasant

accommodations here. Father and mother, husband, wives, or children, or the company of earthly friends, are but shadows, but God is the substance. These are but scattered beams, but God is the sun. These are but streams, but God is the ocean (2.244). (Page 143)

14. Willing to Suffer So Some May Be Saved

It grieves me to see people, everywhere ready to perish for lack of knowledge. I care not what I suffer, so that some may be brought home to Christ. . . . (Page 156)

15. Great Awakening

The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth' [John 3:8]. In short, the Great Awakening is one of many confirmations of the statement: "The history of religious revival proves that all real, spiritual awakening of the national mind have been those in which God and not man, has been the prime mover.¹

¹(Octavius Winslow, *A Plan for a National Baptism of the Holy Ghost*, 1858. p 84) (Page 159)

16. All Great Religions Awaken

W.G.T. Shedd, a later New Englander: "All great religious awakening began in the dawning of the august and terrible aspects of the Deity upon the popular mind, and they reached their height and happy consummation in that love and faith for which the antecedent fear has been the preparation'. (Page 169)

17. Tremendous and Irresistible Individualized Power

One of the prominent features of the great awakening was that the gospel was armed by the Holy Ghost with a tremendous and irresistible *individualized* power. Man was made to come forth into the light and take his appropriate place before God as guilty and accountable'. The same author quotes the words of Isaac Taylor:

Instead of that interchange of smiles which lately has prevailed the congregation while the orator was doing his part, now every man feels himself alone in that crowd. Even the preacher himself is almost forgotten, for an immortal guilty spirit has come into the presence of Eternal Justice. (Page 170)

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