

‘SOME AGREEABLE CONVERSATION’:  
JONATHAN EDWARDS AMONG EARLY AMERICAN BAPTISTS

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**ABSTRACT:** Jonathan Edwards has long been recognized for his theology, philosophy, biblical studies, and pastoral ministry. The influence of Edwards’s life and ministry has stretched both far and wide. While his effect among English Baptists has been examined in a variety of ways, less attention has been given to his influence among early Baptists in North America. This article provides a survey of the research concerning Edwards’s influence upon early Baptists in North America. It argues that early Baptists in North America have been more influenced by Edwards than previously recognized. These Baptists looked to Edwards for instruction on Scripture, theology, piety, conversion and revival, preaching and pastoral ministry, and missions. Yet, more work needs to be done to understand the full scope of the reception of Edwards by early Baptists in North America.

**KEYWORDS:** Baptists, Edwards, legacy, influence, North America

## Introduction

Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758), the great Congregational minister from the eighteenth century, continues to be a formative voice in biblical interpretation, theology, and philosophy. His ministry and writings promoted, defended, and contributed to spreading the gospel in North America and Europe. And his lasting influence has been shown in various fields and studies. Edwards’s influences upon early Baptists in North America prove to be one area that needs further prodding. While studies have shown Edwards’s reception among English Baptists, such as Andrew Fuller and the so-called Fullerites, his presence among early North American Baptists has received less attention (Chun 2012; Clary 2019; Crisp and Sweeney 2012; Morden 2015; Roberts 2001)

One would expect there to be at least some, if not significant, interaction between Edwards and early Baptists in North America. The presence and proximity

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of Baptists in New England and the Colonies suggest at least some association with Jonathan Edwards. And yet, few books concerning Baptist history in North America discuss the influence of Edwards upon Baptists (Holifield 2003: 282–83; Kidd and Hankins 2015: 19–38). On the other hand, knowing Edwards was not a Baptist, one might reasonably expect that he had limited interaction with Baptists. However, this would be mistaken. Baptist identity has been especially characterized by its ecclesiology over a singular, confessional theology. The theological milieu of Baptists from their earliest days has been and continues to be diverse. Certainly, Baptists have held to various confessions of faith, which have been diverse theologically, particularly in relation to soteriology. This, in part, has allowed for a positive and negative reception of Edwards among Baptists due to his Calvinistic leanings. John Gerstner wrote, ‘Though Edwards was not a Baptist, many Baptists claim that the awakening he promoted benefited them more than it did the paedobaptists. He has been recognized as a spiritual giant by those who disagree with his theology as much as by those who agree’ (Gerstner 1985: 44). Due to the theological diversity among Baptists, Gerstner’s claim is not far-fetched.

As such, it’s worth considering how Edwards may have proved to be a ‘spiritual giant’ among Baptists in North America. Baptist historian Tom Nettles remarks, ‘It might safely be contended that The Southern Baptist Convention was born, theologically, out of the energy of the writings of Jonathan Edwards’ (Nettles 2003: 6). Even those who may debate Southern Baptist origins and the truthfulness of this statement, the claim nevertheless points to the presence of Edwards among Baptists in North America. This essay provides a survey of research concerning Jonathan Edwards’s influence among early Baptists in North America, arguing that Edwards has influenced early American Baptists far more than has previously been recognized.

### **Edwards among the Baptists**

Edwards developed a greater influence upon early Baptists in North America than has previously been assumed. During Edwards’s lifetime and the years that followed, leading Baptists recognized his impact upon religious life. Isaac Backus (1724–1806) characterized him as ‘our excellent Edwards’ (Backus 1871: II: 38). Baptist leaders like Backus recognized both the sophistication and administration of his theology. According to Basil Manly, Oliver Hart (1723–1795) celebrated God’s sovereignty in allowing him to live in a time when God was working revivals, mainly through Whitefield, Edwards, and the Tennents (Manly 1889: 102). As will be shown, Edwards influenced several areas of Baptist theology and life in the North American context, including convictions concerning Scripture, theology, piety, conversion, revival, preaching, and missions.

## Scripture

Jonathan Edwards believed that God was a 'communicative being,' one who sought to reveal himself to the world and show his glory so that the world might find their happiness in him (Edwards 1994b: 410). According to Edwards, 'The being of God is evident by the Scriptures, and the Scriptures themselves are an evidence of their own divine authority' (Edwards 1994b: 410). The Scriptures served as the foundation for understanding faith and practice. This conviction, however, was not universal. Noting the different perspectives on Scripture among believers and non-believers, Edwards wrote,

Natural men may indeed have a common belief of many things in the Word, as they have of probable histories. But the faith of the godly, whereby they believe the Word of God to be true, is from the intrinsic signatures of divinity which they see in it. They see that excellency and that image of God in the Word that constrains the mind to assent to it and embrace it as true and divine. There are signatures of divine majesty to be seen in the Word, and signatures of divine wisdom and of divine holiness, and the evident marks of divine grace that make it evident that the Word of God did proceed from a divine majesty and wisdom, and holiness and grace (Edwards 1997: 251–52).

Thus, he emphasized that belief in the authority of Scripture emerged from the imprint of divinity upon them. God worked in the hearts of those who believed to see the Scriptures as 'true and divine.' As Edwards established his beliefs about Scripture, he opposed three groups. First, he rejected Enlightenment thinkers who scorned the divine origin of the Scriptures. Second, he rejected Roman Catholicism. And third, he rejected the radical evangelicals, for some were claiming divine authority in their proclamation (McClymond and McDermott 2012: 171–72).

The legacy of Edwards's commitment to Scripture for doctrine and practice arose in the thought of several Baptists, including Isaac Backus. Backus referenced Edwards's defense of the revivals when addressing the controversy regarding Article Three of the Massachusetts constitution, which created an ecclesiastical system that favored Congregationalists over dissenters, Backus recalled John Owen's three principles related to the Reformation. First, Scripture is the authority for religious matters. Second, man has the rational right to judge the meaning of the Scriptures. And third, all power in the church arises from "Christ by his Word and Spirit to each particular church" (Backus 1968: 386–88, 423). Further, the church's leaders were called and qualified by God for the work, despite the presence or absence of succession. To Backus, Edwards modeled Owen's principles in Northampton. Backus wrote that Edwards 'plainly proved' this in *A Faithful Narrative* (Backus 1968: 424). In this work,

Edwards highlighted the importance of the Scriptures in comprehending spiritual experiences and revival. Edwards wrote,

Some are thus convinced of the truth of the Gospel in general, and that the Scriptures are the Word of God: others have their minds more especially fixed on some particular great doctrine of the Gospel, some particular truths that they are meditating on; or are in a special manner convinced of the divinity of the things they are reading of, in some portion of Scripture (Edwards 1994a: 179).

The Scriptures proved authoritative not only for knowing God and understanding spiritual experiences but also for calling and equipping saints for the work of ministry. Again, Backus found Edwards to model Owen's three principles. As Brandon O'Brien has explained, Backus recognized Edwards as a 'faithful representative of both the Reformation and the New England traditions' (O'Brien 2013: 191). Backus praised Edwards for his faithfulness to Scripture, such as his rejection of the Half-Way Covenant (Backus 1767: 68). Yet, Backus also disagreed with Edwards on occasion. For example, Backus deviated from Edwards's exegesis and his requirements for clergy. Backus's conviction was driven by his understanding of Scripture. Though Backus did esteem Edwards and the legacy of Edwardsean Calvinism, he did not adopt his views wholesale (Backus 1754: 109; O'Brien 2013: 191–94).

## Theology

As Baptists studied and taught theology, some gleaned from Edwards's musings, particularly when reflecting on God's sovereignty and the atonement. Edwards fought to defend the sovereignty of God in light of the responsibility of man in *Freedom of the Will*. Isaac Backus expressed that this work 'afforded more light to [his] mind in these points' than any other work on the same subject (Backus 1767: 82). In it, Edwards wrote, "The sovereignty of God is his ability and authority to do whatever pleases him; whereby "he doth according to his will in the armies of heaven and amongst the inhabitants of the earth, and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, what dost thou?" (Edwards, 1957: 378). His sovereignty was supreme, universal, and infinite in power. Edwards built his conviction regarding divine sovereignty upon the Scriptures. Through them, he affirmed both common and special grace while maintaining the necessity of faith (Edwards 2003: 153; McClymond and McDermott 2012: 366–67). While the New Divinity movement developed and modified Edwards's theology, several Baptists followed Edwards through this tradition, including Jonathan Maxcy, Isaac Backus, Abel Morgan, and Jesse Mercer.

Jonathan Maxcy (1768–1820), an accomplished leader who served as president of Rhode Island College, Union College, and the University of South Carolina, echoed

Edwards's theology. While serving in Providence, he delivered a two-part sermon in 1796—'A Discourse, Designed to Explain the Doctrine of Atonement.' The sermon conveyed Edwards's influence upon Maxcy's view of the atonement through the New Divinity movement. Though he did not explicitly reference Edwards in these sermons, he did appeal to Jonathan Edwards, Jr., a leading proponent of New England Theology, whom he succeeded as president of Union College. Michael Haykin concludes that Maxcy 'argued that Christ's death is an obligatory punishment by God on behalf of sinners primarily because "punishments are necessary in God's moral government of the universe"' (Haykin 2012: 204; Sweeney 2007: 227). While not a direct reference to Edwards, this work reveals the reach of Edwards's influence as it reflects a portion of his position on the atonement. Edwards's view of the atonement is complex, and he did not write a complete work addressing it (Crisp, 2015: 124–42). Instead, most of his reflections on the atonement are interspersed in his corpus. Primarily, Edwards held to a substitutionary view of the atonement. In 1729, Edwards explained in a sermon, 'What Christ offered in sacrifice to God was equivalent to what justice demanded for us of our sins' (Edwards 1997: 452). At the same time, Christ's substitutionary work fit into the economy of God's moral government, which required him to punish sin justly (Edwards 2000: 434–49, 2002: 95–106). This view would be held and modified by Edwardseans, including members of the New Divinity movement. Edwards's works, along with the labors of the New Divinity movement, left an inheritance for many Protestants, including Baptists like William B. Johnson (1782–1862), the first president of the Southern Baptist Convention, and members of Kentucky's Bethel Baptist Association (Bethel Baptist Association 1836: 6, 8; Crisp 2012: 84–85; Haykin 2012: 204; Wills 1999: 87–88).

Isaac Backus also looked to Edwards for theological support concerning the sovereignty of God, freedom of the will, and the identity of the church (Grenz 2013: 199–208). First, Backus, like Edwards, emphasized the sovereignty of God. Backus wrote that only 'one supreme BEING' rules over all the earth, and this being cannot be removed from the minds of men. Further, governments appeal to him for truth and justice (Backus 1968: 402). Second, Backus held to a view of man that was particularly influenced by Edwards and John Locke. He believed the intellect dominated the will. Man needs divine love to transform the intellect, and thereby the will, to be restored. Third, Backus, like Edwards, sought to see a pure church. In several of his works, Backus explored the nature of true faith. In so doing, he called for a personal testimony of faith. His appeal to Edwards may be observed through his insistence that the church should consist of true believers (O'Brien 2013: 66–68). In at least one instance, Backus described the 'exact nature of a church covenant' (Backus 1871: 2:304). Through regenerate church membership, he sought to see the visible church

reflect the invisible church. Backus, in *True Faith Will Produce Good Works*, wrote, 'A profession of christianity necessarily implies faith in Christ, and a devotedness to him; and if there is not a measure of that, truly in the heart, the profession is false' (Backus 1767: 69). Immediately following this, he quoted Edwards's *Misrepresentations Corrected, and Truth Vindicated* (1752). In this work, written against Solomon Williams, Edwards corrects misunderstandings regarding *An Humble Inquiry* (1749). In it, he argued for the importance of a profession of faith, writing, 'There are two competitors for the kingdom of this world, Christ and Satan; the design of a public profession of religion is, to declare on which side men are' (Edwards 1994a: 393). While this evidence does not show that Backus obtained this ecclesiological conviction from Edwards, it does show that he relied upon him for maintaining it. For Backus, this same conviction contributed to Edwards's removal from Northampton after his rejection of the Halfway Covenant. Through these themes, among others, Backus was able to contribute to the continued spread of the evangelical Calvinism promoted by Jonathan Edwards.

At times, Backus came to the defense of Edwards against those who strongly rejected Calvinism. As Edwards's *Freedom of the Will* circulated, it faced opposition for its staunch Calvinism. Backus came to the defense of Edwards's position, explaining he knew Edwards better than his opponents and that he had embraced this form of Calvinism (Backus 1871: 2:252). Further, Backus viewed Edwards's position of freedom with high regard. He said, 'I am certain that the author who has thus censured him, is not a greater friend to the full liberty of the human will, and against every idea of positive influence from God to restrain men from good, or to impel them to evil than Edwards was' (Backus 1871: 2:252). As the more excellent friend for understanding freedom, Edwards helped Baptists understand the will and how this corresponds to Christ's work in salvation (Backus 1871: 2:252–66) 1871: 2:252\{66.

Beyond Maxcy and Backus, Edwards's theology can be found among other early Baptists in North America. Abel Morgan (1713–1785) appears to have been closely acquainted with the work of Edwards. As a Particular Baptist, Morgan held to robust Calvinistic theology after being converted under the ministry of George Whitefield. He pastored Middletown Baptist Church in New Jersey, one of the first five churches to join the Philadelphia Association. His library primarily consisted of Puritan works, including John Bunyan, John Flavel, Thomas Goodwin, Isaac Ambrose, and Jonathan Edwards (Priest 2011: 403–8). In addition to Morgan, Edwards's theology can be found among the works of Jesse Mercer (1769–1841). Mercer mainly relied upon Edwards when defending evangelical Calvinism (Beck 2007; Mercer and Stokes, 1835: 23). And, as Peter Beck argues, Mercer seemed to

have found Edwards helpful in developing his understanding of freedom and moral and natural ability (Beck 2007: 23–37).

Not all Baptists received Edwards favorably. Elias Smith (1769–1846), converted in a family sympathetic to the revivals, was a self-taught Baptist minister. After an early call to ministry, he read several resources to equip him for pastoral ministry, including Edwards's *History of the Work of Redemption* (1774). He wrote, 'Edwards' history of redemption, I read with attention and pleasure' (Smith 1840: 125). While he first embraced Calvinism 'for ballast,' he rejected Calvinistic theology some years later, calling it a 'terrible doctrine of men' (Brackney 2004: 228–30; Smith 1840: 214). Like Smith, many other Baptists rejected Calvinism and Edwardsean Calvinism over time.

## Piety

Jonathan Edwards's spirituality has been characterized in several ways. Marsden has shown that 'piety preceded intellect' for Edwards (Marsden 2004: 330). McClymond and McDermott have described his spirituality in terms of discipline, enjoyment, and consummation (McClymond and McDermott 2012: 61–76). Edwards's early life modeled a commitment to Christian disciplines as seen in his 'Resolutions.' Edwards wrote, 'Resolved, that I will do whatsoever I think to be most to God's glory, and my own good, profit and pleasure, in the whole of my duration, without any consideration of the time, whether now, or never so many myriads of ages hence' (Edwards 1998: 753). Additionally, Edwards described the enjoyment of the Christian life as like that of the earth soaking in the sun as to give off sweet aromas from its fruits (Edwards 1998: 795–6). As Edwards enjoyed life in the Savior, he recognized the future hope of the Christian, for 'heaven is a world of love' (Edwards 1989: 366–97).

Edwards's understanding of the Christian faith revolved around the gospel and a transformed life. Through several of his works, he sought to promote true religious experience, and he provided helps for his readers in assessing their own spirituality. True spirituality, for Edwards, hinged on God's gracious giving of his Spirit to the believer (Edwards 1994b: 345).

After Edwards established himself as a leading voice in practical piety, several Baptists turned to him as a devotional mentor. Jesse Mercer often reproduced portions of Edwards's works in the *Christian Index*. Mercer also used Edwards's *A History of the Work of Redemption* to develop a three-month Sunday School lesson guide (Beck 2007; Mercer 1837: 21–22). Another mentee was John Williams, who immigrated to America in the mid-1790s and began preaching and pastoring in New York. He played a significant role in bringing the missionary movement sparked in Europe to America, corresponding with William Carey and others

along the way. He became one of the leading founders of the American Bible Society. Evidence shows that Williams was influenced by Edwards' works. In one instance, Williams, on his death bed, read from *Religious Affections* because Edwards spoke 'so sweetly of Jesus' (McMullen 2015: 438).

Baptists looked to Edwards for guidance in their theology of the Holy Spirit. While describing the separation of those Christians that would become Baptists, Backus said that 'a first principle of their separation was, that the leadings of the divine Spirit are ever to be followed, and not fleshly wisdom, nor man's inventions' (Backus 1871: 2:89). After identifying this principle, he turned to Edwards as an example who followed the Spirit. He recounted Edwards's rejection of the Halfway Covenant at Northampton, a doctrine that he first embraced while serving under his grandfather Solomon Stoddard. However, his intention was to remove this practice from Northampton. Backus noted, other individuals have separated from churches on a similar principle. Of this, he wrote, 'The fundamental principle... naturally leads to the exclusion of infant sprinkling; but the generality of those who came out in separation has no such idea' (Backus 1871: 2:93; 238–40). With this in mind, one may conclude that Backus perceived Edwards to be led by the Spirit on the road toward becoming a Baptist, or at least a credobaptist.

### Conversion and Revival

Edwards's influence has been widely connected to his instruction about and experience of conversion and revival. Edwards understood these through his own experience and reading of the Scriptures. Edwards displayed his view of conversion in several writings, including *A Faithful Narrative* (1737). This work traced the beginnings, characteristics, and process of the revivals in New England. While Edwards painted a particular view of conversion, he recognized the process is not always uniform. Ultimately, Edwards found that conversion is 'a great and glorious work of God's power, at one changing the heart and infusing life into the dead soul; through that grace that is then implanted does more gradually display itself in some than in others' (Edwards 1994a: 177).

Isaac Backus depicted how early Baptists evaluated revival. Backus appealed to Owen's three principles in his *History of New England Baptists*. He explained the tension between those for and against the awakenings (Backus 1871: II:35). Early on, Backus observed the work was primarily seen among paedobaptists. In his assessment, the majority of Baptists were against the revival (Backus 1871: II:41). Yet, some Baptists embraced the religious stirrings. Backus explained:

And because the great reformation, in and after the year 1740, was begun and mainly carried on among Pædobaptists, many had asserted that the Baptist principles always

came in at the tail of a reformation, when the life of religion was gone, and people were settling down upon the bare letter of Scripture. For a dozen years, this argument was much harped upon, until it was silenced in these parts by clear evidence to the contrary (Backus 1871: II:134).

Backus appealed to Edwards as an authoritative voice for the defense of the revivals. Turning to Edwards's *Five Distinguishing Marks* (1741), Backus relied on his reflection on the significance of the work of ministers to help congregants navigate spiritual experiences, particularly conversion (Backus 1871: II:47–48). As Baptists navigated the awakenings, they maintained the importance of true conversion and regenerate church membership. As people were saved and baptized, some looked to Edwards for evaluating true conversions.

Leading Baptist revivalists, including Nathaniel Jenkins, Edward Barber, and Elisha Hutchinson, continued in the legacy of Edwards's convictions. First, Edwards shaped Nathaniel Jenkin's views of the revivals. Jenkins, a Welsh Baptist that immigrated to North America in 1710, began pastoring a church in Cape May in 1712, which joined the Philadelphia Association the same year. Jenkins also pastored in New Jersey during the 1740s and the effects of revival would certainly extend to his ministry there (Wolever 2006: 345–48).

Second, Edward Barber (1768–1834) proved to be a significant voice on revival among Baptists. Barber pastored Bottskill Baptist Church in what is now Greenwich, New York. Barber, a Regular Baptist, held a theology of revival similar to Edwards (Gazal and Wolever 2015: 448). In a time when revivalists like Charles Finney (1792–1875) sought to bring revival through the use of means, Barber stood in the legacy of Edwards, who emphasized God's grace in producing revival. Both Edwards and Barber agreed that revival, as a special work of God, was exclusive rather than inclusive. For both Edwards and Barber, a revival was a particular work of God in a certain place at a specific time (Gazal and Wolever 2015: 448–49).

Edwards's life and work also informed the convictions of Elisha Hutchinson (1749–1833). Hutchinson, born into the context of the Great Awakening and through the mentoring of early revival leaders, became an evangelical leader. After his conversion, he moved to study under Dr. Eleazar Wheelock. Hutchinson likely received instruction from Edwards's theology through Wheelock, who was a friend of Edwards and one who conducted services with him. Wheelock helped Hutchinson and other students develop a vision of conversion and revival. As Wheelock recalled various experiences with Edwards, Hutchinson embraced this vision, and he committed himself to the work of taking the gospel to all peoples, including Native Americans (West 2014: 468–69). Further, like Edwards, Hutchinson opposed excesses in revival and that which violated the true workings of the Spirit of God (West 2014: 473n18).

## Preaching

Edwards emphasized the importance of true piety in his preaching and pastoral ministry. In his view, pastors were to guide or 'direct' souls, both regenerate and unregenerate (McClymond and McDermott 2012: 466–7). Therefore, the pastor's primary work was the preaching of the Word. He wrote, 'The work and business of ministers of the gospel is as it were that of servants, to wash and cleanse the souls of men: for this is done by the preaching of the word, which is their main business' (Edwards 2006: 335). Edwards held the pastorate in high regard and viewed his work as a matter of life and death.

Edwards acted as a pastoral mentor to several early Baptists, both in and out of the academy. Joseph Cook (1749–1790) became a strong preacher and evangelist in the late eighteenth century. Though he began his ministry in England, he would serve several years among early American Baptists in the South. Cook, a byproduct of Whitefield's ministry, learned from Lady Huntingdon. Lady Huntingdon sent Cook to Trevecca College in 1769. This college, through its graduates, impacted gospel preaching in both England and America (White 2014: 404). A letter written to Lady Huntingdon tells of the school's intended course of study for its students. In the list of works to be studied, names like Wesley, Mason, Henry, and Gill appear. In addition, 'Edwards on preaching' was to be included in the course of study (White 2014: 408). Thus, Edwards played a role in instructing Cook on the task of preaching. Cook's interest in leaving England to preach in America was tied to his understanding of revival as well. As he observed Whitefield's ministry, learned from Lady Huntingdon, and heard reports from Edwards's church at Northampton, he developed a conviction to do gospel ministry in America (White 2014: 426).

Edwards's preaching affected other Baptist ministers. Edwards's sermons shaped Elisha Hutchinson's personal and family life. Hutchinson and his wife frequently read Edwards's sermons to their children on Sunday evenings (West 2014: 489). Above all, their readings of Edwards and others led them to a practical piety centered around the Bible and the God of the Bible. Oliver Hart, according to Richard Furman, was impressed by the preaching of Edwards and others (Furman 1796: 21; Smith 2015: 23). In addition, Thomas Baldwin was converted while reading and meditating on Edwards's sermon, 'Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God'. Of this reading and reflection, he wrote, 'In an instant the great plan of mercy, through the atonement of Christ, was astonishingly opened to my view. He appeared to be just such a Saviour as I needed' (Brackney 2004: 256–7; Sommers 1835: 379). As one clearly impacted by the revivals and its leaders, Baldwin would go on to be a leader in promoting the revivals.

## Missions

Edwards adamantly supported and participated in missionary work. Edwards referred to missions as the 'propagation of the gospel' (Edwards 1989a: 908). The work of the missionary could only be successful by the work of the Holy Spirit. In fact, Edwards believed that missionary work was the responsibility of the church, not simply missionaries. This was counter-cultural to the time of Edwards, as leading theological works were often silent on missions (McClymond and McDermott 2012: 551). Therefore, it can be said that Edwards was one of the earliest Protestant evangelicals to promote obedience to the Great Commission for all Christians.

Edwards promoted David Brainerd as a model Christian and missionary. In his edited edition of Brainerd's diary, Edwards displayed Christ as the supreme example of true religion. Then, he proposed that David Brainerd is, though on a completely different level, a good example of true religion. He identified weaknesses in Brainerd's life, such as melancholy and overwork (Edwards 2002a: 91–5). Nevertheless, Brainerd proved to be 'a remarkable instance of true and eminent Christian piety in heart and practice' (Edwards 2002a: 96). Edwards's work on Brainerd was highly circulated in North America and Europe. With this in mind, it is important to recognize that Edwards used Brainerd as a means for teaching true conversion, disinterested benevolence, the beauty and glory of God, religious affections, the doctrines of grace, Christian living, and divine sovereignty (Edwards 2002a: 500–34). As such, this created even more opportunities for Edwards's convictions to spread.

Edwards influenced Baptist missions among Native Americans. For example, toward the end of the eighteenth century, Elkanah Holmes (1743–1832) emerged as a leader in missions among the Native Americans at Stockbridge and among those that Edwards previously served. Edwards had discovered and addressed the correct name for the Native Americans at Stockbridge, and the correct name would end up being used by Holmes, a fact that conveys his awareness of Edwards's involvement there (Wolever 2014: 132–34).

Edwards's theology of missions spread through generational influence. Edwards influenced Jonathan Maxcy's theology, as noted above. Maxcy conveyed Edwards's theology to William Bullein Johnson (1782–1862), a leader of several Baptist entities that engaged in mission work (Holifield 2003: 283). Likewise, Elisha Hutchinson provided generational leadership in the overall modern missions movement. Baron Stow, a convert under Hutchinson's ministry, began to be mentored by him. Through this relationship, Stow developed a vision and passion for missions. From this, West has concluded that 'Hutchinson thus served as a bridge between the early evangelical revivals of Edwards, Wheelock, and Whitefield and the American Baptist missionary

movement' (West 2014: 483). Thus, if Hutchinson is the bridge, Edwards, among others, proved to be the landmass on the other side.

Other Baptists echoed some of Edwards's practical theology concerning missions. Edwards advocated for concerts of prayer in his *Humble Attempt* (1748). He wrote, 'How condecant, how beautiful, and of good tendency would it be, for multitudes of Christians, in various parts of the world, by explicit agreement, to unite in such prayer as is proposed to us' (Edwards 1977: 364). Years later, Richard Furman (1755–1825), the first president of the Triennial Convention, played a key role in the development of foreign missions among Baptists. He, like Edwards and other Baptists, promoted concerts of prayer for international missions (Brackney 2004: 235; Haykin 2011).

## Conclusion

Jonathan Edwards has shaped, both directly and indirectly, early North American Baptists to a greater degree than previously recognized. During a time of transition and development, these early Baptists were committed to several principles, and many of these principles echoed the theology and ministry of Edwards. Like Edwards, Baptists relied on the Scriptures as the directive for their theology and ministry. At times, Baptists appealed to Edwards's use of Scripture as evidence for how it should be interpreted and applied. In addition, some Baptists were informed by certain areas of Edwards's theology, particularly regarding God's sovereignty and the atonement. This is especially apparent in the Edwardsean Calvinism found in *Freedom of the Will*. Baptists, likewise, gleaned from Edwards's spirituality. His commitment to an authentic religious experience led many Baptists to embrace his *Religious Affections* and similar works to help with navigating the revivals and evaluating authentic religious experiences. In addition, Baptists looked to Edwards as a model for preaching and pastoral ministry. Finally, several Baptists embraced Edwards's beliefs and practices of missions. Though his *The Life of David Brainerd* would stimulate the modern missionary movement with William Carey and Andrew Fuller in England, he did lead early North American Baptists to reach those in their land and to plan for engaging the nations with the gospel.

Baptists certainly embraced aspects of Edwards's theology and ministry. Yet, the reach of his influence deserves further investigation. Future studies will do well to investigate Edwards's place among Baptists by examining circular letters, Baptist papers, church minutes, and the like. In addition, Edwards's influence upon some of the individuals mentioned above needs additional attention. Edwards certainly knew of Baptists and shared commonalities with them. In his work *The Diary of David Brainerd*, Brainerd wrote on Friday, January 10, 1745, 'Near night, visited a serious Baptist minister and had some agreeable conversation with him; and found that I could taste God in friends' (Edwards 2002a: 353). Between Baptists and Edwards, there is 'some

agreeable conversation' to be had, and it may turn out that they 'could taste God in friends.'

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